

# How about see with the others in a globalized and intercultural era

## *Sobre como ver com os outros em uma era globalizada e intercultural*

TISSIANA PEREIRA <sup>a</sup>

University of São Paulo, Post-Graduation Program in Communication Sciences. São Paulo – SP, Brazil

MARTÍN-BARBERO, Jesús; CORONA BERKIN, Sarah.

*Ver con los otros: comunicación intercultural*

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### ABSTRACT

This text is a critical review of the recent book published by Jesús Martín-Barbero and Sarah Corona Berkin *Ver con los otros: comunicación intercultural* which the authors discuss how the knowledge is constructed dialectically between theory and practice, paying attention to the dialogue between a researcher and their informer (the other) who end up asking each other to draw this path together. Martín-Barbero and Berkin are interested in the socio-cultural thickness of the visuals and the ways of *seeing the other* in the current context of globalization in which we are living.

**Keywords:** The other, view, visualities, ways of seeing, intercultural

<sup>a</sup>PhD student in Communication Sciences, School of Communication and Arts at University of São Paulo. CAPES Fellow. Researcher of Centro de Estudos de Telenovela (ECA/USP) and member of Observatório Ibero-Americano de Ficção Televisiva (Obitel). Orcid: <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-1972-1348>. E-mail: [tissianapereira@yahoo.com.br](mailto:tissianapereira@yahoo.com.br)

### RESUMO

O texto é uma resenha crítica do recente livro publicado por Jesús Martín-Barbero e Sarah Corona Berkin, *Ver con los otros: comunicación intercultural*, em que os autores discutem como o conhecimento é construído dialeticamente entre a teoria e a prática, atentando para o diálogo entre um pesquisador e seu informante (o outro), que acabam por se interperlar ao traçarem juntos tal caminho. Martín-Barbero e Berkin estão interessados na espessura sociocultural das visualidades e nos modos de ver o outro no atual contexto de globalização.

**Palavras-chave:** O outro, olhar, visualidades, modos de ver, interculturalidade

FOLLOW THE THOUGHTS of a seminal and fruitful author as Martín-Barbero requires that we keep in mind the possible intertextualities in his different works. In the case of one of his most recent work, co-authored with Sarah Corona Berkin, the book *Ver con los otros: comunicación intercultural*, draw the attention to the development, in new directions of certain ideas already exposed by the author.

Thereby, if Martín-Barbero already teach us the importance of analyzing the “media texts without losing sight of, in any way, what concerns the modes and ‘seeing exercises’ of different audiences” (Fischer, 2002: 93), such concern now is expanded. *Ver con los otros* has, therefore, an essentially epistemological nature, because the work discusses, from empirical data, the hegemony of the West over ways of seeing. Both through science as a way of knowing and controlling, as with their technology (could be; photography, film, television or video), converted into a way of seeing / integrating with others, that is, the most varied cultures. Thus, Martín-Barbero analyzes and deconstructs homogeneous thinking from the critical position, and the coauthor discusses the homogenizing action from an anthropological perspective and a dialogical action.

Both authors, even with different starting points and trajectories, they have a common interest: the sociocultural thickness of the visuals related to the images and ways of seeing and being seen in the current context of globalization. In this context, the borders where the capitals, the goods, the ideas, the images and the people circulate are broken, therefore creating an interculturality never seen before. This ends up changing the forms of representation and the look of the *other*. The results of these crossings and these crossroads are also explained in the book.

There are three general themes that illuminate the proposed reflection: the first concerns the factors that affect the image we have and what kind of communication we can have with cultures different from our own; the second is about the aspects from which we started and that are composed of different sensitivities, uses of technology and miscegenation as a cultural and political alternative both locally and globally; and the third refers to what the actors call “*mal de ojo*” (p. 5), that is, a look that excludes and invisibilizes, which suffer the intellectuals of the social sciences being insensitive to the cultural challenges they proposed images, the ways of seeing of *others*.

The book is divided into three major chapters. In the first one, the authors state their academic trajectories to try to see with the *others*. Martín-Barbero tells how was to live in Latin America - both the global hyper-global world and the local / national - and everything that led him to think about such worlds. To this end, the author situates the reader from his first relations with the

cinema in the early 1960s in Colombia, to his well-known analysis of television, especially reception studies to “think about seeing” (p. 57) from people everyday life. The author then reaffirms how he found out his remarkable premise that communication ceased to become a matter of means, and became a matter of mediations (Martín-Barbero, 1987). For him, it was because of the knowledge coming from the economy of the image and from a sociology of seeing that has led him to the key question of mediations. The reception and the consumption of the images extrapolate the moment of assistance of the television, the photography or the cinema, happens also in the daily of the social actors. Martín-Barbero also reflects again on popular culture, a theme that is dear to him, stating that it “traces its own path by transforming the meaning of expressions and contents”<sup>1</sup> (p. 8), constituting a form of resistance.

