FROM THE CHILEAN LABORATORY TO WORLD-COMMUNICATION

ARMAND MATTELART'S INTELLECTUAL JOURNEY

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Foreword by Peter Simonson

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CHAPTER FIVE

Between the Mitterrand (Dis)enchantment and the Institutionalization of Communication Science

> I'm one of those who experienced the '60s like a spring that seemed like it would never end, so much so that I'm embarrassed to become accustomed to this long winter of the '80s!
>
> —Félix Guattari, *1980–1985, Les années d'hiver* [*Winter Years*]

In the period that goes from Mattelart's arrival in France in 1973 until December 1983, when he finally secured a steady job as a professor at the University of Rennes, he had to scramble to find work. He juggled temporary jobs at two universities with a variety of other activities: He was a filmmaker, an editor, a guest professor abroad, an expert consultant hired by international bodies and institutions, a writer and regular collaborator for prestigious journals like *Le Monde diplomatique.* Looking back, Mattelart (2010: 149) recalls this stage of his life as a period of *nomadism* that he associates with his experience of exile and the need to find ways to earn a living and advance his professional career. His status as a foreigner, his cosmopolitan background and ties to Latin America and the Third World, his links to left-wing activism and diverse spaces of cultural production, but

also his affiliation with an emerging disciplinary field seeking legitimacy in the hierarchy of knowledge and the division of scientific and academic work—all these elements taken together created a general profile difficult for the French university system to recognize. Without a doubt, these ten years of professional instability and nomadism made important contributions to his intellectual profile, to the development of his theoretical perspectives, and to his political stances. In the mid-1980s, Mattelart achieved a certain institutional stability that allowed him to consolidate his position as a university professor and researcher. This change took place in the context of profound transformations in the world of French politics and the French intellectual and cultural field. Within this broader scene, which we will look at carefully, the *sciences de l'information et de la communication* (SICs) [sciences of communication and information in France] advanced in an incipient process of disciplinary consolidation and institutionalization within the university.

After making *La Spirale*—for which he was hired for eleven months in 1974—Mattelart went through a period without regular employment, and for about a year and a half he received an unemployment subsidy as an "intermittent show business worker," a benefit that came from his work on the documentary. It looked as though he would be leaving the precariousness behind in 1976 when he was accepted as a *maître de conférences associé* [associate professor] in Information and Communication Science at the University of Paris 7 (Jussieu), where he led a seminar on the internationalization of communication systems. Since he was a foreigner, he could not be recruited as a full professor of the state, which meant that he had to renew his appointment as a *maître de conférences associé* every year, and even then was not entitled to hold the job for more than three years. It was clearly a position far from the pinnacle of the university hierarchy. Paris 7 was a new university, created in 1971 in direct response to the events of May 1968 and the decentralization promoted as a solution to the crisis in institutions of higher education. At the time it did not have a communication department, only an "audiovisual service," and it had only just launched a doctorate in Information and Communication Science. When his contract expired in 1979, Mattelart tried to get his rank reconsidered so that he could be made full professor. The university's preference for a professor from the field of informatics—Mattelart (1999: 22) recalled years later—gives an indication of

the tensions over the different sorts of expertise in a discipline undergoing a consolidation and institutionalization process.[1]

Aided by the publication and impact of *De l'usage des médias en temps de crise* [*Media Usage in Times of Crisis*] under his belt, Mattelart was brought onto the faculty of Paris 8 (Vincennes) from September 1979 to September 1980, again as a *maître de conférences associé.* At Paris 8 in that time, there was no department of information and communication science, and Mattelart, in his capacity as a sociologist, was appointed head of the Department of Economic and Social Administration (AES, in its French acronym), a subject area that was manifestly foreign to his expertise. When it came time for him to renew his appointment, one year later, his experience at Paris 7 repeated itself: In spite of the university commission's favorable recommendation, the national sociology commission voted against extending his contract.[2] In Mattelart's retrospective account, this time his rejection had to do with his political stances: One committee member, Annie Kriegel (a former member of the French Communist Party, historian, and specialist in the world of French communism), suggested ironically that given Mattelart's international and leftist profile (Mattelart 2010: 149), he should look for a job at UNESCO, which was then engaged in a debate over the global imbalance in information. From that point, more precisely between September 1980 and December 1983, Mattelart did not have a regular job at a French university and, as we have seen, he spent much of his time working abroad.

The socialists' accession to power in May 1981 would bring changes to the social and political scene, and with that, the possibilities for the intervention and institutional inclusion of intellectuals, professors, and researchers. In 1982 Mattelart was hired, together with Yves Stourdzé, by the Ministry of Industry and Research to produce a report about the status of communication research in France. In a very specific context in which they entertained the possibility—soon to be frustrated—of intervening in the design of an alternative model for teaching and researching communication, Mattelart and Stourdzé wrote the report titled *Technologie, culture et communication* [*Technology, Culture and Communication*] (1982). There, as we will see, they summarized a series of proposals. As a result of this report,

[1] It should be pointed out that, in the French configuration of the field of information and communication science, everything that we in Latin America call communication science shares space with disciplines dealing with information processing and storage, such as informatics and library science.

[2] In the French university system, professors' promotions must pass through two stages: First the local university's evaluation commission renders its judgment, then the applications are passed on to an evaluation committee that belongs to the national state.

the director of the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique [National Center for Scientific Research (CNRS in its French acronym)], the physicist Pierre Papon, suggested to the anthropologist Maurice Godelier, who was in charge of the Department of Social Sciences, that he invite Mattelart to join the institution, one of the most important centers of prestige and symbolic power in the French scientific field (Bourdieu 2008 [1984]: 60, 258). They offered him a position as an advisor, which he held for a short time, until December 1983, when he was officially accepted at the University of Rennes 2 as a *professeur* in the Department of Information and Communication. As he recalls, he left the CNRS because it adhered to a view of communication made hegemonic by Dominique Wolton, who openly identified with the classical sociological tradition and opposed critical sociology. In the face of these difficulties, Mattelart opted for the "more plural" possibilities—his words—that the University of Rennes offered (Mattelart, personal correspondence, March 2011). [3]

In December 1983 Mattelart joined the faculty of a provincial university, Rennes 2, as a full professor, and he worked there for fourteen years. The process is indicative of the vicissitudes that marked his career in the French university system. After his exile, his attempts to be reappointed and promoted as a professor were repeatedly blocked by the state administration, which refused to take his previous experience into account; nor was his appointment to Rennes 2 absent difficulties. After being awarded the highest merit-based recommendation by the university's own evaluation committee, the national state commission relegated his application to third place, alleging among other reasons that Mattelart—this despite protests by Robert Escarpit, who sat on the national commission—was so engaged with international issues that he would neglect his obligations as a research professor. It was only the direct intervention of the Ministry of Education that managed to reverse the decision, and Mattelart was finally accepted (Mattelart, 2010: 169; interview with the author, 2011). His application for a position at a provincial university also points to his difficulties in securing a professional position in Paris, the academic and intellectual capital of

[3] Wolton and Mattelart did not have the same decision-making capacity at the CNRS: While Wolton had secured a permanent position, Mattelart had only a temporary appointment, as an advisor. The testimonies of people close to Mattelart are in agreement that the disputes between the two at the institution were heated (Tristan Mattelart, interview with the author, 2011; Jacques Guyot, interview with the author, 2011). They also agree that Mattelart's intellectual profile did not suit the institutional and bureaucratic disputes and dynamics at the CNRS. His colleague and friend Michael Palmer (interview with the author, 2011) sums up the tension with the proverbial English expression: "It was not his cup of tea."

