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**APUNTES PARA PENSAR HOY LA COMUNICACIÓN, LAS  
TECNOLOGÍAS DE LA INFORMACIÓN Y EL DESARROLLO  
EN UN HORIZONTE POSTCAPITALISTA**

*APONTAMENTOS PARA PENSAR HOJE A COMUNICAÇÃO, AS TECNOLOGIAS  
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APONTAMENTOS PARA PENSAR HOJE A COMUNICAÇÃO, AS TECNOLOGIAS DA INFORMAÇÃO E O DESENVOLVIMENTO EM UM HORIZONTE PÓS-CAPITALISTA

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### ABSTRACT

The primary objective of this essay is to retake some significant milestones within the field of communication research that address issues of development, information technologies, and social change, considering their capacity to generate alternative projects and public policies within a post-capitalist perspective horizon and for social justice. The approach adopted in this study follows Walter Benjamin's idea, to comb through the history of this field of knowledge by "*brush against the grain*", thereby illuminating perspectives that have been overlooked by the canonical history, the history of the victors. In this regard, several key contributions, among others, will be retrieved. It includes the "*Farewell to Aristotle*" by Bolivian scholar Luis Ramiro Beltrán, serving as a critique of communicative functionalism and hegemonic Western thought. Other contributions are the proposals of Latin American dependency theorists (dependentistas) in opposition to modernization-oriented development. Finally, the critiques of *technological solutionism* that have taken shape in recent years will be presented, emerging from those who propose a sociocentric view of information technologies.

**Keywords:** Communication and Social Change; Dependency Theorists; Technological Solutionism; Post-capitalism; Walter Benjamin.

### RESUMEN

El objetivo principal de este ensayo va a ser el de recuperar algunos hitos significativos en el campo de la investigación en comunicación que aborda las cuestiones del desarrollo, las tecnologías de la información y el cambio social, teniendo en cuenta su capacidad para engendrar proyectos y políticas públicas alternativas, en un horizonte postcapitalista y de justicia social. El método a seguir consistirá, siguiendo a Walter Benjamin, en *pasar el cepillo a contrapelo* sobre la historia de este campo de conocimiento, para hacer visible aquello que ha sido despreciado por la historia canónica, la de los vencedores. En este sentido, se recuperarán, entre otras aportaciones, *el adiós a Aristóteles del boliviano* Luis Ramiro Beltrán, como crítica al funcionalismo comunicativo y al pensamiento hegemónico occidental; la propuesta de los dependentistas latinoamericanos, como oposición al desarrollo modernizador; finalmente, se presentarán las críticas al solucionismo tecnológico que han tomado cuerpo en los últimos años, procedentes de quienes proponen una mirada sociocéntrica a las tecnologías de la información.

**Palabras-clave:** Comunicación y Cambio Social; Dependentistas; Solucionismo Tecnológico; Postcapitalismo; Walter Benjamin.

## RESUMO

O objetivo principal deste ensaio será o de recuperar alguns marcos significativos no campo da pesquisa em comunicação que aborda as questões do desenvolvimento, das tecnologias da informação e da mudança social, levando em conta sua capacidade de gerar projetos e políticas públicas alternativas, em um horizonte pós-capitalista e de justiça social. O método consistirá, seguindo Walter Benjamin, em *escovar a contrapelo* a história deste campo de conhecimento, para tornar visível aquilo que tem sido desprezado pela história canônica, a dos vencedores. Nesse sentido, serão recuperados, entre outros aportes, o *adeus a Aristóteles*, do boliviano Luis Ramiro Beltrán, como crítica ao funcionalismo comunicativo e ao pensamento hegemônico ocidental; a proposta dos dependentistas latino-americanos, como oposição ao desenvolvimento modernizador; e, finalmente, serão apresentadas as críticas ao *solucionismo tecnológico* que têm tomado corpo nos últimos anos, provenientes de autores que propõem um olhar sociocêntrico sobre as tecnologias da informação.

**Palavras-chave:** Comunicação e Mudança Social; Dependentistas; Solucionismo Tecnológico; Pós-capitalismo; Walter Benjamin.

## INTRODUCTION

The title of this article may lead some readers to believe that the essay will address these issues from the perspective of the “*optimism of the will*” described by Antonio Gramsci<sup>1</sup>, as opposed to the more pragmatic attitude of yielding to the “*pessimism of reason*.” If that were the case, I admit they would have good reason to think so. At first glance, it might seem that the triad formed by these three words (*communication, information technologies, and development*) is a sort of *Bermuda Triangle*, capable of making critical thought vanish when it ventures into this dangerous space. Certainly, *development, technologies, and communication* are, after all, three terms associated with the capitalist project or reappropriated by it.

