From the media to mediations – 3 Introductions[1]

Dos meios às mediações: 3 introduções

■ JESÚS MARTÍN-BARBERO

FROM THE MEDIA TO MEDIATIONS[2]

IN THIS BOOK, Martín-Barbero discusses the conflict between senders and receivers, and the fact that the latter are not always seduced without resistance; the production of meaning beyond the mass media; and social processes that break the old certainties in Latin America, confronting us with the true culture of these countries. Communication becomes a matter of culture, which requires reviewing the entire mass mediation process from the reception, recognition, and appropriation. This methodological shift implies a new vision of Latin American modernity and its perspectives, not by self-developed cultural dissent or traditional legacy, but by the study of the power, density, and diversity of popular cultures and their relationship with the historical emergence of the masses. "The bet and aim of this book" – he says – "is to make searchable the mass constitution processes beyond the culturalist blackmail that inevitably turns them into cultural degradation processes," avoiding that "the presence of the people in the mass" makes us forget the necessary criticism that everything that masks social inequality in the massive is a device of ideological integration.

What will be exposed brings the marks of a long journey. I came from philosophy and, by the paths of language, I came across the adventure of communication. From a Heideggerian space, I ended up among people and shacks of wattle and daub, but with radio transmitters and TV antennas. Since then I work here, in the field of mass mediation, of its production devices and consumption rituals, its technological apparatuses and exhibitions, its codes of assembly, perception, and recognition.

For a time, the work consisted of investigating how we are manipulated by this discourse that, through the mass media, makes the untruths bearable, how the ideology penetrates messages, imposing the logic of domination to communication.

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By sociolinguistics and semiotics, I carried out ideological readings of texts and practices, and showed and recorded everything in a book that I called, without hiding influences, *Comunicación masiva:* discurso y poder (Martín-Barbero, 1978). Even so, at the time – I'm talking about ten years ago – some researchers started to suspect that *image* of the strategy process of the dominator, in which no figures could fit beyond the dominator's strategies, in which it all came down to dominating senders and dominated receivers, without the slightest hint of seduction or resistance, without conflicts or contradictions in the structure of the message, much less fights. Around those years, something stirred our reality – in these latitudes, earthquakes are not uncommon – so strongly that it brought up and made visible the profound mismatch between method and situation: all the ways people produce meaning in their lives, the ways how they communicate and use the media, did not fit that *model*. Said in other words: the political and social processes of that time – authoritarian regimes in most of South America, surrounded by liberation struggles in Central America, huge migrations of men of politics, art, and social research – destroyed old certainties and opened new loopholes, confronting us with the *cultural truth* of these countries: miscegenation, which is not only that racial fact from which we came, but the current web of modernity and cultural discontinuities, of social formations and structures of feeling, of memories and imaginaries that mix the indigenous with the rural, the rural with the urban, the folklore with the popular, and the popular with the massive.

That is how communication has become a matter of *mediations* more than of media, a matter of *culture* and, therefore, not only of knowledge, but of acknowledgment. An acknowledgment that was, at first, an operation of methodological shift to re-view the entire process of communication from its *other* side, of the reception, the place of resistances and of appropriation from its uses. But in a second moment, such acknowledgment, precisely so that this shift did not become mere reaction or temporary theoretical change, became re-acknowledgement of history: historical reappropriation of Latin American modernity and its mismatch that opens a loophole in the deceptive logic by which the capitalist homogenization seems to exhaust the present reality. Because, in Latin America, cultural diversity does not mean, as perhaps in Europe and in the United States, the countercultural dissent or the museum, but the validity, density, and diversity of popular cultures, the space of a deep conflict and an inevitable cultural dynamics. And we have been recently discovering that the popular does not speak only from indigenous or rural cultures, but also from the thick web of miscegenation and the deformations of the urban, of the massive. Similarly, at least in Latin America, contrary to the predictions of social destruction, the masses still *contain* – in the double entendre of control and inclusion – the

people. We cannot, then, think today about the popular acting in the margin of the historical process of constitution of the massive: the access of the masses to their visibility and social presence and of the massification that this process materializes historically. We cannot continue building a *critique* that separates the massification of culture from the political fact that originates the historic emergence of the masses and of the contradictory movement that produces the non-exteriority from the massive to the popular, turning it into one of its modes of existence. Attention, because the danger is both in confusing the face with the mask – popular memory with the mass imaginary – and in the belief that there may be a memory without the imaginary, in which the present is anchored and the future is projected. We need a lot of clarity to not confuse them, to think about the relationships that today make up miscegenation.

This is the bet and aim of this book: to change the place of the questions, to make searchable the mass constitution processes beyond the culturalist blackmail that inevitably turns them into cultural degradation processes. And, for this, to investigate them from the mediations and the subjects, that is, from the articulation between communication practices and social movements. Hence its three parts – the situation, the processes, the discussion – and its inverted placement: for being the place of departure, the *Latin American situation* will end up becoming place of arrival in the exposition. I hope the marks left along the way will activate the complicity of the reader and allow them, during this journey, to recognize it.