France.[4] Mattelart kept his residence in Paris during the fourteen years he worked at the provincial university, during which time he commuted weekly to Rennes, over 300 kilometers away; and it was not an easy job that awaited him there, nor one that afforded a high level of institutional recognition. For a considerable period of time, he was the only professor in the Department of Information and Communication, which the institution had recently created and did not invest great hopes in. Mattelart threw himself into organizing the department and shaping it as a disciplinary entity, including the formation of a third cycle (doctorate) and the gradual incorporation of new faculty members. Jacques Guyot—one of his first students at Rennes and later one of his collaborators—recalls a certain institutional resistance or indifference to Mattelart's efforts (Guyot, interview with the author, 2011). Mattelart himself, looking back, associates these obstacles and difficulties in a general way with his status as an exile. But even though he revises his account of these difficulties in his telling and sees value in them as an engine for creation and research (Mattelart, interview with the author, 2011), the truth is that at the time, before securing the professorship at Rennes and faced with the difficulties of institutional promotion, at the age of 48—after devoting over twenty years to teaching and publishing books and articles—he had seriously considered the possibility of leaving France in search of more favorable career prospects in some other country (Mattelart, 2010: 169).

He ended up working for fourteen years at Rennes 2, until 1997, when at age of 61, he successfully applied for a professorship at the University of Paris 8 (Vincennes-Saint-Denis).[5] There he also devoted himself to establishing the Department of Information and Communication that was just getting

[4] Jacques Guyot trenchantly observes that the process of consolidating and institutionalizing information and communication science in France can be read through the lens of the geography reflected in the system of disciplinary hierarchies. It is no coincidence that in Paris, these disciplines' possibilities for development had been blocked, and that it was the product of provincial universities: Miège consolidated a research group that looked at cultural industries and developed the Department of Communication at Stendhal University in Grenoble; Escarpit did the same with a focus on the sociology of literature at the University of Bordeaux; Mattelart established himself over fourteen years at a university in the city of Rennes, where he carried out his research and shaped the area of communication (Guyot, interview with the author, 2011).

[5] The University of Paris 8 (Vincennes-Saint-Denis) also did not occupy the peak of the French university hierarchy. It was created in 1969 in response to the events of May 1968 and operated during an initial experimental stage in Vincennes, where it attracted leading professors and researchers who brought with them such prestige as critical thinking and left-wing positions could garner at the time. After its move some years later to Saint Denis, a working-class district on the outskirts of Paris with a significant immigrant population, it became known for receiving foreign students, especially from Latin America (Djian, 2009).

started when he arrived: He initially occupied the only professorship that existed at the time, which had been vacated by Eliseo Verón, an Argentinian sociologist and semiotician, also an expatriate. Aside from expanding the faculty and promoting the formation of a third cycle (doctorate) in communication, he founded the Centre d'études sur les médias, les technologies et la internationalization [Center for Studies on Media, Technology and Internationalization (CEMTI in its French acronym)] at Paris 8 and directed it until January 2004. After he retired, he was named professor emeritus by the university.

In short, his employment stability at the University of Rennes and his tenure as a research professor brought about a change in his working conditions and his intellectual production: Mattelart was enjoying institutional continuity for the first time since the Catholic University of Chile. After 1984, his job at the University of Rennes would require him to spend more hours teaching and running the Department of Information and Communication. He would make use of his position to create conditions for more long-term research and, in general terms, his theoretical stances and perspectives would undergo certain modifications. This shift cannot be explained except in relation to the upheaval that French society and the world of left-wing culture was going through since the socialists had taken charge of the government in 1981. Or to be more precise: The high hopes placed in the socialist government, and the subsequent—and sudden—disenchantment, would contribute to a reorganization of the cultural world as it existed at the time, to a radical transformation of both its ideological coordinates and the conditions of intellectual life itself.

Intellectual Counterrevolution and Socialist Hopes and Dreams

By the end of the 1970s, the political-cultural context had changed noticeably since Mattelart's arrival in France (1973–1974). It had been a period of excitement and activist mobilization that, with the echoes of the events of May 1968 still in the background, was reinforced by the expectations that one sector of the left placed in the alliance and common platform of the Socialist Party (PS, in its French acronym) and the Communist Party (PC, in its French acronym) (1972). This alliance had real possibilities of winning the presidential election of 1974, but victory would have to wait until the next election in 1981. Thus, the period from 1974 to 1981 can be

considered the great return to order, a moment we need to go back to in order to trace the genealogy of the transition from the years of upheaval to those of political reaction and neoliberal ascent. . The agony of the 1970s was, in the view of the historian François Cusset (2008 [2006]), the "preamble" to the "nightmare of the 1980s," which Felix Guattari (2009: 31) called the "long years of winter."

What happened was that, once the springtime of the years of insurrection passed, the atmosphere in the second half of the 1970s was completely different, characterized by political retrogression and repression. [6] Even though France, in 1976–1977, witnessed a wave of factory struggles and political and cultural movements, Cusset recognizes that the organization of the party-based left and the struggles of workers, whether they were spontaneous or union-led, seemed to constitute separate worlds, less and less connected and incapable of joining forces. In this context of political retreat, a profound cultural transformation would come about in France; Cusset calls it an "intellectual counter-revolution" (Cusset, 2008 [2006]: 26). Within this context, theoretical work—which between 1970 and 1975 was sacralized as one of the keys of potential transformation—would be marked from 1976–1977 as the wellspring of all the disasters of the twentieth century. In 1977 André Gluksmann published *Les Maîtres-penseurs* [*The Master Thinkers*] and Bernard Henri Levy *La Barbarie à visage humain* [*Barbarism with a Human Face*], where they proposed a line of continuity between critical thinking and the Soviet concentration camps. It was the societal letter of introduction for the so-called "new philosophers." A whole series of initiatives put the topic of the Soviet gulag on the French agenda (in 1974 Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's *Gulag Archipelago* was published, selling a million copies in one year), making the rights of man a dogma instead of a specific demand and demonizing "murderous" critical thinking: "For them," observed Cusset (2008 [2006]) about the new philosophers, "the operation consists of throwing out the baby of any kind of social criticism with the totalitarian bathwater" (27). He felt that their critiques were less an anti-totalitarian struggle than a battle against Marxism (28). This mutation of the intellectual field would also take the shape of an attack against "overly Marxist" "Third-Worldism."