However, at their core, these concepts also harbor seeds of rebellion, sown by authors who made significant efforts to redefine them by situating them, from other perspectives, within a framework of emancipation and social justice. The history of a scientific discipline necessarily involves recalling the genesis, tensions, and development of the key concepts that define it, even if this means remembering other passages that, at their most extreme, some would like to tear from *the annals of history*. If carried out, the risk of such an impulse would be to repeat, under other names, the errors of that past from which one seeks to distance oneself. These are the dangers of all Adamism (or Eveism)- more excusable in the

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<sup>1</sup> According to authors such as Asad Haider (2020), the phrase is not Gramsci’s original, since “he borrowed it from the French left-wing writer Romain Rolland (who would later campaign for Gramsci’s release), in a 1920 review of Raymond Lefebvre’s novel “The Sacrifice of Abraham”. Gramsci first used the phrase in his “Speech to the Anarchists,” published in *L’Ordine Nuovo* in April 1920, just as the situation in Turin was escalating toward a general strike.” Although, certainly, it is a phrase to which the Italian philosopher returned repeatedly and which, ultimately, has become associated with him.



young people who, in a more or less veiled narcissistic gesture, seek to assert that history begins with them. It is the dynamic of *the eternal return of the new*, which Walter Benjamin (1892-1940) applied to capitalist modernity, a concept now linked to the academic research conducted in the aforementioned fields in recent years and decades.

Based on these initial considerations, the main objective of this essay-style reflection will be to revisit certain significant milestones (in the subfield of communication research that addresses issues of development, technology, and social change) due to their ability to generate, in the present, alternative projects and public policies, within the perspective of social justice and a post-capitalist future. To this end, it will be considered those studies that have been particularly relevant in the field for this purpose, due to their contributions to the scientific community in some cases, and for incorporating the Latin American context into their genesis or application in others (Beltrán, 1980; Calvelo Ríos, 2015; Gumucio-Dagrón; Tufte, 2006; Lennie; Tacchi; Marí, 2011, 2021; Peruzzo, 2008; Servaes, 2002, 2023; Svampa, 2015; Tortosa, 2011; Waisbord, 2020; Wilkins; Enghel, 2013).

The method to be followed will consist, in Benjamin's words, of *brushing the history of this field of knowledge against the grain*<sup>2</sup>. This term, one of many evocative and provocative images left to us by the author in his "Theses on the Concept of History" (1940), proposes an alternative reading of history to that of the victors, who highlight the *brilliance* and linearity of progress, just as it is conceived (and constructed) by those who wield the *faithful sword of victory*. History against the grain allows us to "pay attention to what is disregarded by canonical history, to look on the other side of the mirror, to focus on the hidden side of reality" (Mate, 2009, p. 150).

Therefore, in the following pages, it will be highlighted some of the contributions that, in the recent history of communication applied to development, have emerged as alternatives to the dominant narratives. A spoiler-style warning is in order to avoid raising false expectations: the following pages will not contain systematic frameworks for the design of alternative projects and programs on these topics. What the reader will find, rather, are concepts, points for reflection, and reinterpretations of the history of the field. A "brush-against-the-grain approach" that can generate or energize *procesos instituyentes* (*constituent processes*) different from those already *instituidos* (*constituted*) (Castoriadis, 1983).

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2 "If what we want is to deepen our understanding of history or, better yet, 'to ensure that nothing is lost' then we must brush history against the grain; that is, we must pay attention to what is disregarded by canonical history, look on the other side of the mirror, and focus on the hidden side of reality" (Mate, 2009, p. 150). [Thesis VII].



## FROM ROGERS'S "THE DIFFUSION OF INNOVATIONS" TO LUIS RAMIRO BELTRÁN'S "FAREWELL TO ARISTOTLE"

Everett Rogers' book "The Diffusion of Innovations" (1962) is likely one of the most influential and most cited works in the history of information technologies applied to development. Of course, from the perspective of power and of those who design technology and development policies from and for the elites. Although there are also those who, with a heavy dose of naivety and cluelessness, have applied, and continue to apply up to date, Rogers' models from purported social and transformative perspectives.

E. Rogers, a professor at Ohio State University and the University of Michigan (U.S.), studied the process by which a new technology is adopted within a given society. To this end, he identified various consumer/adopter response profiles based on their level of interest and the speed at which they adopt new technologies. Thus, he identifies, among the first profiles to respond favorably, *the innovators*, followed by *the early adopters*. This language and terminology, in short, this understanding of technological development and innovation, continues to resonate today among those who focus their energies on changing consumer behavior, energies that could be directed toward changing social structures. Rather than being *liquid* (Bauman, 2002), it seems that social structures have become invisible to them.

In general, these approaches are a prime example of the tenets of functionalist media sociology, also known as *Mass Communication Research* (MCR). This theory, the foundation of American propaganda and market research in the first half of the 20th century, confines communication within a glass bubble, isolated from the social sphere, which they perceive as communicative noise that undermines their desired transmission effectiveness. In short, social change is viewed as a dysfunction by the dominant functionalist paradigm.

Mass Communication Research thus served as the communicative spearhead of modernizing development policies (Marí, 2011; Servaes, 2002) promoted by the United States in the Latin American context, from the end of World War II until the mid-1960s. It did not take long for these communication and development theories to be challenged by Latin American intellectuals.



The analysis begins with a critical examination of the prevailing functionalist approach to communication. In contrast to the Mass Communication Research, an alternative form of communication began to take shape, with various epicenters scattered across Latin America, shifting from communication theories that served the status quo to others oriented toward the structural transformation of society. Hierarchical communication models paved the way to more horizontal, participatory, popular, and dialogic ones (Mario Kaplún, 1985). The project of cultural imperialism (Schiller, 1969) gave way to the formulation of national communication policies, which made it possible to reposition communication at its intersections with local culture, citizenship, and endogenous development (Bustamante; Corredor, 2016).

