

A LATIN AMERICAN PERSPECTIVE FOR THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF COMMUNICATIONS

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Abstract

In the past few decades, there has been an accelerated and transversal change in the “techno-information mechanisms” of production and reproduction in modern society. This change belies a new cultural ecosystem whose configuration and organisational logic is clearly unstable and random. This has affected the cultural codes, the methods of configuration, representation of space and time, the habits and forms of interaction and public knowledge, the models of regulation and control of the networks and infrastructures of data transmission.

The very roots of the relationship between capital, work, and knowledge have been altered. The unfolding of the digital revolution and the accelerated expansion of the media and industries of information and culture have not only served to alter the map of social communications systems, but also led to a profound transformation in the organisational system of public life. The authors emphasise the main intellectual predecessors that can contribute to a diagnosis and alternative transformation of the universe of communications and thus establish a basis for a new critical viewpoint of the peripheral, dependent countries of Latin America and the international division of intellectual work in the context of computerisation.

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In the past few decades, there has been an accelerated and transverse change of the “techno-information mechanisms” of production and reproduction in modern society. This change belies a new cultural ecosystem whose configuration and organisational logic is clearly unstable and random. The uncertainty caused by this is understandable in the context of the transition of capitalist society, and it equally affects cultural codes, the methods of configuration and representation of space and time, the habits and forms of interaction and public knowledge, and the models of regulation and control of the networks and infrastructures of data transmission. The transformations of the public sphere and the dominant socio-cultural forms in our “semio-sphere” could be deemed revolutionary. They have altered the very roots of the relationship between capital, work, and knowledge: As a result, they are restructuring the links between the cultural system and the methods of production.

The unfolding of the digital revolution and the accelerated expansion of the media and industries of information and culture have not only served to alter the map of social communications systems. The radical nature of the ongoing changes associated with new electronic technologies has also led to a profound transformation in the organisational system of public life. This transformation is based on the norms, systems, and cultures of information introduced by the new multimedia conglomerates; today, these groups make the wide gap between different groups, regions, and cultures seem acceptable and natural.

The economic dominion of communications is, in effect, the basis and condition for new forms of inequality and social control. In this process of restructuring the systems of reproduction, three spheres are directly affected: education, culture, and the working world. In short, thanks to the explosion of communication technologies, the information society is revolutionizing systems of knowledge and the traditional model of mediation. As a result, it is also theoretically revolutionizing the categories and the very meaning of information itself. The features and the characteristics of collective communications, which have defined what liberal thought has called the public sphere for the past several centuries, have been radically altered as a model of modern bonding.

In this paper, we attempt to cohere historically significant communication research streams, placing specific emphasis on the principal intellectual predecessors that can contribute to a diagnosis and alternative transformation of the universe of communications. Thus we will establish a basis for a new critical viewpoint of the peripheral, dependent countries of Latin America and the Latin culture in the general context of computerisation, the colonisation of living spaces, the increase of inequalities, and the international division of intellectual work.

The Political Economy of Communications and Culture

The history of investigation in communications in Latin America is quite long, and has confronted a wide variety of issues. However, the lack of importance given to the study of the political economy of communications is particularly noteworthy, in spite of the explosion and growth of careers in the field of communication sciences in Latin America. In the United States and Europe, there has been a certain tradition of these type of studies; in Latin America, however, studies of political economy have usually remained on the margin of the curricular agenda.

The origins of the political economy of communications lie in the need to find a replica of the functional orientations that predominated in communications studies in the 1950s. We can study this history by examining the two principle groups that collaborated in its development: The first could be called the “North American school” developed by professors Dallas Smythe and Herbert Schiller in the tradition of Baran and Sweezy. The second group includes sectors from British and French academia, including the intellectual production of Nicholas Garnham, Peter Golding and Graham Murdock, on one hand, and Patrice Flichy, Bernard Miège and Dominique Leroy, on the other.

