

LUDOVICO SILVA AND THE MOVE TO CRITICAL STANCES IN LATIN AMERICAN COMMUNICATION STUDIES

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Abstract

Despite his intellectual impact in the field of communication studies during the 1970s, Ludovico Silva is hardly remembered today even in his native country, Venezuela.

Showing a singular intellectual honesty, Ludovico Silva worked on a general theory of ideology, challenging the official Marxism and leftist political forces of the age. Based on Marx's difference between use value and exchange value, Silva argued that the Marxist category of surplus needed an equivalent in the symbolic realm; hence he developed the concept of ideological surplus in order to reject mechanical interpretations of ideology. Thus, Silva, among other scholars, contributed to Latin American communication studies by incorporating power and domination as structural forces in the making of social relations. The ideological power of media became the ultimate concern in media studies, questioning the explanatory value of the functionalist and quantitative studies focused on media effects, which were dominant at that time. Silva's work is recovered here in a historical perspective, stressing his intellectual commitment to the truth, and his contribution to move Latin American communication studies from a conventional academic stance to a critical one.

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Critical analysis of communication nowadays is a reality in Latin America as much as in any other part of the world. Media systems and communication processes are currently analyzed from different critical perspectives, e.g., from macro perspectives of political economy, micro analyses of reception and consumption, or case studies of media and news production. The work of dominant transnational corporations – on foreign images, and discourses on race, gender, geography, sexual differences and preferences – and their encounters with local commercial and independent media forces, imagery and cultural practices of consumption, are normal concerns these days among scholars in the fields of communication and culture. These interests emerged in the late 1960s and early 1970s with the incorporation of a Marxist critique into these fields, in which a conventional and functional approach had prevailed in regional research and teaching of communication.

A number of thinkers and scholars were key factors in the move from an approach focused on media effects to a critical stance, in which the ideological consequences of media uses became new sites of inquiry. However, Armand Mattelart and Ludovico Silva were particularly important, because by extending Marx's preoccupation with ideology to the field of media analysis, they claimed to understand media work as an active force in the making of social relations. They argued that the power of media could only be grasped through their connections with other parts of the social structure. Mattelart's and Silva's texts became popular in Latin American universities, where professional programs on journalism and media production had begun to be developed.

Unlike Mattelart, however, who continued working and contributing texts to the field, Ludovico Silva's leading role declined. His work stopped being important as a result of abandoning his concern with ideology and communication alongside the extensive production by new authors and the emergence of new topics and texts.

While Mattelart's work is still retrospectively analyzed, Silva's accomplishments are not even remembered. His name and contributions faded unfairly. This essay will explore Silva's concept of *ideological surplus* and its relevance for Latin American communication studies.

Ludovico *Who?*

Ludovico Silva is almost unknown, even in his native country, Venezuela. Although David Sobrevilla (1994) places him among the most relevant Latin American Marxist thinkers in the twentieth century, and although his intellectual career was important not only in philosophy but also in literature, there is no visible influence of Silva on the current Venezuelan cultural milieu. His situation has been so remarkable that in October, 2004, the Venezuelan National Assembly agreed to an homage on the occasion of the 16th anniversary of his death, on December 4, 1988. In the session one of the speakers, Eddy Gomez, agreed that "no other writer in Venezuela has reached such a universal dimension and has produced such intellectual work as Silva had..." He added that the country was indebted to Silva, "because his work *must* be known for all the academic groups and for all the Venezuelan people ... we must spread his work because this is an avid-for-culture country" (Morillo at www.asambleanacional.gov.ve/ns2/noticia.asp).

The biographical information on Ludovico Silva is scant. An internet search produced two documents containing identical information. His real name was Luis

José Silva Michelena. He was born in Caracas on December 12, 1937, where he died almost 51 years later, on December 4, 1988. Ludovico is a nick name given to him by Spanish students while studying philosophy and literature in Madrid during the mid-1940s. Its meaning is not clear, since it is not a Spanish word. It could be related to the noun, *ludribio* (mockery, derision) or the verb, *ludir* (rub). Possibly, those words described Ludovico's personality. However, there is not indication in the biographical document that his nickname was related to these words or that the name referred to Silva's personality.

