

Iberian and North American testimonies

Testemunhos ibéricos e norte-americanos

ISABEL FERIN CUNHA^a

Universidade de Coimbra, Faculdade de Artes e Humanidades, Centro de Investigação. Coimbra, Portugal

THE TESTIMONIES OF Margarita Ledo Andión, from the Universidad de Santiago de Compostela, and Manuel Pinto, from the Universidade do Minho, reflect two different experiences concerning the intellectual proximity to Jesús Martín-Barbero (JMB) in the Iberian Peninsula. In Spain, more specifically in Galicia, Margarita Ledo lived closely with Master Martín-Barbero, from the academic work shared in meetings and tables of congresses, conferences and seminars in Brazil, Spain and in several countries of Latin America.

In Portugal, JMB, although known and read in some universities and higher schools of Communication and Education, has never had significant theoretical and conceptual impact, which is due to different reasons, but the proximity between Brazilian and Portuguese researchers is astonishing. I tried, with Fernanda Castilho, to explain and understand this phenomenon in an article published in this magazine (Cunha & Castilho, 2018). I crossed with the master in several academic and private moments, and his precise reasoning, looking trained in exercises of seeing and the constant work to deconstruct the media-centrism, insisting on culture and relationships between and within communities, always impressed me. However, in the Portuguese academy, almost always, his bibliography was avoided, replaced by Anglo-Saxons more *valued* by the prevailing academic policies. Thus, Manuel Pinto's testimony is undoubtedly important as a record of personal and intellectual memory.

The text of the galician professor and researcher reflects a continuous line of thought in the time, which permeates the European and Spanish philosophy and intersects, at different moments of her professional and research trajectory, with the theoretical and methodological devices proposed as a challenge by Martín-Barbero. Margarita Ledo also highlights the master's ability to give daily meanings to the emancipation of Latin American thought and experiences

^a Associate Professor at the Universidade de Coimbra. She was Vice President of the Centro de Investigação Media e Jornalismo (2004-2006) and manages projects approved by the Fundação Ciência e Tecnologia, from Portugal. Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8701-527X>. E-mail: barone.ferin@gmail.com



by appropriating theoretical and conceptual parameters of disciplines such as sociology, history, and economics. This path led, according to the researcher, to the creative production of a theory that valued experiences of memory and communicative processes in Latin America.

Manuel Pinto, professor at the Universidade do Minho and researcher at the Center for Communication and Society Studies, presents a testimony in which he resumes the elaboration of his doctoral thesis in the early 1990s. When he was researching the bibliography about the relationship between children and television – and at that time, the internet and social networks were not yet active – he found a text by Martín-Barbero. The text was published in the journal *Nómadas*, of the Universidad Central de Bogotá, Colombia, and was entitled “Heredando el Futuro. Pensar la Educación desde la Comunicación” (Martín-Barbero, 1996). JMB’s proposal, which is related to cultural anthropology, communication processes, electronic media and education, opened alternative horizons to Anglo-Saxon literature, focused on the effects of television, to the researcher. For Manuel Pinto, the reading of this text not only increased his search for new ways of looking at the technological devices of communication and its interrelation with culture, but also encouraged the rethinking of communication processes in education, drawing attention to the need to develop an action research in media literacies, preferably aimed at children and young people.

In a unique North American interpretation, the testimony of Joseph Straubhaar, professor at The University of Texas, Austin, and researcher specializing in geographic space studies in Lusophony and Latin America, is particularly relevant. With great knowledge of the domain on which he works and being a tireless traveler, he crossed countless times, in his personal and professional life, with JMB, having shared tables in congresses, conferences and seminars. On the other hand, he is known by many institutions and researchers in the area, which leads him to elaborate an interpretive snapshot of Martín-Barbero’s communicational thinking and how it expanded and was appropriate in the different countries of Latin America. As he points out, at the very beginning of the text, how his path as a researcher in Brazil and Latin America gave him the opportunity to observe, live and in progress, the development of an original theory of communication and media in Latin America. Martín-Barbero contributed a lot to this purpose, as well as the researchers and Latin American academic and research institutions, which persisted in collaborative research and constant dialogue, which were developed in projects, conferences, seminars, and other academic exchanges.