[6] In his cinematic essay *Le fond de l'air est rouge* [released in English as *Grin Without a Cat* (1977) Chris Marker presciently suggested, with exquisite style and pointed political insight, that the moment marked the end of a cycle that had started in 1967. The essay is divided into two parts. The first, "Fragile Hands": from Vietnam to the death of Che and May 1968; the second, "Severed Hands": from the Prague Spring to the Common Platform of the French left and the fall of popular Chile. "To… what?" is the question that closes Marker's film.

Gérard Chaliand published *Mythes révolutionnaires du Tiers Monde* [*Revolutionary Myths of the Third World*] at Seuil in 1976, and in mid-1978, *Le Nouvel Observateur* organized a long debate about Third-Worldism, featuring attacks against "Third-Worldist intellectuals" who were allegedly either blind to or complicit with the supposed totalitarianism of African socialism (idem: 32–33). The birth of the "second French Left" completed the scene. In Cusset's view, this could be attributed to a conversion to realism by a libertarian left that professed self-sufficiency and, from then on, would take potshots at statism rather than at power. A coherent set of guiding principles was taking shape: "Moral anti-authoritarianism, political anti-Marxism, a constant mantra of 'political realism,' the return of an ideas-based right wing, critique of criticism itself, new religion of democracy" (30).

The final pages of *De l'usage des médias en temps de crise* lend themselves to a reading of how Armand and Michèle Mattelart perceived the situation. They wrote: "Everything seemed to conspire against the need to grasp the particular in the general. The mistrust is also applied to theory and leads them to reject as totalitarian any attempt at systematization (even when it is only about experiences)." "Anti-intellectualism" and "anti-theory" were the new buzzwords of what the Mattelarts characterized as a "period of retreat" that produced mutations in the intellectual field. The combination of "blackmail" by the "terrorist threat" (West Germany was the model) and the growing pressure of commercial interests on media systems (which threatened to change the rules governing their logics of production) had reached the extreme, the Mattelarts (2003 [1979]) asserted, of "criminalizing critical reflection" (258–259). Within this framework, the question of communication as a strategic aim emerged forcefully. Without a doubt, one of the watershed moments was the report on technological change that President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing commissioned from Simon Nora and Alain Minc in December 1976. In the view of the authors of *L'information de la société* [*The Information of Society*], the report they prepared, the promotion of information could and must become one of the keys for overcoming the crisis: It was seen as a new structuring principle of society, as the heart of a reformulation of the relations between citizens, the state, and civil society. Technophilic stances and a discourse that turned communication into a vehicle of redemption made their entrance into one sector of the elite in power.

This overview of the shifts that took place in the world of French politics and culture must be interpreted without falling into anachronism. As François Dosse (2007 [2003]: 78) teaches, doing so implies eschewing generalizations established with the benefit of hindsight that obscures an appreciation of

the contradictions, tensions, advances, and counter-advances of the historical process. In other words: Regardless of the overall, long-term scheme that we are proposing—which can be summed up with Cusset's idea of the emergence of an "intellectual counter-revolution" at the time—the truth is that we cannot overlook the implications and significance that the electoral victory of French socialism in 1981 had, especially in the world of left-wing culture and intellectuals.

The victory of the united left—PS and PC primarily—that gave François Mitterrand the presidency in May 1981 represented, at least until early 1983 (when Mitterrand would announce a shift in economic policy in favor of monetary austerity and European integration), a moment of intense mobilization of broad social sectors and left-wing activism, of wide-ranging political debate and high hopes in a segment of the cultural and intellectual world, which manifested themselves in the typical ways: special issues of journals, public interventions, calls to collective debate. As could hardly be otherwise, these spaces abounded with analyses of the possibilities of the era that was dawning, and posed the classic question about intellectuals' role in the process of change.[7] Another relevant point in this trajectory: Eight years later the Chilean Popular Unity's experience still echoed in the world of the French left. Mitterrand invited the widows of Salvador Allende and Pablo Neruda to his inaugural parades. The victory of the PS-PC unity ticket was celebrated by many "as a first revenge for the Chilean defeat" (Leenhardt and Kalfon, 1992: 18). In sum, we can thus speak of a "grace period" or honeymoon for the socialist government between May 1981 and

[7] In August 1981 the newspaper *Libération* issued a call for proposals under the heading "Les intellectuels et l'état de grâce" ["Intellectuals and the State of Grace"]. In response, the philosopher Félix Guattari wrote an article for *Le Nouvel Observateur* called "Mitterrand et le Tiers État" ["Mitterand and the Third Estate"] that does a good job of capturing the contradictions, expectations, and possibilities that the process set in motion for one sector of the French intellectual field tied to the New Left. In Guattari's view, France was facing two possible scenarios: either worldwide capitalism, combined with a social democratic turn by the regime, would try to freeze the evolution of social relations, or else there would be an intensification of social movements that the socialist government would leverage to transform French society for good (Guattari, 2009: 46). Not long afterward, Paul Noirot, in an editorial published in the monthly *Politique aujourd'hui,* placed Mitterrand's victory on the list of "great national hopes"—alongside others such as the Popular Front of 1936 and liberation in 1945—that initiated a historical adventure that could "cause a political break not only in France but in Europe, and change international relations for the better" (*Politique aujourd'hui,* January–February 1982: 2). Noirot called on the left as a whole to commit to the experience (marking clear distance from the radical left and subsuming it within this unity) and encouraged intellectuals to get out of their "ivory towers" to mobilize the population and influence public opinion. For this he put the journal's pages at their disposal.

March 1983.[8] Its ending would be dramatic: The abyss that opened from the dream-turned-disenchantment definitively transformed French politics, the intellectual world, and left-wing culture.

The threads that connect the *Chilean laboratory* to the French situation run not only through a shared debate about political strategy and the tensions it entailed (reform/revolution, socialism/democracy), but also through big questions about the role that transformations in the scientific system, universities, media, and cultural apparatuses in general could play in the process of democratizing society. These issues took up a significant portion of the debate in journals and intellectual circles tied to left-wing groups, and also in government media, institutions, and agencies. Mattelart participated in some of these spaces and played a rather prominent role in the debate. Giving an account of this participation, including its conditions of emergence, will allow us to situate his role in the institutionalization of communication studies in France and the continuity of his stances with the positions he built through his Chilean experience.

