

# Critical theory of information in Brazil: Armand Mattelart's contribution<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

In this article we identify some of Armand Mattelart's main ideas which offer possible approaches to issues addressed by information science. Special attention is given those of his ideas which are connected with the ideological analysis of informational materials and exposing inequities in the international flows of communication (connected with the cultural imperialism theory), and his criticism of the notion of "information society". There are aspects in common between these ideas and those from the areas of "social information" and cultural action, in the field of Library and Information Studies and Information Science in Brazil. In conclusion, the author's attitude as a critical thinking intellectual is highlighted. He is permanently opposing the figure of the positivist administrative scientist who focuses exclusively on technical issues and who seeks to resolve all tensions by developing technological apparatuses.

## Keywords

critical theory of information; social information; Armand Mattelart

## Introduction

Presenting researcher Armand Mattelart leads us to the need to consider both aspects related to his thinking, to his ideas expressed in a large set of published works in several languages, as well as aspects related to his biography and his inclusion in different political and social action fronts. In that sense, one could very well state that speaking of Mattelart immediately evokes the idea of praxis, extended as "a way of acting in which the agent, his action and the product of his action are intrinsically connected terms dependent on one another; it is not possible to separate them" (CHAUÍ, 2006, p.23).

Born in Belgium, after finishing his education in Europe Mattelart decides he would like to start his career

as a university professor in Latin America. After considering a number of options and invitations, including the Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro, he chooses to work as a professor-researcher of Sociology of Population and Sociology of the Press at the Catholic University of Chile in September 1962. During that period, he occupied the position of Head of the Mass Communications Investigation and Assessment Section of Quimantu and also worked as professor-researcher of Ceren, Center for National Reality Studies, founded in 1967 and associated with the Catholic University of Chile. His efforts at the time concentrated on systematic studies of products transmitted by mass communication media (both the news and works targeting entertainment).

From 1970, Chile begins to experience a unique reality with the election of a socialist president, Salvador Allende. The “Popular Unity” coalition, which had massive support from the Chilean population, slowly starts implementing a project for a socialist country in several action fronts. One of such fronts is the sphere of culture and education. Mattelart participates directly in such actions, with a prominent role in programs to reformulate mass communication media and draw up a new national policy on information and communication.

Mattelart’s intellectual production at that point is directly linked to analyses which realize the connection between the cultural products and economic interests, especially from the moment when there is an industrial production of those cultural products - transformed, thus, into merchandise, a category dear to the Marxist tradition, with all its implications and consequences: the processes of alienation and reification, among others. Furthermore, he starts to reflect on the way in which the production of this culture was centralized around first world countries - especially the United States - and the third world countries’ share was merely the position of consumers of such products (thus reproducing another key idea of Marxist thinking, the social division of labor). Mattelart applies Marxist presuppositions to the analysis of culture in a unique fashion, placing the notion of ideology as a central concept to understanding informational products. Information, instead of being studied “in itself”, is understood as articulated with the political and economic contexts in which it is produced and in which it circulates. It constitutes both a domination element and an element which is capable of boosting the revolutionary process. Among the books published in that period, the following can be listed: “Los medios de comunicación de masas: la ideología de la prensa liberal em Chile” (1970, with Mabel Piccini and Michéle Mattelart), “Comunicación masiva y revolución socialista” (1971, with Patricio Biedma and Santiago Funes), “Agresión desde el espacio: cultura y napalm em la era de los satélites” (1972), “La comunicación masiva em el proceso de liberación” (1973) and “La cultura como empresa multinacional” (1973).

In 1973 the military coup led by General Augusto Pinochet overthrew Allende’s government. The socialist president takes his own life, the general becomes a dictator, disbands the popular revolutionary process and, among other actions, bans Mattelart from Chile. The Belgian researcher then makes, together with Chris Marker, a documentary called “La Spirale” (presented at the Cannes Festival in 1976) about the Chilean Popular Unity period. Mattelart remains concerned with the issue of domination processes through cultural products in Latin America. During that time, he gives courses and conducts research in collaboration with universities from Argentina, Brazil and Mexico. Actually, it is in Mexico that he publishes, with Ariel Dorfman, a book which becomes a classic: “How to Read Donald Duck” (written, in fact, in 1971).