AROUND JESÚS MARTÍN-BARBERO: MAP FOR NIGHTFLIGHTS

MARGARITA LEDO ANDIÓN^b

Universidad de Santiago de Compostela. Departamento de Ciencias da Comunicación. Santiago de Compostela – Coruña, Spain

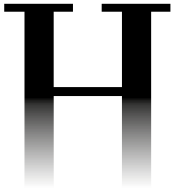
In the preface of *Vol de Nuit*, by Saint-Exupéry, André Gide (1931) speaks of the “overcoming of oneself” and the “sense of duty”, and perhaps that is why it is common to find in the writings of Martín-Barbero himself, as well as in his analysts, these tops that put us in the night in a “slow and beautiful” way, as when Fabien, the pilot of the postal flight between Patagonia and Buenos Aires, contemplates how each house illuminates its star, its saint and sign of inhabited.

Jesús Martín-Barbero told to Omar Rincón on Monday, May 22, 2017: “For me, it is more important to I think from where I am, than what I think”. And the Professor Rincón repeated this at the inaugural conference of the International Association for Media and Communication Research (IAMCR) Congress, in Cartagena de Indias, a place where we hoped to meet the *passer* Martín-Barbero, the pilot who expands and sometimes patches his night map to explore a new field and, as the note three says in one of his notebooks, find the mixed-race cartographer who, without ceasing, groping.

Overcoming its own limit and searching for that place, in this case Latin America, from which it decides to run with others. This is the turn that we will honor in the thought of the person who summons us, the intellectual-interpreter or the one who goes to the square because he feels, in Blanchot’s just observation, “the concern for the other” (“*le souci de l’autre*”). And we will do so by relying on some of the references he himself cites and on aspects such as the constitutive dimension of languages in the perception of the world or on his position on a multiple theme, as addressed as *diversity*, because he was able to explain it as what “is here, that touches us closely”, insisted in the conference on April 29, 2010, in Santiago de Compostela.

Shortly before, at its second congress in the city of Malaga, the Asociación Española de Investigación de la Comunicación (Aeic) recognized in Martín-Barbero one of its organic references. And when, in his speech, he declared that one of the marks of the century emerges in the words of performative order “the personal is political”, I understood why he had turn so often to the work *De los Medios a las Mediaciones* (Martín-Barbero, 1987) that, at that moment, people so different read together.

^bPhD in Information Sciences from the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona and Audiovisual Communication Professor at the Universidad de Santiago de Compostela. Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2001-1498>. E-mail: margarita.ledo@usc.es



Intertwining politics, culture and communication represented a change that brought us the emergence of the other, as a face in which we recognize Levinas' mark; as this alterity that gives meaning to the action of looking and that leads us to thickness, towards what others see and we do not see – in the cinema or telenovela, its field of testing – while the wings of the technical artifact become a possibility that allows us to celebrate, once again, the loss of the object in favor of the process. Operation carried out to overcome the event and touch the rough fabric of truth procedures, producing one of *the profane illuminations* that Martín-Barbero, with his beloved Benjamin as the source author, develops and shares, under the sign of interculturality and cultural sustainability, with female authors and authors from Latin America and the world.

“Every identity is generated and constituted in the act of narrating itself as a history, in the process and in the practice of *telling to others*” (Martín-Barbero, 2014, p. 20), he writes in a text for journal **MATRIZes**, an idea that, following in the wake of his work mechanics, has been nourishing and examining, in a visible and latent way, from the beginning to the moment, the work that summons us.

In the background, the “intertwining of radiation” that Paul Ricoeur (2004) locates in *the translation* because he understands that this is where we learn – I quote – the real possibilities and also the limits of any exchange between cultures. And this idea of limit, that “cultures know each other and recognize themselves as such in the possibilities and limits of exchange between them” (Martín-Barbero, 2014, p. 20), is seminal in the politics of diversity. As an example, I look back, quite within my reach, and I find myself encouraging several research projects in this sense, the latter with the title “For a European Subtitling Program in Non-Hegemonic Languages”, with the 2018 label, *European Year of Material, Immaterial and Digital Cultural Heritage*, elaborated from a very simple idea to which Martín-Barbero draws attention: the permanent declarations and tributes to cultural diversity are inversely proportional to what happens in the field of protection and incentive policies to it, the core of his intervention in Santiago de Compostela, a city for which he traveled in the company of Elvira Maldonado and which served to bring together the Asocia Galegación de Investigadores e Investigadores en Comunicación (AGACOM) around him.