Many researchers contributed to the development of a *Latin American approach to communication* (Melo, 2009): Rosa María Alfaro, Juan Díaz Bordenave, Mario Kaplún, Fernando Reyes Matta, Cicilia Peruzzo, Armand Mattelart, Antonio Pasquali, Jesús Martín Barbero, Maria Cristina Mata, and many others. Although there were nuances among them all, they converged in their rejection of the communicational colonization coming from the North, primarily from the United States.

Within this group, it is worth highlighting the role and work of the Bolivian Luis Ramiro Beltrán, due to his ability to penetrate, through his critique, to the very core of dominant Western thought. What lies behind his “Farewell to Aristotle”? We believe that, at the very least, two major consequences can be drawn from this distancing and critique of the Greek philosopher. The first is of a communicational nature. The functionalism of the MCR and its propagandistic model revolved around Lasswell’s proposals and the five questions (the famous 5Ws) of his new rhetoric, which was nothing more than an update of another rhetoric, the classical one, of Aristotle. The forms were adapted to the 20th century, but the core of the theory remained intact: for them, communication consists, basically, of persuading the recipient of the message constructed by the sender. Therefore, by bidding “Farewell to Aristotle”, Luis Ramiro Beltrán distances himself from a form of communication conceived and organized to persuade the recipient of the messages, whether these are constructed and disseminated by the mass media, by a political leader, or by an advertising company.



Nonetheless, there is a second level to Beltrán's critique that has gone largely unnoticed by communication experts; to uncover it, we need to draw upon the insights of philosophy and critical historiography. To do so, we must go back to the 16th century, to the debates held by two illustrious Spanish intellectuals of the time (Ginés de Sepúlveda and Bartolomé de las Casas) regarding the ethical consequences of the conquest of the Americas. Let us take this flashback guided by the contemporary philosopher Reyes Mate.

The first of the two in dispute, Ginés de Sepúlveda, is considered a modern thinker, a representative of official doctrine, who presents himself as a defender of the conquest. He has, as Reyes Mate (2012) notes, notable academic accomplices, among them the undisputed authority of Aristotle, who not only distinguish between inferior and superior beings, but also associate natural inferiority with inhumanity. For this reason, they have no trouble regarding the indigenous peoples as inferior beings who possess no science, who do not know writing, who practice cannibalism, and even human sacrifice (Mate, 2012, p. 34).

The second thinker to take the stage is Bartolomé de las Casas. A member of the Dominican Order and a philosopher trained in the intellectual tradition that regarded Aristotle as one of its cornerstones. De las Casas had been part of the first colonizing expeditions that arrived in the Americas in the early 16th century. There he began to participate in the processes of plundering the riches and exploiting the native population, but the fact of being a direct witness to the injustice and suffering caused by Spanish colonization led him to question the ethical foundations of what was being done there.

The controversy with Ginés de Sepúlveda centered on whether or not the inhabitants of the American lands under Spanish rule were subjects of rights. The intellectual landscape in which Bartolomé de las Casas had been educated led him to deny such rights. But his direct encounter with injustice and suffering led him to think otherwise. If he dared to "send Aristotle packing" (Mate, 2011), he would not only be going against his education but also against the glorious past of the order to which he belonged, which counted the fellow Dominican Thomas Aquinas as one of the key figures in the *Christianization* of Aristotelian thought.



How did De Las Casas resolve this ethical and existential dilemma? As Reyes Mate points out, Bartolomé de las Casas's *intellectual gesture* led him to recognize that the experience of injustice comes first and that, if established bodies of knowledge propose interpretations of events that exacerbate injustice, "we must send Aristotle packing; for truth cannot be unjust, but rather the opposite — it must set us free" (Mate, 2012, p. 34). The contemporary Spanish philosopher goes on to say that, historically, although Western thought "has been forged on an anvil that attached no importance to suffering [...] we, those born after Auschwitz, are obliged to take suffering as that which gives us pause for thought" (Mate, 2012 p. 43).

Hence, this second stage of Luis Ramiro Beltrán's "Farewell to Aristotle" no longer focuses on the functionalist paradigm of propaganda, which he leaves behind. Instead, it points to the core of his communication model, which, in confronting the reality of social injustice and suffering generated by the structures of capitalist domination, places horizontal communication at one vertex and, at the other two, the pursuit of social justice and the democratization of societies (Marí, 2021). In this way, communication emerges from the glass bell jar in which the functionalists had enclosed it, so that it would not be contaminated by *the social*, to be articulated from that which in the previous model had been despised, repressed, and denied.