## The ideological analysis of information

In this book Mattelart and Dorfman carry out a true “dissection” of the contents of a cultural product which was widely spread in Latin America: the comics starred by characters created by Walt Disney. The authors show, through analysis of typical narratives and depiction of characters and places, how this cultural product, usually seen as a harmless type of youngster entertainment, worked in fact as an instrument of cultural domination, crystallizing certain ways of viewing the world and society, like a “symbolic dropper”, to use one of Bourdieu’s expressions.

As an example, it is worth going back to one of the main criticisms presented by the authors: the in which different peoples in the world are depicted in Disney stories. Characters presented as locals from fictional places such as Aztecland, Inca-Blinca or Unsteadystan (DORFMAN & MATTELART, 1980, p. 53) are surrounded by symbols easily identified as those of the Mexican peoples. But such association is not explicit; it is, like the ideology, a “hiding of social reality” (CHAUÍ, 2006, p. 23). That is because the characters which inhabit these places are, as a rule, depicted as lazy, not very bright or creative. The stories do not state, clearly, the idea that the Mexican peoples do possess these features. They unconsciously suggest the association of these ideas; on the one hand, the inhabitants of these fictional places, with their characteristics of slowness, backwardness; on the other hand, little indexes added “innocently” (but carefully planned) which characterize these places: stupid, *siestas*, volcanoes, cactus, huge sombreros, ponchos, etc. In summary: “It is Mexico for all recognition and marginal disproportion purposes; it is not Mexico for all the real contradictions and real conflicts of this American country” (DORFMAN & MATTELART, 1980, p.53).

The same strategy, of association between fictional characters and real peoples, is used with regard to African peoples. Tribes are depicted in several stories with all physical characteristics of African peoples (skin color, facial features, etc). These tribes are always associated with features of “backwardness” too: beliefs in unfounded superstitions, ignorance, incapacity for organized work, aversion to technology.

At the same time, the stories’ lead characters, especially Scrooge McDuck, Donald Duck and his three nephews, clearly associated with the North American individual and with the North American values and way of life, are infallibly presented as their representatives of “progress”: they are entrepreneurs, dynamic, creative and honest. Their presence in distant lands is always a privilege for the latter. After all, Donald and company are always in the most diverse places in the world to solve problems: they help to improve crops, ban the deceitful “dictators”, implement new technologies, and improve hygiene habits.

The association with the North American presence in third world countries is evident, however hidden under the “magical” content of Disney’s universe. It revitalizes, in a particular style, the old positivist mentality of

hierarchy among peoples and the one way march toward progress - the latter no longer understood as the “European enlightenment culture” but as the *American way of life* developed during the 20th Century. Years later (as described in the next topic), Mattelart will continue this discussion in his criticism of diffusion theories.

In these stories there is also a constant glorification of capitalism, expressed mainly in the figure of Scrooge McDuck. Firstly, by the confirmation of the “basic myth of social mobility within the capitalist system”: “equal opportunities, absolute democracy, every child starts from scratch and accumulates what they deserve” (DORFMAN & MATTELART, 1980, p. 102). The class relationships are concealed, success and failure (economic, social, etc.) are always regarded as a result of individual action, of private choices, of effort and nature. Secondly, by the glorification of this character’s “greed” as a “sign that he is predestined to succeed” (DORFMAN & MATTELART, 1980, p.102) – in a manner much similar to the “capitalist spirit” identified by Weber in the study of protestant ethics in the early 20th Century United States.

Several other topics could also be mentioned, such as the issue of sexuality, the position of women, family relationships or the authority figure. However, for this text’s purposes, the examples above are sufficient to illustrate the way in which the author’s analysis is carried out, and how the concept of ideology can then be used to analyze the cultural products.

## Cultural imperialism

A less central aspect in “How to Read Donald Duck” is connected with the extreme polarization between the interlocutors of the communicative process in relation to the Disney universe: on the one hand, emitters in an industrial process of content production; on the other hand, populations from several countries in the passive position of informational consumers. This aspect, however, will become central in Mattelart’s production in the following years, especially after two publications: “Mass media, *idéologies et mouvement révolutionnaire*” (1974) and *Multinationales et systèmes de communication: les appareils idéologiques de l’imperialisme* (1976).

At that moment, Mattelart joins, together with several researchers (most of them Latin American), a great current of studies later named Cultural Imperialism Theory. The phenomenon identified by these authors is imperialism’s attack of an ideological nature on Latin America, which gradually replaces the division of labor as a medium for the imperialist penetration. The goal of this cultural imperialism is to “conquer hearts and minds”, and its features change their form and content according to the stages of political and economic expansion, and it adapts to different realities and national contexts. The background for this theory’s development is the perception of an “international class struggle”, the existence of a psycho political war. At that moment, one notices both the inclusion of the notion of hegemony, taken from the Gramscian thinking, and Althusser’s idea of “technological apparatuses”.