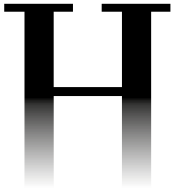
Language is not external to action. This performance capacity is always, for him, the announcement of a transformation program – literacy, freeing the word – that is already in his doctoral thesis (Martín-Barbero, 1972) and that Thomas Tufte recovers with the author in an interview in 2010, from the reading that our intellectual interpreter makes of the Danish linguist Hjelmslev

(Martín-Barbero, 2017). These are issues that we get used to find in their texts, enriched from one to another with singular observations, with borrowings of multiple origins and that take away from us the fear of thinking and establishing new relationships and other hypotheses.

And perhaps due to the echoes of a linguistic system shared between Galician and Portuguese, the Brazilian geographer Milton Santos has his perspective on globalization as *perversity and possibility*, as a generator of inequality and abysmal precariousness, but at the same time as an immense utopian horizon that he calls empirical *universality*. Milton Santos, as we said, this “presence of an absence” that we used to call *saudade*, was a very special guest in that memorable session in Compostela, while we learn to look elsewhere at the worst symptoms of neoliberalism and to think about the “centrality of the periphery” not only at the level of countries, but of the marginalized social” (Martín-Barbero, 2009, p. 82) for which the return of politics is a nodal element, which should not cause strangeness in journalism and communication studies. The teacher-organizer told us this way: at a time when the theory of dependence was enabling the Latin American appropriation of sociology, history and economics, we wanted to make a structure that would assume, without any chauvinism or provincialism, the task of working creatively in the production of a theory that had as axes the cultural and communicative experiences and memories of the Latin American peoples.

Centrality of the periphery that Maria Immacolata Vassallo de Lopes (2018) also converts into a rather recent proposal of what *he calls barberian theory of communication*, in which he interweaves epistemology, concepts and methods, reminding us of that *epistemological chill* that Martín-Barbero (2002) always gives as an example to make visible the moment when he is aware of the “indispensable methodological displacement, done at the same time as an *ethnographical approach and cultural distancing*, which allows the researcher to see with people, and people to tell what they see” (p. 29), until dialogue, in this last stage, according to the Brazilian researcher, as Jacques Rancière does, with the multiple sensitivity regimes.

As for me, every time I read Beatriz Sarlo’s essays (2000) about that Benjamin whose synecdoche is what she calls the “poetic method in action”, with “the quotation [which] travels from one writing to another, it is torn from its original scripture, from its aura to merge into another writing and surround itself with other marks and other senses” (p. 29), I think of Martín-Barbero. And like Benjamin, I see him accompanying Hélène Cixous (cited by van Rossum-Guyon, 1997), who comments:



I always had a kind of panoramic view of our time: being on the balcony of our apartment in Oran, I was on the balcony of the century, and I saw it develop tirelessly behind me, in front of me, around me, in the future, and I was inside of it. (p. 236)

The text, which at that moment is covered with the fog of absence, leads me to finish with a quote that also travels from a philosopher and theologian from Galicia, Andrés Torres Queiruga (2018), in which I find so many coincidences with the professor of Javeriana of Bogotá – phenomenology, Ricoeur, the position against addiction and in favor of liberation –, who, during a Galician-Portuguese congress around nostalgia, used as material, among others, the poem “Campanas de Bastabales” by Rosalía de Castro, author who since the mid-nineteenth century

recovered the cognoscitive character of the feeling. And he recovered precisely by revealing the complicity and rapprochement between the subject and the world. So that the clear evidence of feeling has a polar character: it reveals objective reality by affecting the subject, and reveals above all the subject when reflecting his agreement or disagreement with reality. (Torres Queiruga, 2018, p. 219)

Agreement or disagreement with the reality that, returning to Gide (1931), leads us to *this overcoming of itself*, to this overcoming of its own limit that defines the master Jesús Martín-Barbero.

