

Notes to the text by Jesús Martín-Barbero “What Latin American communication research owes to Brazil: Personal account of an intercultural experience”

*Alguns apontamentos feitos
ao texto de Jesús Martín-Barbero
“O que a pesquisa latino-americana de
comunicação deve ao Brasil. Relato pessoal
de uma experiência intercultural”*

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*A form of tribute to Master Jesús Martín-Barbero,
a few months after his departure.*

WHAT FOLLOWS ARE brief notes arising from the rereading of a text by Jesús Martín-Barbero (JMB) originally presented in 1997, 21 years ago. The long-elapsed time and the present moment created a special reading of the text marked both by the emotion of the recent loss and by the theme addressed. Today, I read this text as a map, in which JMB ended up charting the most important Brazilian contributions to communication research in Latin America. And I read it as a historiography of the initial period of the field of communication, in the 80s, with the author simply pointing out the numerous innovations that Brazilian research had made in the period that are now evident and their resonances up to this day. Even more, I could then follow, in the first-person account, the Brazilian influences in his own work – recalling that only ten years separated it from the first publication of *From Media to Meditation* (1987) – such as the deepening of his study program of the communication and culture relations, the approximation of the theory of gaps with the theory of mediations; the “*tempranos*” studies on the reception competence and on new ways of looking at globalization and interculturality.

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Starting the cartography, the author identifies Paulo Freire's libertarian pedagogy – with his word and action program – and Gramsci's hegemony concept – with his study of domination as a communication process – as the two pillars that enabled him to *think about communication* in different way than that which prevailed in Latin American research at the time (a kind of left-wing functionalism), not only as a process of domination, but as a lived social process and as a cultural battleground. These two authors, according to him, helped him draw four maps of the original contributions of Brazilian research, condensed below.

1. THINKING THE MEANS IN THE HISTORICAL FORMATION OF THE NATIONAL-POPULAR

The first contribution of Brazilian research is identified from his first meeting with Brazil in September 1983. It was the discovery that, here, to think the means was to think the country, it was to think beyond their property and functions. The complex formation of a country, conflicting political and cultural mixes, starting with the ambiguities of populism, the “misplaced ideas” and, mainly, the debate on national-popular culture inaugurate the modern culture studies according to JMB. Here, he found diverse and innovative approaches to national culture and identity, with great theoretical and political intensity, also to everyday culture and to the media and the presence of the popular in them.

These are explicitly recognized sources for his concept of *popular-massive* and allowed him to approach the circuit of stratagems and cunning and tactics in a manner akin to Michel de Certeau, that is, *culture as a field of struggles*. Seeing them against the background of the conflicts and contradictions between movements by the affirmation of the national-popular identity and the movements of modernization of a mass culture in the country. They are peculiarities of a cultural industry governed by the switch between distinct logics that relate to a Brazilian kind of cultural modernity. The new idea of nation and national identity, which is born under the aegis of an ideology of national integration, will have the television as its main vehicle and the telenovela as its best speech.

It could be said that JMB, already marked by his future sensitivity mediation, could not fail to notice the absence of the “*evil eye of the intellectuals*” in Brazil, as opposed to other Latin American countries, whose insensitivity marked the relations of those countries with the media. Here, he examines the importance of the relationship of intellectuals with the massive media, their understanding and their configuration as a cultural industry, mainly through the television. Philosophers and social scientists of great weight turned to her, such as Muniz Sodré, Décio Pignatari, Sergio Miceli, Renato Ortiz, Sérgio Capparelli, Marlyse Meyer; and

writers and artists such as Dias Gomes, Doc Comparato, Walter George Durst, Aguinaldo Silva. They are authors of studies and essays, authors and directors of telenovelas and series that were decisive to birth the relations of the television with the country and the capacity for dramaturgic and audiovisual experimentation.

