

Emergence of (hybrid) youth cultures

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Abstract: The article approaches the theories of communication in / from Latin America, based on the work of the Mexican anthropologist Rossana Reguillo, in particular from her book *Culturas juveniles* [Youth cultures], originally published in 2000 and reprinted in 2012, which has had a great impact in cultural studies, on communication and youth studies. The author presents a theoretical-ethnographic journey organized in five stages: reading youth, mapping identity, interpreting biopolitics, ethnographing emerging cultures, and rethinking citizenship. From the body to technopolitics, Reguillo constructs a hermeneutic map as a travel guide to the emerging and insurgent landscapes of contemporaneity.

Resumen: El artículo se aproxima a las teorías sobre comunicación en / desde América Latina, a partir de la obra de la antropóloga mexicana Rossana Reguillo, en particular de su libro *Culturas juveniles*, publicado originalmente en 2000 y reeditado en 2012, que ha tenido un gran impacto en los estudios culturales, sobre comunicación y juventud. La autora presenta un recorrido teórico-etnográfico organizado en cinco etapas: leer la juventud, mapear la identidad, interpretar la biopolítica, etnografiar las culturas emergentes, y repensar la ciudadanía. Del cuerpo a la tecnopolítica, Reguillo construye un mapa hermenéutico a manera de guía de viaje hacia los paisajes emergentes e insurgentes de la contemporaneidad.

Resumo: O artigo aborda as teorias da comunicação em / da América Latina, com base no trabalho da antropóloga mexicana Rossana Reguillo, em particular do livro *Culturas juveniles* [*Culturas Juvenis*], originalmente publicado em 2000 e reimpresso em 2012, que teve um grande impacto nos estudos culturais, da comunicação e da juventude. A autora apresenta uma jornada teórico-etnográfica organizada em cinco etapas: ler a juventude, identificar o mapa, interpretar a biopolítica, etnografar as culturas emergentes e repensar a cidadania. Do corpo a tecnopolítica, Reguillo constrói um mapa hermenêutico como guia de viagem para as paisagens emergentes e insurgentes da contemporaneidade.

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3 Reguillo, R. (2012). *Culturas juveniles. Formas políticas del desencanto* [Youth cultures.
4 Political forms of disenchantment]. Buenos Aires: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 2nd ed. 187
5 pp. ISBN 978-987-629-202-3. [1st. ed.: *Emergencia de culturas juveniles. Estrategias del*
6 *desencanto*. Buenos Aires: Norma, 2000].
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11 *Me gusta ir a pintar bardas y después ir a lavarlas*
12 [I like to paint walls and then go clean them up]
13 (Café Tacuba)
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18 The book by the Mexican anthropologist and communication theorist Rossana Reguillo
19 reviewed here was published in Spanish in two emblematic years: the original appeared in the
20 *Enciclopedia Latinoamericana de Sociocultura y Comunicación* (Grupo Editorial Norma,
21 Buenos Aires) in the year 2000, the millennium divide that threatened to reset not only
22 computers using Windows, but also the passage into the second modernity. The updated edition
23 was published in 2012 by Siglo Veintiuno Editores, with a significant change in the title –youth
24 cultures are no longer “emerging”– and with a new foreword by the author and a new chapter –
25 the 6th– that in her own words “seeks to be the hinge between the end of the 20th Century and
26 the beginning of the 21st” (as cited in Scolari, 2013). This was shortly after squares, in many
27 parts of the world, were filled with Arab springs and Indignados' protests, and while the
28 movement in which Reguillo was active, #YoSoy132, emerged in Mexico like a self-fulfilling
29 prophecy of the book's theories about the strategic capacity of youth cultures to communicate
30 the political forms of disenchantment.
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38 Reguillo updated the book during her time as New York University's Andrés Bello Chair,
39 where she could integrate her experience of years of study and fieldwork with youth groups
40 from different countries. Between the first and the second edition, four relevant changes had
41 occurred: the advance of the international financial crisis and its consequences on youth bodies;
42 the advance of the network society; the advance in youth cultures studies (led by the author as
43 the Latin American counterpart to the Birmingham School); and the advance of Latin American
44 cultural studies. This advance was represented by two much referenced authors with whom
45 Reguillo has collaborated and engaged in dialogue for years. Her work weaves Néstor García
46 Canclini's (1989) arguments about youth as a scenario for emerging hybrid cultures and Jesús
47 Martín-Barbero's (1998, 2017) reflections on youth cultures as identity palimpsests.
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3 Starting from her pioneering ethnography about youth gangs in Guadalajara (México), which
4 focused on forms of street communication (Reguillo, 1991), in *Youth cultures* the author puts
5 forward a theoretical-ethnographical journey organized in five stages: considering how to think
6 about youth, mapping identity, interpreting biopolitics, conducting an ethnography of emerging
7 cultures, and rethinking youth citizenships. Reguillo proposes an analysis of the biopolitical
8 dimensions integrated within the body, the materiality into which youth identities and practices
9 are anchored and upon which power is exerted. With this aim, in the chapter on ethnography she
10 reviews key cases of identity denominations defined by young people themselves through
11 processes of cultural hybridization: *punks* (fusion of anarchism and postmodernity), *taggers*
12 (fusion of local and global), *raztecas* (fusion of rap and neo indigenism), and *dilleis* (Mexican
13 version of the DJs, fusion of shamanism and technology). In all cases she goes beyond mapping
14 the aesthetics, searching for the *links* with politics through an original approach in relation to
15 Anglo-Saxon cultural studies and arguing that “it is not possible to envisage communication
16 apart from sociocultural processes and the reverse” (Reguillo, 2005, p. 197). As she states in the
17 introduction, the book is not only about young people, but also about communication: “In its
18 strategies, in its forms of communicative interaction, in its perceptions of the world, there is a
19 social text waiting to be deciphered: that of a lower-case type of politics that can render the
20 world, the locality, the future and each day a better place to live” (Reguillo, 2012, p. 15).

