

Hoggart. The net result of this global theoretical *mestizaje* is firmly to situate Martín-Barbero's work within a larger school of leftist thought characterized by an insistence on the constitutive—rather than merely 'superstructural'—role of culture in reproducing social reality, a preference for semiosis over economics, an emphasis on audiences' 'resistant' readings of media, and a view of hegemonic struggle pitting, not class against class, but, as Hall puts it, "the popular forces against the power bloc."

As Hall and his colleagues reacted against the idea of people as "cultural dupes," endlessly defrauded by an omnipotent capitalist cultural industry, so Martín-Barbero's work takes issue with radical analyses representing the inhabitants of South as hapless victims of the multinational corporations' media bombardment. If the classic instance of such cultural "dependency theory" was Dorfman and Mattelart's critique of Donald Duck as an agent of imperialism, a counter-example for Martín-Barbero's perspective might be the 'Superbarrio' figure, lifted from the pages of Superman comics by the inhabitants of Mexico City's slums as a symbol of their fight for livable neighborhoods.

But despite broad similarities to Anglo-Saxon cultural studies, Martín-Barbero's post-colonial perspective yields distinctive theoretical insights from which we in the North should learn. Here one might single out his emphasis on collective "memory" as a vital element in the construction of oppositional identity. A catastrophic history of exterminations and disappearances has clearly made the remembering of peoples, places and communities erased by official terror crucial to Latin America's liberation movements. Charged with this background, Martín-Barbero's concept of "popular memory" assumes a particular depth and urgency. This is accentuated by the prominent place his concept of popular *mestizajes* gives to the struggle for cultural survival waged by indigenous and rural communities. Understanding continuities with the pre-capitalist and pre-colonial past as living resources for resistance, rather than mere anachronistic hangovers, Martín-Barbero foregrounds issues that are central for ethnic minorities, aboriginal peoples and immigrant communities, but which are only beginning to be moved from the margins of academic attention in Canada.

In doing so he also by implication raises the profound complicity of so many strands of 'Northern' popular culture in a colonial history of genocide, slavery and racism.

Elsewhere, however, Martín-Barbero displays blindspots common throughout the discourse of 'cultural studies.' Justifiably determined to shake free of monolithic, Eurocentric visions of the industrial working class as the sole agent of social change, he adopts a highly pluralistic concept of "the people" as a source of effervescent heterogeneity welling up against an homogenization imposed from above. But equating diversity with subversion displaces attention from vertical subordination to horizontal variety. This is apparent in Martín-Barbero's treatment of gender, where the relatively benign discussions of machismo and of the domestic sphere scarcely take account of feminist critique. Moreover, in rejecting the "mythos of the proletariat" he also discards any precise analysis of changing class composition, thereby throwing the baby out with the bath water. His reaction against Marx thus veers toward a characteristically postmodernist depoliticization—very evident in recent Anglo-American cultural studies—whereby the celebration of difference eclipses systematically structured inequality.

Equally problematic is the de-emphasis of media production that accompanies Martín-Barbero's theory of "mediation." Attention to the strategies of reception is a real advance over assumptions that the ideological valency of messages can be simply 'read off' from the structures of media ownership. However, fascination with 'audience resistance'—now ubiquitous throughout cultural studies—slides easily toward denial of any specificity or determining power to the moment of production. At the extreme, this reinstates an ultra-subjectivised doctrine of 'consumer sovereignty.' Affirming the symbolic reappropriation of cultural products, Martín-Barbero downplays the importance of materially appropriating the means of cultural production. But retreat from issues of ownership and control risks circumscribing the left's cultural activity within an essentially reactive space, endlessly salvaging telenovelas and game shows, rather than fighting for the enlarged access to media resources which might permit the emergence of something new.

These issues ultimately bear on

the politics of cultural studies. While Martín-Barbero constantly suggests the potential for connecting popular culture with political mobilization, his concrete examples of such projects are rather skimpy. But the general direction of his thought is clear. For Martín-Barbero, the "rediscovery of the popular" is linked to a political reevaluation by the Latin American left, which, he believes, has resulted in a rejection of the armed, anti-parliamentary, class-based struggles of the 70s in favour of an approach rooted in the democratization and cultivation of civil society. It is thus part of a move away from the "politics of total transformation" toward a more pragmatic line.

