

# Contributions to a critical pedagogy in Latin America since the footsteps of Simon Rodriguez

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## I. Some starting points

I'm from Mendoza, Argentina. The city where I live is a thousand kilometers from Buenos Aires. There I worked as a teacher at all levels (in secondary, tertiary and in college). In Latin America teaching is precarious and teachers have to work at several institutions to make a living. Especially, if they also try to carry out research tasks. My first approach to the work of Marcuse was in the 90s, as a student activist. At that time, the student movement in our country was a boom of participation and revolt against neoliberalism. We took colleges and universities unprecedented during the period between 1995 and 2001. In this context, we appropriate the political experience of the French May, the texts of Sartre, Angela Davis and the writings of Herbert Marcuse. 90s were experienced by us with intensity; many of us determined a whole way of life: some we are dedicated to teaching in rural areas, others traveled to work in Latin American universities, others were devoted to political participation in social organizations environmentalists and others continued to participate in the human rights movement.

In my field of study about media, culture and power, the *cultural industry* is a fundamental concept in the first place because it demonstrates a whole way of producing theory problematize social contradiction is more than a hasty, cyclical explanation. Make critical theory can mean a search for decades, crossed by the dynamics of the historical process, the uniqueness of the imprints of various theoretical references and technological processing going succeeding. To understand the *culture industry* we work with these texts:

- In 1947, Dialectic of Enlightenment: to understand the initial conceptual proposal.
- In 1954, "The theory of multiple layers" of Adorno article in TV and mass culture: to understand the construction of the ideological sense of the messages that produces and reproduces the culture industry.
- In 1969, the conference for radio "Free time" of Adorno.
- In 1977, the "Culture industry summary" of Adorno.

In this context, Marcuse's work in general is essential but especially the chapter on "The closure of the universe of discourse" of *One-Dimensional Man* (1964) because we understand it as a key to understanding the closing direction of the dominant language, stigmatizing, cager, precluding the culture industry or Marcuse, in terms of the entertainment industry. For us, this chapter contributes to the understanding of the cultural industry concept, it helps explain of how it is produced and reproduced the dominant ideology of capitalism. For us, the culture industry is not a concept

technology on the media. But just on ideas, on the naturalization of the same and the daily habits that produces and justified.

Our Latin American intellectuals made great contributions to the construction of a critical pedagogy that largely revolves around the need to create an opposite to the dominant language to build emancipatory political processes in general; and teaching in particular. To understand this process, the starting point is the work of Master Simon Rodriguez mid-nineteenth century. In the twentieth century in the 60s (in Brazil) as we know the imprint of Paulo Freire was a key. To think Brazilian experiences as part of a continental process brought to share with you some notes on an Argentine professor named Daniel Prieto. He returned uniquely pedagogical proposal of Simon Rodriguez, experience brutally interrupted in the 70s by the last military dictatorship in our country. The update that made Professor Prieto put new meaning the dominant forms of communication in the process of teaching - following clues, hopes of Simon Rodriguez.

## **II The struggle for the opening speech in Latin America**

Simon Rodriguez was born in Caracas, Venezuela, in 1769. He was interested in teaching and politics so late eighteenth century made a critical analysis of the school system and demanded an equal education for children, blacks, mulattos and whites. It was the famous teacher of Simon Bolivar. For conspiring against the Spaniards in the struggle for the independence wars was exiled, first to Jamaica where he learned English, then came to Philadelphia, where he learned the art of the printers. Later he went to Europe, a place where he witnessed the promise of Simon Bolivar free Venezuela, the two together at the top of Monte Sacro in Rome.

A mid-nineteenth century Rodriguez understood that it was necessary to unite communication and utopia in education. Communication as a fundamental element of the teaching-learning process because unrelated, without bond, there is no possibility of sharing knowledge. And second, because she is reached by the experience of knowledge. That search led him to Rodriguez innovations in language that permeates all his work seeking to develop a discursive strategy: Rodriguez gambled that the contents were useful; they make it to the students stronger than the word tamed by the monotony of books traditional.

We understand that Rodriguez inaugurated by then, in the words of visual artist Luis Camintzer, a new conceptualism: a Latin American conceptualism. His writing is expressed in concrete poetry and visual aphorisms: they are paintings on paper. The teacher Simon Rodriguez believed that the art of writing requires the art of painting. In his 1828 book *American Societies* said two fundamental concepts about print: *paint the word with signs representing the mouth, paint thoughts on how they are conceived*. To meet this objective, Rodriguez artistically used different fonts, argued about concepts like *republic, society, freedom, knowledge*, using braces and brackets, signs of mathematics, positioning the body of the text in different areas of the page and even writing sentences in the margins: completely innovative narrative and aesthetic resources at the time. From Rodriguez, writing becomes a dialogue with art and even more interesting: political dialogue again with art.

The Argentine philosopher Arturo Roig said here is an opening speech that necessarily requires the development of a new rhetoric, expressive resources, aesthetic, as valid

enough to approach utopia, to the possibility of experiencing the alternative, that the other is not governed by the law of the domain. Not enough to have faith in it, it is able to implement it, to learn from the mistake.