Mattelart then turns against the fashionable theories of the moment, identified under the label of Diffusion Theories. These are the theories which supported the need to export the development model of “advanced” countries to “backward” countries - which would happen, in the spheres of communication and information, through the mass diffusion of cultural content, replacement of national informative, artistic and entertainment ways (that is, those produced by the third world countries themselves) with those from the “modern” and “civilized” peoples. In summary, Mattelart exposes the way in which the idea of progress itself (or of modernity, or of development) converts into ideology. As Mattelart explains:

*In order to consent to that ‘progress’, backward societies or those who do not have the support of the Lights must allow the entrance of successive levels of eras or states of History. The path leading to it is a straight line, without closed circles, without detours, without points of return, without regressions, without intersections between paths already followed. The golden rule of this irresistible and ‘necessary’ movement ahead is the imitation of perfectibility models represented by societies which have already reached the advanced stage: this is the idea which is theorized, from the last quarter of 20th Century, by a certain anthropological approach known by the name of diffusion (MATTELART, 1996, p.106).*

Mattelart and the other authors of that current of studies offered to carry out analyses which expose the way in which the project for “world integration” takes place through unequal exchange: the news agencies, for example, with headquarters in four first world countries, become a sort of “mandatory filter” for the coverage of all world news; the cinema industry organizes the production and distribution centers in order to inhibit alternative and local productions. Mattelart also turns specifically to the study of increasing military and governmental funding and subsidies to cultural industries in first world countries in a moment in which the study of culture, information and communication is surrounded by a strategic component and starts to be seen as an issue of “national security” (MATTELART & MATTELART, 1999, p.116).

Another criticism is made on the doctrine of the *free flow of communication*, supported by sectors of the North American cultural and intelligence industries. Of liberal inspiration (the free flow of goods), the idea is that the flow of information and communication between the different countries in the world should be completely non-regulated, liberalized - which, in practice, as exposed by the cultural imperialism theorists, means that such flows will end up being adjusted by the market, that is, by the unequal forces of the countries which occupy different positions in the international scenario.

This theory has resulted in different theory initiatives and procedures. One of them concerns Unesco, when this entity, back in 1977, formed a committee to study the international problems in the spheres of information and health. Presided by the Irish Sean McBride, this committee studied systematically the unbalance in flows and drew up suggestions for action in changing this

reality. His report, together with several studies published during that period, proposed a “new world information and communication order (NOMIC)” (MATTELART & MATTELART, 1999, p.120). In the ensuing years, however, several factors (the USA’s intransigence under Reagan’s office, the closing of communist countries, disputes between non-aligned countries) ended up suffocating the possibilities of this debate. On the other hand, initiatives by community radio stations and TVs, workers’ newspaper, cooperative news agencies, among others (including the field of Library and Information Studies, as will be addressed in the next topic) appear as successful consequences of this initiative. Mattelart’s assessment is, thus, positive:

*In spite of these limits, such debate and the studies arising from them raised an alarm regarding the unequal exchange of images and information flow. On that occasion, the voices of that majoritarian part of the world were heard whose reality is often known through the filters of studies carried out by experts of major industrial countries. Dominant in international semi-circles, the references from the modernization sociology of American origin were, during the 70’s, replaced with representations of development formulated by those who were the subjects of their own development (MATTELART & MATTELART, 1999, p.121)*

It is not a coincidence that the title of Unesco’s committee report was *Voix multiples, un seul monde*. The idea of ensuring different actors and countries in the world a place as subjects of the production of information and communicational content slowly gains a vital space in discussions. Mattelart highlights the importance of the Latin American ideas in that context, and draws attention to the thinking of Paulo Freire, “who had a profound influence in guiding popular communication strategies and accomplished worldwide diffusion” (MATTELART & MATTELART, 1999, p.119).

## Utopias and information society

In 1983, Mattelart became a full professor of information and communication sciences in the University Paris VIII. During the 1980’s decade and in the first half of the 1990’s he accomplished important theory work in which he correlates different theories and study models on communication and information. In those works, the author reexamined his own theoretical and epistemological presuppositions, acknowledging the importance and incorporating contributions of thinkers connected with cultural studies, ethno methodology, phenomenology, among others - without, however, ever being other than an author of a critical and Marxist inspiration.

