

Introduction to Argentine communicational thinking

Introdução ao pensamento comunicacional argentino

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ABSTRACT

This is a review of the collection of essays dedicated to three thinkers from the Argentine communication school. Organized by Guillermo Mastrini, Mariano Zarowsky and María Rodríguez, the volume reconstructs the biographical and intellectual path of Margarita Graziano, Aníbal Ford and Héctor Schmucler, characters behind the establishment of communication sciences at the University of Buenos Aires. Although the collection provides a worthy and detailed tribute to the legacies of these researchers, it lacks the examination of their intellectual meaning.

Keywords: Argentine communicational thinking, Latin American school of communication, intellectual biographies

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RESUMO

A resenha versa sobre a coletânea de textos dedicada a três pensadores da escola de comunicação argentina. Organizado por Guillermo Mastrini, Mariano Zarowsky e María Rodríguez, o volume reconstrói o percurso biográfico e intelectual de Margarita Graziano, Aníbal Ford e Héctor Schmucler, figuras por trás do estabelecimento das ciências da comunicação na Universidade de Buenos Aires. Com o objetivo de prestar merecida homenagem aos pioneiros, observa-se que o material recupera em detalhe as trajetórias, todavia não preenche a falta de exame para entender o significado intelectual dos referidos legados.

Palavras-chave: Pensamento comunicacional argentino, escola latino-americana de comunicação, biografias intelectuais

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MATRIZES

BOOK COLLECTIONS HONORING Argentine thinkers who contributed to the institutionalization of communication as an academic area in the country are being published by the National University of General Sarmiento press. Between 2018 and 2020, two volumes were put into circulation¹, each charged with reconstructing the biographical, intellectual and political path of three names. They are compact books but, in general, fulfill the main objective proposed.

Here, we will review the most recent title, *Pensadoras de la Comunicación Argentina* (2020), dedicated to Margarita Graziano, Aníbal Ford and Héctor Schmucler. Although they belong to different disciplines, the piece shows that they were some of the main characters behind the formation of the area of communication sciences at the University of Buenos Aires. In this volume, the reconstruction of the authors' life and work was done by Guillermo Mastrini, Mariano Zarowsky and María Graciela Rodríguez.

Iván Schuliaquer, who is responsible for the presentation of the first volume, reappears in this edition with an improved introduction, since it now provides a panoramic view of each chapter and anticipates nodal points among the thinkers discussed, inciting the reader to study the topic. Heriberto Muraro writes the epilogue, which, as we will detail at the end, constitutes perhaps the most valuable part of the edition, as it critically presents what he calls the first phase of the Argentine school of communication.

Starting with the first chapter, Mastrini describes, in three unique stages, the cross paths of Margarita Graziano's intellectual and political life (1949-2000). The first involves the years 1971 to 1975, marked by her education in sociology with an emphasis on politics, by her militancy in the Peronist left-wing movement against the dictatorship, and by the approach of the communication field – motivated by her interest of thinking, in a propositional way, alternative media and Argentine television. He then discusses her exile in Venezuela, between 1976 and 1983, and her participation in the Institute of Communication Research, under the direction of Antonio Pasquali. Mastrini reports her return to Buenos Aires after she completed her graduate studies, where she became an academic leader in the communication sciences.

Graziano is appointed as the founding mother of the political economy of communication in the country, at a time dominated by French semiology. That is, her approach considers media as a problem of economic and political power rather than a question of language. However, she left few theoretical contributions on the subject. As a result, Mastrini is able to explain some

¹ Both are available in print and electronic format, specifically in ePUB.

scientific and intellectual resonance in no more than four essays published by Graziano (1974, 1980, 1981, 1986), over three decades of academic activity. Her importance to the field is justified by her position as a public intellectual, her contributions to the democratic debate and by the role of professor advisor. Thus, he as biographer adopted the strategy of evidencing her legacy from the statements of colleagues and disciples, without the possibility of developing an accurate analysis of her theoretical legacy.

The same does not apply to Aníbal Ford (1934-2009), author of a varied bibliography composed of books such as *Desde la orilla de la ciencia* (1987), *Navegaciones: Comunicación, cultura y crisis* (1994) and *La marca de la bestia* (1999). Rodríguez deals with the theoretical contributions given by Ford, whose writing was more creative than rigid, more intense than extensive, navigating through various themes such as popular genres, everyday life in the context of permanent crises, structural inequalities and narratives that organize social life.

Without detailing Ford's academic trajectory, Rodríguez focuses on the issues that motivated the reflection. In her view, Ford was not concerned with new technologies, but with the transformations that result from them for the dynamics of democracy and the formation of citizenship. Instead of a global village based on Marshall McLuhan, Rodríguez argues that, for Ford, the phenomenon should be thought of as a "global tenement". However, Rodríguez did not critically address the meaning of this confrontation of ideas. In fact, it would have been more beneficial for the piece if she had systematized and appreciated Ford's communication theory or dealt with some key question about. Instead, she proposed a free reading, lacking method, about the multiple ideas that make up Ford's work.