Back to the present, we might ask: What place does the communication theory of Luis Ramiro Beltrán occupy in the training of Ibero-American communicators? We would say that Beltrán plays, in this context, a mixed role, but in every case, unfortunately, one that falls far short of what the depth of his thought and work deserves. In the Latin American tradition, he has played and continues to play a central role, although we cannot generalize or get carried away: not all Latin American communication theory is permeated by either a critical and emancipatory perspective or by the contributions of authors such as Beltrán. As for Spain, Luis Ramiro Beltrán remained, until the early 21st century, a virtual unknown within communication research conducted at universities. Honorable exceptions such as Miquel de Moragas or Enrique Bustamante only partially filled this unjustifiable void. With the dawn of the new century, his thought has begun to be known and recognized, albeit within a current that occupies a minority and marginal position within Spanish communication research (Jones, 2021; Marí, 2020).



## FROM ROSTOW'S FUNCTIONALIST DEVELOPMENT THEORY TO THE CRITIQUE OF LATIN AMERICAN DEPENDENCY THEORISTS

The communicative functionalism of authors such as Everett Rogers is accompanied by another form of functionalism, in this case in the field of development. Only by analyzing, together, the dominant theories of communication and development can one gain a holistic view of their shared logics of domination. Its defenders will argue that, in order to modernize backward societies, they will have to incorporate the technologies of developed countries and the Western lifestyle. Development, according to Rostow's frameworks, follows the metaphors of transportation. Thanks to the adoption of these measures, *underdeveloped* countries will take off on the path to development, or will religiously pass through the various stations of the development train that, in an irredeemably linear fashion, will take them to their destination station.

Given today's critical perspective on colonial thinking, what stands out is the crude Westernization of these proposals, barely concealed behind the domineering universalism that underlies the imposed development and modernization. The gap between the promised development and the actual development (in the aid-receiving countries) was evident to some from the very beginning, and for many, it took only a few years to see through it.

In response to the modernization drive promoted by Northern powers such as the United States or Europe, a resistance movement emerged that, initially, took shape in various Latin American countries before spreading to other parts of the world. This movement was led by the so-called *dependentistas* (dependency theorists) (Katz, 2018), which we must examine in order to discuss some of its most significant contributions.

Dependency theory exposes the fallacy of identifying underdevelopment as a stage (according to Rostow's thesis), thereby challenging the foundations of the modernization model. It was the countries of the then so-called Third World- that is, the periphery of the dominant world-system- that identified the contradictions of a modernization process that generated some development in the centers at the cost of exporting high levels of underdevelopment to the peripheries (Marí, 2011). This new theoretical proposal, put forward by Fernando Henrique Cardoso and Enzo Faletto, André Gunder Frank, Paul Baran, Ruy Mauro Marini, and Theotonio dos



Santos, among others, would pave the way for the structuralist analytical model in the study of underdevelopment from the periphery.

Several decades have passed since these theories were formulated, and the specific contexts in which they emerged have changed. Be that as it may, the dominant world-system remains capitalism, and therefore a critique of this system as a totality (Adorno, 2005 [1951]) is as necessary as it is, unfortunately, rare. The reflections of Katz (2018) fall within this framework; he has revisited dependency theory fifty years after its formulation. The author considers that dependency theory faces a new scenario in Latin America, in which there is room to revitalize and broaden a general reconsideration of it. Contemporary neo-extractivism (Weltmeyer; Petras, 2014) demands a global response that could incorporate the lessons drawn from the experience of dependency theorists.

According to Alfonso Gumucio (2011), dependency theories laid the groundwork for numerous successful communication for development initiatives around the world, which promoted the creation of community radio stations, the implementation of participatory video, and many other forms of educational and transformative communication. The communicational aspect of dependency theory “has been described in numerous books and articles, including those published by Colin Fraser and Sonia Restrepo (1998), Andrew A. Moemeka (1994), Roberto C. Hornik (1988), and Jan Servaes (1989)” (Gumucio, 2011).

In recent decades, degrowth proposals and the decolonial turn, as applied to the field of communication, have stirred up the debate and spurred a new wave of critical thinking on the subject. While this is, in itself, both positive and necessary, it is true that there is a plurality of positions regarding the colonial dimension of capitalist communication and development, ranging from excessively culturalist emphases to approaches that, fortunately, combine colonial critique with the no less necessary critique of the world-system, taking into account the dominating logics of capitalism, understood in its entirety.

In this regard, one of the scholars who has most strongly challenged the tendency within postcolonialism to prioritize culturalist criticism over structural and systemic criticism is Vivek Chibber (2013), for whom it is not possible to advance an emancipatory analysis without taking



into account the category of social class and the logic of capital as a universally influential force to be subjected to discussion, thereby overcoming particularist and fragmented perspectives. Also from a Marxist perspective, like Chibber, but with different emphases, Larsen (2001) exposes the limitations of Anglo-Saxon postcolonial thought and some of its key figures, such as Spivak (1999), through his comparison with the conceptual framework of the Brazilian Roberto Schwarz (1973). Larsen's underlying idea is that the Brazilian researcher's analysis is a materialist and dialectical alternative to the postcolonial paradigm, primarily for three reasons: 1) because it allows us to see how ideology functions in contexts of capitalist dependency, based mainly on his analysis of *ideas out of place*<sup>3</sup>; 2) because, unlike postcolonial theory, the focus of his analysis is on relations of production and class structure rather than discourse and representations; and 3) because the periphery functions as a *unique configuration* within capitalism, allowing us to identify aspects that remain hidden at the center.