From the second half of the 1990’s decade, Mattelart concentrates on issues related to the contemporary moment - discussions about globalization, multiculturalism, post modernity, the crisis of utopias - always including in his analyses consistent and exhaustive historic research.

One of his most important books from that period is *Histoire de la société de l’information*, launched in 2001. In this book, Mattelart opposes radically the apologetic and optimistic contemporary discourse produced by

authors such as Drucker, Toffler, Negroponte and Lévy, who define today’s society as an “information society”, seen as a recent and inevitable reality. His method for analysis is very rich: Mattelart goes back to the 17th Century to perceive, from that moment, “the idea of a society conducted by information” (MATTELART, 2002a, p.11). He integrates several historical facts and authors of several theory currents to show the construction of a discourse about this “information society” (that it is an inexorable, fair, democratic reality) promoted by true “promotional artifice” involving official proclamations, manifestoes, scientific and “semi-scientific” studies which end up generating, as a consequence, the orientation for action on the part of governments (through their “information society programs”), companies, entities, leading to actions in a certain direction, reinforcing the belief in the miraculous power of information technologies and, above all, neutralizing a reality.

Mattelart notes that, in fact, the discourse about the “information society” is a geopolitical construction, which possesses an ideological dimension (in which one can see that the historical dimension of the phenomenon is, purposefully, forgotten) and that gains strength in the end of the 20th Century with the theses about the ends (the end of history, the end of ideologies, the end of utopias, the end of classes, the end of the political), with projects of intelligent machines, with the technological promises and the “wonder” of the Internet and cyber culture.

Mattelart begins his “archeology” of information society in the idea of algorithm, in Leibniz, in the 17th Century. He covers the Baconian idea of a “useful science”, John Wilkins’ project of a universal language, the statistics, and crowds management project through the calculation of probabilities (the “actuarial reasoning”), just to mention a few examples.

In several of the author’s analyses, it is worth going back to the criticism he makes on Otlet and La Fontaine’s projects. Mattelart criticizes the idea usually accepted (and, in Information Science, celebrated) that both are visionaries working for a utopia of peace. Mattelart analyzes the ideological and geopolitical implications behind the universalizing intentions of those researchers. In one of these analyses, for example, Mattelart shows that “Even more ambitious, he [Otlet] formulates an ‘Intellectual Nations Society’ project to cover up the gaps of the Nations Society (MATTELART, 2002a, p.49). In another moment, he analyzes the notion of “universalization” of these authors, the idea of “turning the entire world into a single city and all peoples into a single family” (MATTELART, 2002a, p.49): the cosmopolitan project always starts from a standard of reference, and this standard is always European. Curiously, Otlet, in elaborating a universal classification system, adapts a preexisting system (Dewey’s CDD). Dewey’s system cannot be used, because it is contextualized, it is North American. His is not; it is universal, valid for all peoples.

The Mathematical Theory of Communication, of Shannon and Weaver, which was regarded as the “foreshadowing” (PINHEIRO & LOUREIRO, 1995)

of Information Science, or its first theory (OLIVEIRA, 2005), does not go unnoticed by Mattelart either, who sees in this project that presents itself as a “scientific theory” (and therefore “neutral”) of information, a series of ideological components:

*This mechanical model, interested in the conductor only, makes reference to a behaviorist concept (stimulus-response) of society, perfectly coherent with that of infinite progress which is diffused from the center toward the outskirts. [...] As for the notion of ‘information’, it will soon turn into a black box, master word, truthful, ‘Proteus of semantic’ out from the ‘Pandora’s box of imprecise concepts’ (THOM, 1974). And that will become even easier because numerous as the human sciences’ subjects are, desirous of being a part of the legitimacy of natural science, they will elect Shannon’s theory as a paradigm (MATTELART, 2002, p.66).*

The limits of this text are not the place to explore all the richness of Mattelart’s work, but only to show how it occupies a vital position in his reasoning. It is from the analysis of several communication and information theories that Mattelart reexamines his own positions, identifying, for example, that his take on informational products in the 1970’s was very strict, monolithic, a very “harsh” application of Marxist principles, formulated for the study of economic phenomena, considering the reality of cultural products.