A TESTIMONY

MANUEL PINTO^c

Universidade do Minho, Departamento de Ciências da Comunicação. Braga, Portugal

^c Full Professor (retired) at the Institute of Social Sciences of the Universidade do Minho, and researcher at the Centro de Estudos de Comunicação e Sociedade. Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4964-8778>. E-mail: mpinto@ics.uminho.pt

Since I am not a scholar of Jesús Martín-Barbero, I only have the record of the testimony.

I had read *The Practice of Everyday Life*, by Michel de Certeau (1980) and I intended to study how young children appropriate television in their daily lives. Interestingly, the literature I found, especially North American – the internet was yet to arrive – almost always led me to where I did not want to go: the purposes of television in children.

As I was seeking, I found, even in these Anglo-Saxon stops, other perspectives and more innovative topics, such as the research of W. Schramm or H.

Himmelweit, in the 1950s. They were more valued, for example, in the diversity of content: to whom the children belong to and what are the contexts of television use. But the hegemonic current of research at the apex was imposed, conditioned in many cases by the interests of the funding agencies.

I also dedicated some time to the authors of the Frankfurt school. It was then that I found, in the library of the University, *De los Medios a las Mediaciones* (Martín-Barbero, 1987). What I discovered in that work, whose projection I only later became aware of, opened the path I had been looking for since Certeau's reading. It made me believe that it would be possible to build the thesis project breaking with the media-centric orientation and simultaneously exploring a critical perspective on socially differentiated children's daily lives and differently guided by the relationship with the television environment.

I met Martín-Barbero at the International Association for Media and Communication Research (IAMCR) congress in Mexico City in 2017, and I was able to participate in a simple tribute that was made there to *De los Medios...*, celebrating the 30th anniversary of the book, so remarkable not only in Latin America, but also internationally, especially with translations. In my notes, and which I went to recover, I heard him say: "the mediation proposal breaks a lot of dichotomies and overcomes them".

In its fourth decade of existence, the contribution of the book remains alive and inspiring. Overcoming dialectically and critically dichotomies and simplifications remains an important challenge today. In the communication sciences and, in general, in the social sciences.

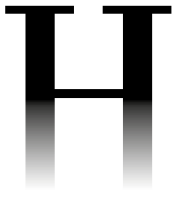
THE ROLE OF JESÚS MARTÍN-BARBERO IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE WORLD

JOSEPH STRAUBHAAR^d

The University of Texas at Austin, Department of Radio-Television-Film. Austin – Texas, USA

It has been very striking to me to observe the growth of a notably independent communications and media theory and research sphere in Latin America. By that, I mean a community of scholars who build on each other's work, attend the same conferences, work on projects together, and cite a somewhat common canon of theoretical and analytical literature. José Marques de Melo, Raúl Fuentes Navarro, Maria Cristina Gobbi, and others have done excellent work to look at the intellectual history of this growth of a remarkably autonomous intellectual

^dAmon G. Carter Centennial Professor of Communications in the Department of Radio-Television-Film at the University of Texas at Austin. Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8285-1498>. E-mail: jdstraubhaar@austin.utexas.edu



sphere. It has inspired theorizing outside Latin America as well. John Sinclair with his ideas of geo-cultural regions and my work on cultural-linguistic regions, based in the related development of a Lusophone communication research area, have been inspired by thinking in and about Latin America.

Since this Latin American communication research sphere takes place largely in Spanish and Portuguese, it has also grown to include Spain and Portugal, as reflected in publishing in Portugal and Spain that includes Latin American work prominently and vice versa. It also includes several conferences, such as IBERCOM, that target the whole cultural-linguistic academic sphere of Iberia and Latin America. Within this context, Spain has re-emerged as a power in publishing and education in the area, along with Portugal to a lesser degree, but Brazil has the best developed academic system in terms of PhD-granting institutions. I would also argue that Brazil and Mexico have added the largest number of innovative researchers, although Spain has quite a few, too. Still, it is interesting how Martín-Barbero and other innovative scholars from across the region have helped create an academic sphere in which the former colonial powers are important players but by no means dominant, certainly not hegemonic.