Moreover, another bias in the analysis emerges when examining the omission of contributions such as those made by dependency theorists in the history of the field of communication for development, as it has taken shape in countries such as Spain. In this regard, Jiménez and Arriola (2016) note the absence of a sufficiently robust state-of-the-art review of the field; for them, the majority of articles published on Communication for Development in Spain have fallen into what these authors refer to as *postmodern fragmentation*. Specifically, they identify an overrepresentation of authors such as Rist (2002), while observing an underrepresentation of positions such as those of dependency theorists<sup>4</sup>.

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3 In his work "Ideas Out of Place" (1973), Roberto Schwarz argues that in nineteenth-century Brazil, a country where slavery remained the fundamental mode of production, the liberal ideas imported from Europe did not serve to mask exploitation, as they did in the capitalist heartland, but rather, due their incompatibility with local reality, these ideas were deprived of their usual ideological function. This structural mismatch generated a permanent sense of artificiality and cultural dependence. Schwarz identifies in "favor" (the material dependence of free men on large landowners) the concrete mediation that linked the universal ideas of liberalism with actual social life, producing a unique cultural configuration that revealed, through its very incongruity, the real nature of relations of domination. Thus, drawing on Schwarz's conceptual framework as a point of reference for postcolonial criticism, authors such as Larsen (2001) identify certain limitations of postcolonial studies. Among others, the need to overcome Eurocentrism without abandoning emancipatory universalism. Specifically, these ideas are addressed in Chapter 5 of Larsen's book (2001, p. 75-82), titled "Roberto Schwarz: A Quiet (Brazilian) Revolution in Critical Theory".

4 In this regard, Deolindo and Gayoso (2025) note that trends in this field of research in Brazil are similar to those observed in Spain. The text is listed in the final references. For a more detailed discussion of the parallel between the Brazilian and Spanish cases, see especially the beginning of section 3 of her article, "Diálogos teóricos e práticos: Peruzzo, Mari-Sáez e a materialização do conceito," between pages 336 and 341.

Fortunately, not everything in the field of development as applied to communication is characterized by neglect or underrepresentation. One of the current fronts of research in the field, such as the study of the *datafication* of society from the perspective of the so-called Global South, highlights the need for a material analysis of the systemic logics at play in these processes. There is a geopolitics of knowledge (Marí; Nascimento, 2021) that must necessarily be taken into account, as a starting point, to move beyond efforts and policies that are excessively focused on the prophetic and voluntaristic. And, specifically, within the field of *Data Studies*, there are voices (Valente; Grohmann, 2024) calling for a move beyond the data colonialism approach, necessary but insufficient, to recover, among other proposals, once again, those of the dependency theorists.

## FROM COMMERCIAL TECHNO-DETERMINISM TO A CRITIQUE OF TECHNOLOGICAL SOLUTIONISM

Following the discussion in the previous section on dominant and alternative approaches in the field of communication and development, we now shift our focus to examine the relationship between communication technologies, on the one hand, and communication itself, on the other. We noted in the introduction that the key terms of this article have, in the hegemonic version of these concepts in the 20th and 21st centuries, an undeniable capitalist matrix, which the authors of Critical Theory had already traced in their analyses. For them, technology, in and of itself, is a social project, revealing what a given society, or rather, the dominant interests within it, intends to do with people and with things. These authors identified the ways in which capitalism led to the hypertrophy of technological-instrumental reason, severing it from the restraining forces provided by ethical-political reason and aesthetic-expressive reason (Mardones, 1995). The resulting paradox, evident in traumatic experiences for humanity such as the atomic bomb and the extermination at Auschwitz, is the unreason to which an excess of (instrumental) reason can lead.

The prevailing research on the development of information technologies, from the 20th century to the present day, has revolved around metaphors that normalize the successive cycles of technological innovation. Perhaps one of the most famous of these is the concept of *technological waves*, proposed by Alvin Toffler (1987) and echoed by a legion of followers. Naturalizing the



social order, as this view of technologies does, is in itself open to criticism, but it is unforgivable for someone like Toffler, with a Trotskyist past behind him. Armand Mattelart adds a subtle detail to this naturalizing critique. It is curious to observe how, in each cycle of technological innovation, the dominant narrative involves changing the technologies in vogue, but leaving the social system in which these technological advances are embedded untouched. The Belgian researcher refers to this dynamic as *mercantile techno-determinism*:

The techno-utopia of a Modernity devoid of a vision has swept away the emancipatory dream of a vision of Modernity rooted in the desire to end inequalities and injustices. Managerial thinking, on the other hand, openly encourages the belief that this ideal is outdated. The space that a true social project should occupy is usurped by technomercantile determinism, which establishes endless communication as the heir to endless progress (Mattelart, 2000 p. 14).

There is, therefore, an *eclipse of reason* (Horkheimer, 1947)- understood in its critical dimension- a type of reason that would allow us to identify the limits of the capitalist project. This eclipse is caused by another type of reason, of an instrumental nature, which governs the design, use, and application of the technological devices in question.