Berkin exposes his path to the study of visuality, first with children and their games and video games and then in the study of young indigenous Mexicans which brought them closer to the research on intercultural communication. The author states that under the influence of Martín-Barbero’s thinking, she began to wonder what others do with messages they received from the media, their contradictions and their creativity, and their relationship in everyday life. Also understood that “when one decides to think with the other, the other has his own questions and answers” (p. 56)<sup>2</sup>, and this premise accompanies all his research. The researcher tells how she met a Mexican indigenous community called *huichols* and how she learned to look and understand the *other* with this community. With them she began to “consider the subject not as a deposit (neither of television nor of culture) but as another that is seen in dialogue” (p. 71)<sup>3</sup>. This caused her to change the way of investigating, considering the reciprocity in research, the mutual exchange between the investigator and the investigated.

The second chapter is based on the work of each of the authors and their distinct empirical experiences and theoretical perspectives. At that moment that they drew up a proposal so that we can *see with others*. Globalization (economic and technological) has diminished the importance and borders of territories, thus devaluing traditional references of identity and in contradiction, local and regional cultures are self-valued. Nevertheless, for the plurality of cultures to be taken into account, it is indispensable that such diversity of identities be narrated and not hidden. In this way, the hypertext arises, which is ambiguous but also constructive of appropriations, miscegenations and hybridizations. The electronic visuality provoked by the Internet is also the cultural visuality with deep transformations in everyday culture and especially with regard to ways of seeing, speaking and appropriating communication and the media

<sup>1</sup> In the original: “traza su próprio sendero transformando el sentido de las expresiones y los contenidos”. This and the other translations are from the author.

<sup>2</sup> In the original: “Cuando se decide pensar con el otro, el otro tiene sus propias preguntas y respuestas”.

<sup>3</sup> In the original: “Considerar al sujeto no como depósito (ni de la televisión ni de la cultura) sino como un otro que se deja ver en el diálogo”.

being of different forms by different peoples. The authors affirm that the present flow in the contemporaneity produces a growing aestheticization in daily life. However, this does not negate the aesthetic performativity that creates virtuality not only in the field of art but also in the re-creation of social and political participation that runs through the activation of different sensitivities and socialities.

Berkin also reports in the second chapter how she reworked the conceptual categories with which she thinks the communication in Latin America with the intention of deepening a new model of interculturality, recovering experience of empirical research with the *Huichols*. In which she gave photographic cameras so that they can photograph the life in the village and years later a trip to the city of Guadalajara, Mexico.

The third chapter is where the authors complete their key positions of the proposal of *seeing with others*, speak of the bases to think the image from a more inclusive perspective designed so that *no one is left out of it*. Cultures today have lived through exchange and that this relationship is conflictive, asymmetric and violent because it is precisely in that place that there is the relationship with the other. The authors states that one should have the interest of living better in the public space, thus distancing oneself from multiculturalists and intercultural perspectives when they place diversity at the center of the discussion and not the power relations between them.

It is also in this last chapter that Martín-Barbero and Berkin deal more specifically with epistemological questions that involve studying and *seeing with others* for them to construct knowledge means to sketch a path to mutual, reciprocal, horizontal knowledge (one recognizes by the look of the other) between the investigator and the investigated. It is necessary to realize how the stories of the *other* and ours interact and not just analyze the facts as researches of social sciences. That is to listen to the other and to interpret it does not means to move on the *other side* to become *one of them* but to have empathy and to let ourselves “be touched by others, and when our vision changes it means you will never see in the ‘same way anymore’”(p. 39)<sup>4</sup>. After all, *seeing with others* is nothing more than a kind of experience that allows access to the lives of many *others* contemporaries.

The book awakens epistemological and methodological reflections essential to all those who investigate communication in the current era of globalization where the flows and production and reception skills merge to form new ways to see and to appropriate communication and media. In an age of transdisciplinarity and complexity (Morin, 2015), it becomes indispensable to *see with others* and to take into account that we are the *others*. ■

<sup>4</sup>In the original: “tocar por los otros; cuando nuestra visión há cambiado, significa nunca más ver lo ‘mismo’”.

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