Utopia and Neoliberalism in Latin American Cinema
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The Allegory of the Motionless Traveler

By Carla Grosman
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From the conclusion of my thesis to the final edition of this book there is an interval of 5 years, which can be considered as one of the saddest *lustrums*. On one hand, Latin American popular resistance got progressively debilitated by neoliberal hooliganism, on the other, the referents of Latin American Utopia began to die: a few days ago departed Nicanor Parra (1914-2018), last November, Fernando Birri (1925-2017), in October, Daniel Viguetti (1939-2017) and Federico Luppi (1936-2017) and in January of that year, Ricardo Piglia (1941-2017). One December before, left Eliseo Subiela (1944-2016), in November Fidel Castro (1926-2016) and in April, Julio Garcia Espinoza (1926-2016). In the previous year Eduardo Galeano (1940-2015) passed away as did Gabriel Garcia Marquez (1927-2014) the year before that.

To these utopians I dedicate my words, so that their disappearance does not leave us orphans but, like them; convinced that poetry in action is the way to fight towards what can still be ‘a better world’.
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Stories of travel abound in world cinema. From the classic road movie genre, where the vicissitudes of the external journey mirror the intricacies of the central characters’ inner journey, to the myriad filmic depictions of narratives of migrancy, nomadism, exile, passage and coming of age, with its constitutive technical affinity towards motion and temporality, cinema, perhaps even more so than literature, seems to be the perfect medium to represent and interrogate the experience and meaning of modern human travel. In support of this idea, we find the ubiquitous presence of images and stories of travel in the cinemas of the world. It would be impossible in a short piece like this even to begin to list the great travel films of the history of the cinema. But if I had to recall only one, I’d name a film that made a huge impact on me quite early on: Wim Wenders’s *Alice in the Cities* (1974). This is a film where the ceaseless movement of characters, the constant streaming of reflections and double images, and the unrelenting passage of time, monotonously marked by the film’s musical theme like the ticking of a clock, become indissoluble ingredients of a modern nomadic experience where cars, buses, trains and planes are hard to separate from photographic and filmic machines, all of which are ultimately capable of showing nothing other than the inscrutability of the human spirit. In Latin American cinema travel is also, if not an obsession, an everlasting commitment. But here this focus is not only on the existential problematic of loss of belonging, meaning and connectedness within modernity but also the political dimensions of a human existence founded on a crisis. In Latin American films, travelers are often subaltern subjects displaced by violence and oppressive, precarious conditions; they seek, fight, hide, escape, circumnavigate, and return only to leave over again. One travel film directed by a Latin American, which, not unlike Wenders’s *Alice*, I have never been able to get over is Raúl Ruiz’s *The Three Crowns of the Sailor* (1983), where a man ceaselessly wanders from port to port in unlikely exotic locations around the world, cyclically returning to and departing from his home in the Chilean port-city of Valparaiso, effectively mixing up and confusing real experience with memory, dream and desire. Equally memorable is Fernando Solanas’s *South* (1988), in which the physical travel is ironically circumscribed to a derelict Buenos Aires barrio soon after the end of the military dictatorship,
where a recently released political prisoner, Floreal, endlessly wanders through solitary, nocturnal streets and empty, ruined buildings, encountering ghostly characters from his past and his dreams before he decides to return home. In one scene, Floreal speaks with Maria, a young woman who is desperately trying to leave the city. Floreal asks her: “Are you going away?” Maria replies: “To the South.” Floreal: “Where to?” Maria: “I don’t know.” Elsewhere, I reflect on the figure of the “South” in contemporary world cinema, suggesting that in this scene of Solanas’s film, as a desired destination, or perhaps as the destination of desire, the South is “marked by a sense of loss of direction and meaning, of life on the outskirts” (2015: 539).