This umpteenth incarnation of technological determinism views technology as an autonomous and exogenous factor in development, one that shapes social relations and organization. It is a perspective that assumes technological development automatically leads to social development. In our time, in the wake of the popularization of social media, artificial intelligence, and, in general, the ubiquity of information technologies in personal and social life, a kind of technological neo-determinism is emerging, which once again positions technology as a prior factor, independent of and external to the historical, social, and political spheres. Technological innovations are presented as the ultimate (and sometimes also the sole) drivers of social change.

It is but a short step from technological determinism to the dictatorship of technology. Technocracy, therefore, presents itself as an engineering solution to problems, a path that, from the perspective of its advocates, has managed to free itself from the cumbersome *contamination* of the human and the social. In the history of hegemonic Western thought, this technocracy has often taken on the appearance of a new religion. This is the thesis of one of the most prominent critical historians of technology of the past century: David F. Noble. In his book “The Religion of Technology” (1999), a true classic, the author traces the evolution of the Western idea of technological development to



analyze how it cloaks itself in the garb of religion for greater and more effective dissemination in society. Thus, for example, in reflections that remain fully relevant today, he argues that

[...] the religion of technology has become a common spell, not only for technology designers, but also for those who are caught up in and set free by their pious designs. The expectation of ultimate salvation through technology, whatever the human and social cost, has become a tacit orthodoxy, reinforced by an enthusiasm for novelty, induced by the market and authorized by the millenarian longing for a new beginning. This popular faith, subliminally condoned and intensified by corporate, governmental, and media extremists, inspires an overwhelming deference toward professionals and their promises of liberation while diverting attention from more urgent matters” (Noble, 1999, p. 252).

It is paradoxical to observe how, only in appearance, increasingly technologized societies are also more secularized societies, in which another eclipse, this time that of religion, seems to be gaining momentum. This, at least, has been the European experience in the modern era. Noble warns us of a shift of the religious from its common spaces toward objects that seem distant, such as the technological phenomenon. Undoubtedly, the religion of technology, in our day, continues to gain followers.

## CONTEMPORARY TECHNOLOGICAL SOLUTIONISM AND ITS HISTORICAL ALTERNATIVES.

Criticism of technological determinism remains a pet cause for many scientists and social activists today, despite their minority status. It is the stance of those who, in keeping with the *leitmotif* from the beginning of this article, want to *brush history against the grain*. Perhaps one of the authors who, in this regard, has gained the most traction in recent years is Evgeny Morozov, particularly through his books “*The Net Delusion*” (2011) and “*To Save Everything, Click Here: The Folly of Technological Solutionism*”(2013)<sup>5</sup>. For Morozov, solutionism involves addressing social problems based solely on the assumption that there are technological solutions to resolve them. To put it vividly, some have argued that his critique lies in the fact that, for the Silicon Valley ideologues he criticizes, “all problems begin to look like nails, and all solutions like apps”<sup>6</sup>. The *internet-centrism* discussed by the Belarusian author is consistent with the classic formulation by Denis McQuail (1991) regarding the *technocentrism* prevalent in communication studies.

5 Translated into Spanish as “El desengaño de internet” (Destino, Barcelona, 2012) and “La locura del solucionismo tecnológico” (Katz, Buenos Aires, 2015).

6 Available at: <https://imt.org/news/energy-data-and-solutionism/>



Morozov began his research career in 2008 at George Soros's *Open Society*, one of the world's most famous and controversial "philanthrocapitalists" (Thorup, 2013; McGoey, 2012). Years later, he distanced himself from this organization and adopted more critical stances, which have led him to publish, more recently, "The Santiago Boys". *The Digital Socialism of Salvador Allende* (2025). This project first began as a podcast (2023) and later as a book. It is the result of more than two years of research and an enormous amount of documentation, for which over two hundred interviews were conducted. The work is conceived as a thriller, reconstructing the process that led, within the framework of Salvador Allende's precarious government (1970–1973), to the design of a *socialist internet* before the "network of networks" existed as such.

The project, called Cybersin (an acronym for Cybernetic Synergy), also known as Synco (Information and Control System), was the result of a collaboration between management and cybernetics guru Stafford Beer and a group of Chilean engineers and activists known as the *Santiago Boys*, who gave the project its name. The goal was to plan the functioning of the Chilean economy (and, by extension, its society) based on the logic of cybernetics and the socialist principles of the Allende government. They attempted to design a socialist Internet before the current one, the capitalist Internet.

Beyond Cybersin's short-lived existence and the precarious nature of its implementation, these *cyber-revolutionaries* (Medina, 2011) brought to light a technological and political alternative from which important lessons can be drawn for the present day. The name itself is a statement of position, in contrast to the well-known *Chicago Boys*, for whom Pinochet's Chile was a social laboratory in which to experiment with the neoliberal *shock doctrine* (Klein, 2010), before exporting it to other parts of the world. In the meticulous and overwhelming research carried out in Morozov's book, for example, between pages 89 and 92, the approaches to technological development promoted by dependency theorists are described. In this context, the need to promote, in Chile, *technological sovereignty*<sup>7</sup> for the country emerges, in Allende's own words, a concept that has been revisited in recent academic literature on the subject.

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7 Footnote No. 105 in Morozov's book (2025), regarding the speech delivered by the Chilean president at the opening ceremony of UNCTAD (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development) on April 13, 1972.