In the realm of science, in January 1982 the National Colloquium of Research and Technology was held, a wide-ranging consultation of the scientific community that preceded the formulation of a law for orienting and programming research in science and technology. The colloquium set out, according to its definitions, "to restore the alliance between science and democracy" (Mattelart and Stourdzé, 1984 [1982]: 9). Between November 1981 and the end of January 1982, thirty-six meetings were held throughout the country to prepare for this colloquium, with the participation of research centers, universities, companies, labor unions, and professional organizations, creating, in Mattelart and Stourdzé's words, "a movement of reflection unprecedented in the history of French research" (9). In general terms, the organizing criterion had been defined by the Ministry of Research and Technology: It was designed around the idea of redefining the relation between democracy, science, and technology in terms of their appropriation by society; or to put it another way: in terms of the will to conceive a new type of relations between scientists and *social demands*, the real leitmotif of the moment.

[8] The government of the Prime Minister Pierre Mauroy (1981–1984) pursued some of the reforms promised in the electoral campaign: nationalization of banks and industrial conglomerates, new labor legislation, a law for political decentralization, abolition of the death penalty, among others. But the momentum quickly came up against the limits of the reformist agenda. France soon confronted a balance of payments crisis, which forced it to devalue its currency and replace Keynesian demand stimulus with neoliberal-style austerity measures.

A wide-ranging debate also took place at the time about the role of communication in the new political context and about reform of the media system. Several prominent figures in the field participated in the public debate in the press and academic or political-cultural journals associated with the world of the left.[9] The journal *Non! Repères pour le socialisme* devoted several of its issues in 1982 to the debate about communication policy.[10] Mattelart (1982c), who sat on the editorial committee, published an article titled "La communication dans la France du 10 mai" ["Communication in the France of May 10th"] (in reference to the date of Mitterrand's victory). There he set out to problematize what he considered to be the tensions, ambiguities, and limits of the communication debate in socialist France. He contended that the call made by different institutional and governmental agencies for the societal appropriation of its technological tools was not so pronounced in the departments devoted to communication issues. Within the overall framework of the debate about the restructuring of the public radio broadcasting monopoly and the new media law, which took place in May and June 1982, Mattelart warned that the discussion centered on legal-institutional aspects, meaning the focus was on the communications rights of professionals to communicate (emphasis was placed on the question of their independence) rather than on the rights of society as a whole. Good intentions notwithstanding, Mattelart observed that the obstacle to a thoroughgoing transformation of the media was formidable because *professional ideology* set the limits within which it was possible to discuss the democratization of communication: The right to be informed took precedence over the right to produce one's own information. The "ideology of journalism" assumed the transparency of meaning, the neutrality of journalistic technique, and with it, of all communication technologies. This emphasis, Mattelart went on, overlooked the perspective that had been emerging in the research and experiences of autonomy over the previous fifteen years in France—and in Europe in general—especially in the field of video and cinema. It ignored the

[9] Aside from Mattelart's publications, see those of De la Haye and Miége (1982) and Flichy (1982). An overview of the alternatives in communication policy at the time can be found in Raboy (1983).

[10] *Non!* compiled contributions from intellectuals tied to left-wing sectors directly related to the Socialist Party (linked to the Center for Socialist Studies, Research and Education founded by Pierre Chevènement, Minister of Government, among others) but also from left-wing sectors that would go on to offer the government somewhat critical support. The main dossier of the January–February 1982 number was called "Pour une autre television" ["For a Different Television"]; the November-December 1982 issue was "Les médias face à la gauche ou la gauche face aux médias?" ["The Media Confronting the Left or the Left Confronting the Media?"].

fact that professional practices, as a codified way to produce information, assumed a type of relationship between specialists and reality that implied a certain kind of link to the rest of society at large. It is clear that this was an issue that grew out of Mattelart's experience in Chile and his observations about the role of the petite bourgeoisie in a process of cultural democratization: It is no coincidence that to support his assertions he drew on his book *Mass media, ideologies et mouvement révolutionnaire. Chili 1970–1973* [*Mass Media, Ideologies and Revolutionary Movement. Chile 1970–1973*] (1974).

In parallel with the debate about alternative forms of communication and their relationship with established models, Mattelart cast the issue in broader relief, suggesting that what needed to be questioned was the logic of the restructuring of the international economy, inherent in a model of overcoming the crisis through technology, in order to properly situate the discussion about the relations between democracy, technology, and communication. He tried to situate the debate in the field of tension that opened up between the imperatives of democracy and social demand, and the imperatives of a new industrial strategy that, by emphasizing the electronics industry, sought to reposition France in the arena of economic competition and international geopolitics. In the spheres of communication, technology, and science, the new government was shifting, Mattelart allowed, but also holding firm with the lines of action drawn in the previous administration, for example (referring to the "Mission Filière Electronique" ["Mission Electronic Sector"] report, 1982), with the philosophy expressed in the Nora-Minc report with its unabashed technophilia.[11] All the same, the aim was to situate the questions of communication, technology, and democracy on an all-encompassing horizon, without falling into an overemphasis on economics: The ways that France or any nation preserved its material and symbolic legacy were impacted both by the pressures that the international economic reorganization brought to bear and the need to produce new consensuses to find a way out of the political crisis. The growing debate about "national culture" (which, Mattelart observed, tended to revolve around topics of technological and cultural reappropriation) needed to be situated in relation to processes of transnationalization (domains that research had hardly touched, he pointed out), while the issues of culture and identity needed to be situated within the

[11] Marking what would be one of the initial lines of action of his government, in the autumn of 1981, in a speech given in the Informatics Hall, Mitterrand had called for "democratizing informatics" (Mattelart and Stourdzé, 1984: 9). The phrase somewhat ambiguously announced a change of perspective with respect to the previous government's orientation as summed up in the Nora-Minc report, which called for "informatizing society."

framework of the power relations upon which this national culture was built, i.e., within the framework of social struggles and antagonisms. Otherwise, "national culture" would become a kind of myth, a tool for homogenization and de-politicization that would paper over the conflicts inherent in relations between groups and classes. So, how is social demand to be captured in the field of communication? How can communication, technology, and democracy be articulated? Since demands and hopes had been raised for new relations between institutions of science and civil society with an eye to putting social demand in the driver's seat, Mattelart pointed out certain limitations in communication studies in France that needed to be remedied if these objectives were to be met. The deficiencies could be blamed on institutional obstacles, but also on the dominant intellectual traditions in France that set the tone for a certain way of thinking and a set of images about the function of science and researchers. In this sense, he observed, it was important to reconceptualize one notion, that of *social experimentation*, which meant rejecting the idea of the "independence of the researcher" in relation to any form of power (another topic that emerged from the Chilean debate), because this image, a close relative of the "committed intellectual," glossed over any questioning of the conditions of knowledge production (Mattelart, 1982: 41). Mattelart then proposed producing a new schema for participating in and understanding social and technological innovations, but its possibility depended on a more general concern: the redistribution of power among the classes and social groups that made up French society at a time of political resolution of the crisis, when negotiations were ongoing regarding the aspirations of the professional and technical sectors to shape society, their relations with the dominant classes and the power brokers. In short, in the framework of this special issue of *Non!* devoted to discussing the tensions related to the Marxist legacy,[12] Mattelart was putting forth, far from a dogmatic position, the argument that the critical task of the moment should be, rather than judging the conception of socialism that underlay the government's philosophy, assessing the contradictions that ran through it (its ambiguities but also the forces being fought over within it) and, in this sense, the possibilities that it could open up for radical policy. With respect to the field of communication policy, he was not pessimistic, although his assessment was cautious without being obsequious.