I initially talked about the traces left by the long journey held so far, and I need to point out some of them. Thus, in the first part, we see the difficulties of articulating a discourse that, being a philosophical and historical reflection, does not hold off nor look external to the problematic and experience it seeks to enlighten. And, sometimes, the doubly unsatisfactory sensation of being halfway between that and this. In addition to the undeniable taste of reckoning that certain pages contain. There is an apparent similarity of the second part with the drawing of an archaeology based on the past, on its grounds, the authentic form of some communication modes and practices that disappeared or degraded. When, in fact, what we are looking for is something radically different: not what survives from the past, but what today makes certain cultural matrices remain valid and an *anachronistic* narrative to be connected with people's lives. Finally, in the third part, there is the illusory impression that, by investigating the forms of people's presence in the mass, we were abandoning the criticism of what in the massive is disguise and neutralization of social inequality and, therefore, device of ideological integration. Maybe this is the price we must pay for daring to break a dualistic reason and affirm the intertwining of distinct logics in the massive, the presence not only of the requirements of the market in it, but of a

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cultural matrix and a *sensorium* that disgusts the elites, at the same time as it is a "place" of interpellation and recognition of the popular classes.

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CLUES TO GLIMPSE MEDIA AND MEDIATIONS[3]

Written in 1987, this book arrives, 14 years later, to its fifth Latin American edition and second Brazilian edition. This forces me, more than updating its content – that is what I tried to do especially in the studies published since the mid-1990s –, to think about the meaning of its topicality. There are many voices that, in recent years, invited me to write a book to answer the reversal of the title, that is, *From the mediations to the media*, as that would seem to be the new direction that is requiring the investigation about the relationships between communication and culture in Latin America. But this proposal hides visions of the social becoming and very different projects. I can glimpse at least two. One that, starting from the economic-cultural scale that audiovisual and computer technologies have acquired in the accelerated processes of globalization, seeks to *take into account the media* at the time of building cultural policies that withstand the desocializing effects of neoliberalism and explicitly insert the cultural industries in the economic and political construction of the region. The other project results from the combination of technological optimism with the most radical political pessimism, and it seeks to legitimize, by the power of media, the *mediating omnipresence of the market*. Corrupting the meaning of political and cultural demands, which somehow find expression in the media, it delegitimizes any questioning of the social order to which only the market and technologies would give shape. The latter is the hegemonic project, which makes us dive in a rising tide of technological fatalism, and before which it is more

necessary than ever to keep the epistemological and political strategic tension between the *historical mediations* that endow the media of meaning and social impact and *the role of mediators* that they may be playing today. Without this minimum distance – or *negativity*, the Frankfurtian would say – critical thinking is impossible. How to assume, then, the social and perceptive thickness that today covers communication technologies, their transverse modes of presence in everyday life, from work to game, their dense forms of mediation both of knowledge and politics, without giving in to the realism of inevitability that produces technological fascination, and without letting themselves be caught in the discursive complicity of *neoliberal modernization* – which rationalizes the market as the sole organizing principle of society as a whole – with *technological knowledge*, whereby, with the engine of class struggle exhausted, history would have found its replacement in the *information and communication* avatars?

The undeniable centrality that today occupies the media ends up disproportionate and paradoxical in countries like ours, with unsatisfied basic needs in education or health, and in which the growth of inequality atomizes our societies deteriorating the devices of *communication*, that is, of political and cultural cohesion. And, by that, "worn the symbolic representations, we cannot make us an image of the country we want, and politics fails to fix the direction of the changes in motion" (Lechner, 1995: 124). That is why our populations can, with a certain ease, assimilate the images of modernization and many technological changes, but can only very slowly and painfully recompose their systems of values, ethical standards, and civic virtues. All this requires us to continue the effort to unravel the increasingly complex web of mediations that articulates the relationship communication/culture/politics.

On the side of *communication*, today we need to think about a process in which what is at stake is no longer the desublimation of art, simulating, in the figure of the *cultural industry*, its reconciliation with life, as the Frankfurtian thought, but the emergence of a *communicational reason*, whose devices – the fragmentation that shifts and decentralizes, the flow that globalizes and compresses, the connection that dematerializes and hybridizes – provide the *becoming market of society*. Before the dialogical consensus in which Habermas sees the *communicative reason* emerge, discharged from the discursive opacity and political ambiguity that introduce the technological and commercial mediation, we are trying to think about the *communicational hegemony* of the market in society: communication converted in the most effective engine of disengagement and insertion of cultures – ethnic, national, or local – in the space/time of the market and in global technologies. In the same sense, we need to think about the strategic place that the communication now occupies in the configuration

of the new models of society, and its paradoxical connection both with the relaunch of modernization – via satellites, computers, video-processors – and with the baffled and tantalizing experience of late modernity.

On the side of *culture*, until recently, the map seemed clear and without wrinkles: anthropology dealt with *primitive* cultures and sociology, with *modern* cultures. This involved two opposing ideas of culture: for anthropologists, culture is *everything*, because in the primordial magma that primitive people inhabit, culture is both the axe and the myth, the oca and the relationships of kinship, the repertoire of medicinal plants or ritual dances; while for sociologists, culture is *only* a specialized type of activities and objects, of practices and products belonging to the canon of arts and humanities. In the late modernity that we now inhabit, the separation that established that dual idea of culture is blurry, on one side, by the growing movement of communicative specialization of culture, now organized in a system of machinery that produce symbolic goods adjusted to their "consuming audience." That is what the school does today with its students, the television with its audiences, the church with its congregation, or the press with its readers. And, on the other side, it is the whole social life that, *anthropologized*, becomes culture. As if the machine of modernizing rationalization, impossible to be stopped – that separates and specializes – was turning, skating, in circles, and culture escapes all compartmentalization, irrigating the entire social life. Today both art and health, work and violence, are subject/object of culture, and there is also political, drug, organizational, urban, juvenile, gender, scientific, audiovisual, and technological cultures, among others.