One of Mattelart’s recent works, which shows once more how this researcher has always positioned himself too as a political actor, is his book “History of the Planetary Utopia: From the Prophetic City to Global Society”, launched, not coincidentally, in Porto Alegre, in the year of 2002. On that choice, the author states his position:

*I am especially happy to see this book published in Porto Alegre. First of all because, in organizing the 1st World Social Forum, in January 2001, the city has become a universal symbol: the belief that another world is possible (MATTELART, 2002b).*

In this book, Mattelart identifies and discusses several utopian projects of different natures (religious, artistic, political, scientific) which arose in a wide variety of moments in the history of mankind, pointing out the ideological contradictions of some of the contemporary “utopias” (such as “techno globalism”, the “managerial society ideology”, the “planet CNN”, the “global” discussed in Davos’ forums, the “info-roads”). His final position, reinforced by his presence as a speaker at the World Social Forum, confirms his commitment with popular struggles, with the movements of resistance, with the clarification of ideological discourse, with exposing the domination projects, with the third world autonomy and the right to diversity.

## **Mattelart, library and information studies and information science**

It is common to find, in Brazilian Library and Information Studies periodicals (CASTRO, 2000, p.29; ROBREDO, 2003, p.86), the idea that it was formed, from the 21st Century to the 1930’s decade, under the influence of the French (marked by a humanist and erudite tendency) and, from that period on, under the North

American influence (prioritizing the technical issues and the professionalization of the activity).

It is also common to encounter, in such periodicals, the idea that Information Science would have started, in Brazil, in the 1970’s decade, from Ibtct’s work and its graduate program ((OLIVEIRA, 2005; PINHEIRO & LOUREIRO, 1995; ROBREDO, 2003), with a strong influence of researchers from England and the United States, some of whom supervised research in Brazil (such as Saracevic, Lancaster, among others).<sup>2</sup>

Likewise, it is possible to encounter the identification, from the 1970’s decade, of a specific branch of development of Library and Information Studies and Information Science, constructed under a third inspiration, partly European (French and German), and partly Latin American. This branch, it should be noted, did not become the hegemonic one in the field, since the North American biased source, of a technicist nature, teamed up with the Anglo-Saxon tradition of information science focused on the scientific-technological context, has maintained their position as the main tradition in the field.

This particular field of manifestation, first of Library and Information Studies and, later, of Information Science, is defined in many ways. One of the most common is “social information”, a field marked by the “increasing presence of organized social movements” (CARDOSO, 1994, p. 109) in Brazil. In Cardoso’s view, thus, the emergence of this field is directly related to the social-political context at that time, with the redemocratization and organization of social movements which “pose interpretative challenges to the social-political theory” (CARDOSO, 1994, p.109).

In that context, theories on information (and on the library) are developed no longer focusing on their technical aspects, on the procedures and principles of organization and treatment of information - themes such as the democratization of information, citizenship, exclusion and others start being a part of the study agenda. At the same time, the field defines as its main presuppositions: the subjects’ history, the totality of social phenomena and the constant tension present in society - categories which are explicitly Marxist.

Several studies thus arise which give preference to social classes who are marginalized or excluded from information, such as maids (AUN, 1994), workers (CABRAL, 1995), housewives (EGGERT, 1994). Several initiatives for concrete action are also developed, such as interactive work involving libraries and the community, itinerant box library services, community libraries, popular documentation centers, car-libraries and public libraries; several of which are also addressed in academic research (e.g. DUMONT, 1990).

In that moment, one of the great foundations of these studies is the concept of “cultural action” (FLUSSER, 1983), which expands the definition of culture, of a set of objects, artifacts, “things” made by man, to incorporate too the world view and the set of social practices (COELHO NETO, 1989). The works inspired by this concept seek, exactly, to demystify the

ideological elements included in several discourses for the “promotion” of culture (of transmitting cultural heritage), relating them to the social practices from which these discourses emerge. Here there is also a clear inspiration in Paulo Freire’s thinking, mainly when one thinks of cultural action as an instrument for freedom, as opposed to the idea of domestication or subjection. In addition, the professional practice is no longer thought under the perspective of “technical action, therefore neutral”, but as action which is necessarily political.

In the following years, this field also gains space in Information Science, when the emphasis “moves from the ‘library’ axis to ‘information’” (REIS, 2007, p.19). Once more one notices the concern in linking the studies to concrete consequences, with the clear goal that “such reflections may materialize in action, thinking them as praxis”, in a perspective that believes, thus, that “it is necessary to consider information beyond its strictly technical design” (REIS, 2007, p.26).