The positions taken by Smythe and Schiller at the end of the 1950s represent some of the most serious challenges to mass communication research that was being developed by Lazarsfeld and Schramm within the framework of behaviourism. According to Mosco (1996, 83), Smythe and Schiller’s proximity to Marxism is owed to their academic studies during the 1930s, and to their practical experiences with the class struggles during the crisis of that decade. Smythe’s work can often be considered reductionist, since he does not consider the role of the State, and he commits the error of considering leisure as part of work. The merit of his work, however, lies in the fact that it returned to the economic issue, instead of focusing on the autonomy of the state ideological apparatus that was the predominant orientation of Marxist thinkers of the same period. In contrast, Herbert Schiller’s work was based on analyzing the international economic structure of the media. He focused especially on the relation between the North American government, the large communication companies (media and publicity agencies), and industrial and banking corporations. His work *Communication and Cultural Domination* is one of the first books to denounce the process of concentration in media ownership. In addition, it questions the diffusionist and developmentalist theses that prevailed in international forums like UNESCO and the academics circles of communications in most countries during past decades. This thesis has recently gained prominence again.

Although it would be difficult to speak of a “European school,” it is important to note the work of Graham Murdock and Peter Golding, and that of Nicholas Garnham. As a general statement, it can be said that in Europe there has been much academic interest in establishing theoretical criteria on the relation between material and symbol production. In their analysis, Murdock and Golding (1981) attempt to explain how mass communications play a role in social stratification through the reproduction of class relations. Nicholas Garnham (1990, 30) also emphasises the importance of treating the media as an economic entity, and he believes that the direct economic function of the media is to create surplus value through the production of its merchandise (programs). According to Garnham, their indirect economic function is to create surplus value in other areas through publicity.

In France, where the concept of the economy of culture and communications prevails, it is important to note the influence of William Baumol’s economic analysis on the performing arts (1968), which Baumol completed in the United States at the end of the 1960s. The most well-known work of the French school is that of the economists linked to GRESEC at the University of Stendhall (Grenoble); the most noteworthy figure is Bernard Miège. The works of Paris-native Patrice Flichy are also included in this group, whose main interest was to study the process of work

and valorisation of cultural products and their specificities, depending on the type of specific work included in their production: cultural, artistic, conceptual, and creative. The limits of the subsumption of this work on capital determine the specificities not only of its production, but also of the structure of cultural markets. Finally, it is important to note the influence of the French school in Spain, especially on Enrique Bustamante (from the magazine *Telos*) and on the team from the Basque Country University, led by Ramón Zallo. This team profoundly debated and revised some of the main concepts of the economy of communications and culture (Zallo 1988; 1992).

All of these thinkers have broken in some way with certain Marxist analyses that were based on an unquestioning acceptance of the base/superstructure model. These analyses attributed the social role of the media exclusively to control and the class structure of property. These were considered the determining factors of the information system. This reductionist vision of the role of the public media in society has been refuted by political economy; although political economists recognise the importance of the economic structure in the workings of the media — and the need to analyze this — they have insisted on not committing the same error of making a mechanist transfer onto the effects of the media.

In Latin America, we find a long list of contributions from authors linked to the theories of cultural dependency and to the debates on the New World Informational Order and National Communications Policies. These areas all have several points in common with the analyses of the political economy of communications.

The most important school of economic thought in Latin America, the Keynesian CEPAL (Economic Commission for Latin America), included members like Raúl Prebisch, Aníbal Pinto, Oswaldo Sunkel, Celso Furtado and Maria da Conceição Tavares. The central issue dealt with by the school was development. The school's greatest contribution was the formulation of a well-known model of substitution process that explains and supports industrialisation in Latin America in the period deemed "developmentalism." However, their diagnoses of the peripheral condition of Latin America should not be disregarded.

At the same time, Marxism made significant contributions to this field from afar; not surprisingly, also outside of academic circles. However, it is the influx of structuralism that tends to reduce this isolation. Structuralism strongly influenced Marxist thought, and even became hegemonic during a great part of the 1960s and 1970s. Among the different trends within this type of leftist Latin American thinking, the most noteworthy are the so-called dependency theories, drawn up by Fernando Henrique Cardoso, Enzo Falletto, Samir Amin and many others; these theories are presented as both a critique and alternative to the crisis of thought suffered by CEPAL. It is interesting to note the existing parallel between the development of economic thought and the Latin American economy with the theories and proposals linked to the field of communications. For example, the "developmentalist" policies theoretically supported by CEPAL spark the debate on Communication and Development, especially when it becomes clear that social development and overcoming poverty are not simply corollaries of industrialisation. In fact, from the 1960's on, there are explicit references to the role of the media in promoting development. Thinkers from CEPAL will be the ones to introduce the concept of communication planning from a non-critical perspective; this concept will become significant across the continent.