Carla Grosman’s *The Allegory of the Motionless Traveler* precisely addresses the crisis of the utopian discourse as evidenced within Latin American travel films after decades of revolution and dictatorship. In view of this, the book charts Latin America’s political history to give social and historical context to its incisive discussion of a cinematic culture relentlessly preoccupied with the region’s politics. It becomes clear quite early on that for Grosman modernity in Latin America is not only a project of rationality but also of violent alterity, namely, the production of the subaltern through colonization and oppression. Not only this, but as Grosman purports, supported by a rigorous engagement with contemporary critical cultural theory, particularly ideas in Latin American cultural studies, that the process of rationality that produced modernity required as a condition of possibility the irrationality and violence of the colonial process. Thus, Grosman asks: how can “utopia” as a concept contained within cultural texts such as film contribute to a process of transformation of the real? European literary allegories of travel are seen here as the expression of a utopian discourse whose influence in modern Latin American art and culture leads to a crisis of self-representation, especially in response to the region’s history of colonial, post-colonial and neoliberal power struggles. Grosman identifies a melancholy tendency in contemporary Latin American cultural expression, which would inhibit collective processes that seek to mobilize the subaltern. But at the same time, within Latin American cultural expression there lie dormant utopian impulses. This idea is then what motivates Grosman’s examination of certain aesthetic strategies in Latin American cinema that in her view challenge manifestations of collective melancholy within neoliberalism. As a way forward through the crisis of utopianism, the book proposes at

the core of its argument an innovative category of analysis: “the allegory
of the motionless traveller,” a figure charged with connotations retraceable
to Walter Benjamin’s conception of history, which is here found to be in
operation within contemporary Latin American literature and cinema. This
paradoxical figure is a most important, original contribution to debates
about Latin American post-modern art and culture.

Grosman’s consideration of the historical film movement known as
the New Latin American Cinema, which used testimony as a key
discursive strategy, leads her to the assessment that this film movement’s
place in the discursive field of its time —1950 and 1960s— was that of a
utopian vanguard that understood itself as a form of cultural guerrilla
where testimony became a utopian discourse in so far as it carried a
performative function whose aim was to produce an empathic
identification with a subaltern subject who had a face and a voice. So, the
book considers the dyad intellectual/people within films of the New Latin
American Cinema, in which the individual intellectual seeks to have the
subaltern speak directly for themselves. However, Grosman contends, the
collectivism and inter-subjectivity inherent in the kind of power relations
demanded by the New Latin American Cinema ultimately exposed the
historical failure of the Pan-Latin-American social and political project.
The new neoliberal, democratic model declares, among other things, the
disappearance of the intellectual as the subaltern’s translator or
spokesperson. In this sense, the fact that in Latin America the subaltern
have always produced self-representations to share among themselves
horizontally is a crucial point, and so is Grosman’s reference to Mexico’s
Zapatista revolution’s distrust of the individual intellectual and reliance on
media and art collectives (a posture retraceable at least to 1920s Russian
revolutionary art). Grosman discusses amateur short films, where the voice
heard is directly that of NGOs, interest groups, and media collectives.
While the films of the 1980s, Grosman argues, reinstated the utopian
project of the New Latin American Cinema through an aesthetics of
nostalgia, films of the 1990s are marked not by nostalgia but by the
melancholia of an era that is incapable of realizing a collective process of
mourning after the historical catastrophe of the 1970s and 1980s.

In summary, the films discussed in the book correspond to films from
Argentina, Cuba and Mexico made between 1995 and 2005, a period
characterized by the hegemony of the neoliberal project contrasted with
the failure of the Pan-Latin American socialist project of the 1950s, 1960s
and early 1970s, and the destruction of the protagonist figure of the
traveler as also the translator and interpreter of the subaltern’s reality.
Neoliberalism is the age of melancholy and crisis of sense, and so the
figure of the traveler of the utopian texts of the past is substituted by the motionless traveler, which is used in the films to promote a project of collective or solidarity-based utopia. Thus, the book’s analysis of these three nations’ recent cinematic production focuses on the figuration of the traveler rather than travel because in this way it can give an account of the diversity of specific or individual directions that can be taken from the point of departure of a continental utopian discourse in crisis.

Reading *The Allegory of the Motionless Traveler* constitutes a marvelous intellectual journey. Its chapters present and engage with their topic in a manner that is sophisticated, exciting, intriguing, and challenging. Grosman appropriately supports her nuanced examination of literary and filmic text with sound critical discussion and abundant bibliographic references in a broad range of fields of study, from philosophy and postmodern theory to Latin American cultural and literary studies. Grosman’s book constitutes a genuine, original contribution to Latin American film and cultural studies.