Regarding *politics*, what we are living is not, as the most pessimistic end-of-millennium prophets believe, its dissolution, but the reconfiguration of the *mediations* that constitute the new ways of interpellation of the subjects and of representation of the ties that make society cohesive. More than replacing it, the television or radio mediation started to *constitute*, to be part of the web of discourses and political action itself. This mediation is *socially productive*, and what it produces is the densification of the ritual and theatrical dimensions of politics. Production that remains unthought, and largely unthinkable, for the instrumental conception of communication that permeates much of the criticism. The *media* is not limited to convey or translate existing representations, neither can it replace them, but it started to *constitute a key scene of public life*. And it does it reintroducing, within the framework of formal rationality, the *mediations of sensitivity* that the rationalism of the "social contract" believed it could (Hegelianly) overcome. If television requires negotiating the ways of its mediation, that is because this medium, like no other, gives it access to the *axis of the look* (Verón, 1987), from which politics can not only penetrate the

domestic space but also reintroduce corporality and gestuality in its discourse, i.e., the significant materiality that constitutes the everyday social interaction. If talking about *political culture* means considering the forms of intervention of languages and cultures in the constitution of the actors and the political system (Landi, 1988), thinking about politics from communication means putting in the foreground the symbolic and imaginary ingredients present in the processes of power formation. Which leads the democratization of society towards a work in the very cultural and communicative web of politics. Because neither the social productivity of politics is separable from the battles that come to light in the symbolic terrain, nor the participatory nature of democracy is today real outside the public scene that builds mass communication.

Thus, more than objects of politics, communication and culture constitute today a primary field of political battle: the strategic scenario that requires politics to recover its symbolic dimension – its ability to represent the link between citizens, the feeling of belonging to a community – to address the erosion of the collective order. *That is what the market cannot do* (Brunner, 1990), however effective its simulacrum may be. The market cannot *settle traditions*, since everything it produces "vanishes into the air," given its structural tendency to an accelerated and widespread obsolescence not only of things, but also of forms and institutions. The market cannot create *societal links*, that is, *between subjects*, because they are constituted in the process of communication of meaning, and the market operates anonymously by value logics involving purely formal exchanges, evanescent associations and promises that only engender satisfactions or frustrations, but never meaning. The market cannot *engender social innovation*, since it assumes non-functional differences and solidarities, resistance and dissent, while the market works only with profitability.

Seeking to draw a new map of mediations, of the new complexities in the constitutive relations between communication, culture, and politics, I have been recently working with the following proposal:
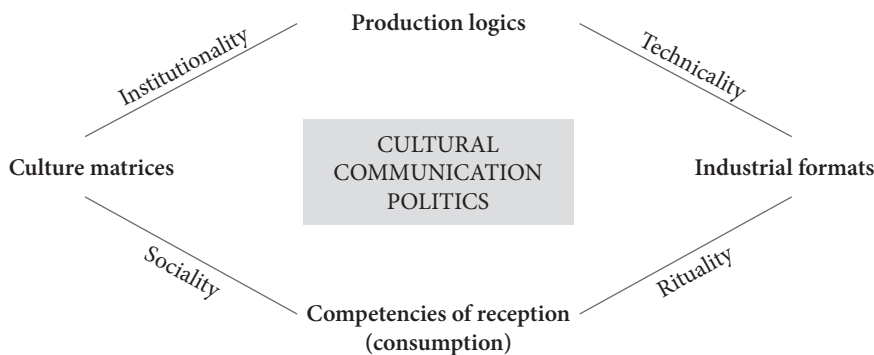
The scheme moves on two axes: the diachronic, or long-term historical – between Cultural Matrices (CM) and Industrial Formats (IF) – and the synchronic: between Production Logics (PL) and Competencies of Reception or Consumption (CR). In turn, the relationships between CM and PL are mediated by different regimes of Institutionality, while the relationships between CM and CR are mediated by several forms of Sociality. Technicalities mediate PL and IF and Ritualities mediate IF and CR.

1. The relationship between Cultural Matrices and Industrial Formats refers to the history of changes in the articulation between *social movements* and *public discourses*, and of these with the modes of production of the public that provide the hegemonic forms of collective communication. An example: initially connected to the social movements of the popular sectors in the beginning of the industrial revolution and to the emergence of mass popular culture, which at the same time denies and confirms the popular transforming its cultural status, the genre *melodrama* will be first theater and will then take the format of feuilleton or novel in chapters – in which the popular memory (kinship relationships as the axis of the plot) will intersect , hybridize, with the bourgeois imagery (sentimental relationships of the couple) – and enter the cinema (especially in North America) and the radio drama and soap opera in Latin America. This history allows us to shift the structural Manichaeism that prevented us for a long time from thinking about the thickness of the complicities between hegemonic and subaltern discourses, as well as the constitution – throughout the historical processes – of discursive grammars originated from *formats of sedimentation* of narrative knowledge, habits, and expressive techniques. *Generative* grammars, which give rise to a topography of shifting discourses, whose mobility comes both from changes of capital and techno-logical transformations and from the permanent movement of the *intertextualities* and *intermedialities* that feed the different genres and different media. And that today are place of a complex intertwined of residues (R. Williams) and innovations, of anachronisms and modernities, of communicative asymmetries that involve, on the part of producers, sophisticated "strategies of anticipation" (M. Wolf) and, on the part of spectators, the activation of new and *old* reading competencies. Today, this history passes precisely through the perspective of the so-called "cultural studies."

