

ness that there is a branch in every neighbourhood," or "the school is an institution of Secuestro." During the debate over the creation of the "Law of Due Obedience," which in 1987 exempted from guilt all human rights violators who had supposedly followed orders, graffiti covered the walls of Buenos Aires: "Rob, kill, torture and find someone who will order you to do it," and "Military terrorism, police torture. There were no changes. SECUESTRO."

You voted: wait two years and do it again (SECUESTRO)

In conclusion, these final three graffiti slogans signal another aspect of modes of symbolic production in youth culture. The symbolic strategies of youth design spaces which acknowledge heterogeneity within education, social class, gender and even age, and which can name forms of control under democracy. Thus, the politics of the everyday enters onto the microscope of the neighbourhood wall. These three graffiti slogans mark the difficulties experienced by the democracy in allowing for the full participation of those sectors which were mobilized to ensure its recuperation. The initial demand for institutional transparency is set back by the inability to encounter mechanisms which will enable the courts to bring those responsible for crimes of human rights abuse to justice. At the same time, the new democracies in Latin America are stuck with the economic conditions fostered by the dictatorships.

In the context of political settlement, the incorporation of youth into education and employment has not been facilitated, and youth have rejected social mobilization as an avenue to new forms of social and political organization. Thus, the tensions of everyday life between work, school and the neighbourhood are translated into a rejection by youth of the authoritarianism of institutions, while nonetheless accepting the role of education in allotting social standing. Aspirations of recognition and social mobility are not reduced to individual history in relation to parents or provincial origins, but rather are invested in the spaces where the everyday practices of the production and interchange of meaning take place. To analyze youth culture of the 1990s it is necessary to look at rock videos, video games and their sites of interaction in order to see how youth have organized themselves to transcend both the image of themselves defined by the crisis and the authoritarian barriers to association. Perhaps the answer was insinuated in 1987 by the rock group "Los redonditos de ricota" ["The little rounds of ricotta"], who would perform in the costume of the creole circus and encourage the audience to dress up and to come on stage. The "redonditos" came to be the most broadly disseminated counter-symbol in the cities of Argentina. The following is "Come on, bands" by Skay Beilinson and Indio Solari:

And what's the use of sleeping under guard
living cynically and wearing golden buttons
and what's the use of being the new band
and going around climbing military radars
Come on, bands
let's boot it

come on, bands
And what's the use of your stomach in knots
and your nostrils trembling from fear
and what's the use of checking everything
if sleep comes so hard
that it condemns you
Come on, bands
let's boot it
come on, bands
(...)
And what's the use of your made-up eyes
and meditating with perfumed ether
and what's the use of being the new band
and going around climbing military radars
Come on, bands
let's boot it
come on, bands.

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Communication :

A strategic site for the debate on modernity.

Written by

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Although the crisis in Latin America is linked more to the debt - and thus to the contradictions of the modernization designed by business people and politicians - than to the doubt over modernity suffered by intellectuals, philosophers and social scientists in Europe and the United States, the crises are intertwined and their discourses are mutually complementary. In some form the reemergence of the modernizing project in our countries is the other face of their crisis, and our "external debt" is part of their "internal doubt," just as their development is part of our dependence. Taking charge of the crisis of modernity is thus an indispensable condition in order to conceive of a project in our countries where economic and technological modernization does not disable or supplant cultural modernity.

Located in the center of the philosophical, aesthetic and sociological reflections on the crisis of reason and modern society, the project of communication now transcends the boundaries and paradigms of our studies and research. The field of communication can no longer be neatly delimited by academic demarcations. Whether we like it or not, others - from other disciplines and with other concerns - now take part in it. We must accept this explosion and redesign the map of questions and the lines of engagement.

At the same time, the economic crisis and political unrest in our countries make the temptation to regress inward stronger than ever. Nonetheless, the return to theoretical certainties, neoconservative positions and to the defence of the most legitimated and legitimating professional ideologies is masked by a convergence of two discourses. On the one hand is the discourse of political possibility, which - while presuming itself to be lucid about what is happening - plays its cards on the expansion of the market and its "presentation" as the only dynamic site in society. On the other hand is the discourse of technological knowledge which presumes that the motor of the class struggle has broken down and that history will encounter its revitalization in the events of communication; in the future, to transform society will require changing the modes of the production and circulation of information.