[12] The central dossier of the issue of *Non!* where Mattelart wrote was titled "Un héritage disputé: Marx sans marxisme ou marxistes sans Marx" ["A Disputed Heritage: Marx without Marxism, or Marxists without Marx"]. Among the other contributors, aside from Mattelart, were Maximilien Rubel and Dominique Lecourt.

The Mattelart-Stourdzé Rapport

The content of the 1982 letter in which Jean-Pierre Chevènement, France's Minister of Industry and Research, [13] justified the request for the Technology, Communication and Dissemination of Culture Mission that raised the profile of Mattelart and Stourdzé, is indicative of the orientation of the first few months of the socialist government and the tensions, limits, and contradictions of its project. The acceleration of technological change, the introduction of microelectronics, and the internationalization of communication networks—the minister wrote—compelled France to make an "economic, industrial, but also, and primarily, a social and cultural" gamble (Chevènement, 1982: 3). The different colloquia held to discuss the issue had underscored the need—continued Chevènement—"to involve the social *partenaires* who have been left out up to now, in the implementation of the new technologies." With this spirit, the minister entrusted Mattelart and Stourdzé with the coordination of the Technology, Communication and Dissemination of Culture Mission, which was to be guided by the following objectives: to assess the status of research and experimentation related to communication issues that were being carried out in administrations, businesses, labor unions, social collectives, and associations; to identify the fundamental issues generated by the foreseeable transformation of communication systems and by the expression of the social demands that arose in this area; to weigh all the useful suggestions about the axes of research, studies, and experiments, the resources that would have to be devoted to them, and the eventual reforms needed in the existing structures. To accomplish these objectives, Chevènement assured Mattelart and Stourdzé that they could count on all the financial and administrative resources they needed.

The findings of the Mission, published in September 1982 by the state editorial house La Documentation Française, can be read as a counterpoint to the Nora-Minc report. The leading figures and historians of French communication and information studies consider it to be one of the watershed moments in its institutionalization process, i.e., one of the first studies that tried to systematize the state of research in the field being done in the country, to define its objects and epistemological obstacles while also identifying the progress and work to be done to consolidate and institutionalize this field of

[13] Jean-Pierre Chevènement had ties to the left-wing sectors of the French Socialist Party. He was one of the founders of the Centre d'études, de recherches et d'éducation socialiste, linked to the journal *Non!*

knowledge.[14] For this, the authors reviewed the communication, culture, and information research traditions that already existed in France and pointed out certain epistemological difficulties for consolidating the field as a realm of knowledge—among others, the predominance of a semiological tradition that could be explained in terms of the great weight afforded the literary tradition, which foregrounded an "aesthetics of culture" that complicated the consideration of the economic, political, and technological dimensions of communication phenomena. In Mattelart and Stourdzé's view, this predominance accounted for France's relative backwardness in comparison to the Anglo-Saxon tradition of studying, to put it in overly general terms, the so-called "cultural industries," the processes of cultural internationalization, and the social history of the media and technological devices. The authors also analyzed the low level of institutionalization and recognition of communication studies both in the university system and in research in France, drawing attention to their "lack of legitimacy," writing, "Very seldom have the major scientific institutions recognized the specificity, originality and social usefulness of this particular field of research and teaching in the social sciences" (Mattelart and Stourdzé, 1984 [1982]: 63).

While the different histories of *sciences de l'information et de la communication* (SICs) in France invariably consider the Mattelart-Stourdzé report to be one of the founding moments of an institutionalization process that played out more or less successfully,[15] it is symptomatic that they do not mention the directions offered by the report's authors proposed for an alternative institutionalization that would be consistent with the possibility under consideration for democratizing the scientific and university teaching system, i.e., of reorganizing it to respond to what was called social demand. This silence is significant, especially in view of the fact that the proposal was not a marginal part of the report; on the contrary, it is what gave the report

[14] In the opening words of the preface of the report, titled "About Communication Research," Mattelart and Stourdzé wrote: "Delimiting the identity of its field was the great problem that the 'Technology, Communication and Dissemination of Culture Mission' had to at least set itself, if not resolve. Trying to conceptually delimit this field that, in the collective imaginary, was caught in a tug-of-war between a dominant aesthetic of culture on one side, and a dominant technology of communication on the other" (Mattelart and Stourdzé, 1984 [1982]: 53).

[15] On the history of SICs, especially as they relate to the recognition of the Mattelart-Stourdzé report on the assessments of the discipline, see the collective volume of the journals *CinémAction* (1992, no. 62–63) and *Dossiers de l'audiovisuel* (1999, no. 85) devoted to the history of communication research in France; also Boure (1997), Miège (2000) and Meyrat, and Miège (2002). In all of these cases the references to the Mattelart-Stourdzé report show a recognition only in terms of its role in institutionalizing communication studies in the French university system.

structure and meaning. "It is the conditions of *demand* for research that should be made to evolve as far as possible," wrote Mattelart and Stourdzé, so that this *demand* would express "widely shared social priorities: the aim should be to create the institutional conditions for *this new demand* to gradually emerge, develop, be renewed" (161). With an eye to creating these conditions, the authors indicated to the minister the gaps in research about communication technologies and mass media (assigning special relevance to the sociology and economics of cultural production and consumption), and put forward as a general orientation the need to reexamine the relations between teaching, research, and the ways its results were communicated to society. To this end they proposed, among other general guidelines, designing the mediations that would permit the reversal of the traditional relation that went from the conception of a technical apparatus (or of a cultural program) to the research about its uses or its reception, in order to go the other way: from research about social demand to the conception and planning of the apparatus or program. [16]