2. POPULAR CULTURE AS A SPACE OF COMMUNICATIVE COUNTER-HEGEMONY

The second strategic contribution of Brazilian communication research to Latin American research was the *early overcoming of the dualist reason*, which, in other countries, was preventing the understanding of the complexity of the relations between the popular and the massive, what the media has of culture and what people can do with them. His references are Sergio Miceli, for whom the Brazilian cultural industry occupies a nonunified symbolic and material market, in which heterogeneous products, demands and readings cross one another (the Bourdieusian study *A Noite da Madrinha*); and Roberto DaMatta, with the original temporalities and spatialities of Brazilian culture (*A Casa e a Rua*). From them, JMB identifies the advancement of two strategic lines of research in Brazil: 1) communicative counter-hegemony, with initial research linking the media to popular movements and the possibilities of counter-information and popular hegemony, in addition to themes of popular communication and counter-information praxis: Luiz Beltrão, Carlos Eduardo Lins da Silva, Anamaria Fadul; the Cycles of the Brazilian Society for the Interdisciplinary Studies in Communication (INTERCOM), in 1979, 1980 and 1981; and 2) the competence of the recipient subject, with the demonstration of the communicative creativity of popular cultures and their relations with the media as a scenario of political and cultural struggles, which generated studies as those of Regina Festa and Luiz Fernando Santoro. On the other hand, this scenario also led JMB to discover *the theory of gaps* that the political contradictions themselves open in cultural industries: Muniz Sodré and the revived and even clandestinely cultivated black culture; Maria Immacolata Vassallo de Lopes and Gil Gomes' voice of the listener that leads to the recognition of the anonymous and poor subjects of the city; the other side of the recipient: Anamaria Fadul and the work of critical reception; Mauro Wilton and the insertion of the telenovela in the lives of young workers. In the early attention paid by Brazilian researchers to the competence of the recipient and its insertion in the day-to-day world, the pioneering presence of an anthropology of the city (Ruth Cardoso, José Guilherme Magnani); of daily life (Teresa Pires Caldeira, G. Velho, Everardo Rocha); of the reception of telenovela (Ondina Fachel Leal); and of the reception of the *Jornal Nacional* (Carlos Eduardo Lins da Silva) played an important role investigating

the critical mediations introduced by the church, the trade union movement, the political parties, the feminist movement. JMB points out the great repercussion, in Latin America, of all these Brazilian studies on the production and symbolic reelaboration that the popular classes make of media products. Another early Brazilian experience was the practice of interdisciplinarity, by putting together sociologists, psychologists, historians and communicators (Seminar *Sujeito, o lado oculto do receptor* [*Subject, the hidden side of the receptor*], 1991).

3. COMMUNICATION GLOBALIZATION AND MODERNITY-WORLD

Authors and seminal works are incorporated: Milton Santos and the new sense of space and time; Renato Ortiz and the new sense of worldwide; Octaviano Ianni and the new sense of globalization as an emerging paradigm of the social sciences of the 21st century. They are taken as examples of studies that surpassed the simplifying approaches of fighting off globalization found in Latin American research.

4. CRITICAL APPROPRIATION OF LATIN AMERICAN RESEARCH

JMB highlights the role of INTERCOM, with a clear Latin Americanist vocation and permanent dialogue with the region's studies, citing the V Cycle, 1982 – *Impasses e desafios da pesquisa em Comunicação* (*Stalemates and challenges of communication research*); *Teoria e pesquisa em comunicação: panorama latino-americano* (*Theory and research in communication: Latin American panorama*); Alaiç's 1989 reconstitution and the importance of José Marques de Melo's performance; the 1st Latin American Congress of Communication Researchers in 1992.

In the particularly fertile dialogue on theory, research and communication teaching, he cites Maria Immacolata Vassallo de Lopes, with her criticism of the functionalization of reception research and the book *Pesquisa em Comunicação*, with new objects and research proposals. However, he criticizes the view of teaching and research dictated by the needs of the market, pointed out by José Marques de Melo in texts from 1987 and 1991, which would mark a break of the author with this line of Brazilian research. In conclusion, JMB endorses the voice of fellow Latin Americans as he

recognizes the decisive presence of Brazilian research in the birth of a Latin American thought about communication that, at once, allows us a deeper understanding of the peculiarities and dynamics of our world, and is enabling us at the international level to move from the role of 'native informant' to that of true producers of thought and knowledge. ■