He was the son of Hector Silva Urbano and Josefina Michelena and had at least two brothers, Héctor and José Agustín, a poet and a sociologist, respectively. After finishing his basic education at the Colegio San Ignacio, a private school in Caracas, Ludovico travelled to Europe, where he studied philosophy, literature and philology in Spain, France (the Sorbonne) and Germany for four years. In 1969 he obtained the most important honours for a student in the school of philosophy at the Universidad Central de Venezuela. During the 1960s his literary career took off. He produced an extensive poetic oeuvre and founded and was a member of the editorial boards of some of the most important literary magazines of that time (*Papeles, Cal*). From 1964 through 1968, he was the head of the Ateneo of Caracas, a public institution, where the most important poets and writers of literature gathered to discuss cultural politics and literature. He also founded the magazine, *Lamigal*, with his relative, Miguel Otero Silva, another of the most conspicuous Venezuelan authors.

From 1970 to 1986, Ludovico was a professor of philosophy at the Universidad Central de Venezuela (www.literaberinto.com/vueltamundo/minibiosilva.htm). In that year, Ludovico was committed to a mental hospital because of his loss of lucidity. Ammonium, an acid produced by his liver as a result of drinking problems, caused his brain to grow; seriously altering his mental and verbal coherence. Ludovico stayed at that institution for 33 days, when he wrote, *Papeles desde el amonio* (*Papers from ammonium*), describing the inferno of his experience (www.letralia.com/98/caraqcol01.htm).

Although his work on ideology was widely used in Latin American schools of sociology, journalism, and communication studies, Silva was not cited, unlike Mattelart, in the academic literature of the 1970s, according to my research, which produced an insignificant number of entries. However, the few mentions by other academics suggests the relevance of his work. Only recently an extensive essay on Silva was posted in a blog of *Movimiento 13 de Abril*, an alternative Venezuelan political group identified with President Hugo Chávez. There, Nelson Guzmán (2005) posts a panegyric paper about Silva and his philosophical work on Marx. He refers to Silva as

probably the most lucid philosopher of modernity in Venezuela; his prose has the peculiarity of being neat, conversational, and sparkling. Unlike the manual-based style of the Soviet writers, the academic style of Marxists, and the fragmentary writing of Althusser, Ludovico resorted to poetry, novel, and the great literature critics to illustrate his reasoning ... Ludovico claims that Marx, but not the Marx of Soviet idolatry, but the one who – to use Althusser's word – had accomplished a theoretical revolution (Guzmán 2005).

Jorge Gómez Jiménez (2006), chief editor of Letralia.com, a Venezuelan blog on literature and art, draws on Guzmán's essay to recover Silva's concept of ideological surplus to slip in criticism of the role of some intellectuals in contemporary Venezuela.

Alicia Entel, Víctor Lenarduzzi and Diego Gerzovich (2000) highlight Silva's work in a recent book on the impact of the Frankfurt School in Latin America. Although the category ideological surplus is not found to be highly productive by these authors, they mention Silva and Antonio Pasquali, both Venezuelans, as important contributors to a critical understanding of mass communication in Latin America in the 1970s.

The Ideological Surplus

Ludovico Silva contributed to the development of a critical analysis of Latin American communication and media studies by rejecting the official version of Marxism, and by establishing a dialectical relationship between the theoretical frameworks of ideology and communication. His contribution is contained in two books, published by Silva, *Plusvalía Ideológica (Ideological Surplus) (IS)* in 1970 and *Teoría y Práctica de la Ideología (Ideology: Theory and Practice) (ITP)* in 1971. Both books are reviewed here with my translation of the original Spanish texts

IS is a theoretical text aimed at offering a general theory of ideology. As Marx identified the historical specificity of capitalism through the concept of surplus, Silva pursues a similar contribution in the symbolic realm by developing the concept of *ideological surplus*. He argues that the specific spiritual alienation that made possible capitalism needed to be defined on the basis of the difference Marx found between use value and exchange value. "The spiritual work force has become merchandise and the regular man in capitalism does not see a use value in it, but just an exchange value" (1977, 208). Silva mixes a historical analysis of the development of the concept of ideology with a philosophical inquiry into texts by Marx, Sartre, Gramsci, Ortega y Gasset, Freud, and Althusser.

