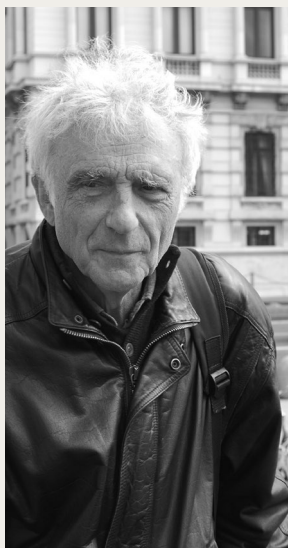


# FROM THE CHILEAN LABORATORY TO WORLD-COMMUNICATION



## ARMAND MATTELART'S INTELLECTUAL JOURNEY

**Mariano Zarowsky**

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**Foreword by Peter Simonson**

**Translated by  
William Quinn & Peter Simonson**

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## INTERLUDE

# From the Itinerary to the Cognitive Map

Yet the compass at once introduces a new dimension into sea charts, a dimension that will utterly transform the problematic of the itinerary and allow us to pose the problem of a genuine cognitive mapping in a far more complex way.

—Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*

The aim of comprehending Armand Mattelart's thinking from its conditions of emergence does not imply that our interest in his itinerary is limited to the historiographic or contextual dimension. On the contrary, one of the aims of the reading we are trying out here is to show the ways his life itinerary ties into his theoretical production, or to put it another way, to tease out the threads that connect a way of thinking about life to a life of thinking. In the perspective of the *history of concepts*, as François Dosse (2007 [2003]) interprets it for intellectual history, recovering what the text meant in the moment in which it appeared makes it possible to "understand the statement's conflictive gamble" (222); at the same time, constructing a *cognitive map*—following the formula proposed by Fredric Jameson—around Mattelart's intellectual itinerary allows us to place that which it offers before the hermeneutic gaze of the present in search of categories and perspectives for gaining insight into recent developments in capitalism. Or in other words, to spotlight those elements of Mattelart's theoretical position that offer a productive and unique way of understanding contemporary social organization through the critique of culture and communication.

A quick clarification: When we look for certain keys to reading Mattelart's thinking and try to systematize his contributions, we run up against the paradox of representing a totality that, as Jameson (1991) points out—and as the metaphor of the *map* makes clear—is “impossible to represent” (83). Embracing this paradoxical dimension implicit in the notion of the cognitive map does not have to do, in our case, with the length of Mattelart's intellectual itinerary or the variety of his life experiences, the diversity of his professional undertakings, or the vicissitudes he had to deal with; the aim is to be faithful to his own conceptions of scientific work, of the status of theory, and its relation to an idea of truth situated in historical developments. These conceptions presuppose the collective nature of statements and the combative dimension of theoretical intervention, and thus suggest that any attempt to construct a closed, incontrovertible theory is to be rejected, since such a claim would be no more than the product of an abstract, linear, and accumulative conception of knowledge production.

Nonetheless, the *itinerary* of Mattelart's intellectual life has followed a *compass* and suggests that it makes sense to systematize certain coordinates and to clarify some theoretical points that could help to turn the itinerary into a *cognitive map*.<sup>1</sup> To this end we will propose some reading keys related to two notions that serve as conceptual hubs: *class analysis of communication* (or the *critique of its political economy*) and *communication-world*. These notions represent two differentiated moments of Mattelart's intellectual itinerary. Their point of differentiation can be located in the mid-1980s, between the time he joined the University of Rennes 2 faculty and the publication of *Penser les médias* in 1986 (published in English as *Rethinking Media Theory* in 1994): a moment when, as we have argued, the political-intellectual horizon in France was undergoing profound redefinitions. On either side of the timeline and around these two conceptual constellations, we can see the condensation and precipitation of theoretical-epistemological concepts that cut across his works and organize a reading of it.

The notion of *class analysis of communication* took shape between the late 1970s and early 1980s, and while it can be read in several publications that came out at the time, it gained currency primarily in one of Mattelart's texts

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<sup>1</sup> Fredric Jameson makes use of the metaphors of itinerary and compass when he refers to Kevin Lynch's work (1991: 83–84) *The Image of the City*, and from there proposes his notion of cognitive map. It is not lost on us that the same formula gives direction and even the title to Fernanda Beigel's work about “José Carlos Mariátegui's Aesthetic-Political Avant-Gardism”: *El itinerario y la brújula* [*The Itinerary and the Compass*]. Beigel (2003: 15) refers to Mariátegui's assertion that *dogma* (Marxism) was not an itinerary but a compass to be used on the journey.

that was remarkably marginal in his overall output (an edition in English that was never reprinted, as French and Spanish were the main languages in which he published his works) and, at the same time, highly significant (in view of the ambition of the intellectual project in which it was embedded): the respective introductions to the two volumes of *Communication and Class Struggle* (1979, 1983).<sup>2</sup> We have already alluded to the futility of trying to reconstruct a fully coherent theoretical system in his works from this period, but it must be noted that in these introductions Mattelart tried to demarcate a key that would organize the reading of the broad conceptual array that was implicit in the selected texts. One can read there a bold attempt to lay out a theoretical position that would condense previous experiences and formulations into a single conceptual enunciation, with an explicit two-fold aim of contributing to the development of Marxism from the perspective of thought about communication and culture, and of contributing to the development of communication and culture studies from the coordinates of the Marxist tradition.

The second notion takes clear shape in the so-called “communication-world trilogy” (*La comunicación-mundo* [*Mapping World Communication*], 1992; *La invención de la comunicación* [*The Invention of Communication*], 1994; *Historia de la utopía planetaria* [*History of Global Utopia*], 2000).<sup>3</sup> It can be traced back, however, to that moment of transition represented by his publication, together with Michèle Mattelart, of *Penser les médias* in 1986. We will situate the perspective of the *communication-world*—following the principle of *intertextuality* that has oriented the research and writing of this book—in relation to positions developed in France in the late 1980s and early 1990s with respect to the critique of the so-called “ideologies of communication” and their planetary scope. One of Adorno’s metaphors, that of *force fields*, will be useful for guiding a reading that will enable us, not to see a closed system of authors, texts, or ideas in oppositional relations, but to situate “concepts and ideas in dynamic relations of proximity and distance, of attractions and repulsions, in different ways” (Lenarduzzi, 1998: 20). From this cognitive map we will then propose reading the uniqueness of Mattelart’s thinking, a body of thought that suggests that the critique of communication and culture offers an especially fruitful approach for understanding social organization today.

<sup>2</sup> Allow us to refer once again to the recent Spanish-language edition of these introductions (Mattelart, 2010 [1979], 2011 [1983]).

<sup>3</sup> [Only the first two books of the trilogy were translated into English, with the titles *Mapping World Communication: War, Progress, Culture* (1994) and *The Invention of Communication* (1996). Like *Rethinking Media Theory* (1994), they were published by the University of Minnesota Press.—Translator’s Note]