It is also significant that the assessments of the SICs in France contain no references to Chapter 6 of the second part of Mattelart and Stourdzé's report: "Toward a Different Conception of the National/Transnational Relation and North/South Dialogue" (219–232). Its content, in line with other documents we have drawn attention to, sheds light on an intellectual program and a unique political-cultural context. At a time when France was reviewing its international alliances in terms of its policy of geopolitical reengagement (as we will see, it was trying to form a power bloc that would encompass some Third World countries, especially from Latin America), the report formulated a series of proposals regarding international exchange in matters of culture and communication. Mattelart and Stourdzé aimed to create spaces for discussion, debate, and research that could draw support from university or scientific (but not governmental, they insisted) organizations, and also from labor and social movements. Given the plurality of actors in France that were associated with communication research, and

[16] To accomplish these objectives, Mattelart and Stourdzé proposed, in a nutshell: a) creating a permanent inter-ministerial mission focused on research and progress in culture and communication; b) creating a technological research institute for communication and culture; c) creating a foundation for innovations in culture and communication; d) restructuring the basic research function in universities, with the creation of a section of the CNRS for information and communication sciences; e) formulating a regrouping policy aimed at alternative audio-visual production at universities; and f) promoting public debate and a program for mobilizing citizens with respect to the challenges of communication technologies. See the third part of the report, "Unas propuestas de estructuras" ["Some Structural Proposals"] (Mattelart and Stourdzé, 1984 [1982]: 235–252).

given the existence of a series of democratic communication practices, of "social experimentation" in communication, France was in the position to make a great deal of relevant information available to Third World countries. But at the same time, Mattelart and Stourdzé pointed to the initiatives that had arisen in countries of the South since the 1970s in response to the new worldwide economic order, and the debate about the transnationalization of culture and the unequal flows of information. The authors held these initiatives up as an example for France and as an opportunity for discussion and exchange. In short, in the field of international relations they proposed "starting to build, in collaboration with other interlocutors of the Third World, a new kind of policy of cooperation. *Relations of civil society to civil society (a mobile civil society)*" (226; italics in the original). This program clearly drew on experiences and relations that Mattelart knew intimately and in some cases had helped to promote. His intervention suggests the complex relations that at the time connected the cultural formations of the *popular international of communication*, part of the emerging *popular international public sphere*, to more institutionalized spaces of knowledge exchange and production. Sustained state-level participation by an industrial and political power of France's stature would have qualitatively modified its makeup and potential. The accounts of communication studies in France, focused on analyzing the role of the Mattelart-Stourdzé *rapport* in the process of disciplinary consolidation and institutionalization, have paid little attention to the implications of this geopolitical gamble.

Finally, another relevant aspect of the report is that Mattelart and Stourdzé drew on a vast community of people to write it, including working groups and institutions from all over the country that submitted specific contributions at the organizers' request. As Mattelart recalls (2002: 80–81), some two hundred people were mobilized in the effort.[17] Many of these inputs were compiled for the second volume of the *rapport*, which was published in April 1983, also by La Documentation Française. There Mattelart and Stourdzé selected and presented some of the articles and collaborations they had drawn on to produce the final report. The diversity of the chosen sources is noteworthy, ranging from civil society organizations—the Association pour le droit à l'information économique et sociale [Association for the Right to Economic and Social Information] for example—to national and foreign scholars—Nicholas Garnham, Jesús Martín-Barbero, among others, and the chapters for the most part looked at experiences or groups

[17] Annex I of the report presents a synthesis of the people, groups, and institutions that submitted contributions (Mattelart and Stourdzé, 1984 [1982]: 255–259).

of communication or cultural activism. Once again, Mattelart acted as a mediator between heterogenous social spaces and intellectual traditions.

The fact that the Technology, Communication and Dissemination of Culture Mission aimed to redefine policy at the highest levels of the state could be seen in the press conference about problems in the communication industries held in Paris on December 7, 1982, when the *rapport* was presented. A number of ministers of the socialist government were on hand, including Jean-Pierre Chevènement, Minister of Research and Industry; Jack Lang, Minister of Culture; and Georges Fillioud, Minister of Communication. The implementation of a plan of "image research" was announced there, and much of the discussion was about the Mattelart-Stourdzé *rapport* on the status of communication in France. Despite the political weight of the participants, Mattelart warned at the press conference about the limits and ambiguities of the socialist project. "The great risk," he stated, "is to go from a society that has long rejected any kind of reflection about its communication apparatus to a society where technological bedazzlement blocks out critical questioning of the model of society that underlies these technical choices" (*Le Monde*, December 9, 1982). His suspicions were not unfounded: The socialist government's lurch toward neoliberal policies would be accompanied by a discourse touting culture and communication as France's savior, which would promptly turn them into a utopian aspiration and the preeminent vehicle of social cohesion.[18] In such a context, the initiatives proposed in the report were to fall on deaf ears. In disagreement with the "necessary shift" in economic policy announced in March 1983, shortly after the news conference mentioned above, Minister Chevènement resigned his post (although he joined the government again the next year as Minister of Education). In Mattelart's retrospective telling (2010: 165), "The shift in the government priorities that took place three months later would negate this announcement that had received so much media coverage." The new policy direction would become even more pronounced starting with

[18] One early example was a meeting of intellectuals held on February 12, 1983, in the grand amphitheater of the Sorbonne, called the "Creation and Development" workshops, promoted with Mitterrand's blessing by the Minister of Culture, Jack Lang. The organizing idea of the event was to put culture at the service of a "rejuvenated" economy and "creativity of all at the service of development." In his final closing remarks, Mitterrand referred to the "advent of a society of creation and communication." Jack Lang, who spoke next, let fly a number of such statements: "Culture must be mobilizing and profitable (*payant*) in times of economic crisis"; and that the "idea of culture has begun to gain stature as a possibility for globally solving the problems of all of humanity" (in Cusset, 2008 [2006]: 80).

Laurent Fabius's government in 1984, marking the close of the first stage of the socialist government.

Eurocentrism and Third World-ism at the Crossroads (or the Twilight of the Popular International of Communication)

Within the framework of the geopolitical realignment that came out of the French socialists' rise to power, in June 1982, the ministers of culture of Spain, France, Italy, Mexico, and Portugal met in Venice, where they declared their intention to promote greater cooperation among Romance language–speaking countries. According to the final declaration, the aim was "to establish an equilibrium of the potential for creation, dissemination, exchange and protection of cultural products" (in Mattelart, Mattelart, and Delcourt, 1984: 12). The government of France was the driving force behind the initiative, and therefore was assigned the job of exploring alternatives. It was no coincidence that the new socialist government was putting its own stamp on the attempt to re-insert France into the league of international powers: In the face of growing US hegemony, the establishment of its own template for technological development and cultural production was seen as a strategic objective. As Nicholas Garnham (1984: 2) insightfully observed, the policy of the French socialist government, which sought to stand up to the United States' power ambitions, led it to establish a policy of creating alliances with so-called Third World countries. In this context, and following up on the Venice conference, the World Conference on Cultural Policies was organized in Mexico City in July 1982. There Jack Lang, the socialist government's Minister of Culture, explicitly set forth the policy of redefining international alliances and solidarity: He expressed his desire that the conference would enable "peoples, through their governments, to make a statement in favor of genuine cultural resistance," i.e., "against financial and intellectual imperialism" (Mattelart, Mattelart, and Delcourt, 1984: 27). The declaration, uttered by an official representative of a great industrial power that also had a long colonial tradition, represented a remarkable turn of events and a provocative stance. Overall, the Conference on Cultural Policies in Mexico City made it clear that new actors were beginning to perceive the links between economics and culture, on the one hand, and on the other, the threats posed by transnationalization, about which many Third World countries had been sounding the alarm publicly and collectively at least since the Algiers Conference in 1973. The growing commercialization of

cultural production and the emergence of all manner of new communication technologies projected culture into the very heart of the industrial and political apparatus. As Mattelart observed at the time, most European countries regarded this situation as "a radical development" (47).