Howsoever, both the Cibersin project and Morozov's work on the *Santiago Boys* contain aspects that warrant critical scrutiny. One of these is the excessively optimistic view of cybernetics, which is understandable, in part, given the influence those theories held at the time. These criticisms were already voiced, at the time the project was active, by one of the leading communication researchers in the Latin American sphere: Armand Mattelart (1936–2025). In those years, the Belgian-born researcher was part of the group of intellectuals in Allende's inner circle. In his *History of the Information Society* (2002)<sup>8</sup> he includes a brief review of this "original and controversial" initiative.

Further limitations of the socialist cybernetic project become apparent when analyzed by drawing on the contributions of *Latin American Communication Theory*, which, as we saw earlier, made it possible to conceive of communication as closely linked to processes of social change, thereby establishing a distinctly critical orientation in its approach to communication (Marí, 2021).

To cite just one of the many possible examples of an alternative perspective on technology, it is worth highlighting, first and foremost, Ivan Illich's contributions regarding its *conviviality* (1973). The conceptual framework within which Illich situates his reflection on technology has a dual countercultural character that, rather than pointing to exact positions on a map, allows us, much like a compass, to establish relative positions and directions toward which to move. We speak of a dual level of counterculturalism in his proposal, referring, first, to the original context in which his ideas were formulated (close to the revolts of '68 and the climate of social change in the early '70s) and, second, to the echoes his ideas evoke today, in the midst of a new revolution, but this time of a conservative nature.

Illich defines conviviality as "individual freedom, realized within the process of production, within a society equipped with effective tools" (Illich, 2006: 384). To explain the meaning of this statement, Matías Aimino (2015) notes that convivial technologies are those that expand the

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8 "In Chile, Stafford Beer, a British specialist in business organization and author of "The Brain of the Firm" (1972), proposed to the government of socialist President Salvador Allende (November 1970-September 1973) that cybernetic engineering be put to use in the overall production planning of nationalized companies. A debate arose within the circles of the Chilean Popular Unity regarding a potential technocratic drift. Numerous cognitive science theorists of Chilean origin honed their skills in this synergy-building program known as Cybersin. General Pinochet's coup d'état brutally put an end to this experience, which was as original as it was controversial (Beer, 1975; De Cidio and De Michelis, 1980)," (Mattelart, 2002, p. 110).

scope of human action without undermining human autonomy and that, to do so, they do not require a structure that escapes the control of individuals or communities. They are efficient technologies (unlike other primitive technologies) but, at the same time, they respect human autonomy (p.16).

Illich's multifaceted thinking, as it relates to the subject of this article, extends not only to his community-oriented view of technology but also to the degrowth-oriented nature of the economy and human development. The influence of his work has, in this sense, been taken up in recent times both by the French strand of the degrowth current (from Gorz to Latouche) and by the corresponding Latin American strand (represented by Esteva, among others). Therefore, in reference to these two fronts of our research, we could apply his evocative revival of the Greek mythological tale of Prometheus and Epimetheus. A Promethean application of technologies would lead "to the annihilation of the environment, war among fellow humans, or the hoarding and exploitation of bodies, minds, and emotions in pursuit of accumulation" (Illich, 2006, cited in Caloca, 2024, p. 68); by contrast, an Epimethean application of technologies avoids "being dazzled by the mirages of industrialization and developmentalism and undertakes a revolution based on new ways of coexisting, of relating to nature, and of forming equitable communities" (op. cit., p. 67).

Alongside the contributions of Ivan Illich's thought to current reflections on the phenomenon of technology, a second rediscovery, the result of our going *against the grain*, points to the work of the Uruguayan communicator Mario Kaplún (1923-1998) and his proposal for dialogical communication. One of his many contributions consisted of adapting and updating Paulo Freire's educational models to the field of communication. In this regard, his book "El comunicador popular" (1985) contains insights that have not always been understood in their deepest and most original sense, especially following the advent of social media (at the beginning of the 21st century) and after the relative dissemination of his work in Spain and Latin America, with the publication of a version of this book by a Spanish publisher in 1998.

In this new context, *dialogical* technologies and communication, as conceived by Kaplún, have become conflated with the mere dialogue driven by virtual social networks and by a form of capitalism interested in conversation, but in a manner quite different from that conceived and



practiced by our author. A conversation, a commercial one, that could be described as hardly dialogical and not at all dialectical. Thus, the noise generated by the contemporary subject's excessive verbiage in the digital space reveals their inability to identify the contradictions of capitalism with a view to overcoming them. It is, rather, a monologue masquerading as dialogue, a new return to Aristotle, following *the farewell* of Luis Ramiro Beltrán. A more prosaic return to classical rhetoric, with less philosophy and almost no glamour.

In any case, if one were to seek a genuinely Latin American alternative to technological solutionism in the realm of communication, it would undoubtedly be the experience of the community radio movement (Downing, 2001; López Vigil, 1997). Emerging in Bolivia and Colombia more than seventy-five years ago, they spread and became intertwined with the processes of emancipation, democratization, and social transformation that swept through Latin America from the 1950s to the present day. On many occasions, these radio stations fostered dialogic communication processes and served as examples of convivial technologies, in their efforts to build democratic societies where dictatorships prevailed and in their pursuit of social justice where inequality reigned. The community radio movement would fit within McQuail's category of *sociocentric* technologies, insofar as its epicenter lies in the social processes of social transformation, in the service of which these media find their *raison d'être*.