How should we confront this new and redoubled reduction? How can we recognize the social and perspectival depths of new communication technologies, their cross-cutting modes of presence in the everyday, from work to play and from science to politics? How can we accept them not as facts that confirm the deceptive centrality of technological development in which social inequality and power is resolved and dis-



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solved, but as challenges to theoretical inertias and to schematic and automatic practices in pedagogy and research?

Along the lines marked out by these questions, I would like to "translate" - from a Latin American perspective - the debate on modernity to several issues which articulate with avenues of reconfiguration in the field of communication. I propose to examine three issues: national histories, urban sensibilities and cultural markets.

National histories: the long term

The nation, one of the most contradictory sites in Latin American modernity, has now become one of the "spaces" most affected by the modalities of communication. This new state of affairs results both from the "universal interconnection" of circuits via satellite and information, and from the "liberation of difference" which accompanies the growing fragmentation of the cultural habitat. The nation finds its communication with the past, and with its own traditions, both devalued and deformed by the demands of the imposing contemporaneity of modernity. Trapped between provincialism and transnationalization and unable to communicate with its own internal diversity, the nation in turbulence - or in the words of R. Schwarz "the turbulence of the nation" - signals a zone of strategic convergences between the study of communication and the new history.

In his splendid essay on Latin American historiography of the 19th century, German Colmenares dismantles the reasons

and mechanisms of incommunication with the past in national histories: "for intellectuals situated in a revolutionary tradition, not only the colonial past seemed strange but so did the population which emerged from this past, so they grasped at straws to come up with a cultural synthesis which had been operative." This attitude was concretized in the absence of an acknowledgement of the reality which was "an absence of the vocabulary to name it," and a quiet hostility towards the dark space of the illiterate subcultures. In contrast to the experience of 19th century historians, Colmenares draws on a key insight of postmodern criticism to problematize the "linear" sense of history which made even the most critical historians incapable of seeing the plurality of historical temporalities. This plurality becomes apparent when - as G. Marramao says - "the long duration of profound strata of collective memory is raised to the surface by brusque alterations of the social fabric caused by the acceleration of modernization itself." To remake history implies above all to establish new ways of



relating to the past, to that which was thought to have been abolished by independence and modernization, but "the features of which began to multiply as soon as attention moved from luminous exploits to everyday life."



To the extent that the incorporation into modernity of the national majorities in Latin America occurs through the mediations established by the technologies of communications - its grammar and imaginary - the new historical perspective opens the field to two important lines of work. First, the investigation must continue into how the processes of mass communication enable or hinder the memory in which the long term is woven, in order to discover the traces which can enable the recognition of 'pueblos' [i.e.: both people and country/nation] and the dialogue between generations and traditions. Second, research is required into the changes in images and metaphors of the national, the devaluation, secularization and reinvention of myths and rituals through which this contradictory but still powerful identity is unmade and remade both from a local and transnational perspective.

Over the past twenty years or so, the population-weight in Latin America has swung from country to city to the point where the proportion of urban dwellers in many countries is near 70%

Urban sensibilities: the hybridizations.

Over the past twenty years or so, the populational weight in Latin America has swung from country to city to the point where the proportion of urban dwellers in many countries is near 70%. Obviously, it is not only the number of people which signals the change, but the appearance of new sensibili-