Antonio Traverso
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INTRODUCTION

As a proposal framed within the field of Latin American Cultural Studies, this book approached the discursive relations that were established during the consolidation of the neoliberal model between 1995 and 2005 in Argentina, Cuba and Mexico, since these are three paradigmatic examples of diverse national responses to the same model of hegemony.

To do this I constructed my cases by analyzing the rhetorical paths that link the historical-socio-political and economic contingencies of daily life of this period with the cinematography of the three affected countries.

Thus I discovered from the beginning that the evident social fragmentation that afflicts them is not the exclusive result of the neoliberal market system imposition but also a consequence of their own “Foundational Narratives” crises (Doris Somer), those geopolitical rhetoric presented as collective utopias that, from each national perspective, coincided in the search for a 'Latin American identity' that justified the continental emancipation from the Eurocentric power hegemony. I claim that the crisis of these utopias was due to the fact that this independence project was formulated in terms of an ontological homogenization of the population from the point of view of the current political-intellectual elites and thus they ended up denying themselves. That is to say, they were constructed like aporias of representation.¹

It is precisely for this reason that I observed that any cultural production that attempts to delegitimize the dominant economic and political system in Latin America must comprise a rhetoric that not only unveils its discursive processes of hegemonic reproduction but also confronts and corrects those utopian desires in conflict.

In order to respond to this discursive necessity I chose to look at the poiesis of cinema; that is, to approach to the intrinsic relation between form and content of the cinematographic work in this case, as a creative process that results from its performative power of the real. The film I

¹ Simply a way of anticipating later development, which does not have an aporia when a reasoning implies contradictions or irresolvable paradoxes that make it impossible to represent a reality. In ‘Aporias’ and ‘Force of Law. The mystical foundation of authority’ Derrida develops the idea that the aporia is both the unconstructable and the source of all deconstructions.
analyze, in my opinion and following Jameson (1981: 67), is a ‘symbolic act’ of utopian re-narration. This is because it is capable not only of reflecting but also of intervening in a given situation simultaneously through two persuasion forms: the level of textualization and the level of narrativization. The first is the rational aspect of explicit ethical-ideological discourse as a reflection of the state of things and the second, the level of narrativization; that is, aesthetics connected to the unconscious impulsivity that becomes performative force of discourse values. By means of this production and reception dynamics, the cinematographic work is easily linked in meaning networks with other fiction and historical or contemporary reality texts that are open to new readings of the real and the possible. They oppose the hegemonic explanation of the real and will, ultimately, re-narrate the interpretive frameworks of history and memory and, therefore, that of what is real.

This particular performative role that cinema adopted between 1995 and 2005 in the analyzed cases responds to a poetic model that I have called ‘the allegory of the motionless traveler’, for whose characterization I considered three aspects: the production context that deals with, intervenes and modifies the theoretical considerations that comprise it, and the cases of cinematic practice in which I have identified it.

Regarding the context of production, which was coincidental to the celebrations of the independence bicentenary of most Latin American countries, including Argentina and Mexico, the first thing that emerges is the paradox that what is celebrated as ‘independence’ is the continuation in the facts of the Eurocentric domination under a renewed hegemony mode that Aníbal Quijano calls “coloniality of power” and that assumes the survival of such a model even two centuries after severing the colonial administrative-political relation. That is to say, the validity of the elitist project of the Creole-bourgeois National State allows pre-existing power relations to continue ontologically and epistemologically to colonize these societies through two dynamics: what Santiago Castro-Gómez calls coloniality of being and knowledge because they reproduce the center-periphery relations at the international and national level within the interior of the continent populations. This contradiction was noticed by the twentieth-century revolutionary social attempts, which undertook a dialectical process of unmasking the reproductive dynamics of domination in order to amalgamate institutional knowledge and/or cultural production legitimized with the revolutionary needs of the people via a cognitive guerrilla. This perception of the subjects subalternized by the coloniality processes was concretized through what we could call the intellectual-artist/people idiologeme.
An outstanding example of this decolonization attempt through the awakening of aesthetic-discursive strategies of legitimizing power was the New Latin American Cinema of the 60s and 70s. Its centered position, speaking by the subaltern, essentially made it an aporia because it prevented it from altering the power relations it denounced.