2. The dual relationship of CM with Competencies of Reception and Production Logics is mediated by the movements of Sociality, or

sociability, and by changes in Institutionality. *Sociality*, generated in the web of everyday relationships that people weave when they get together, is in turn a place of anchorage of the *communicative praxis* and results from the collective modes and uses of communication, that is, of interpellation/constitution of the social actors and their relationships (hegemony/counter-hegemony) with the power. In this process, the CM activate and shape the *habitus* that make up the several Competencies of Reception. *Institutionality* has been, since always, a dense mediation of opposing interests and powers, which has mainly affected, and continues to affect, the regulation of discourses that, on the part of the state, seek to give stability to the established order, and, on the part of citizens – majorities and minorities –, seek to defend their rights and be recognized, that is, permanently re-constitute the social realm. Seen from *sociality*, communication is a matter of *ends* – of the constitution of meaning and of the construction and deconstruction of society. Seen from *institutionality*, communication becomes a matter of *media*, that is, of production of public discourses whose hegemony is paradoxically on the side of private interests.

The changes in *sociality* refer to movements, not necessarily fundamentalist or nationalist ones, that reconnect with the community, such as one that is occurring among young people around music, who are more closely linked to deep changes in sensitivity and subjectivity. The reconfiguration of *institutionality* could not be stronger, in spite of the paradoxes it presents: while traditional parties (and also many of the new) entrench on their feuds, state institutions are corrupted until the unthinkable and parliamentary institutions are bureaucratized until perversion, we watch a proliferation of movements in search of other institutionalities, able to give *shape* to the drives and shifts from *citizenship* to the cultural context and from the representation plane to the instituting *recognition*.

3. Understanding the functioning of Production Logics mobilizes a triple quest: 1) about the *business structure* – in its economic dimensions, professional ideologies, and productive routines, 2) about their *communicative competency – ability to interpellate/construct publics, audiences, consumers, and 3) especially about their technological competitiveness – uses of Technicality, including the ability to innovate in the IF. Because technicality is less a subject of apparatuses than of perceptive operators and discursive skills. Confusing communication*

with the techniques and the media results as deforming as thinking they are exterior and accessory to (the truth of) communication. Likewise, confusing the industrial process with the profitability of the capital – visualizing their complicity is another thing — was what transformed criticism in evasion, because if the total rationality of production runs out in the rationality of the system, there is no other way to escape reproduction except being unproductive! The strategic mediation of technicality is currently in a new scenario, globalization, and in its conversion in global universal connector (Milton Santos). This does not only occur in the space of computer networks, but also in the connection of the media – television and telephone – with the computer, rapidly restoring the relationship of public discourses and media reports (genres) with industrial formats and virtual texts. The questions opened by technicality point to the new social status of the technique, to the restoration of the meaning of discourse and political praxis, to the new status of culture, and to the avatars of aesthetics.

4. The mediation of Ritualities brings us to the symbolic nexus that supports all communication: to its anchorage in memory, to its rhythms and forms, its scenarios of interaction and repetition. In their relationship with the IF (discourses, genres, programs and grids, or palimpsests), the Ritualities constitute *grammars of action* – of looking, listening, reading – that regulate the interaction between the spaces and times of everyday life and the spaces and times that form the media. This implies, on the part of the media, a certain ability to dictate rules to the game between meaning and situation. However, one thing is the *meaning* of the message and another is that to which the pragmatics alludes when asking for the *meaning* that the action of listening to the radio or watching television has to the receiver. Seen from the CR, the *ritualities* refer, on one hand, to the different *social uses* of media, for example, the expressive baroqueness of the popular modes of watching movies before the sobriety and seriousness of the intellectuals to whom any noise is able to distract them from their cinematic contemplation. Or the productive consumption that some young people carry out using the computer before the markedly playful-evasive use of the majority. On the other hand, the *ritualities* refer to the multiple *trajectories of reading* connected to the social conditions of taste, marked by levels of quality and education, by possessions and knowledge formed in ethnic, class, or gender memory, and by family habits of coexistence with

the literate, oral, or audiovisual culture, which carry the experience of seeing over reading or vice versa.

The ritualities are also ripped from the archaic time, by some anthropologists and sociologists, to illuminate the specificities of urban contemporaneity: modes of existence of the symbolic, trajectories of initiation rites "of passage," fictional seriality and ritual repetition, thus allowing one to glimpse game between everyday life and experiences of difference, of resacralization, of re-enchantment of the world from certain uses or modes of relationship with the media, between inertias and activity, between habits and initiatives of looking and reading.

What I'm looking for with this map is to recognize that the media are today key spaces of condensation and intersection of multiple networks of power and cultural production, but also to warn, at the same time, against the *single thought* that legitimizes the idea that technology is today the "great mediator" between people and world, when what the technology mediates today, in a more intense and accelerated way, is the transformation of society in market, and of the latter in main agent of globalization (in its many and opposing meanings). The fight against the single thought thus finds a strategic place not only in the nomad and decentralizing polytheism that mobilizes the reflection and research on the historical mediations of communication, but also in the transformations that cross the *sociocultural mediators*, both in their traditional and institutional figures – school, family, church, neighborhood – and in the emergence of new social actors and movements that, such as the ecological or human rights organizations, ethnic or gender movements, introduce new meanings of the social and new *social uses* of the media. Meanings and uses that, in their touches and tensions, refer, on one hand, to the difficulty of overcoming the purely instrumental conception and practices to take on the political, technical, and expressive challenge, which helps the recognition *in practice* of the cultural thickness that the processes and means of communication have today. However, on the other hand, they also refer to the slow illumination of new public spheres and to the new forms of social imagination and creativity.