ties which challenge the frames of reference and comprehension forged upon a base of neat identities, deep roots and clear boundaries. While an urban identity is not quite realized, there is an industrious pursuit of European and North American models, and while there is a distancing from rural identities, there remains a secret link to ancestral, indigenous authenticities and solidarities. Our frames of comprehension are failing us because our cities are the opaque and ambiguous stages of something unrepresentable from the perspective of a difference which both excludes, and is excluded from, that which is embodied and indigenous, and from the perspective of the homogenizing inclusion of modernity. The everyday life of the majorities issues a deep challenge to our paradigms because it neither responds to our notions of culture, nor does it allow itself to be so emphatically labelled as uneducated. Incorporated into modernity without renouncing an oral culture, this sensibility does not issue from books but from a "secondary orality" whose grammar is radio, cinema and television. In the process, the study of communication has been converted into a task of truly anthropological dimensions. At play here are not only displacements of capital and technological innovations, but deep transformations to the social fabric. These shifts release profound dimensions of collective memory at the same time as they mobilize fragmentary and dehistoricizing imaginaries, changes which accelerate the deterritorialization of cultural demarcations and the hybridization of identities.

In an attempt to transcend the explanatory paradigms used to describe the violence in the city of Medellín, a communication researcher has had the nerve to investigate the violence from its toughest and most painful site: gangs of youth who work as hired assassins. Working with the new orality he attempted to approach these gangs. The result of his research is a report which focusses its analysis on the explosive mixture of three cultures: the "paisa" (from the region of Antioquia), the "maleva" or "tango," and that of modernization. The "paisa" base, which comes from the rural culture of ranchers or cowboys and from colonization, is evident in these youth through three very particular features: the intention to profit, a strong religiosity and the spirit of retaliation. The culture of the "tango" permeates the "paisa"

base and supplements it with the values of machismo, manhood and the idealization of the mother. It is not that there is not more to these cultures than the elements mentioned, but that this is the selection made by marginalized youth to mix with the component of modernity.

The modernity lived by these youth is, first of all, a sense of the ephemerality of time. This is what is expressed in the short life of the majority of objects - disposable - that are produced now, and in the value of the instant when neither the past nor the future matters much, and when the feeling of death becomes the most powerful experience of life. These youth also incorporate the modern sense of consumption, which is simultaneously a manner of making and exhibiting oneself as powerful and of assimilating the economic transaction to all spheres of life. Finally, these youth incorporate a powerfully visual language which is fragmented and rich with images. Ranging from styles of dress to ways of making music and even talking, these youth are inspired by visual mythologies of war crossed with the sonorous stridencies and gestures of punk. One final ingredient to the three cultural matrices of these youth: the Antillean music of rumba and salsa-correct "paisa" asceticism with a pleasure of the body which transforms the old Christian sacralization of death into its acceptance as part of life and even as part of the party!

Cultural hybridization corresponds to the heterogeneity caused by the disintegration and de-urbanization of the city, the form of identity with which one survives. The anarchic growth of cities is expanding the periphery, thus dispersing and isolating human groups to the point where the different cities which make up the city are almost without connection. The dissolution of the traditional spaces of collective encounter results in a de-urbanization of everyday life - as Garcia-Canclini et al. point out about Mexico City - and the city becomes of less use.

It is precisely this sociocultural disaggregation of the city which will be compensated by the network of electronic cultures, a vicarious but efficient compensation. The audiovisual media, and television in par-

ticular, will be responsible for returning the city to us, of reinserting us into urban life. Introduced as a dense mediation which can enable the recreation of the social fabric and of the modes of collectivity, the media responds less to the topographies of urban planners than to the topologies of imaginary territories. It is here where the game of the mass media encounters both its sustenance and its limit; this is where social groups perform their re-localizations and thereby mark the city, selecting and putting into play symbols of pertinence which provide them forms of identity.

Cultural marketplaces: integration and difference

According to J.J. Brunner, modernity in Latin America is linked more to the development of communication media and the formation of a cultural marketplace, than to philosophical doctrines or political ideologies. Rather than being an intellectual experience, modernity becomes a collective reality and a social experience in the centrifugal dispersal of the sources of community cultural production to specialized apparatuses, in the substitution of traditionally transmitted forms of life to ways of life based on consumption, in the secularization and internationalization of symbolic universes, and in the segmentation of communities into audiences for the marketplace. All of these processes can be traced back to the turn of the century in some aspects, but they do not achieve their true social visibility until the 1950s and 60s. At this time, mass education was introduced - thus bringing schooling to the majority of the population - and the professionalization of workers and the segmentation of consumers enable the culture to gain differentiation and autonomy from other social orders. For Brunner, our modernity emerges as "an experience divided by differences but within a common matrix caused by schooling, televisual communication, the consumption of information and the necessity to live connected to the signs of the city."