Now, the assessment of strategies for the Latin American left is a matter for activists enduring the dangers of Bogota, Rio and Havana, not for academics safe in Vancouver. But insofar as Martín-Barbero's work may be enlisted to corroborate political realignments in the very different context of the North, comment is in order. This is especially so because of its affinity with that of another Latin American theorist, Ernesto Laclau, whose concepts of popular-democratic struggle have been so influential here in shaping 'post-Marxist' positions. A necessary challenge to ossified dogmatism, post-Marxism has also often simply rationalized a watering-down of radical commitments rendered unfashionable by a decade of neoconservatism. In the field of 'cultural studies' such dilutions are particularly ill-timed: for it is precisely within 'popular' cultural traditions that the threads of desire for totally transformative social change—change which would 'turn the world upside down'—have often run deepest and been stubbornly preserved during the most reactionary eras. Cultural studies' critical edge may depend on retaining its affiliation to these disturbingly unpragmatic, apocalyptic, frankly revolutionary energies. With so many leftist verities vanishing into air, we are surely engaged in making what Martín-Barbero, in one of his most telling metaphors, terms a "nocturnal map"; but working in the dark as we are, we can perhaps appreciate the many illuminations his work offers, while not agreeing with every aspect of his cartography.

Nick Witheford is a graduate student in the Communication Department at Simon Fraser University.

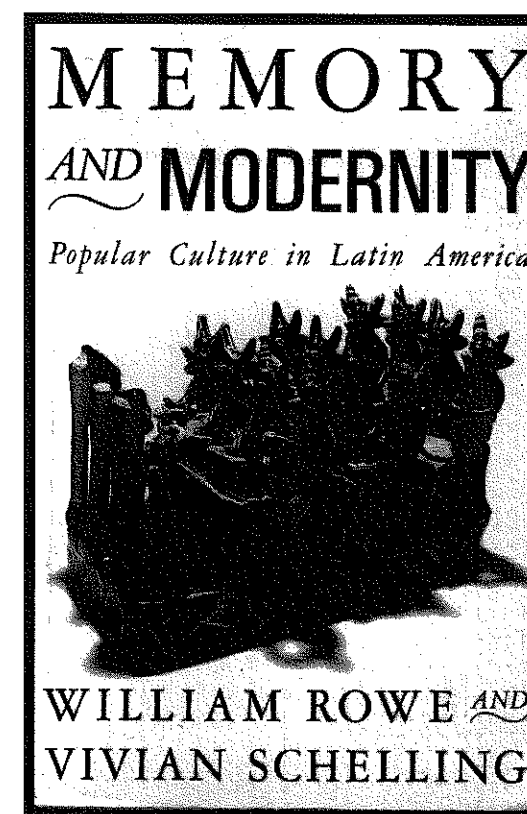
## Resources for Memory

BY Michael Hoechsmann

William Rowe & Vivian Schelling,  
**Memory and Modernity: Popular Culture in Latin America.**  
London: Verso, 1992.

A new generation of Latin American researchers is finding a powerful "optimism of the will" amongst the people of Latin America. *Memory and Modernity: Popular Culture in Latin America* by William Rowe and Vivian Schelling marks the first major attempt to outline this emerging body of research and scholarship to an anglophone audience. The title of the book alludes to the two primary paths of this research: first, the excavation of the substratum of collective memory as it is embedded in popular cultural practices, the roots of which in some cases extend as far back as pre-conquest times; and, second, the exploration of how modernity in a Latin American context is lived and adapted through popular cultural practices, the "mediations" - to borrow a term from Jesús Martín-Barbero - by which people make sense of their worlds with mass media and commodity products.

*Memory and Modernity* not only frames the terms of reference for this new arena of debate, but it also offers a comprehensive journey through the terrain of Latin American popular culture, both historically and geographically. Ranging over a wide variety of popular cultural practices, Rowe and Schelling discuss soccer, samba, salsa, rock music, popular theater, community radio, comic books, soap operas, oral poetry and poetic duels, and religious syncretism, to mention only a sampling of topics covered. This entertaining, yet sometimes dizzying, collection of anecdotes provides the backdrop for the important theoretical insights developed by Rowe and Schelling from their own analysis and that of others, most notably Martín-Barbero, Néstor García Canclini and Carlos Monsiváis.