These fights are intertwined with the main lessons learned in these fourteen years and trace the paths of my hope. As wrote Borges: "What comes is never encouraged to be entirely present without first rehearsing, and this rehearsal is hope." I refer especially to the slow and profound revolution of women – perhaps the only one that marks this disappointing century in history – on the world of culture and politics, articulating the recognition of *difference* with the discourse that denounces *inequality*, and affirming the *subjectivity* implied in every collective action. I am also referring to the ruptures that, mobilized young people, go beyond the framework of generation: all that the youth condenses,

in its restlessness and rages and in their cognitive and expressive empathies with the language of technologies, of transformations in the *sensorium* "our" time and of political-cultural mutations that announce the new century. And I refer, finally, to these "new ways of being together" by which citizenship is recreated and society is reconstituted, from neighborhood groups to peaceful conflict resolution and from community radio and television stations in which memories are recovered and new ties of belonging to the territory are woven, to the communities that, with rock and rap, break and re-imagine the meaning of coexistence, undoing and redoing the faces and figures of identity. It is from these lessons and hopes that reading this book already contains its entire rewrite.

Bogotá, October 1998.

PREAMBLE TO A MAP OF THE COMMUNICATIVE AND CULTURAL MUTATIONS[4]

> *Cartography lives an ambiguity that puts it at the confluence of science and art. Historical and geographical, it produces an image that shows the relationships of human beings with the territory, a general apprehension of the thickness of its conflicts and, at the same time, the historicity of our knowledge.*
> *Jean-Claude Groshens*

The book that houses this preamble was released over twenty years ago throughout the world, in four languages, and published by two publishers, to which a third is added now. Already in its introduction, written in December 1985, it explicitly showed its cartographic tendencies when it proposed to study "*miscegenation, which is not only the racial situation from which we came, but the web of modernity and cultural discontinuities, of social formations and structures of feeling, of memories and imaginaries that mix the indigenous with the rural, the folklore and the popular with the massive* […]. *The bet and aim of this book is to change the place of the questions to make the processes of communication searchable from the mediations and subjects, that is, from the articulation between communication practices and social movements.*" The abundance of signs and signals that highlights the places from where we think and write, the crossroads of knowledge that overflows its customary borders, the intertwining of languages and figures with which one un-folds, un-centralizes, or undoes the field of knowledge, are good examples of an almost initiatory bet to map territories we think are familiar and that, as we go through them, we realize are strange,

un-known and quiet, all the ignorance that still inhabits knowledge, resisting internally, baffling it and subverting it.

It was this mixed feeling of proximity and strangeness that made me recognize my way of researching in the figure of the "night map" proposed by Saint-Exupéry to name his flight map, and whose peculiarity is told to us by placing it in the mouth of a character based on Guillaumet, an already dead friend of the author, from whom he received his learning to fly over Spain in postal flights between France and Algeria:

> He was not describing it to me, but it made Spain my friend. He did not talk to me about hydrography or the population or Guadix, but about three orange groves bordering a field near Guadix… "Don't trust them, mark them on your map," he repeated. And the three orange groves were more important in the map than Sierra Nevada. He wasn't talking about Lorca, but of a farm near Lorca, a live farm, of the couple of farmers. This couple, lost in space 1500 km above us, acquired great importance. Well installed at the foot of their mountain, as if they were the guardians of a lighthouse, they were ready, under the stars, to help human beings. And we learned from their forgetfulness and their distance lessons about details ignored by all the geographers of the world.

The navigability of a territory would come then as much or more than the specialized knowledge of the terrain, of a certain experience of the pilot about what is truly significant for a *far vision*, and that, therefore, only turns into knowledge de-ciphering this vision with approaches from the other senses: smells and sounds, memories and fears, glimpses and intuitions. Thus, the idea of *mediation*, which gives title and meaning to this book, was also the product of an experience that became known as being instigated by this other *far vision*, that of philosophy, many and dense approaches to the territory of social life and everyday cultures, approaches mobilizing at the same time very different feelings and meanings, mobilized mainly from history, ethnography, and this other ancestral knowledge indispensable to draw maps, which is calligraphy, its drawing writing and writing drawing. I wrote this book by hand based on an infinity of maps of each of its three parts, built with different colored pencils that marked the relationship of some ideas with places and events, strong names with phrases crossed with drawings of transits between authors and themes. Only later, when I typed it, I rewrote it so that the seams and patches were left only in its back.

Mediations, then, refers more to the tracing that connects in web the dispersed, different, and distant dots and lines that weave a map to a reality that is verified or to a concept that is maintained and managed. Hence my

tenacious resistance to define *mediations*, and my bet to unfold and delimit them as the communication processes, cultural practices, and social movements *were becoming close*, imposing a dense relationship between the world of media production in cultural industries and the worlds of consumption, massive, but differentiated, active and citizen. For all that, this preamble has the task to locate this book in the long time that goes from the drawing of a first map that includes the lines of tension and glimpse that comprise the field of communication/ culture in the late 1970s to the tracing of the map that I work on today, thirty years later. Thus, located at the end of the 1980s, *From the media to mediations* was for me, at the same time, the point of arrival of fifteen years of work and the starting point of many others.