This modernity is taken into consideration neither in the spheres of cultural politics, where the primary objective is to search for roots and to conserve authenticities, nor in the education systems which are dedicated to denouncing cultural confusion



and degradation and to condemning the media as most directly responsible. Some commentators remain anchored to a paradigm of divisions and exclusions which does not correspond at all to the movement of integration and differentiation which our modernized societies are living in great part thanks to the impulses of the marketplace. This movement - as Garcia-Canclini explains - "resituates art and folklore, or academic knowledge and industrialized culture under relatively similar conditions. The work of the artist and the artisan draws closer when each one of them experiences that the specific

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symbolic order in which they are nurtured is redefined by the logic of the marketplace. Less and less are they able to withdraw from modern information and iconography, or from the disenchantment with their self-centered worlds and the re-enchantment which is offered by the spectacle of the media."

There is a third border zone to explore jointly by communication and

sociology: the reorganization of hegemonies in a time when the State can no longer command or mobilize the cultural field. The State is limited to defending its autonomy, guaranteeing the freedom of its actors and ensuring opportunities of access to diverse social groups, while the marketplace assumes the role of coordinating the cultural field and ensuring that it remains dynamic. At the same time, cultural experiences have ceased to correspond exclusively and linearly to the sites and practices of ethnic, race and social class groupings, as neither modernity nor tradition delimits exclusive social or aesthetic boundaries. While there is a traditionalism of the lettered elites which has nothing to do with that of the popular sectors, there is a modernism in which the greater part of the upper and middle classes "get together" with the majority of the popular classes, brought together by the tastes molded by the cultural industries.

The integration and reorganization of differences play a part in the reconstitution of social relations. But while in the countries at the center the postmodern eulogy of difference is leading to a growing scepticism about any type of community, according to N. Lechner the ascension of diversity and heterogeneity to social value in our countries will only be possible if it is articulated with a collective order, one that is linked to some notion or form of community. This is at the basis of our challenge and on the horizon of our work: the research and teaching of communication, in which the advancement of knowledge of the social translates not only into a renovation of problems and methods but also into projects which can link the development of communication to the strengthening and growth of forms of urban coexistence.

Post-Marxist Post-Modern Cultural Populism From Birmingham to Bogota?

BY Nick Witheford

Jesús Martín-Barbero, *Communication, Culture & Hegemony: From Media to Mediation*. Translated by Elizabeth Fox. London: Sage Publications, 1992.

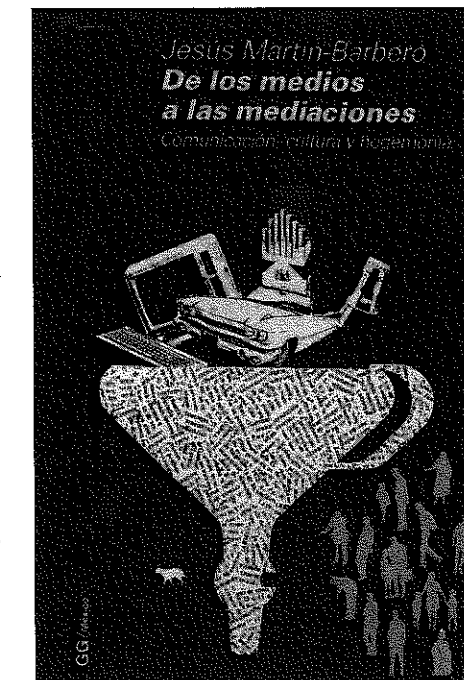
The translation of this work by one of Latin America's leading communication theorists has a twofold importance, for it not only opens a richly informed perspective on the relation of media and social movements in the South, but it also makes a provocative contribution to controversies current within cultural studies in the North.