Both the Latin American communication research sphere and its inclusion of Iberia has led to very productive current efforts like the Ibero-American Observatory of Television Fiction (OBITEL), led by Maria Immacolata Vassallo de Lopes of Brazil and Guillermo Orozco-Gómez of Mexico, with teams in several countries, stretching to include the Hispanic U.S., which does have an increasing presence as not only an import market, but producer of media for Latin America with Telemundo and Univision, and their partnerships in the region.

There was an initial wave of pioneering research in a critical political economy wave, written by some of the first major writers like Antonio Pasquali and Luis Ramiro Beltrán. There was another wave of somewhat more comprehensive thinkers that built on the classic elements of political economy, but included elements of cultural studies, anthropology, cultural sociology, U.S. mass communications, and French social theories. In this generation, I would include Muniz Sodré, José Marques de Melo, Jorge González, Guillermo Orozco-Gómez, Maria Immacolata Vassallo de Lopes and other amazing, innovative scholars¹. Looking at both Latin America and the wider world, though, I would argue that the two with the widest impact as theorists are Jesús Martín-Barbero and Nestor García Canclini.

Canclini is better known in the English-speaking world through a series of excellent translations of some of his works, such as *Transforming Modernity* (García Canclini, 1993), *Hybrid Cultures* (García Canclini, 1995), and *Consumers and Citizens* (García Canclini, 2001). He has particularly been considered as very

¹ In a very comprehensive review, Maria Cristina Gobbi (1999) breaks this generation into two groups: First, Innovators: Eliseo Verón (Argentina), Armand Mattelart (Chile), Mario Kaplún (Uruguay), Juan Díaz Bordenave (Paraguay), Javier Esteinou Madrid (Mexico), Jesús Martín-Barbero (Colombia), Muniz Sodré, José Salomão, David Amorim e José Marques de Melo (Brazil). Second, Renovators: Jorge González (Mexico), Jesús María Aguirre (Venezuela), Daniel Prieto (Argentina), Luciano Álvarez (Uruguay), Valerio Fuenzalida (Chile), Carlos Eduardo Lins da Silva, Venício Artur de Lima, Nilson Lage e Sérgio Caparelli (Brazil).

important in the definition of a major wave of post-colonial theory about hybridity that strongly touches media studies but also anthropology, sociology, and literature. He communicates well the different take on the concept coming from Latin America, which is often more about racial *mestizaje* and religious syncretism than the literary hybridity focused on in many other post-colonial writings.

However, in the breadth of the history of Latin American media and communications studies, Martín-Barbero has emerged as perhaps the most cited and centrally placed theorist, more even than Canclini. His book *De los Medios a las Mediaciones* (Martín-Barbero, 1987) contains a wealth of insight about the development of communication and media theories, which lends it to inclusion in advanced theory classes – including mine at Michigan State University and the University of Texas at Austin. That this book has been so widely taught across Latin America – and insufficiently in the rest of the world – is one reason that his thought has tended to be so central.

He very insightfully reviews a broad range of ideas that are essential to communication research. He starts in a key place that most such histories don't reach – core historical, usually national conceptions of how we think about people as subjects. For example, the first chapter addresses the terms of Romanticism and the national romanticism that underlies many popular and even hegemonic ideas about national identity, followed and then critiqued by ideas of class. He also does a much better job than the majority by analyzing the importance of how people were thought about as masses, which was a crucial predicate for the early 20th Century fear of and focus on propaganda, which produced the beginnings of North American effects research, which has ostensibly been rejected in most Latin American communication research traditions, but still underlies much research on persuasion, campaigns, advertising, public relations etc., which have had a resurgence as professionalized academic communication research fields, particularly in Brazil.

Perhaps most central and influential has been his concept of the mediations of the media themselves. He asks essentially what forces help mediate the influence of the media on the audience. This idea that media were not inherently all-powerful but were, in fact, mediated by a variety of social forces was one of the central insights from the North American research on both propaganda and persuasion that began in WW II and expanded in the 1950s-60s. This is an excellent counterweight to theorizations that give media extremely strong centrality and power, such as those of the Frankfurt School research in the 1940s-50s. Martín-Barbero gives one of the most sophisticated and critical readings of that set of theories that I know of, which was a useful corrective to the strong hold that the Frankfurt School had over theory and research in Latin America for

decades, at least up through the 1970s-80s, leading to the very acute wisecrack by Anamaria Fadul (2005) that Latin American communication research was suffering from “Frankfurt’s curse”.