Silva rejects the on-vogue theory of ideology as a reflex of the economic structure of society by proposing a psychological approach in which sub-conscious forces and language play an important role in the process of alienation. Thus, Silva defines ideology as a "system of representations, beliefs, and values *unconsciously* imposed to men in the social relations of production that work on his mind as idols" (1977, 33). It is, an "expression of the historical reality, that is, the *language* the men use to express what they think, feel, or wish about their material conditions" (p. 58). Opposing mechanical interpretations of alienation, Silva sustains that men, willingly participate on their own process of oppression.

Ideology is a social formation, "something occupying a precise place in society that is determined by the material structure of that society" (p. 185). There is a dialectical relationship between structure and ideology: the material basis of the relations of production determines ideology but, at the same time, ideology can also determine the material structure. Following Althusser, Silva situates ideology in places and accords it active social power.

The relevance of Silva's text lies in his attempt to find a specific content for the concept of ideology. His opposition to the official interpretations of ideology emerges from his refusal of all types of self-contained philosophical discourses,

but also from his philological and logical formation. Since ideology, as a discourse, needed a specific definition, according to Silva, he advances the concept of ideological surplus to help identify the place and the way in which ideology is produced and works:

It is possible to think that as in the capitalist workshop of material production surplus is a specific product, in the capitalist workshop of spiritual production an ideological surplus is produced with the ultimate goal of strengthening and enriching the ideological capital of capitalism in order to protect and preserve the material capital (Silva 1977, 190).

Silva's concern is to confer upon ideology an independent status so that its understanding becomes a matter of historical analysis. Ideology is, Silva insists, an expression, a language, and not a simple reflex. Consequently, he takes on the psychological processes by which men reproduce ideology, the products of the cultural industry and their alienating effects. Not surprisingly, Silva ends with understanding ideology as a false consciousness.

Silva's main concern in this book is to find answers to these questions:

How is the ideological expression of the production of material surplus constituted in today's capitalism? What should be its name? How does capitalism proceed to justify itself in men's minds? Through rational arguments? Or through pressures exerted on unconscious mental layers, which are a fertilised ground for making men believe they justify the system and not that the system justifies itself in their minds? How do men make theirs the ideological belief that the world is a merchandise market? (Silva 1977, 193-194).

ITP is a text in which Silva synthesises his theory of the ideological surplus by adding a comment on the specific importance of the concept of ideology and the role of the mass media to better understand the monopoly stage of capitalism. Silva takes on Paul Baran's challenge to the value of a theory of ideology. As ideology has become universal and rules human needs and wishes, inequality, injustice, and exploitation are seen as natural states in contemporary society. There is no general interest anymore in fighting those phenomena, according to Baran.

Silva rejects the discrediting of ideology as a valid concept. Ideology has grown and reached almost every field of social life, but its essence remains the same. It is still a set of false representations and values that unconsciously move men to reproduce capitalism (Silva 1971, 80).

The mass media are the most important ideological instrument in this particular historical age:

The capitalist ideology, as such, has not changed: it is always a system of values aimed to ideally justify the material exploitation. What happens is that in the monopolist stage of capitalism, alongside the total internationalisation of capitalism, a global nerve system of mass media has grown to ideologically work parallel to the economic system. If exploitation has reached an international level (development vs. underdevelopment) its ideological justification has reached it as well. This fact explains the presence in Latin America of a powerful American television empire, which has rightly been called the U.S. media empire in Latin America. In that empire all old ideological forms (religion, metaphysics, judicial and moral norms) have converged and melted

with that invention of our time, which is the scientific control of unconscious loyalties to the merchandise market (Silva 1971, 79).

Based on Vance Packard, Silva finds that the mass media's essential function is to spread commercial propaganda (1971, 200). Through a series of psychological tools of manipulation, Silva follows Packard and suggests that advertisers persuade people to be engaged in consumption processes, which are more beneficial to the economic system than to themselves. By choosing merchandise irrationally rather than seeking to satisfy their real needs, people not only contribute to the reproduction of the capitalist system but they are also caught in the trap of ideology.