With the immediate precedent of having worked on the Technology, Communication and Dissemination of Culture Mission for the socialist government, Jack Lang asked Mattelart to convene a commission to study the conditions of viability for creating a "Latin audio-visual space." Mattelart chaired the commission (called, precisely, the Commission for a Latin Audio-Visual Space), which worked from November 15, 1982, to June 30, 1983, and brought together researchers as well as people involved in cinematic and audio-visual production from France, Spain, Italy, and Latin America. The final report, written by Armand Mattelart, Michèle Mattelart, and Xavier Delcourt, was submitted to the French Ministry of Culture in July 1983. It updated the analysis of the imbalances in international flows of culture, information, and communication, and related them to the tendencies inherent in the restructuring of the international economy. The authors pointed to the tensions that existed, in the French case, between the democratization project (which required society to appropriate technology) and the industrial imperative and its pressures aimed at conquering foreign markets. They also looked at experiences in the Third World, especially in Latin America, that had shone a spotlight on the question of unequal information flows and, by the same token, the conditions that explained the lack of such problematization in countries like France, where, for example, the publication of the MacBride Report had made few waves. In this sense, the authors advocated the creation of a space for international intellectual cooperation and exchange, which would arise out of the confrontation "not only of experiences but also of different historical, cultural, and economic heritages." Only the sharing of such multiple ideas, realities, and projects, they stated, "could guarantee the preservation of diversities in this quest for new kinds of international solidarity" (Mattelart, Mattelart, and Delcourt, 1984: 12).

This initiative might have represented the high-water mark of institutionalization for this space of exchange and cooperation we have called the *Popular International of Communication* and that, operating within an emerging *international public sphere*, had in Mattelart one of its many guides and organizers. It was, as we have argued, a space with blurred boundaries, made up of reciprocal cross-pollination and borrowing between emerging and dominant elements from the cultural and intellectual fields. Perhaps for this

reason it can also be said that the commission's very existence marked the moment it began to decline. The proposals formulated in the report gained little traction in the face of the global offensive of neoliberal deregulation and privatization policies that took off in the 1980s. As we have seen, by then the French socialist government's orientations had taken a drastic turn. In Mattelart's recollection (2010: 166), the report was filed away where it would have no impact or even consideration, so he decided to publish it as a book without the Ministry's authorization. *La culture contre la démocratie? L'audiovisuel à l'heure transnationale* was published almost simultaneously in French, Spanish, and English (as *International Image Markets: In Search of an Alternative Perspective*).

Even so, a number of European luminaries from the field of communication research praised Mattelart, after the book was translated, for his capacity to foster dialogue between heterogenous realities and intellectual traditions. Enrique Bustamante, who wrote a prologue for the Spanish version, situated the book's release precisely in a context of structural changes in communication, and argued that it invited readers to question a certain "Eurocentric" way of regarding knowledge production in peripheral countries from the perspective of central countries, especially when it came to communication. Bustamante attributed the report's merit in this regard to Mattelart, while also highlighting the scope of critical communication studies coming out of Latin America.[19] In a similar vein, in his introduction to the English-language version of the book, Nicholas Garnham (1984) highlighted its value for English readers, who might well first look at a report drawn up by the commission for Latin audio-visual media as irrelevant to their reality. Garnham made use of his introduction to highlight Mattelart's contribution to communication thought and underscore his Chilean experience as a vital element for forming "a Third World perspective that is rare among Western scholars" (4). In spite of the expression, Garnham was referring to Mattelart's ability "to avoid the trap of ghettoized Third Worldism by

[19] He wrote, "Just when it seems that we are finally witnessing the collapse of that absurd arrogance and incredible shortsightedness that led many European countries to regard the whole issue of informational imbalance and national communication policies as alien, Third World concerns, it also becomes important in this Latin space to emphasize the need and urgency of exchanging and sharing the communication experiences, analyses, and theories that have been developed with the North as well as with the South. And this is particularly true in the case of Latin America, where critical communication studies have had a remarkable development, driven by the continent's status as a pilot region for the best and the worst, for communication alternatives and for the transnationalization of information" (Bustamante, 1984: V). Bustamante then highlighted the figure of Mattelart (VI).

bringing the lessons learnt in the Third World to bear upon the problems of Europe, and vice-versa," which accounts for the exceptional quality of this thinking. He concluded that Mattelart's work represented "a model of internationalism in its best sense."

The Crisis of the Left and the Change of Episteme

Mattelart's job security at the university starting in the mid-1980s coincided with a decisive shift in the world of French culture and politics. It could be characterized as a veritable change of episteme, understood as a way of naming that which defines the boundaries of what can be said and thought at a given time in a given society. 1984 represented the year when liberalism triumphed in France as the guide for economic policy and, above all, ideological horizon (Cusset, 2008 [2006]). It makes sense, then, to situate a certain shift in Mattelart's intellectual project within this framework, or to be more precise, within the profound disenchantment that broad sectors of the intellectual left felt toward the socialist government's change in direction and the jettisoning of its reformist platform.