Contemporarily, Information Science has been considering above all aspects linked to the digital exclusion, as part of the research agenda of a Marxist nature in the field (SILVEIRA, 2001; SORJ, 2003); it is also concerned with assessing and providing criticism about the ways in which the idea of “information science” is being adopted (WERTHEIN, 2003).

In the works of this entire area it is possible to notice a great approximation between Mattelart’s ideas and those developed in the sphere of “social information” studies: the ideological analysis of informational products; exposing the unbalance in flows and access to information; information seen as both an element of domination and of resistance. However, what can be effectively noticed is that the explicit inclusion of Mattelart in the studies in the area of information, in Brazil, is still very timid - despite the proximity in terms of theory which the author shares with a considerable portion of the field.

But it is exactly then that the following question surfaces: the configuration of the area of “social information” in relation to the totality of the field. As the majority of Information Science, at least in Brazil, focus on technical and technological issues of information, the contribution of ideas from critical thinking, such as Mattelart’s end up becoming much reduced.

The other issue is that, unlike what happens in France and other countries, in Brazil communication and information have followed different paths in their academic formalization. And, in this process, Mattelart ended up being more identified with the area of communication, in which he is, by the way, often cited (VANZ & CAREGNATO, 2007), while he remains not very well known in Information Science.

## Conclusion

In one of his most important works, the book *Histoire des théories de la communication*, Mattelart argues, in his conclusion:

[...] in this route, certain issues on the relationship between intellectuals and the society have faded. The crisis of utopias and of alternatives has hit the notion of critical work. All who work with the media find themselves today affected by the administrative positivism, by this new utilitarianism stimulating research of epistemological tools which allow tensions to be neutralized via technical solutions (MATTELART & MATTELART, 1999, p.185-186).

Recently, researchers who conduct studies in the lines of Information, culture and society, from the Graduate Program in information Science of UFMG, have published a book in which they discuss a series of issues on the future perspective of such studies (methodological challenges, the issue of meaning, the challenges of the information society, digital inclusion, the issue of reading), considering essentially the collection of knowledge that is being produced in these areas’ history (REIS & CABRAL, 2007). Among the main challenges raised, the theory’s own position - and, consequently, that of the researcher - stands out. In times of great demands, both by regulatory agencies and the government, for productivity criteria for scientists, the latter tend to distance even more from their social reality and from their critical positioning - in summary, from the idea of praxis itself. In that sense, it is always useful to consider the Mattelart - both the theorist and the militant, as a source of inspiration and support.

While the Colloquium Mediation and Use of Knowledge and Information is taking place in Brazil, in the perspective of dialog between Brazil and France, it is extremely relevant to evoke Mattelart’s thinking - a thinking which, like this colloquium, positions itself somewhere other than with the hegemonic influence of the positivist and instrumental thinking of the Anglo-Saxon *information science*.

In conclusion, it seems appropriate to return to one more passage from Mattelart. In the same book on communication theories, written with Michèle Mattelart, the author highlights, in a certain moment, the importance of Wright Mills, a North American intellectual who presents radical criticism to the “sociology of bureaucrats or of intelligence workers” (MATTELART & MATTELART, 1999, p.55), fashionable in the North American academic and scientific environments at the time, co-opted into the USA’s war efforts. The Mattelarts indicate that Mills revolted against a social science which “lost all reforming intention and deviated into social engineering” and, in order to revert this situation, proposed a return to the ‘sociological imagination’, title of one of his works, published in 1959” (MATTELART & MATTELART, 1999, p.55).

Perhaps what Information Science lacks at this moment, in times of crisis of utopias, of political projects and even the informational inclusion and democratization projects; with projects targeting an essentially technical dimension, like a “social engineering”; and with takes which are often merely instrumental of work in the area and of professionals educated by it; is the proposal to engage itself in constructing an “informational imagination”. In order to, then, without setting aside the ideo-

logical criticism and the distrust of discourse about the contemporary moment, reunite with the possibilities of utopia and execute, then, praxis.

## Notes

1. This article is inserted into the scenario of research on the epistemology of information science with some of its main theorists as a starting point. The choice of theorists to be studied was made from results obtained in two research projects carried out with Brazilian researchers in this field (ARAÚJO et al., 2007a, b).

2. So much so that many papers which describe the field's history, both in Brazil (as previously mentioned: OLIVEIRA, 2005; PINHEIRO & LOUREIRO, 1995; ROBREDO, 2003) and abroad (SARACEVIC, 1996; INGWERSEN, 1992; MIKSA, 1992; CAPURRO, 2003) do not make any reference to the existence of a critical theory of information.

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