According to Martín-Barbero, Latin America's crises of the 70s and 80s—including the rise and fall of military dictatorships, triumphs and defeats for revolutionary socialism, and the appearance of new forms of popular mobilization—have compelled its left intellectuals to rethink the role of mass communications in social change. Focus has shifted "from media to mediations." Theories of "media manipulation" which saw the controllers of the mass media unilaterally imposing ideological domination on passive audiences "without the slightest indication of seduction or resistance" now seem inadequate. In their place is emerging a more complex sense of "mediations," stressing the "articulation between practices of communication and social movements," and the possibilities for resistance and reappropriation in the reception of media messages.

To grasp these processes Martín-Barbero develops a theory of the interaction between "popular" and "mass" culture. The concept of "the popular" is, he argues, one misunderstood by both left and right—too swiftly absorbed by Marxists into reductive schemas of class, and by conservatives into the image of the vulgar masses. What is needed now is a rediscovery of "the people" in the sense better understood by 19th century Romanticism and anarchism—as the subordinate, potentially insurgent sector of society whose boundaries exceed those of the proletariat and embrace a multiplicity

of cultural experiences.

In the case of Latin America, with its tortuous colonial and post-colonial history, this means recognizing "the popular" as constituted by *mestizajes*—mixtures, compounding native, peasant and urban identities in a series of densely layered, historically dynamic hybridizations. Throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, capitalist modernization has attempted the "massification" of these *mestizajes*, violently assimilating them to a model of progressive rationalism in the name first of the nation state and then of the global market. In this project the mass media has been allocated a major role as an instrument of enculturation.



However—and this is Martín-Barbero's crucial point—massification cannot wholly succeed in the destruction of popular cultures, for "There is no imposition from above which does not imply, in some form, an incorporation of what comes from below." Mass culture aims to win consent for development by "covering over differences and reconciling tastes." But this is possible historically only to the extent that it simultaneously "deforms and activates" the content of pre-existing knowledges and traditions. The mass media is caught up in an intricate interplay of submission and resistance, opposition and complicity, because "Contrary to the predictions of social implosion and depoliticization, the masses still 'contain'—in the double sense of control and

conserve within—the people." There is thus a sense in which "subversion is imbedded in integration."

Martín-Barbero stresses that in affirming the resilience of the popular he is not seeking a nostalgic rescue of 'authentic' archaisms, but rather tracking a living process in which popular memory interacts with communicative innovation to generate "new combinations and syntheses . . . that reveal not just the racial mixture that we come from but the interweaving of modernity and the residues of various cultural periods, the mixtures of social structures and sentiments." With examples ranging through Mexican cinema, Argentinean radio, black music in Brazil and Chilean journalism he shows how the subordinate classes 'take' the products of the culture industry and "re-semanticize" them in the context of their own neighborhoods and struggles. The media is in turn obliged to acknowledge the demands issuing from below, creating "a popular that appeals to us from the mass." Thus, for example, Martín-Barbero insists that Latin America's famous form of soap opera, the telenovela, is no mere instrument of capitalist indoctrination, but rather articulates an idiom of passion and moralism which lies outside the bounds of modernizing rationalism, thereby "allowing the people as a mass to recognize themselves as the authors of their own history" and providing a language for "the popular forms of hope."

By this point, readers familiar with British and North American cultural studies may themselves experience a certain sense of recognition. For Martín-Barbero's work, issuing from the University of Cali, near Bogota, Colombia, has surprising affinities with the line of thought that has burgeoned in the wake of Stuart Hall and the Birmingham Centre for Cultural Studies. This is no accident. Eruditely internationalist, Martín-Barbero parallels many of the theoretical moves which have shaped the revived interest in popular culture in the North. Thus the Frankfurt school's pessimism is punctured with the help of the perkier Benjamin; Gramsci is invoked in his familiar guise as the theoretician of rule by consent, rather than coercion; there is an acknowledged debt to the work of Williams and