In the beginning of the 1970s, the debate on the New World Economic Order (NWEO) is also generalised, at the time when the crisis of capitalism is beginning and the methods for regulation are being readjusted. In conjunction with the debate on NWEO, proposals begin to appear in the field of communications for a New World Information and Communications Order (NWICO); this is debated within another UN organisation, UNESCO. In Latin America, special emphasis will be placed on establishing National Communication Policies (NCP). In addition to its general proposals for state and civil intervention in defining audiovisual policies, the debate on NCP confronted the need to democratise social communications in order to achieve increased economic equality. The struggle to establish National Communication Policies left a theoretical remainder: the debate on concepts as important as public services, access, and participation (Exeni 1998). In this respect, Capriles (1980) warned that in many cases, the debate on NWOIC was utilised as a smokescreen. According to Capriles, it actually constituted an objective obstacle in the path of the process of effective democratisation of Latin American societies that were supporting NCP. In the debate over NWICO and NCP, Latin American communication thinkers are both original and profound in their ability to debate. Authors like Luis Ramiro Beltrán, Antonio Pasquali, Armand Mattelart, Elizabeth Fox, and Ariel Dorfman, among others, sparked the so-called theories of cultural dependency, or cultural imperialism.

We know what occurred in the 1980s on the international scene. At the beginning of the Reagan presidency, a policy of recovering North American hegemony was implemented. This policy was based on increasing interest rates. In terms of political policies and the military, the Reagan government also worked towards the recovery of North American hegemony, especially after the collapse of the so-called real socialism. In terms of the issue of NWICO and NCP, the United States and Great Britain withdrew from UNESCO a short time after the twentieth general assembly reached a consensus on the so-called "McBride Report." Following the withdrawal of the United States and Great Britain, UNESCO faced an important financial crisis; it was reoriented towards less-conflictive issues and its importance was reduced, like that of CEPAL. In practice, the free exchange of information was imposed, and the United States replaced its participation in international organisms with bilateral relations. While UNESCO lost its influences, and neo-liberal ideas spread across the planet, the conglomerate of the world's most important investors increased their ownership percentage in the communications, information, and cultural sectors worldwide. This process then accelerated and became more radical with the expansion of information and communication technologies. Other factors included the lifting of restrictions and the privatisation of the telecommunications systems, and the expansion of computer networks, particularly the Internet. All form part of the profound process of capitalist restructuring that is currently underway.

Given these circumstances, the theories of cultural dependency also enter into crisis; in the Latin American field of study, these theories were eventually replaced by a series of diverse options. In the first place, the theories of reception shift the focus of interest from the producer to the receiver, who is fully authorised to create meaning. During the 1980s, various works that celebrate the mass incorporation of new information and communication technologies appear as well; again, these works attempt to justify the economic success of Latin American economies with

the mass introduction of these technologies. Finally, another branch of cultural studies also appears. This branch criticises the sociological structuralism of the cultural dependency theories, and proposes an anthropological vision. This vision is based on the idea that the efficiency of the mass media in terms of ideological domination must be questioned. According to this theory, popular culture is autonomous; mass-culture products are received according to the people's own vision of the world. Authors like Barbero, Canclini, and others end up forming part of what could be called a school of thought on communications, a school that is both important and sophisticated.

On the other hand, for the Latin American reality, it could be misleading to transfer the Anglo-Saxon debate between political economy and cultural studies. On our continent, both perspectives arise autonomously as a critique of the insufficiencies of dependency theories. This is owed in great part to their link to the structuralist perspective, which was then hegemonic in the field of Marxism. When both of these critical contributions were made, they were presented as being more in line with Marx's original thoughts; however, in the following years, cultural studies has moved away from this link, and adopted a vision that is strongly influenced by the most non-critical postmodernism.

In this context, political economy again questioned the need to analyze the economic methods of symbolic production. This is expressed by Nicholas Garnham (1990) when he reviews the works of Adorno and Horkheimer:

Indeed, the real weakness of the Frankfurt School's original position was not their failure to realise the importance of the base or the economic, but insufficiently to take account of the economically contradictory nature of the process they observed, and thus to see the industrialisation of culture as unproblematic and irresistible (Garnham 1990, 28).

A similar need for analysis appeared in another review of the cultural dependency theories, this one by Heriberto Muraro. Muraro introduced important issues to consider for the future development of the political economy of communications:

The reason for this deficit among different dependency theoreticians – who are the ones that have advanced the furthest in the field of the global analysis of the relations between economy and communications – is that most depend on the economic analysis to ideologically interpret the messages. In such studies, the strictly economic sphere is seen from afar (Muraro 1987, 92).