In the opening words of the prologue to the French edition of *Penser les médias* [*Thinking about the Media*] (1986), the Mattelarts referred to the socialist government's communication policies and its style of political communication. The language suggests the perception of a radical change in the media and cultural environment, as well as traces of intense personal and collective disappointment.[20] Mitterrand's government contributed to a reconfiguration of the political-ideological horizons of French leftist culture: Impossible to criticize on pain of playing their enemies' game, but also impossible not to criticize on pain of intellectual dishonesty, the left wing in power promoted just enough cynicism or resignation to the "possible" in the intellectual field to accompany the profound socio-cultural mutation that was underway. By missing its historical opportunity, as Félix Guattari (2009) observed, the left disappointed French society as a whole and, perhaps, the intellectuals most of all. In this context, intellectual life in France would undergo a radical

[20] They wrote, "In five short years France has made peace with the media. Who would recognize in today's France the country that struggled so hard to reach technological modernity?" (1987 [1986]: 25). The Mattelarts were referring to the socialist policy of liberalizing networks that led to a doubling of the number of television networks during the period. The left had been successful where it had not hoped to be: It had allowed itself to be seduced by the media and tried to be seductive itself using the logic of the media. In a few years it would achieve—they wrote—what "capital and market forces had not managed to do: It would help to grant this logic full legitimacy" (26).

modification. In general terms, it would be marked by the disarticulation of a good number of the networks of intellectual sociability tied to the cultural world of the left (the emblematic closure of the François Maspero publishing house in 1982, to name one example) and by the decline of all the varieties of the figure of the committed intellectual, now to be replaced by the figure of the expert. Historians confirm the consolidation of what was already being perceived as the emergence of a new *regime of truth*. The narrative of the end of politics and the end of history, the turning in upon the individual, the rehabilitation of business, technophilic optimism, among other elements, constituted its central tropes (Cusset, 2008 [2006]: 100).[21]

It is at this crossroads where the writing of *Penser les médias* (1986) must be situated. This is undoubtedly a hinge book in Mattelart's itinerary where, together with Michèle Mattelart, he makes an assessment of both the history of communication research and the paradigm that was unfolding at the time at the heart of leftist social sciences and thinking. This review coincided, in the words of the authors themselves, with a questioning of the certainties that had guided their theoretical stances up to that point: "By rethinking the history of communication research, we are also sketching out the history of a personal itinerary," they stated in the prologue to the Spanish-language edition (Mattelart and Mattelart, 1987 [1986]: 22). The evaluation of the "new paradigms" of social theory and thinking, i.e., what Armand and Michèle Mattelart called a shift from thinking about the *mechanical* to thinking about the *fluid*,[22] must be read, then, in autobiographical terms as a questioning

[21] Of course, these mutations in the cultural universe of the left can be explained by a series of elements that we cannot thoroughly examine here and that must be considered as a whole. To put it briefly: the new ways of subsuming intellectual work and knowledge production under the law of value, and the need to reorganize the higher education system that this entailed (Bolaño, 2005); the reorganization of the specific weight of the fields of symbolic production under the domination of the audio-visual media, and with them, the introduction of market logic into cultural production (Debray, 1979; Bourdieu, 1997 [1996]; Champagne, 2007, among others); finally, but not least importantly, the crisis of leftist thought produced by the debates about the status of the so-called "real socialisms" and the controversies over the ties between socialism and democracy that, as we have seen, had played out with particular intensity in France in the late 1970s.

[22] The metaphors refer less to a definite body of theories and concepts than to a way of thinking. They wrote, "With 'mechanical' we had the solid, we had the high and the low, the before and the after, the *infra* and the *supra*, along with the whole entourage of metaphors that try to express the meaning given to history, to progress, to the imbalances of power, to the dynamics of social movement. Marx's celebrated metaphor, of society as a building, with the famous structure base-superstructure, isn't that the best example of this kind of thinking?" Then they added, "The syncopated montage of the social, shot after shot, has been replaced by the fused-linked montage. The former indicated before and after, hierarchies, source and recipient, cause and consequences, breaks and continuities" (Mattelart and Mattelart, 1987 [1986]: 75).

of their own intellectual journey. "We thought we had certainties," they stated in the first-person plural, referring for example to their embrace of structuralism and the belief it afforded of "being in possession of a single method that was valid for all sciences" (70). In contrast, the drifting nature of Foucault's propositions, the return of the subject and subjectivities, the analysis of micro-interactions, consumption processes, and the place of pleasure in communication processes (as opposed to linear approaches or a focus on media texts or large-scale power apparatuses) renewed the ways of understanding the functioning of societies and their relation with communication. In this sense, the Mattelarts wrote, "we cannot overstate the importance of this break," because it represented "a considerable advance in understanding what is real," the merit of which, they added, was to "question the smooth, clear-cut certainties of the categories and paradigms that have long lorded over critical thinking" (83–84).

After laying out the merits of this way of thinking about the fluid, the Mattelarts emphasized that the new paradigm must be read ambivalently and pointed to a series of "omissions" in many of the theories and research projects that tied into it: omission of economics, of large-scale macrostructures, of the role of the state, or of the power of media texts as indispensable dimensions for understanding what is real. Thus, it was necessary to read these new paradigms in all their ambiguity and to ask over and over throughout the book whether they formed part of a new *regime of truth* that lent itself to the new ways of managing the social dimension and producing new legitimacies.[23]

With respect to Marxism, it is telling that Armand and Michèle Mattelart (1987 [1986]) broadened their critiques of what they referred to as "Althusserian theoretical formalism" or called out the "cult of didacticism" and the "morality of effort" that, driven by historicist optimism that regarded the victory of socialism as a given, expressed a "religious dimension of Marxism" (37, 129). Nonetheless, these observations indicated not so much a break or distancing—quite in fashion at the time—from Marxism as a theoretical tradition, but rather a change in the coordinates of their positions and references. What can be read here, in any case, is that Mattelart stepped back from his earlier aim—exemplified by the editorial project he undertook with Seth Siegelaub—to promote a way of thinking about communication

[23] This ambiguity has not been acknowledged by those who only observe the Mattelarts' positive evaluation of the new paradigms. See Efendy Maldonado Gómez de la Torre (2003) and Fuentes Navarro (1992).

and culture that would draw explicitly and exclusively on the frameworks of Marxism, although, as we have seen, its lineage was broad and varied.

To sum up, while many French academics and intellectuals jumped on the bandwagon and disavowed their earlier political-theoretical identifications as youthful excess, or even tried to sweep them under the rug, Armand Mattelart was able to participate candidly in a debate about "communication and politics" (together with Michèle Mattelart and Bernard Miège, among others), like the one organized in the spring of 1988 by the Institut de Recherches Marxistes [Marxist Research Institute], a research center affiliated with the PC. In a special dossier about communication put out by the institute's journal (*Société Française*) that followed up on these interventions, Armand and Michèle Mattelart (in an interview titled "Debate: Marxism, Media, and Communication") told the story of how they got involved in Marxism in Latin America, and reasserted the potential of Althusser's contributions, of the Frankfurt School and of Gramsci, among others, for understanding the cultural phenomenon (Mattelart and Mattelart, 1988). [24]

[24] They also insisted on differentiating between what they felt had been the operationalization of Althusserian theory in Latin America (which had allowed for an "epistemological break" with functionalist theories, with manifest content analysis, and with the conception of communication and society in terms of interpersonal relations) and the use it had been given in France, where an "elitist" and "hierarchical" appropriation had predominated, along with disdain for the analysis of media and mass culture.