The book includes brief analyses of some of the comics Latin American children were exposed to in the 1970s, when comics were still popular and had large audiences of children, since television industries were in their first phase of development. Most comics were translations of U.S. comics, resulting, according to Silva, in a subtle way of an ideological gravitation of the United States over Latin American countries (1971, 123). Ideology is present in those comics, Silva argues, following Adorno, as a *hidden message* (p. 124).

The Critical Sense of Marxism

In the early 1970s, Latin America was experiencing a special political moment. Cuba's status as a socialist state in Latin America was consolidated by that time. Salvador Allende's victory in the Chilean electoral process of 1971 had not only injected enthusiasm and brought hope to leftist forces in the region, but also contributed to overcoming the frustration and sense of defeat produced by the assassination of Ernesto Che Guevara by the Bolivian army in 1967.

This political success occurred when the relevance of Marxism in the social sciences had reached Latin America. Althusser's interpretation of Marx from a structuralist perspective had brought debates on ideology to Latin America with a special emphasis on the character of its relationship to the economy. A dominant topic was whether Marx and Engels had developed a theory of ideology. Thus, analysts were entangled in thoughtful and meticulous reviews of their texts, pursuing to decipher precise meanings or the sites of concepts. Few scholars developed their analyses assuming as a premise the social character of knowledge; instead, most of Marx's texts were read as if they contained ultimate and definitive truths. This academic style coincided with the authoritarian mode by which the left political forces defined both, what the unchallengeable economic and social goals were and through which unique processes they should be reached. Therefore, correctly interpreting Marx and Engels and adjusting political action to the interpretation were an intellectual challenge and a political need.

In that context, most intellectuals focused on proving their theoretical purity and denouncing deviant interpretations of Marx. Ludovico Silva defied that way of proceeding by brilliantly rejecting the existence of a fully-elaborated theory of ideology in Marx and Engels and by recovering the work of *idealist thinkers*. Thus, Silva makes what Zemelman (2004) calls critical use of theories of Sartre, Ortega y Gasset, Freud, and Pavlov.

In his attempt to develop a general theory of ideology, Silva reviews various approaches to the concept, including Sartre's. In this process, he shows a singular intellectual involvement with texts and authors. Contrary to others, Silva does not

develop his argument only on the basis of authors and theories close to his own thoughts, but on ideas. He was a good reader, who examined minutely the relevant texts with an unusual critical commitment: theoretical disagreement does not mean epistemological rejection.

Although he agrees with Henry Lefebvre on his critique of Sartre's interpretation of the concept of ideology, Silva does not disqualify the entire work of the French philosopher:

I want to show that although there is not concordance between the Marxist theory of ideology and the Sartrean approach, Sartre, guided by his intellectual instinct rather than by a theory, guesses the genuine meaning of ideology (the Marxist, for me) in some particular analyses. Put simply: Sartre engages in a right use of the concept when he is not theorising it (Silva 1977, 102-103).

Some paragraphs below, he adds:

I state that Sartre has a frankly Marxist spirit, even though his existentialism betrays him. It is enough to consider him a Marxist spirit just because he is the contemporary thinker who has done the greatest effort to think dialectically. That is what to be a Marxist means, no to make faith protests, or ideological confessions. Besides, Sartre has contributed to the development of the Marxist science in particular ways like in the case of ideology as language (pp. 103-104).

Silva recovers a number of theoretical propositions from Sartre which, according to him, are useful for understanding ideology in contemporary industrial society. First, Sartre points out the social existence of practical objects that constitute a collectivity and are defined by an absence, such as the mass media, for instance. Media audiences are groups that become a collectivity at the moment of consumption. At the same time, they have a social relationship through absence. There is no communication between senders and receivers, or among them. Second, the mass media produce in human beings a unity outside of them. They keep people segregated and secure their communication through the other. The relationship between a program anchor and his audience is not a human relationship (1977, 115).