He follows his critique of the Frankfurt School with an interesting focus on culture as the most important focus for communication research. That is very parallel to the *cultural turn* that was being taken through cultural studies in media studies in Great Britain, the U.S., and Europe, but I have always thought that his take, from the point of view of Latin America, was an excellent complement to what my students and I had learned from those other sources. The overall effort, notably including his work, to define what Latin American cultural studies might look like had been very interesting. I only wish that there was even more work in this area and that more of the world research community was aware of it, as it has become aware of cultural studies in East Asia, Australia, and other parts of the world.

As Martín-Barbero, in *De los Medios a las Mediaciones*, focused on the early historical conditions of mass media, I have always been intrigued with his idea of “the long process of enculturation”, in the fifth chapter. He perceives greater cultural and political complexity than most authors, examining the interplay between the nation-state and its hegemony, and the development of a popular culture of resistance. That should have great global resonance as a theory idea, but for my interests in also gains greatly by its nuance as a Latin American work, in the particular way that the region has developed popular cultures that work resist or hybridize outside forces, as Canclini would emphasize.

It is interesting to me, in his next step, in *De los Medios...*, as he focuses on the interplay between folk culture and popular culture, that he both provides some key seeds for the development of what Brazilian scholars now see as folk-communication and with greater impact, lays out much of the terminology and concepts for the region-wide focus on melodrama and its expression in television as the telenovela. He also continues a theoretically interesting move by connecting the older idea of the masses with the new idea of mass communication through media.

In *De los Medios...*, Martín-Barbero led more Latin American scholars to focus on the greater complexity of a variety of possible mediations of the media. I think that helped develop another major strength of Latin American research, as it has helped produce a strong wave of reception theory studies across Latin America by scholars like Orozco-Gómez and Nilda Jacks. That wave, inspired at least partially by Martín-Barbero, is another one of the distinctive aspects of Latin American research, as reception research in the region shared some

trajectories with North America and Europe, but developed its own specificities, in part due to the theoretical focus on mediations.

I also think Martín-Barbero has been important in global communications literature. I know I have assigned generations of media theory students to read *Communication, Culture and Hegemony: From the Media to the Mediations* (Martín-Barbero, 1993). I am very fond of the broad historical sweep of the book and how it develops the history of a wide set of theories before arriving at his specific ideas about the theories most relevant to Latin America. However, I also know from graduate students' complaints that the translation of Martín-Barbero's work was not as good as the translation of Canclini's work, which they consequently found easier to read.

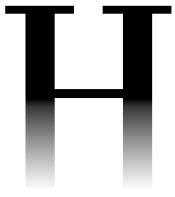
His two final chapters in *De los Medios...*, focus less on sweeping issues relevant to broad theoretical concerns and more on the specific issues of Latin American media studies. His already interesting analysis of nationalism gets even more fascinating when applied fully to Latin America, where it is in tension with transnational processes as well. His major book was written before the turn to focusing on many of these issues as part of globalization.

I would love to have seen him produce a book that fully addressed the turn toward seeing things in the context of a supposedly new phase of globalization. He does address that in "Comunicación y Cultura Mundo: Nuevas Dinámicas Mundiales de lo Cultural" (Martín-Barbero, 2010). He notes that the change from the modern era of nation-states to the global era is just as profound as that from traditional society to the nation-state. He also makes a theoretical distinction between global and world ("mundial") media systems and flows, reflecting some French theorizations that I find very useful – to the point of entitling my 2007 book *World Television...* (Straubhaar, 2007) instead of global television.

In his final chapter in *De los Medios...*, Martín-Barbero preferred the Latin American idea of *mestizaje* to the more common global focus on hybridity. Assigning him has enabled me to stress what Latin American research has added to the overall concept when teaching about hybridity, but it may have made his work slightly more difficult for global scholars to absorb. ■

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