*Memory and Modernity* is divided into four chapters, a theoretical introduction and a short conclusion. Unfortunately, the book is poorly integrated, and hence the quality is uneven. While the introduction sparkles with promise, the rather long-winded and rambling Chapters 1 and 2 slow things down to a crawl and force the reader to do the writing, so to speak. This is a disappointment, because the material is extremely rich and suggestive, a testimony to much careful research. Chapters 3 and 4 are much more successfully integrated, simultaneously developing theoretical insights and historical anecdotes, and the conclusion briefly reframes some of the central questions posed in the introduction. Whether the publisher or the writers are at fault, *Memory and Modernity* has the feel of a very promising advanced draft of a manuscript that was rushed to market. Given that its publication pre-empts the imminent release of English translations of works by Martín-Barbero and García Canclini, this is more than a little bit problematic.

Rowe and Schelling contextualize their analysis in the global processes of late-twentieth-century capitalism where an eclectic array of cultural goods from a

wide variety of cultural environments "seems to offer an unbroken horizon." Two countervailing tendencies arise from this situation. First, is the tendency to "cultural homogenization" which, in its worst case scenario, results in "cultural death," and, second, is the possibility of dismantling "old forms of marginalization and domination and making new forms of democratization and cultural multiplicity imaginable." Rowe and Schelling maintain the tension between these opposing tendencies, warning that with the growing concern in the 1990s about the "globalization of the media" and "the defense of cultural multiplicity," it is important to resist "apocalyptic pessimism" about the former and "attempts to preserve 'purity'" in regards to the latter.

For an anglophone audience, the context of Latin America offers an opportunity to reconsider popular culture from another historical and geographical vantage point. Rowe and Schelling point out that the history of the relationship between modernity, nationhood and the mass media in the USA is often "taken as a model" for similar experiences elsewhere. To the contrary, the authors point out, "the different historical moments at which the culture industry becomes established give rise to crucial differences." Thus, for example, in the case of Brazil, "modernity arrived with the television rather than with the Enlightenment." The historical difference that marks Latin America "is the force of popular culture," where modernity has not entailed "the elimination of pre-modern traditions and memories but has arisen through them, transforming them in the process."

Rowe and Schelling distinguish between three principal interpretive narratives which have been used to circumscribe the role of popular culture. First, is the Romantic version of popular culture as "an authentic rural culture under threat from industrialization and the modern culture industry." Second, is

the conflation of popular culture with mass culture, "either as threat or solution." Finally, the perspective which most closely approximates that of the authors invests popular culture with an emancipatory and utopian optimism where the practices of subaltern groups are interpreted as "resources for imagining an alternative future society." Rowe and Schelling recognize that these perspectives are all flawed; the first is nostalgic, the second is pessimistic and the third is idealized.

Rowe and Schelling point out that, as an object of study, popular culture has been taken up within the disciplinary frameworks of folklore and mass culture. Folklore has a particular political resonance in Latin America "because of the crucial fact that its referent - the cultures thought of as folkloric - can be as much part of the present as of the past." Thus, folklore has been mobilized to the cause of fledgling nation states in an attempt to incorporate rural populations, either as a bank of "authenticity" or as "a way of referring to contemporary cultures which articulate alternatives to existing power structures."

Of course, Latin America should not be considered a homogenous entity, and, accordingly, the meanings ascribed to folklore have varied between countries and historical contexts. For example, the merging of the European tradition of carnival with the African roots of samba in Brazil incorporated racial difference into the nation, while in Mexico the effort to validate the artisanal products of the peasant population as national symbols was an attempt to incorporate the rural populations into the nation. On the other hand, a genuine attempt to "articulate alternatives" can be seen in the Nicaraguan literacy campaign where folklore - in the form of popular wisdom and poetry - became the material for social change. And, in Chile, the emergence of *arpilleras* - patchwork images made by women in the *poblaciones* around Santiago - has transformed an innocuous social practice into a powerful political tool.

While folklore can be seen to ground the popular into a particular set of lived practices which make up a whole way of life, mass culture appears as a set of technologies which conduct ideological messages to passive recipients. State Rowe and Schelling: "If the idea of folklore gives popular culture an ontological solidity, that of mass culture appears to

empty it of any content." A powerful research tradition which held sway during the 1970s in the study of Latin American communication processes - best known in the anglophone world through the work of Armand Mattelart and others - tended to adopt this view of mass culture, inflecting it with the analysis of cultural imperialism. Recent work, most notably that of Martín-Barbero and García Canclini, has attempted to recuperate the role of mass culture to a position of historical and political relevance in Latin America.