Third, the voice of this collective object is mystifying and represents official points of view. Media users are subordinated as an inorganic materiality to the work of the voice and its discourse on what is socially accepted as valid truth. Fourth, the mass media fuse men's identities into a collectivity. Consequently, every individual rebellion against the object is condemned to loneliness. Fifth, the origin of this otherness is a knowledge produced by a language. "It is a knowledge that has become a fact, that has become independent of human life and is imposed on it from outside—repression—until it becomes part of the unconscious life of everybody—repression" (1977, 116-117).

Silva connects these ideas, clearly influenced by Adorno, with the thought of Jose Ortega y Gasset, a thinker, whose ideas, for many, would be considered beforehand non-compatible with Marxism. Silva himself warns about any visceral reaction to the name of the Spanish philosopher:

There is a kind of reader who turns around and goes when Ortega is mentioned, as if he has heard about the evil. In this country (Venezuela) I have found several Ortega enemies, most of them enemies avant la lettre, that is,

without having read carefully his books ... as a result of these attitudes, nobody has made an impartial inventory of all of his intellectual findings, which were too many and delicious. Nobody either has developed a criticism from inside his work, but from outside, from pre-existing opinions, which most of the time are nothing but political opinions (Silva 1977, 158-159).

Without embarking on making such an inventory, Silva takes on Ortega's concern about the difference between *ideas* and *beliefs*. This is, according to Silva, the problem of ideology in contemporary society. Silva's ideas coincide with Ortega's understanding of the suspicious nature of people's most settled beliefs. Following Ortega, Silva asks himself whether we must call *ideas* those representations, beliefs, and convictions that are part of ourselves as if they were organs of our vital system and in such a way that we never challenge their value (p. 162). Those beliefs do not belong particularly to anybody; they exist in every historical age and in every society. They are the basis of human social action. Silva brings Ortega's ideas into his argument to reinforce his theory of ideology: all what is said or thought in a society is ideology.

With extraordinary lucidity for that time Silva builds a bridge between Marxism and non-Marxist thoughts. He shows that his rejection of official versions of Marx is not a political reaction, but an act of intellectual honesty, arising from a commitment to critical thinking. He believes in the *truth* as a result of scientific inquiry rather than political agreement. Thus, joining Althusser's idea of ideology having a material existence within institutions, Sartre's critique of mass media as an alienating force, and Ortega's denunciation of the power of socially accepted knowledge, Silva finds a way to develop a theoretical approach to ideology which includes the human psyche as a part of the process of alienation:

In the capitalist relations of production, the material work is a value from which surplus can be extracted. Likewise, in the production of conscience (Marx) there are values at work from which it is also possible to extract surplus. The capitalist takes possession of a part of the work force's value, which really belongs to the owner of such a force; in the same way, capitalism – through its control of massive communications and the cultural industry – takes possession of a good part of men's minds by inserting in it all kind of messages seeking to preserve capitalism (Silva 1977, 198).

Ideology and a Critical Approach to Mass Media

In 1978, Ludovico Silva participated in a series of courses organised by the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Mexico that focused on communication and dependency in Latin America and Mexico. The event brought together academic researchers and professionals to discuss the status of the mass media in the Latin American region. Researchers from the most important Mexican universities presented specific analyses on the press, radio, the film industry, television, comics, and advertising. In addition, a number of Latin American academics offered juncture analyses of their countries. Silva was in charge of an overview on ideology and mass media in Latin America.

In his speech, Silva made a comprehensive presentation of his theory of ideological surplus, emphasising that the mass media—particularly television—are

expressions of a dependent capitalist ideology (1980, 15-16). Clearly influenced by the critical vocabulary of the time, Silva substitutes here underdevelopment (used in *ITP*) for dependence. In another part of his text, he explicitly rejects historical causality: "historical reality does not *causally determine* the ideological formations." Equally important, Silva refers the relationship between structure and ideology as *reversible and multivocal* (1980, 23). Those references can neither be found in *IS* or *ITP*.

The event and Silva's speech are clear demonstrations that the study of the mass media in America Latina had taken a critical path. By that time, debates on Latin America's economic and cultural dependencies were not unusual, and critical thought was present in the teaching of the social sciences in a good number of universities. Students of mass communication were used to critically analyze the mass media. But there was a very different panorama in the early 1970s, when Silva developed his concept of ideological surplus.