THE FIRST MAP

My first map dates to 1980 and is in a text (Martín-Barbero, 1981[5]) explicitly written to be presented to the Steering Committee of the ALAIC (Latin American Association of Researchers of Communication), in the meeting I left its presidency and made a balance of the Latin American research in communication during the second half of the 1970s. It is a map in two levels that, however, overlap: one covers the new epistemic and political fabric unraveled at the end of the 1970s for this field of knowledge, and the other traces the emerging lines of a research that started to insert the studies of communication in the field of culture studies. The first level consists of three points: one political, another epistemic, and the crossing of both. From the *political* one, the major changes started from a fact: *in recent years, the conflict between the transnational character of the economic structure and the national character of the political sphere has become insoluble.* It was only recently that the word "transnational" became present in the social sciences, and it is nonetheless premonitory that it was the field of communication that expressed more clearly the contradiction between the processes that named the existence of the transnational in the economy and of the national as the (only) sphere belonging to politics. A contradiction that seemed associated, on one hand, to the ideological recomposition of a political right *that started to lose the dislike of certain issues and is stealing from the left some of its most precious "objects," subjecting them to a cleaning and neutralization operation; because of this, the battlegrounds are no longer delimited as they were some years ago. The direction of the fight is no longer clear, that is, at the service of who or what are we working?*

On the other hand, being aware of what has been said above, *the era of the "major complaints" – always necessary – seems to give way to a more obscure, but no less risky and difficult work: the fight against an eclectic amalgam that functionalizes*

criticism, the fight against environmental neopositivism. Parenthesis: it is surprising to note that this contradiction, detected by Latin Americans at the end of the 1970s, is now leading to some of the most heated debates about the meaning and scope of *globalization*, as was explained in the successive meetings of the World Social Forum, between a European left – predominantly French-oriented – that continues to cling to the national sphere as the only field of political battle, and the African and Latin American left that seeks to bring politics to the global field!

From the epistemic plan, what is dis-covered is that this functionalization and, to some extent, this neopositivism, was within a left wing thought – Althusserian, more specifically – that continued investigating technology only from its instrumental dimension, that of "ideological apparatus of the ruling class and its State," ignoring what the new technologies began to shape: *they appear and are perceived as the matrix of a new social model, and a new political-cultural framework. And only placed in relation to the model of society in which they are inserted can the changes that these technologies bring be understood.*

It is precisely in this "point" – the third of my map – where the political and the epistemic intersect as strongly as evidenced by a quote from the first Stuart Hall I met: "communications are penetrating the heart of the work and of the production system," and this by a new idea of *information as a raw material of any production and even redefining the production processes themselves*, while in the political field *all the Western democratic model is being affected by the direction that the "computerized society" goes.*

The other side of the map that I proposed in 1980 drew the three priority lines of research that I called *strategic fields*: the transnational structure of information, the new communication technologies, and alternative or popular communication. The first line was intended to expand and unfold the study of the *transnational information structure* of the very peculiar perception developed by Latin Americans based on the Dependency Theory. The researchers of these countries were the pioneers in seeking the translation of this theory to the field of *communication public policies*, and this contribution was decisive in the writing of the famous and frustrated "MacBride Report" with which Unesco pointed the need for *a new world communication and information order*, which would be published in the same year of 1980. What my map addressed then was the urgent need to think about the *structures of information production*, from the transnational economic processes and national power structures, that is, the different positions of the national bourgeoisies and of the evolution of political parties. That is because the relationship between culture and industry had emerged from the Frankfurtian determinism in the analyses of R. Williams, S. Hall, and F. Murdock when reading *the social and ideological determination*

not in terms of content, but of setting limits and imposing demarcations. This allowed us to start investigating the other meaning of "structures of production," that is, in terms of devices of relationship between technologies, market, and "productive routines": codes of a system of techno-discursive operations that regulate the work of the videographer or TV editor, generating a knowledge acquired by exercising their work and through which a way to see and say what is seen is materialized.

The second line, new technologies, aimed to investigate what was called n*on-contemporaneity between technologies and social uses*, the paradox of these countries that, at the same time in which, *for the first time, felt contemporary with technological inventions* – someone wrote: "for the first time, the machines are not coming to us second-hand" – *however, they lived in social conditions that prevented the access by most people and, in other cases, a mode of use that was not automatic.* This was pointing to a trend that would become quite fruitful, that of researching *putting technology in the singular and cultures in the plural* to enable the identity marks that pass through the uses, including the anachronistic and even strange usages, since these make more visible the diversity of the modes of appropriation and, therefore, of our cultures, which was what the mere ideological analysis of the content or the effects prevented us from thinking.

The third line, *alternative or popular communication*, was trying to turn into a participating object of research *the other forms of communication in which the speech of dominated groups was liberated*, so that what really matters *is not the means, but popular creativity.* Understanding as popular *the memory of another economy, both political and symbolical, memory of other denied cultural matrix.* And, thus, *more than an alternative in themselves* – source of idealizations and Manichaeisms – *what the practices of popular communication show to us is the radical impoverishment that everyday and festive communication suffers with the commodification of social life.*

Two other maps mediated the first map and the one I am presenting today. One of them led the research behind this book, enabling the study of the *cultural mediations of communication*, whose axes were: the diachronic or historical, between cultural matrices and industrial formats; and the synchronic, between mass production logics and competencies of reception or cultural consumption. The other map, found in the *Preface to the fifth edition*, made by the CAB in Bogotá in 1998[6], was what, in the 1990s, allowed me to start studying the *communicative mediations of culture*, whose axes were the relationships between *everyday sociality* (the "communicative action") and *media institutionality* (the economic/legal scope of the media); and that of the relationships between

[6] The text preceding this (W. N.).

technicality (sociocultural thickness of the new technologies) and *rituality* (symbolic connection of contemporary communication with large memories, their mixed-race rhythms and rites).

The current map of work

Drawing only its most central lines, the map that I work on today connects the previous ones to the study of *contemporary cultural mutations*, whose axes are *times/spaces* and *migrations/flows*. I sketch here the dots and lines that trace it.