Rowe and Schelling point out that, for Martín-Barbero, the media are "vehicles or mediations of particular moments of the 'massification' of society, and not its source." In Latin America, the "secularization of popular memory is only partial," and thus, "the majority of television viewers in Latin America at the beginning of the 1990s... continue to participate in symbolic systems which combine pre-capitalist and capitalist worlds." Most importantly, and this is what distinguishes the current generation of communication researchers from those who came before, these viewers are seen to make their contribution at the point of reception. The media are not understood as "mere conveyors of messages but meeting-points of often contradictory ways of remembering and interpreting." The move from the media to the mediations humanizes the technological apparatus of the media by bringing social, cultural and historical contexts into the discussion.

Despite his useful insights, Martín-Barbero neglects a careful analysis of power relationships and thus opens himself up 'in the last instance' to charges of romantic cultural pluralism. García Canclini, on the other hand, combines the work of Pierre Bourdieu and Antonio Gramsci to investigate both the forms of power inscribed into symbolic processes and the impact of the capitalist market on popular cultural practices. Rowe and Schelling mention García Canclini's theory of "a market for symbolic goods" in a consumer society where the popular "becomes defined by the unequal access of the subaltern classes to this market." Through a process of "reconversion," or the "refashioning of cultural signs," the popular practices of the subaltern groups resist "being wholly absorbed into the dominant power structures." Among other examples, Rowe and Schelling report on the ceremony of "parading the commu-

nity-based radio station in a Brazilian shanty town as though it were a saint in a religious procession."

The Latin American context helps to problematize key concepts of Gramsci. For one, the authors argue, there is his "diminished relevance to situations of violence." Furthermore, as Jose Joaquín Brunner argues in his critique of García Canclini, "Gramsci's formulations, which belong to a different historical moment, are not necessarily appropriate to an age of simulation and hybridization." Finally, Latin America has not had to wait for the translation of Gramsci to start theorizing, or practicing, the popular. Figures such as José Martí, who led the movement to Cuban independence in 1895, and José Carlos Mariátegui, who struggled for an indigenous socialism for Peru in the 1920s, have long since set the terms for a serious engagement with popular culture. Revolutionary governments, such as the Sandinistas in Nicaragua, have recognized that their project was dependent on being firmly "rooted in the experience and language of the people."

Despite its aforementioned limitations, *Memory and Modernity* provides a rich resource for the history of Latin American popular cultural practices. Rowe and Schelling conclude their study with two important terms in contemporary Latin American cultural theory: hybridization - "the ways in which forms become separated from existing practices and recombine with new forms in new practices" - and deterritorialization - "the release of cultural signs from fixed locations in time and space." Thus, for example, pre-capitalist practices can coexist with modern ones and rural practices can undergird urban ones. These fluid concepts suggest a cultural politics which is evolving and which can provide a resource for collective memory, both as a way of keeping cultural traditions alive and as a site for political mobilization.

Michael Hoechsmann is a student at The Ontario Institute For Studies in Education

## Beyond Boundaries

BY W.F. Santiago Valles

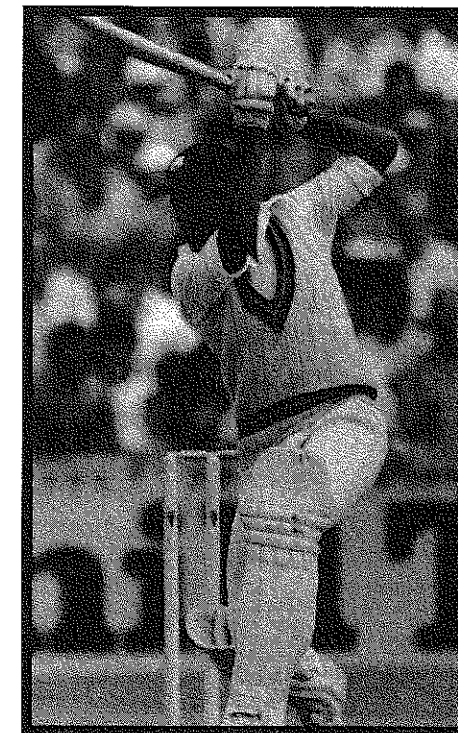
The C.L.R. James Reader, ed., Anna Grimshaw  
Oxford, U.K: Blackwell, 1992