The first university schools and research centres of communication in Latin America date back to the 1960s. Most of them were located within the institutional divisions of the social sciences, where the integration of social theories and methodologies into the curricula was considered necessary. By that time, functionalist approaches to the social sciences and empirical quantitative techniques of analysis were dominant. Thus, the phenomenon of mass communication was first approached from a functionalist perspective. Wilbur Schram's model of communication was broadly used to illustrate the phenomenon of mass communication as a process with an emphasis on the effects of messages on individual receivers. Studies on media effects based on a number of psychological theories became popular, most of them replicas of previous work in the United States.

Since underdevelopment was a concern in the area, there were some attempts to link research on media effects and development policies. Everett Rogers' model of diffusion of innovations was a perfect fit. A remarkable shortcoming of these studies was the omission of power relations as a relevant force determining communication agendas. Thus, when Armand Mattelart, Ariel Dorfmann, Héctor Schmucler, Antonio Pasquali, and Ludovico Silva and others challenged both the theoretical foundations of the functionalist approach to communication and the epistemological principles of its methodology, they were promoting a very important shift in the way the relationship between media and society was perceived, studied, and taught.

Mattelart, Dorfmann, and Schmucler would denounce the increasing presence of foreign media products in Latin America as cultural imperialism, questioning the relevance of effects studies and the epistemological obstacles to the analysis of ideology and domination set by quantitative analyses. Pasquali and Silva, taking on the critical approach of the Frankfurt School, would point out the alienating nature of the media system feeding the needs of an anti-human capitalist order instead of human wants.

Indeed, Silva finds a theory of ideology incomplete without a theory of communication:

... without a theory of communication it is impossible to elaborate a theory of the ideology of the capitalist-imperialist world, from a Marxist point of view... Too much has been written on the theory of communication and most of it is subtle metaphysics — for example, functionalism, with just a few excep-

tions. But almost nobody has attempted to analyze, for instance, the empire of North American television (CBS, NBC, Time-Life, etc.) in Latin America as the mode of ideological production that works as support and in loyalty to the system that causes underdevelopment (Silva 1977, 214-215).

The challenge for communication research focused on effects was clear: what really matters is the ideological consequences of the pre-conscious language of the media. Silva was questioning, in a non-explicit fashion, the level of the psychological inquiry of a media effects approach. Concerned with the social learning of receivers, the effects studies were not paying attention to the process by which men unconsciously absorb domination as natural and unquestioned.

Silva adopts Adorno's concept of cultural industry to stress the alienating sense of media (1977, 223). Its major cultural contribution is the amount of images, values, idols, beliefs, and representations that maintain the workings of the ideological machinery of the capitalist system (p. 226). Thus, Silva casts doubt on the relevance of quantitative studies of communication and contributed to setting a different research agenda for media studies. A critical perspective of an analysis should be focused on exposing the connections between the economic system and the cultural production rather than on exploring the superficial learning effects of messages. By 1978, this agenda was underdevelopment in many Latin American countries. Carlos Villagrán's comments on Silva's speech on that occasion in Mexico show the path of the preoccupation and what issued had received priority:

It is through the mass media that the dominant classes today adorn and embellish the conditions of their society model imposing on the dominant classes a false consciousness, which induces them to make theirs the world vision of the dominant classes. This constant supply of ideology will take different forms in every social formation, depending on the level of confrontation of the class struggles. During calm periods, the broadcast of ideological messages will be subliminal, covered, disguised; but in moments of crisis, when the class struggle is open, ideology will take an explicit, direct, fierce form, in other words, openly doctrinal (Silva 1980, 33).

The critical agenda eliminated the receiver-oriented research focus, since it was taken for granted that the real media effect was an ideological one. The new concern would be the language through which ideology expresses false views and leads people to misinterpret their social reality. Some of the other speakers at that event exposed the workings of different media on behalf of capitalist reproduction regardless of their specific languages and contents (Silva et al 1980).

Silva himself, in *ITP*, had followed that path. *Phantom, Mandrake, Donald, Duck, Tarzan*, and *Superman* are fiercely criticised by Silva, because they offer ideological representations of development and underdevelopment, the capitalist obsession, and the schizophrenic economic system.