Twenty years after those attempts, and with the neoliberal democracy coming, this process of popular unrepresentativeness was strengthened from the 'coloniality of power', intensifying a social atomization that led the citizen to act as a private consumer in order to survive economic coercion. A market economy that was imposed as 'natural', as an objective force – that is to say, autonomous from the human will, translated into social fragmentation and individualism in the three observed cases (Argentina, Cuba and Mexico) even though the processes and national responses had different characteristics.

The second aspect of the 'allegory of the motionless traveler' developed in the book addresses the theoretical considerations that make up the model, a poietic pattern constructed as a reading of the travel narrative as an allegorical vehicle of the modern-critical utopian discourse. This is why the corpus focused on films, in a dialogue with other literary texts, which use the travel narrative structure as narrative forms.

In this context, *Utopia* by Thomas More (1992 [1516]) represents the first attempt of poietic intervention, a mediation of symbolic language to unveil and deconstruct the modern totality idea as an epistemic imposition of Europe ethical values that justify economic colonization of other territories and their populations and, at the same time, eliminate the possibility of an exteriority space. In my opinion, More uses the travel narrative – as a vehicle chosen to disseminate the world-wide discourse of material and symbolic appropriation of the peripheral territories – to discuss the centrality of Europe by problematizing the place of the Other as a valid and exemplary interlocutor. But, in spite of its propositional ambiguity as the ‘u’ of utopia is understood as ‘ou’ (no) or ‘eu’ (good), that is, ‘no place’ or ‘good place’, when imposing a *Utopia* reading from the Eurocentric point of view of the modern/colonial world, More's work is hardly self-critical of the Modern through understanding utopia as ‘the place that does not exist’.

In this framework given by the cosmovision of coloniality, this work leads me to affirm that the “Other”, understood in the broad sense of the subject, territory, culture, knowledge, is represented as a ‘myth of impossible exteriority’. Therefore, from this concept of 'impossible exteriority' to the modern totality, I observe that it is an idea that the Latin American intellectual elite has not been able to undo during the two
centuries of decolonization and thus in the literature of the boom, for example, the travel narrative travels round the continent and round the will to integrate itself into a geopolitical ethical unit. That is to say that this allegory does not deconstruct that Michel Foucault calls the modern episteme (1971, 11) because it continues conceiving utopia as a displacement that reproduces the structure of center and periphery, which does not escape a Eurocentric perspective.

But the situation changes when the intellectual-artist/town idiologeme begins to disintegrate in the twentieth-century travel narrative, as this book tries to support. The films of this stage make the journey from the failure of the Latin American political project. They demonstrate the oppression of the hegemonic system and the persistence of the rhetoric of 'coloniality of power', but instead of exploring a collective ethical sense with nostalgia for a better way of living, it turns to the melancholy that is, in the end, its way of generating new meanings. That is why we say that the cinematographic authors in the neoliberal era rhetorically attack the iconic dimension of the modern-critical/Latin Americanist ideal and, by means of removing the possibility of travel and traveler, they account for a world without that utopia. In this frame 'the allegory of a motionless traveler' takes the place of a possible poetic that, in each context of national production, responds to a particular modality.

This diverse national response to the utopian crisis itself is explained in the third aspect of 'the allegory of the motionless traveler', in which it addresses the cases of cinematographic practice in which I have identified this model.

In Argentina, from Bad Times (Mariano de Rosa et al., 1998) to the films of the current 'New Argentine Cinema' that followed, the 'allegory of the motionless traveler' manifested itself in an involuntary and disoriented travel. This is a travel through expulsion that in its randomness made the possibility of linking with the different come into existence and it fundamentally and symbolically accompanied the process of civic power social recovery through the emergence of new social movements.

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2 There is nostalgia when you notice the impossibility of returning to a past or a place where you were happy. On the other hand, melancholy is a lasting state of sadness, grief, which generates monotony and loss of meaning and is related to the impossibility of 'naming'; that is, finding the available semantic resources to represent the loss. Referring to the melancholic state of the Chilean post-dictatorship, Nelly Richard retrieves the following Julia Kristeva’s fragment: "The melancholy-depressive effect comes not only from the sadness left by the irretrievability of what is lost, but also from a destructive alteration of the signifying nexuses that blocks the ability to represent" (2001, 105).
In the chapter on Cuba, the travel narrative in the cinema of the ‘Special Period’ worked as a symbolic act of utopian re-narration of the Revolution. In this sense, I observe that *Life is to Whistle* (Fernando Pérez, 1998), like many films of this period, manifests the “allegory of the motionless traveler” by locating the dramatic action at the time of the personal – emotional and moral dilemma – of emigrating or staying in a space where the Brechtian *inside/outside* constitutes a counterpoint between two world projects: capitalism and socialism.