The last chapter documents the trajectory of Héctor Schmucler (1931-2018) through his editorial practices, as editor of journals like *Los Libros, Pasado y Presente* and *Comunicación y Cultura*. In his analysis, Zarowsky shows how Schmucler's experience as a communist activist in the transition from adolescence to adulthood – when he graduated in language, literature and linguistics – deeply impacted his way of interpreting the world. Between Marxism and French semiology, his reflections involved subjects such as mass communication, political literature and technological changes, under the influence of the ideas of thinkers like Roland Barthes and Armand Mattelart, with whom he published *América Latina en la encrucijada telemática* (1983), among other works².

² Before, Schmucler wrote the prologue to Dorfman and Mattelart's book *Para leer al Pato Donald* (1971).

With the support of Mattelart, Schmucler was hired to teach at the Metropolitan Autonomous University in the 1970s, when he went into exile to Mexico to escape the authoritarianism of the Argentine regime. After he returned to his country of origin in the following decade, Schmucler was invited by the then president of the University of Buenos Aires to work on the creation of the communication sciences program. Then he transferred to the National University of Córdoba, where he became professor emeritus. Zarowsky follows up on other contributions by Schmucler until he completed his intellectual path.

The authors of the chapters can be praised for their sensitive analysis of how their masters – strongly engaged in politics – had their lives impacted by the military dictatorship and exile, and the consequences of this for the development of communication studies in Argentina. In other words, they show that the intellectual interest combined with the political activism were fundamental in the construction of the field in the country during the democratic transition. A careful examination of the historical and social conditions that formed the field is also seen in the epilogue. Here, Muraro presents a critical synthesis of what would be the first generation of the Argentine school of communication, seen between the 1960s and 1983.

Of the main trends commented on by him, the following are emphasized: the emergence of this school was part of a larger movement that took place in Latin America, in the context of the successive dictatorships that affected the continent. Communication scholars were often public intellectuals who were not restricted to teaching and research activities in the academic field but were almost always left-wing and human rights activists, as well as practitioners of liberation theology, opposing the economic and cultural dependence on the United States. In addition to these political concerns, these scholars shared approaches such as semiology, structuralism, neomarxism, dependency theory and liberation pedagogy.

Based on these assumptions, the first group of the Argentine school would be committed to the task of putting an end to neocolonialism and giving more voice to the popular classes historically silenced by imperialism. “Their great utopia was not only to investigate how the mainstream media contributed to perpetuating dependency, but also to create a kind of popular counterculture that contributed to the political organization of the masses”³ (Muraro, 2020, para. 17).

³ In original: “Su gran utopía no consistió meramente en investigar de qué manera los medios de comunicación dominantes contribuían a perpetuar la dependencia sino también a crear una suerte de contracultura popular que contribuyera a la organización política de las masas”. Author’s translation.

Muraro (2020) also draws attention, however, to the limitations contained in their emancipatory project that proposed to read media messages using the theories of reproduction of underdevelopment in Latin American countries in the process of globalization. Many were the works that denounced more than interpreted the ideological media contents. Still according to Muraro (2020), criticisms of American cultural penetration were often confused with a criticism of the United States' own culture, exposing one of the simplistic aspects of this Latin American approach.

In conclusion, we can affirm that this book is a welcome introduction to Argentine communicational thinking, as it fosters the discussion of the contributions of each referred thinker, intertwining the social and historical conditions that, ultimately, determined the formation of the communication field in Argentina and, at the same time, forced the founders to dialogue widely with their Latin American colleagues.

However, as we said at the beginning, it is a collection of essays whose purpose is to honor the mentioned thinkers. Therefore, with the exception of the epilogue, the book fails to develop critical analyses through which one could understand the epistemological significance of their legacies and thus interpret the trajectory of communication theories in the country – one with continental dimension. This statement, however, should be met with lowered expectations for the continuity of the collection; on the contrary: may new invitations be launched in the near future for a more in-depth study of the Argentine school.

Concluding, it is worth highlighting the content of the first volume: Oscar Landi, Jorge B. Rivera and Nicolás Casullo are the pioneers addressed in *Pensadores de la comunicación argentina* (2018). The essays are written by three of their disciples: Eduardo Rinesi, Julio Moyano and Ricardo Forster. The complementary materials available are also worth mentioning: a very brief presentation by Iván Schuliaquer and a more in-depth epilogue by Horacio González, an expert in Latin American thought and former director of the National Library of Argentina. ■

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