Utopia as possibility is not in the work of Simon Rodriguez a place "other" to go. It is, as was José Martí the Cuban, a reality that we are building on the present and the school space (in the broad sense of the term) must be the space of experimentation in new ways. It is not just an educational exercise, it is a political exercise. Therefore, the work of Simon Rodriguez gives us clues to build a new pedagogy. Their writings inspire us to take the ethical policy of disrupting the dominant system of knowledge and disrupt decision is the only way to build a different one in all its forms (mainly language: de-historicizing, cager, exclusive); we have to denounce the vices and argue the system is abandoned; we must know the subjects with which the new project is founded (back to wonder who our students, what their disappointments are, what their hopes); we have to denounce the false paths; we have to add new teachers (learning together) able to appropriate this new vision of education; we have to re-experience media seem to have lost their reality, as spoken language and writing-to found the new paradigm.

These words are not mined alone: in the mid-60s, Professor Daniel Prieto wanted to make these hopes. He saw in the work of Rodriguez a possible program from which to start building libertarian pedagogy in the twentieth century. Inspired by the proposal of Rodriguez, Daniel Prieto founded the first race of Communication called School of Mass Communication.

### **III Simon Rodriguez experience in teaching Daniel Prieto**

In 1973, Daniel Prieto took the College of Mass Communication direction. He wanted to create a career from practice to put this ideology, with a profoundly anti-imperialist character. The exercise of this writing allowed me to find documents, photos and testimonies that are not yet known in my province and my country and to challenge me to devote his systematization when he returns, as well as intellectual and political project, probably with other teachers and activists. They will be added to the hard work of reconstruction and repair of emancipatory political processes sadly interrupted by the dictatorship in my country. I found myself writing these pages that the case of the School of Mass Communication forms one of the records in the trial for crimes against humanity being done in Argentina the military responsible for the crimes committed. The implementation of the pedagogical approach of this university career Rodriguez mentioned that left a sad balance student activist killed nine missing students and teachers exiles.

This was a team of professors and teachers inspired by the ideas of Rodriguez proposed to question the pedagogical conservatism among teachers, plans deniers study illuminating historiography of critical political processes as well as the lack of curiosity of teachers by innovations to experience the knowledge and even the ethical failings of some. Prieto wrote that the idea was that the graduates had to compromise and surrender to the social reality of the community to which they belong. Learning is no more and no less, rejoining knowledge with the sense of life. It was difficult to understand that this story begins to be visible while I wrote these pages, not take public scope, depth and recognition it deserves. More than 30 years after the last military dictatorship is much work that remains to be done to rebuild the collective memory.

In the footsteps of Rodriguez, Prieto proposes to build an alternative to the dominant pedagogy (or pedagogy of transmission, as he calls it) we have to question:

- a) Its legitimating principle: the academy is not the only institution validating what is knowledge and what is not. We take as a starting point how the student as a subject of discourse defines what knowledge brings.
- b) The depersonalization links in the teaching-learning process: we need to create educational projects that allow us to other links, other links with our students. We work for example from pinhole photography workshops, film series, from the collective creation of magazines.
- c) The devaluation of the context in which the learner is placed. The book knowledge or giving the teacher is alien to the student; we believe it is necessary that the student has the opportunity to explain the context of next year, in a geographical sense, political, historical and cultural.
- d) Information as entropic component of society: We start from the idea that information and knowledge are not the same, that the student write his experience of meeting over curricular course which is offered collaborates largely put in crisis this illusion that while I access more information, more know.

In 1990, working at the University of Guatemala Prieto finished synthesize pedagogical proposal that had begun in the early 60s. Upon recognition of five instances of learning (with the teacher, which is written with the group, with the context and with oneself) proposes as one of its teaching techniques that the student write over completed a matter and even of his career, which he called: his *parallel text*.

Prieto proposes in its *parallel text* the student front of the text of the institution with critical and creative eye make tangible their own learning track, force yourself to observe their context and extract information from it, materialize their learning in a product itself becomes author, write, describe, is expressed: that is, achieve a precious document to assess their own learning.

How? Valuing her life story using the resources of the autobiography, the characteristics of the context from which learning, identifying the knowledge learned in the art that has completed, making explicit the way in which the student redefines this knowledge in relation to the needs of their social, historical and cultural context. A *parallel text* flows as the completed develops and supports and welcomes the use of aesthetic resources as did the teacher Simon Rodriguez: the creative use of fonts, publishing on paper, the use and creation of all types of pictures, creating other media (including visual and sound) to break the plastic space of traditional monograph.

More than an end, as a start, I brought a video of five minutes we did for this meeting. We created collectively with activists who are filmmakers and students who have participated in educational projects I have been fortunate to accompany and guide in the in recent years. Perhaps our history of struggles in Latin America shows that the starting point for building a critical pedagogy begins to return to the subject that is also a fundamental principle that we learned from Marx. Perhaps we need to re-look at our students, ask what their disappointment, their fears ... In summary, finds out what their hopes are.