In addressing the case of Mexico, I propose that the individualism that characterizes the neoliberal era in this country is intimately linked to its Judeo-Christian moral world perspective, which has historically naturalized the tradition of betrayal in the constant internal struggle for power. In *Amores Perros* (Alejandro González Iñárritu, 2000), I see that the idea of power as *a priori* metaphysical order that dictates the future destroys the formula that associated the travel narration with the pursuit of a utopian goal beyond the traveler's life circumstances. In that frame the ‘allegory of the motionless traveler’ supposes a reconstruction work of the story that involves the viewer from its ethical dimension.

In sum, this essay could confirm at the conclusion level that the cinema functioned as a range of utopian re-narrations able to unveil, discuss and rewrite their corresponding utopian excuses in crisis.

These processes were possible because their poietic strategies, gathered here under the sign of ‘the allegory of the motionless traveler’, were located in the trans-modern episteme of the millennium change and outside the modern totalizing narration through an enunciative displacement from the position of the intellectual-artistic elite towards multiple body-political expressions where the crisis of the project is inscribed in the concrete life of its survivors and descendants, that is, of the traditionally subalternized characters.

Therefore ‘the allegory of the motionless traveler’ demystifies the modern idea of ‘impossible exteriority’ by destroying the *telos* of travel, without centers or peripheries, and at the same time recombining the syntagmatic chains of the utopian problematic of Modernity – critical and Latin Americanist – to deconstruct the constant rhetoric that it formulates.

Finally, ‘the allegory of the motionless traveler’ fulfilled the political-performative mission of sliding the horizon of truth joining a cultural project that divorces the reproductive logic of the ‘coloniality of power’ to propose, from the exterior, a new form of a self-sustaining intracontinental relationship that celebrates interculturality as a collective utopia and reconstructs ‘utopian impulses’ (Jameson 1981, 292), instead of continuing.
to aspire to the ontological homogeneity of 'Latin American identity' from
the melancholy of its failure.

The present volume is then developed in a series of six sections, in
addition to the final bibliographical references: a contextual framework
about the three countries whose filmography was selected for the corpus,
the development of the poietic model of analysis, a chapter on national
filmography following alphabetical order (Argentina, Cuba and Mexico),
and finally the conclusions.

Carla Grosman
June 2018
THE CONTEXTUAL FRAGMENTATION OF ARGENTINA, CUBA AND MEXICO

By analyzing this text, we have made a brief reference to the fact that in the Latin American context, the period comprising the thesis – 1995-2005 – is immediately prior to the commemorations of the bicentennial of independence, particularly in the cases of Argentina and Mexico, despite the permanence of Europe-centered domination under a renewed mode of hegemony that Quijano has called ‘coloniality of power’. The idea is to corroborate that, even when the colonial administrative-political relationship was ended, the elitist project of the bourgeois-Creole National State allowed the previous power relations to colonize the population ontologically and epistemologically and, moreover, demonize, as enemies, the national values to any ideal that, already in the 19th century and then in the 20th with the search of a socialist-based Latin American identity, sought a historical and geopolitical unification of the newly emancipated countries.

In both centuries, and given the representative weakness of this social structure, it was enough for the ruling elite to demagogically or dictatorially react, depending on the era, by repressing the spokespeople of the intellectual-artist/people idiomeme in order to deactivate any existing solidary link between the political-critical movements, the cultural agents and the people.

The resulting process of social atomization that since the 1990s has been strengthened in the “perverse institutional system” (Valenzuela 1992, 62) of neoliberal democracy, exerting such economic coercion on the citizen that the latter cedes political rights and responsibilities in pursuit of his/her survival as a private consumer. The new atomized subjectivity is instrumental for the hegemonic reproduction of a capitalist order now masked as a market utopia.