The panorama of the field of communications at the beginning of the 1990s was characterised by the predominance of cultural studies, which were linked to the regional theoretical developments already mentioned. At the same time, however, from a critical perspective it became clear that the academic-carping political projects were being abandoned, due to the theoretical response to certain axioms from the 1970s. The new methods of investigation were marked not only by a sort of formal institutionalism, but in many cases, also by explicit or hidden market stimuli. As expressed by Héctor Schmucler:

The idea of the market is seductive: it invites you to enjoy and to be free without breaking the rules. Once the truth of the market has been revealed, professors and investigators could give up the tedious task of "accusing." To

Correct. To Propose. To express objections is not to oppose, but to include oneself in a respectful way. The type of investigation deemed “know-how” ignores a substantial number of options, and the market, the paradigm in which anything can be thought of or done, only requires the elimination of any leftover essentialism. The connected person, who becomes the ideal individual of communications, is no different than the market ideal, which aspires to incessant transactions (Schmucler 1996, 66).

In spite of this unpromising panorama, responses to this mass reconciliation also appear. One such response is that of a series of investigations which attempt to return to the analysis of the production of cultural industries from the point of view of the value-work theory. Political economy attempts to return to the analysis of the economic form of development of cultural industries, in order to link it to the study of consumption. However, this also implies a return to the debate on media policies and on the democratic organisation of information and culture.

We believe that the political economy of communications is confronting three basic tasks. In the first place, it must return to the issues related to media ownership; work to define democratic policies of communication, and struggle for a more just information distribution on the international level.¹ The task of updating the state of media ownership is becoming absolutely essential. It would not be an exaggeration to point out that the concentration and trans-nationalisation has far surpassed the most pessimistic prognoses of the 1970s. Secondly, we believe that it is imperative to systematise the theoretical analysis of the workings of the cultural industries. As we have already mentioned, we believe that it is necessary to consider the media as systems of production, distribution, and consumption. Symbolic forms are consumed, and these require the utilisation of scarce social resources that are distributed according to the restrictions established by the capitalist mode of production. In order to understand the logic of this system, it is not enough to simply conduct a macroeconomic study of the media, of the media’s participation in the process of capital accumulation, and of the participation of the State. We must also take into account the forms of production, the characteristics of the cultural merchandise, and the amount of capital in each sector. Finally, the political economy of communications must create a program for intervention that again joins academia with social practices and organisations.²

Political Economy and Epistemological Criticism

Political economy of communications – or, more inclusively, the political economy of knowledge – can play a role in the process of the construction of the global information society. This role includes sketching the map and the cultural cartographies utilised to project the methods of inhabiting and imagining different worlds. These different worlds are ecologically strong and well formed, socially integrated, and productive from a cultural standpoint. To this end, it is necessary to establish at least three strategic conditions for the left and for the critical theory of communications:

1. To identify, through a “symptomatic reading” (Althusser 1988, 43-57), the series of problems and theories used to conceive the persistent realities of the new informational surroundings – the network of discourses, tendencies, and conceptual constructions that define these surroundings. The goal is to acknowledge the

sphere of struggles and voices that today frame the limits for emancipating actions and thought. Within this struggle, the concept-fetish of “globalisation” today constitutes the principal theoretical reference that determines the political and intellectual debate in the field of communications. The method of confronting these changes and their ideological implications is, we know, divergent. In general, as the result of the effects of the modifications experienced by culture, there has been a complex and contradictory quilt woven by the socio-cultural effects produced by globalisation. This has sparked a return to recurrent forms of reducing the global phenomenon, but these forms are not very practical when it comes to tentatively discovering the tendencies of the future.

Over the last two decades, this culture of investigation has permeated the scientific work of even reputable and committed communication analysts. Thus, there are few proposals that are made from the point of view of a global, all-encompassing vision, and which attempt to recognise the logic of the informative globalisation based on an economic-political critique of communications. The weight of the great majority of the analyses of media globalisation, in contrast, are placed on the technological factor. These analyses update determinist formulas that were questioned years ago for offering a reductionist vision of communicational logic. In our days, the works on the informed nature of contemporary society’s thoughts thus sketch a contradictory and relatively indeterminable scenario, based on the inertia of the informational mechanisms themselves. In this respect, the work of Manuel Castells is the most compelling example, it describes and conceptually defines the society that springs up around the cultural structures of the media universe. Castells’s reading is purposefully critical and reflexive, but he repeats old dualisms and binary oppositions that are not very useful for the social construction of the universe of communications-world (Garnham 2000; Bolano and Mattos 2004).