If cultural studies addresses the relation between cultural industries and the organization of daily life, the forms through which meaning is negotiated, the historical understanding of the popular sectors and their cultural practices with an integrated overview of the social processes of communication, then it would be safe to say that C.L.R. James is a pioneer in the field within a Latin American perspective that is critical of European and North American influences. In *Beyond a Boundary* (1963), James writes that if you begin from what people do in their daily life, it is possible to understand their goals and values, their consciousness of obstacles and their strategies to overcome them.

During the last ten years, social debate in Latin America has turned on the character of our social formations, on the problems of culture and politics, on the applicability of the concept of hegemony, on the possibilities that limited economic growth might be enough to postpone an anti-capitalist revolution, and on the possible expansion of democracy beyond the limitations of the existing order. For James, as for others since, notably Agustín Cueva (author of *La Teoría Marxista* (1987) and *América Latina, En la Frontera de los Años Noventa* (1989)), the separation of economic and cultural domination denies the problematic of imperialism and how the daily lives of people in the periphery are organized by state terror. The advice from progressive intellectuals in the North for gradual reforms in the South is based on this denial, as is the notion that social reforms in the North here are due to their own efforts instead of being the consequence of exploitation in the South.

Since the 1930s, C.L.R. James had been researching and writing about the place of social processes of communication in the organization of daily life within industrial capitalism, and about the relationship between European civilization and the new world. His interest in the relations between working people and dominant society had been pursued

through sports, labour relations, film, jazz, comic strips, the stories of marginalized women, soap operas on radio, West-Indian self-government, and detective stories. According to Anna Grimshaw, the editor of this anthology, these "case studies" were specific instances of a larger project on the relations between the creative possibilities of individuals and societies organized by relations of industrial capitalism. In his travels from the colonies to the metropolis, James studied how mass culture combines elements of the popular and dominant cultures, the social relations which make this process meaningful, as well as the historical evolution of the place of the audience.



Grimshaw refers to James' life work as the study of democracy in world history, as the search for an integrated experience of the relation between the parts of human existence made possible through an understanding of culture. In order to achieve this he had to make a clean break with metropolitan conceptions and look for clues in the daily practices of the popular sectors in the colonies. In James' own words, "to establish his own identity, Caliban, after three centuries, must himself pioneer into regions Caesar never knew" to discover the ways in which the working people in the West Indies made their own road as they travelled it.

This process began in the 1930s with the research for *Black Jacobins*, James' best known book. The history of Latin America's first war of national liberation in Haiti (1792-1803) is that of a Black people making revolution without an organized party. This study not only questioned European cultural leadership in the pursuit of self-government in the colonies, it also questioned the need for a trained vanguard given the evidence of a triumphant social movement within industrial capitalism. More than twenty years later when James began writing *American Civilization* he had moved from the canon to the daily life of the working people - the emerging social protagonist - for source material with which to integrate social history, dominant art forms and popular culture. James' interpretation of the Haitian revolution and the emerging protagonism of the collective subject was confirmed by the independence struggles after 1945. As Grimshaw states in her preface, James also believed the West Indies were in a privileged position to contribute to the liberation of the colonial world. For over two hundred and fifty years the region has experienced the spontaneous opposition of working people to the capitalist organization of their daily lives, and the symbols of those struggles had been adopted by European and North American students in the late sixties. The creative integration of social experience by working people in the new world confirmed James' notion that European civilization had lost the cultural initiative. For the student of cultural studies the inclusion in *The C.L.R. James Reader* of the theatrical script version of *Black Jacobins*, the section from *American Civilization* in which the work of Whitman and Melville is compared, and the section from *Beyond a Boundary* on the definition of art should be more than enough, but this anthology includes many other pieces that recommend it as worthwhile reading.

James' study of the Haitian revolution helped him understand that there is a liberation tradition in Latin America that does not depend on European leadership, and that understanding the way human experience has been integrated (in the region) to create something new is accessible through the study of cultural practices. With the study of the relation between mass culture and popular art forms in the U.S., James was expanding the scope of the vision used to address the conflict