Structures of time and shapes of space

> *The great 19th-century obsession was history, development, crisis, cycle, accumu-lation, the overload of the past, the overhead of the dead, and the cooling of the world. Maybe the current time is that of space, simultaneity, juxtaposition, the near and the far, the side-by-side, the scattered. We are in a moment in which the world is experienced less as a great life that develops over time and more as a network linking points and weaving its mesh. Some of the ideological conflicts that enliven the current ideological controversies are developed between devotees descending from the time and convinced inhabitants of space.*
> M. Foucault ([1987] 1999)

Temporalities

Modern is that temporality in which and the dynamics and weight of history were entirely focused on the future rather than the past. Before the romantic look that, since the 18th century, sought to recover and preserve what modernity made hopelessly obsolete – in languages and music, in stories and objects –, the learned look legitimizes the destruction of the past as a burden, and makes the novelty the only source of cultural legitimacy. But, in the early 20th century, W. Benjamin pioneeringly highlighted the black hole that sucked this temporality: "The representation of a progress of the humankind in history is inseparable from the representation of the realization of history next to a homogeneous and empty time." And it is the experience of this "homogeneous and empty time" that F. Vattimo (1990) shows now as characteristic of the late modernity society: that of progress turned into routine, because the permanent and constant renewal of things, products, goods, is "physiologically needed to ensure the pure and simple survival of the system. Novelty now has nothing of revolutionary or disturbing." We are facing an empty progress whose *reality* is confused with the appearance of change produced by the images. Thus, following

Heidegger when he speaks of the connection of the technique, with *a world that consists of images*, Vattimo asserts that "the direction to which technology moves is not so much the domain of nature by machines, but the specific development of the information and communication of the world as *image*."

Contemporary is, first, a temporality configured by the crisis of the modern experience of time, which has in the current *boom of memory* one of its most eloquent manifestations. A. Huyssens (1999) outlined the areas of expansion throughout the current society: the growth and expansion of museums in the past two decades, the restoration of old urban centers, the rise of the historical novel and biographical narratives, the retro fashion in architecture and clothing, the enthusiasm for celebrations, the rise of antique stores, the video as memorialization device, and even the conversion of the past of world – and not only the one collected by museums – in a database. The mere enumeration of the references gives us clues about the omnipresence that features and the complexity of the warp that feeds the "fever of memory" that our society undergoes. A second plane of analysis refers *to the various forms of amnesia* the market and the media produce. We live in a society whose objects last less and less, because their accelerated obsolescence is planned by a system whose operation depends on their implementation. Before the old memory accumulated in objects and houses, through which several generations talked, today many of the objects with which we live every day are disposable, and the houses we inhabit bear as value the most complete temporal asepsis.

We are, therefore, facing a *contemporaneity* that, with its worship to the present, "a present designed in the form of successive blows without historical relationship between them, and autistic, which believes it can be self-sufficient" (Lechner, 1995), confuses the times and crushes us with the *simultaneity* of the current. A contemporaneity that feeds especially from the *weakening of the past* and the *bricolage* of the times that acquaint us with any other time effortlessly, plucking the complexities and ambiguities of its time. But be careful, A. Huyssen warns us, revealing the action of the market and the media that deep down we do not reach, there is still something back: the accelerated obsolescence and the weakening of our identity are generating in us an *irrepressible desire for the past* that does not end with evasion. Although shaped by the market, this desire exists and must be taken seriously as a symptom of a deep cultural dissatisfaction, expressing the anxious misery we have suffered longer and the materiality of our bodies claiming less space and more place. All this represents a radical challenge: not opposing memory and amnesia in a Manichean way but thinking about them together. If the "fever of history" denounced by Nietzsche in the 19th century worked inventing the national and imperial traditions, that

is, giving cultural cohesion to societies torn apart by the convulsions of the industrial revolution, our memory "fever of memory" is an expression of the *temporary anchorage* suffered by societies whose temporality is brutally shattered by the informational revolution that dissolves the space-territorial coordinates of our lives. And in which the profound transformation of the "structure of temporality" that modernity bequeathed us is manifested.

Spaces

The inhabited space is the primitive space of bodies and territories. The *niche* space, so phonetically and topographically close to the nest that, as Heidegger taught us ([1951] 1984), inhabiting precedes construction, is to have a place to fit in, so that the entire construction process to human beings is the permanent quest for a perfect habitat, that is, where they feel well, comfortable. The inhabited space refers to the vital necessity of niche-home, a place with warm, without which the body cannot survive. Not just any body, but the one that Merleau-Ponty (1945: 114-180) called the "own body," precisely what gives shape to its own spatiality. This implies that the inhabited space is inseparable from time, not that of the of clocks, but the time *that does* and to which myths of origin and rites of initiation give shape, and the time of the *rhythms* of the day: morning, afternoon, night; of the seasons: spring, summer, fall, winter; and of the stages of life: childhood, youth, maturity, old age. But the inhabited space also mobilizes what we call *territory*: the space marked by mud or stone beacons – other animals mark it with urine – and with which the clan demarcates the *terrain* of its work and its survival as a community, made of proximity and belonging, ties also closely linked to the time, by rituals that celebrate them periodically, that is, renew and deepen them.

The produced space is created by the essential connection of some territories with others, by a relationship of wars and interdependencies that gave rise to a new spatiality, and it is fabric of the different modes of communication produced or demanded by displacements due to accidents of nature, as well as trips of exploration and conquest. Space of the ways, sidewalks, paths, roads, and also vehicles, from the horse to the space shuttle. *Inventions* that have changed the ways of travelling and warring: from the horse to the horse-drawn carriage and the trireme, and from the carriage to the car and the tank, passing by the ship and the plane. The *machines* play both ways: the compass that extended and secured navigation also extended and increased the power of the sea wars. Paul Virilio (1993) has lucidly thematized the relationship between communication machines and war machines. And in our cities, increasingly extensive, disarticulated, and violent, the radio, television, and computer network produce a new type of shared

space, able to offer ways of opposing the isolation of individuals and families, allowing them minimum sociocultural ties. This is the imbalance generated by a type of irrational urbanization of space that, somehow, is compensated by the communicational spatiality that weaves the electronic networks.