However, while this has historically been the prevailing trend at many of these stations for a long time, it is true that community media have also been used as instruments of social demobilization. It is this spurious purpose that guides and has guided large international foundations and development agencies to fund this type of media, thereby squandering the social and symbolic capital built up around them over several decades. Therefore, and returning once again to the central theme of this article, what is essential and valuable about community radio stations is not the medium itself, but the modes of social appropriation that social movements and active citizens set in motion to incorporate them into their processes of liberation and the pursuit of social justice.



## (OPEN-ENDED) CONCLUSIONS IN A POST-CAPITALIST FUTURE

The time has come to summarize our reflections so far, in order to outline some conclusions that will enable us to design possible future lines of work, alternatives to the dominant ones. To this end, situating this task within a post-capitalist framework is already a way to begin that journey. I admit that I am reluctant to use the term “*post-*” (or “*pos-*”). There is a certain tendency (which I do not share) in the world of research to pepper reflections with this type of words. One of the terms that has been heard most frequently lately in my field of research is *post-media*. Another, *posthuman*, has been with us a little longer. Generally, the latter proliferates in interpretations that view the vestige of the human, in a world that is already highly automated, as nothing more than a source of noise and disruption in the desirable flow of *intelligent* machines.

The decision to accept the use of the term *post-capitalist* stems from the distinction this word makes from the previously mentioned terms, with which it shares the same prefix. It gives the impression that a future post-capitalist world will necessarily be better, at least from the perspective expressed in this essay. And this is something that is not so evident with the previous terms: will a post-media and/or post-human world be better for the dispossessed of the earth?

We are therefore faced with the challenge of envisioning communication, development, and information technologies within a post-capitalist framework. It is difficult to imagine, from our immediate and mundane present, that capitalism will ever come to an end. Nevertheless, this factual reality is accompanied by the realization that, like any human construct, the capitalist system will necessarily have to come to an end someday. It is unclear whether this end will come about through its own collapse (Taibo, 2020), through the efforts of its critics to bring it down, or through both of these actions combined.

The fact is that some have already ventured to reflect on what might take shape after capitalism, from a variety of perspectives (Hudis, 2012; Jappe, 2016; Mason, 2021; Cruddas; Pitts, 2020; Snicek; Williams, 2017) that point toward the emergence of a post-capitalist society, one that is different, governed by other principles in the realms of work, production, consumption, and communications.

For some, the defining feature of post-capitalism lies in the type of work that will occupy the center of social life. They argue that this work will be based on carrying out activities that are useful to society, with the aim of meeting real human needs, and will therefore be a far cry from the alienating



labor characteristic of the wage-labor relations that dominate contemporary capitalism. For others, post-capitalism is based on a radical humanism, on an ethical stance of resistance against the dehumanizing logic of neoliberal capitalism, authoritarian drifts, and the excesses of the new techno-feudal lords. While some positions seek to accelerate the already rapid pace of current technological development, in the hope that such acceleration will be liberating, other positions question the logic of the commodity that continues to underlie all these dynamics. In short, there is a wide range of approaches to post-capitalism that, on this occasion as well, do not exclude somewhat *techno-optimistic* arguments.

We began our reflection with Benjamin's proposal to brush history against the grain, in order to identify certain significant moments, figures, and experiences in the field of communication, information technology, and development that can serve today as a foundation for a critical examination of this field of knowledge. Luis Ramiro Beltrán's "farewell to Aristotle", the proposal of Brazilian and Latin American dependency theorists, critiques of capitalist technological solutionism, and convivial and dialogical alternatives are some of the milestones on this alternative path that, both from academia and from the realm of social practice, deserve to be revisited and recreated.

And, just as we began this article with a provocative image in the style of Benjamin, we wish to conclude it with another. The one that led him to identify the *phantasmagoria* of commodities in the covered passages of *Paris* at the end of the 19th century. In doing so, the German philosopher added his own personal touch to the classic Marxist category of *commodity fetishism*. Commodities, like ghosts and idols<sup>9</sup>, possess a seductive power that first attracts and then enslaves. In capitalism, the logic of the commodity establishes and imposes a mode of social relations in which commodities come to life at the expense of objectifying human beings. Benjamin's genius anticipated, by more than a century, what commodities are capable of doing today to the contemporary subject, dominated by the totalization of branding. There are no longer human beings, but personal brands (personal branding). There are no peoples or nations; now we have *Nation Branding*.

And so it is with so many other realities. Our terms as well (development, information technologies, communication) have historically been subject to the logic of the phantasmagoria of commodities. But this is not an inevitable fate. History can be brushed against the grain.

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9 For a study of Marx's work (including, among other things, the category of "commodity fetishism") from the perspective of the prophetic tradition of Israel in Judaism and Christianity (for example, its relationship to the concept of "idolatry"), see Dussel (1993).



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