Likewise, the critical emphasis on ideology and domination would push the analytical inquiry towards media ownership. It was a consequence of the Marxist emphasis on production as the key process of the capitalist system and highlighted the fact that the owners of the means of material production were also the owners of the means of spiritual production. Thus, Herbert Schiller, who was also present in Mexico, pointed out that the commercialisation of radio and television in the

United States was linked from its inception to businesses and exports (1980, 41). More importantly, Schiller added, “all the information-communication activities agglutinated in the term “communication means” are now an increasingly vital part of the advanced capitalism and the contemporary imperialism” (p. 42).

Along the same lines, a study of the most important Mexican newspapers by Fátima Fernández (2004) in 1979 would support Marx’s thesis of the structural connections of ownership in the economic system. Newspaper owners were industrialists and entrepreneurs who had found it attractive to invest parts of their capital originally earned elsewhere in the economy in media. By the time Fernández conducted her study, all of those businesses were still owned by them.

Final Words

Even if nowadays a critical analysis of communication and cultural studies in Latin American is widely shared, few scholars remember that three decades earlier, power struggles and class domination were not dominant concerns of communication studies. The shifting focus was a historical phenomenon. The economic dependency of Latin American countries on a central economic centre, the United States, the advances of socialism in the region, the presence of a large number of U. S. media products, the popularity and academic impact of critical literature, influenced by Marxism, and the interest of a number of academics and professionals in creating a world where exploitation and alienation are not its defining features, combined to promote this critical endeavour. A number of philosophers and social scientists collaborated on communication research in Latin America as a site of critical analysis. Some of them are still making significant contributions or are subject of retrospective reviews in regional schools of communication.

Ludovico Silva, however, has become an obscure intellectual contributor to the field, in part because he had returned to his intellectual roots, philosophy and literature, in the latter part of his life. But in part also, because his idea of ideological surplus was not pursued by others, although it deserved a better treatment.

Ludovico Silva demonstrates in his work a deep intellectual honesty. He confronted religious interpretations of Marx and carefully read non-Marxist literature. He constructed knowledge instead of repeating it. In addition, alongside other critical researchers—he pushed for a critical agenda in a time when identifying with leftist thoughts and political stances could have serious professional and personal consequences. In 1971, when he embarked on his adventure of developing a general theory of ideology, the field of mass communication was an incipient area of research, dominated by theoretical perspectives and methodological approaches not useful for making a more equal and fairer society. Nonetheless, he did not hesitate pioneering the endeavour.

Silva challenged the theory of ideology as a reflex of the economic structure and worked hard to show that individuals participate—even in an unconscious way—in their own process of oppression. He found in Althusser, Sartre, Ortega y Gasset, Freud and Adorno a theoretical basis for rejecting the idea of ideology as an automatic phenomenon and proclaimed, instead, its reversible nature.

Certainly, he was trapped by the concept of ideology as false consciousness. However, the beginning of the 1970s was too early a time to come up with a different approach. One of the most important challenges by the end of the 1970s came from Birmingham and Stuart Hall as a result of critical readings of Marx, Gramsci,

Lacan, and Foucault. In Latin America the questioning of ideology would also appear by the end of the 1970s and be fully developed during the 1980s. The works of Jesús Martín Barbero and Néstor García Canclini are particular relevant in this process. For example, the 1980s would be a decade when reception studies would transform the theoretical conception of consumption, suggesting that receivers are not the docile victims of media as presumed by Silva (Guardia 2006; Fuenzalida 2006; Martín Barbero and Téllez 2006; Checa 2006; Alfaro 2006).

The contribution of Ludovico Silva to the field of communication research in Latin America is, nonetheless, significant albeit not recognised or even remembered. He was committed to critical thinking and, therefore, it is time to read him again. He was an excellent reader and, consequently, a great researcher, a feature Latin American researchers of communication must recover from him. His respect for Marx included showing the limitations of his work. Likewise, we must show respect for Silva by recovering his commitment to authentic thinking even though his theories may not fit current problems and times.

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