The tendency towards globalisation and towards the global convergence of economy and culture in the new system-world is transforming the material structure of information. It thus requires a revision of the habitual theorisations that, beyond pan-communicational idealism and technological determinism, assume the radical capitalist revolution in the field of culture. It does so by linking the current forms of information development with the capitalist system, with the logic of how much things are worth, and with the real subsumption of the living world by capital. This leads us to an initial conclusion: If the globalisation of information is the first sign of the radical changes of the hegemonic forms of power, then there are several inevitable criteria for a complete knowledge in communication. These criteria include outlining the placement and market niche of this globalisation, and constructing the political standards and framework of the cultural production that the capital system both organises and penetrates. To achieve these conditions, it is necessary to replace the interpretations on the distribution of the global information society with productive theories. In addition, it is imperative to stop paying attention to the accelerated circulation of symbolic values and merchandise and instead, as Marx would criticise, to prioritise the systems of production. This must be done from a global viewpoint which considers the socio-historic problems and processes in a moment of progressive interconnection, convergence, and interlinked progression of the diverse human spaces and realities.

What is necessary, then, is to overcome the traditional fragmentation and division of reality on the part of scientific knowledge, as outlined in Marxism. This

need places the philosophical, political, and epistemic critique of political economy in a privileged position, thus surpassing instrumental knowledge. This knowledge inspires not only the sociological functionalism of mass communication research and its epigones of the social theory of information, but also the attempt to bring to the forefront contemporary cultural studies. In the field of our work, these studies repeat the tendency towards isolation of the experience of history and of the political-ideological conditioning that serve as the basis for all fields of intellectual work. This thus turns the theoretical criticism into postmodern rhetoric and illusionism, as commented ironically upon by Eagleton (1997, 193-198). In this sense, the transversal logic of contemporary informative processes becomes the basis of the value systems for the new model of social regulation. This not only surpasses the conventional borders and scientific limits, but also makes the social contradictions visible. The scientific discourses and the public policies that make these contradictions evident are the same ones that articulate the accelerated process of change in postmodern times.

2. Given the current crisis and marginal position of economic-political studies, or more generically, of the critical-materialist position of communications, a genealogical analysis that reconstructs the history is useful. This analysis can make these contradictions dialectically productive. This is done from a retrospective point of view of the discipline, which makes evident the contradictions that arise from the social, academic, and political-cultural conditions. These conditions determine the scope of emancipating thought in communications, from the point of view of the issues, methods, problems, and accumulated knowledge on the social reality of the new forms of mediation. The first challenge, without a doubt, is that of historically reconstructing the formation of our objects of knowledge. It is vital for this process to take place in cultural regions like Latin America, precisely because of its peripheral situation in the global information system. The eccentric, exclusive viewpoint of Latin American critical theory is that which best favours the deconstruction of the logics encompassed within the global information society. This viewpoint makes the rules, forms of control, and regulating mechanisms of the dominant model of informative globalisation explicit, both in terms of its discourse and in terms of its cultural practices. It does so not only at the level of the industries of conscience, it also does so with respect to the logics of the production of communicational knowledge, which determines the current international division of intellectual work. This is particularly so if we consider that the fields of production, circulation, and accelerated consumption of cultural commodities constitute the nucleus of control and development in society. However, other fields are also involved in this process, like the field of mediated production (in terms of techno-information) of life and biological processes.

Thus the problems of political economy of communications can no longer be included within the social dimension of communications. The socio-cultural processes must be conceived and connected with the industrial production of minds and bodies, and with human work (in the anthropological sense). They must also be connected with the strategic problem of knowledge in the valorisation and reproduction of social and human life and the systems of domination.

The paradigmatic sectors of the industrial economy are influenced today by the development of informational and communicational technologies, and by the different biotechnological industries and industries of content. These sectors are

those in which the dynamics of the subsumption of intellectual work (Bolano 2002) are most evident. Today surplus value is based more on the extraction of the mental energy of workers, than on their physical energies. A generalised production of intellectualisation of production and consumption affects the cognitive capacity of men and women, forming an extended “general intellect.” According to Marx (1857-8), this capacity makes capitalist domination appear obsolete, thus creating a real possibility of overcoming it. This is linked to both the essentially informative and communicational nature of the new structure of the capitalist system, which is derived from the two intrinsic logics of late capitalism: the virtualisation of social spaces and worlds, and the extension of the bio-political logic based on the binomial science-technology. Directly or indirectly, this changes the dominion of knowledge or, in a wider sense, the systems of production and construction of meaning, and it changes them into a strategic mechanism for control and social change.