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31 Young people seek meaning beyond institutional expressions that in their view don't make
32 any sense, so new forms of organization, political participation, and communication arise from
33 their disenchantment. While this disenchantment manifests itself as indignation, rage or sadness,
34 Reguillo claims that, once we add a political dimension to it, it becomes agency, or “active
35 disenchantment.” From this point of view, young people are “discursive subjects and social
36 agents, with the capacity to take hold of (and to mobilise) social and symbolic objects and
37 material objects” (p. 30). That is, Reguillo recognizes this active role in their capacity to
38 negotiate with the institutions and structures: she acknowledges their subjectivity. Thus, the
39 challenge or “hope” lies in turning young people’s disenchantment into new forms of collective
40 actions.
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47 The book is a comprehensive analysis of young people and youth culture that avoids the term
48 “subculture” due to its Western and hierarchical nuance; it is also an in-depth reflection that
49 does not lay blame on young people nor idealizes them. The author believes that youth cultures
50 manifest themselves with expressions, symbols, and languages in order to hide both hope and
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3 fear at the same time. Reguillo is very honest from the beginning, making explicit already in the
4 first chapter her ideological stance and its implications. On the one hand, the book is a good
5 example of how to study a phenomenon at the intersection of different disciplines –sociology,
6 anthropology, history and communication– with a strong critical component and political
7 commitment. It also makes a significant contribution as a theoretical-methodological model of
8 how to carry out a sociocultural analysis of a topic. Through deep historical and social
9 contextualization, it studies the bewilderment of young people in the social context where they
10 are inserted and the causes that brought this bewilderment about. It accepts that youth identities
11 are globalized, while at the same time sustaining the historical and cultural specificity. It is also
12 a state of the art that raises the knowledge produced by the youth studies carried out in Latin
13 America for discussion. Finally, it provides a rationale of the methodological stance taken, the
14 interpretative–hermeneutical perspective that transcends essentialist stances “without losing the
15 centrality of gender, ethnics and territory centrality” (Reguillo, 2012, p. 37).

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18 From a methodological perspective, the book lays the foundation for rethinking concepts,
19 categories, approaches, empirical analyses, and interpretations. It moves away from the
20 mechanical relationship between practices and their representations inasmuch as they limit
21 themselves to the descriptive, empirically observable dimension. It is original in its way of
22 linking macro and micro aspects and social and subjective dimensions. Reguillo’s interpretive-
23 hermeneutics perspective intends to harmonize these two positions; she seeks to overcome the
24 inner/outer dichotomy as part of an inseparable tension in the production of scientific
25 knowledge. Ultimately, she seeks to transcend essentialist stances and depart from another level
26 “that is not limited to the anecdote or the empirical data” (Reguillo, 2012, p. 31)). Her critical
27 research model allows her to analyze the relations between structures and subjects, starting from
28 an active understanding that is defined as it takes place. To that end, she puts forward a multiple
29 research strategy that combines different techniques such as observation, biographies, focus
30 groups and data analysis. According to Reguillo, rigor is not methodological rigidity, and she
31 therefore defends the diversification of quantitative and qualitative instruments. The book is a
32 good example of this triangulation.

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35 Reguillo believes that opposing scientific styles do not respond to geographical contexts
36 (Anglo-Saxon versus Latin American), but rather to ways of approaching scientific practice. She
37 recognizes that in the Latin American academic culture there is a tendency towards a more
38 socially and politically committed type of research. Latin American intellectuals claim to carry
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3 out “studies about cultures” (Reguillo, 2005, p. 193), not “cultural studies.” They start from
4 culture as the center of their analysis, and hold a critical stance in the face of reality and
5 asymmetrical conditions of power. In addition to the political vocation, there is a disciplinary
6 disassociation: "The transdisciplinary has been, more than a methodological approach, a
7 necessity in Latin America" (Reguillo, 2005, p. 193). The lesson for cultural studies and for
8 youth studies is to avoid becoming a new subspeciality, instead promoting the synergies
9 between disciplines, topics, and methods with young people cultural practices at the centre.
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14 Since its first publication, as numerous citations in Google Scholar prove, the impact of the
15 Reguillo's book has been enormous both on youth and communication studies, although
16 unfortunately limited to the Ibero-American context, due to lack of a translation into English.
17 The book, as well as Reguillo's subsequent work and reflections within and beyond social
18 networks, are indispensable for educators, communication theorists, politicians, and social and
19 youth analysts across geographical and cultural contexts; her original views would merit
20 translation to English. Reguillo remains committed as an activist to the constant analysis of how
21 this disenchantment is changing at present. She does so through Facebook, where she has a vast
22 community of followers of diverse profiles (young people, researchers, journalists, etc. from
23 Mexico and beyond), and where she claims to be constructing “a new collective word, a new
24 grammar of politics.” (p. 17). Her research from this privileged observatory has been recently
25 published in Spanish (*Paisajes insurrectos* [Insurgent Landscapes], 2017).
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