The imagined space is the one that names the "imagined community" in the terms of B. Anderson (1985), in which the nation-state is formed when modern *society* comes to replace the pre-modern organic *community*. Before the organic community formed by a dense network of ties, to which were tied relationships of territory, kinship, religion, and trade, the modern society produces a powerful abstraction, resulting in the only two founding relations: the one that binds the citizen with the national state and the worker with the factory boss. The imagined space of the nation is not only the key spatiality of the political modernity, but also of the cultural: which allows the State to legitimize itself historically is the heritage, and from there derives the other name of the nation: *fatherland*. Which in turn are translated in the two components, increasingly more imaginary of the national: the border and the identity. Because neither the border ensures sovereignty nor what keeps us together is this identity. National space that is at the heart not only of the debate, but also of the processes, both those that refer us to the fundamentalist nationalisms, such as the ones that de-locate and resignify the meaning of this space in the globality of the world.

The practiced space is the *modern city* in the sense that W. Benjamin (1972) understood it when observing the city that is formed not only by new constructions – such as avenues and galleries – but by the anonymity of the walker the great avenues and the new art that is the cinema. Thus, it is the "modern subjectivity" that emerges in the new relationship of the people with the city, a new feeling of loneliness that the individual shares in the crowd with that of the moviegoer in the dark room, both inaugurating two devices of perception: the dispersed look and the multiple image montage. M. de Certeau (1980: 175) thinks about the city from the ways it is appropriated: pleasure, pain, fears. Because the city is experienced by *practicing it*, by the paths and uses that its inhabitants make and trace, these "space motricities" combine collective styles and individual uses, all crossed by changes that break and reconfigure the modes of belonging to the territory and modes of living an identity. A *city* today invigorated by the devaluation of the national, produced by the global logic in the local dynamics; challenged by the plurality of stories that today are built by ethnicities, regions, and women; the national explodes and decentralizes, making the city the strategic place where some ties of belonging still survive, coexisting with the shift produced by global flows.

Figures of sensitivity and mobility: migrants and Internet users

Rather than opposing in a Manichean way the city inhabited by immigrants to that of Internet users, the former symbolizing the painful uprooting of their territory and the latter celebrating the lightness and mobility of flows, we proposed to develop the imbrications between the dis-order of the social integration of immigrants in the city and the cultural discomfort that Internet users produce. The first not opposing them like this is Z. Bauman (1999), differentiating the figures of the tourist and the bum. The *tourists* live in a non-spatial world, without territory, thus their mobility is almost instantaneous, as much as the time in which they live, *a world in which to stand still is to die*, and live is to travel incessantly accumulating "new" experiences, feelings, and emotions; the world of the tourist is, ultimately, that of the consumer. The *bums* inhabit the thick world of the space with territories and borders, visas and uprootings, a territory to which they belong, but in which they cannot stop, because they are expelled without having another one to call their own, since travelling to them leaving without completely arriving nowhere, because the world of the bum, according to Bauman, is really that of the *emigrant*. Today, migrations in cities of the *North* are one of the most visible causes of *urban chaos*, increasing the extent and intensity of the heterogeneous, aggravating the sociocultural dis-order. The one that G. Simmel ([1971] 2002) predicted when noting that, compared with the relationship according to which the neighbor is one that is near and the foreigner is the one that is far, the emigrant is that weird character, *foreigner who is nearby*, becoming an intruder who inhabits our house. The presence of the immigrant is resented by local citizens as a threat that, putting the safety of residents at risk, must be fought, multiplying the registrations and verifications, that is, installing the mistrust as normal behavior and extending the suspicion to the gestures, voices, and clothes. The biggest problem of *sudaca* immigrants (as Latin Americans are called in Spain), is that, although they believe they speak Spanish, their accent the *denounces* them, because their way of talking and gesturing change normality.

As the migrant flows cause social and political disorders in the city, the flow of information and images, the virtual languages and writings introduce chaos in the literate city, since they also upset authorities and hierarchies. The audiovisual world has already challenged the school in the everyday experience of the teachers who witnessed the change in school life by logics, knowledge, and stories that are beyond their control. The audiovisual media has become a new powerful field of socialization (Bell, 1977), as it addresses the elaboration and transmission of values and patterns of behavior, patterns of taste and lifestyles that clutter and dismantle the old and resistant forms of intermediation and

authority that until recently made up the social status and power of the family and the school.

But in a much more intensive way, digital technology radicalizes the experience of dis-anchorage produced by modernity, because this technology shifts knowledge, modifying both the cognitive and institutional status of the *conditions of knowledge*, leading to a strong blurring of the boundaries between reason and imagination, knowledge and information, nature and artifice, art and science, expertise and profane experience. Thus, the changes in the ways in which knowledge circulates constitute one of the most profound transformations that a society can undergo. The experiences and narratives of the immigrant are increasingly intertwined with those of the Internet users. Millions of refugees and migrants in and out Latin America inhabit a city wrote with stories typed in a *chat* or in web hypertext, where individuals and communities communicate with their relatives who are on the other side of the world, and this by the circulation of stories and pictures, in which they tell and are told to continue telling among their people and to be taken into account by those who, above them, make decisions that affect them.

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