3. Finally, the program of political economy of communications would not be epistemologically coherent with its scientific logic if not confronting the positioning and social commitment of the theory with the practice of the social movements of the region, within their historical projection. This must join investigation with the vision and desire to emancipate and locate these groups. If it is done in any other way, the result will be a failure similar to that of the NWICO, and social and political isolation of the critical theory will take place as it did several decades ago. The fundamental contradictions of this new imperial order can seem imperceptible in terms of the totalitarian control of information; the liberating elements of articulation and transformation can be difficult to locate – invisible, and elusive. However, the alternatives for change and collective mobilisation are many, and they multiply within the system. Thus the reticular forms of the integrated spectacle coordinates the processes of reproduction, but it also regulates the methods of cooperation and social communication both within and outside of the system.

Now, what bases and perspectives could be used in order for the power of criticism to activate its emancipating mechanisms? What are the alternatives for transforming actions? How can the media and information technologies be reoriented, and reorganised in a more democratic way? What lines of thought and plans for action could be prioritised so that the information society would truly be for all? Without a doubt, answering these and other fundamental questions requires a good amount of theoretical reflection; it would not be realistic to confront these questions in this short text.

As a foundation of thought for social change a good first step is to go from the formal, constructed idea of global multimedia communications towards the actual construction of a democratic ideal of the networks of symbolic interaction. This process is not a simple one to begin. Civic networks, community call centres, and the public platforms of anti-globalisation are generating innovative forms of appropriating and utilizing the ICT (Information and Communication Technologies). Thus they revitalise the creative processes of organisation and social development that must be explored and conceptually considered. This is a new liberating reality of processes and logics that have not even been imagined by political economists. The capacity for innovation lies in the advanced capacity for knowledge and in the raised level of consciousness permitted by the new processes of productive communications. In contrast with the traditional forms of communications, this exposes subjects to the requirements and incessant changes of the complex and in-

formation-packed surroundings of the so-called cognitive society. These new processes demand of social actors the ability to evaluate the situation and to respond to transformations in the media as they arise. In other words, these are intelligent communities that are organised to act. For the first time, communications has the possibility of becoming a type of know-how that allows for change. In our point of view, this is the main contribution of the ICT, and it allows us to envision communications linked to action, to development, and to the most pressing needs of humanity. The technical development of the very system itself allows for this possibility. However, this change cannot take place from within; not without the organised, transforming actions of the subjects, that is, the intellectual or intellectualised workers of a new capitalism.

Now, in order for this to occur, the academic community of communications must address what is lacking in the theory, concept, and methodology of investigation. In addition, it must attempt to articulate new forms of organisation that facilitate social autonomy and the construction of complex knowledge. To do so, it must connect the nodes of the network that produces us – physically, materially, and socially. In truth, the future of the alternative to the global information society depends on the creation of a common culture that is necessarily linked to the anti-imperial social networks. In this sense, political economy of communications could be a starting point for understanding social relations from an open-minded and critical point of view, instead of a reductionist one.

Notes:

1. In this sense, it is also important to return to the first attempts to link the economy with the media, without taking into account the problem of ideological determination. In addition to the texts already mentioned by Heriberto Muraro, the works of Chilean Diego Portales and Mexican Patricia Arriaga should also be mentioned. In the 1970s, Portales (1981, 30) presented “the pressing need to develop an economy of communications ... in the world of economic science, the study of the production and distribution of communication material is practically absent.”

2 This is, in fact, one of the most outstanding objectives – and plans for action – of the Latin Union of the Political Economy of Information, Communications, and Culture. This organisation’s participation in the Social Forum in Porto Alegre, Brazil, is evidence of a will to join political and social forces with the organisations dedicated to the struggle against global capitalism. However, it also points to a culture of scientific movement working in conjunction with social movements. By studying and revising the logic of control of world communications, this represents a constant attempt to construct models for social economy within the media. In addition, it represents a theoretical-conceptual framework for critiquing and transforming the information system as a result of an active interaction with the social forces for progress, in order to avoid the failure of the unfortunate experiences of the National Communication Policies and the NWOIC.

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