In these two hundred years of republican life nothing has been able to escape the civilizing plans of capital without being qualified as savage, subversive or resentful, as dictated by the bourgeois discourse of the time. In this context, the subaltern subject is such because, within the
The Contextual Fragmentation of Argentina, Cuba and Mexico

epistemology of modernity, they have not ceased to be an audience or object of representation.¹

Within this situational complex are registered the new social movements that have emerged since the second half of the 90s, which, in all their diversity, coincide in their discussion of the market logic presented by the economy and its corresponding social practices as objective, totally autonomous human forces. I insist that one of the main characteristics of struggle of these movements is the subjective redefinition in a broad solidarity framework of social interaction that brings with it a new commitment to citizenship responsibilities and rights; it leaves aside individualistic practices and, in the meantime, demystifies the market utopia.

Specifically, my work takes as paradigmatic national examples which illustrate a significant diversity of sociocultural responses to the same hegemonic model – the Argentine, Cuban and Mexican cases indicate my reading’s connecting of the relationships between everyday life and Latin American cinema under the neoliberal system.

I chose Argentina because, after almost a hundred years of popular struggles and bourgeois repressions – manifested through military coercion or economic coercion by abuse of oligopoly power – this country in southern Latin America reached the end of a long process of disintegration that reduced social cohesion and then began recovering from a redefinition of its own utopian excuses. Facing the crisis of representativeness of its leaders and intellectuals as guides of the collective process, the Argentine response was embodied in the formation of new social movements intending to recover civic power and thereby intercede in the narratives that structure recent history. Citizens awakened in their solidarity not by a vertical imposition, but as the individual conclusion that comes from noticing the depth of the crisis of that utopian pre-text embodied in a national state project as a republican organization that presents the idea of individual integration to the collective under the ideal of civilization and civilization.

¹ I use the term ‘subaltern’ based on the meaning given to it by Subaltern Studies; that is, a subordination position within the political culture dynamics of power in the postcolonial societies of the South Asian region. I follow key texts that promoted this concept; for example, Gayatri Spivak’s work, ‘Can the Subaltern Speak?’ (1988). I find the use of this term in the context of Latin American postcolonial relations relevant since this concept establishes, reinforces, and unifies the perspectives of Latin American decolonial authors who, at different times and through different nomenclatures, reflected on this precise problem: Aimé Césaire, Frank Fanon, Paulo Freire, Enrique Dussel and Aníbal Quijano, among others.
progress. On the other hand, ordinary Argentines perceive that their system of parliamentary representation, justice and patrimonial administration has only shown signs of barbarism.

I included Cuba, a very diverse context from the Argentine, when it was about to complete its first fifty years of the anti-imperialist Revolution. I could observe that the permanence of its socialist system in power has demanded a constant dialectic of its ideology between practice and theory. This dynamics of tension ranges from its institutional relations to its interpersonal relations, permanently traversed by the aggressions of the capitalist environment and the difficulties of its own economic dependence on other socialist countries until 1990. Within this framework, a paradox of epistemic location was built, in which Cuba was situated simultaneously 'inside-outside' the dynamics of the modern-colonial world system. This aporia, transferred to the scope of the relations between daily life and artistic-intellectual production, is similar to the authority conflict that the epistemological guerrillas of the 60s and 70s faced in the rest of Latin America when they proclaimed themselves spokespersons of the people’s essential needs. In addition, Cuba adds its epistemic conflict to its geographical positioning by materializing its status as an 'isolated' project of the political-economic dynamics that dominate the rest of the continent.

The third case included in the corpus is Mexico, due to the variety of responses from its different social sectors to the impositions of an insertion model in globalization governed by financial capital and embodied in 1994 in the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) signed with the United States and Canada, which brought with it many social consequences. In the following decade (1995-2005) it was possible to identify the development of three groups of social movements that act paradoxically and counterproductively in Mexico: an indigenous movement that fights for the equality of its rights and integration within Mexican society (a group that, while attempting such goal, is subdivided and self-excluded); a movement of illegal emigration to the United States that, in search of a better quality of life, ironically risks it when trying to cross the border; and a civic movement that fights against the fraudulent State, but whose program depends on the willingness to change the attitude of those who hold power thanks to fraud and institutional abuse. Mexico’s social fragmentation is evident and, in my opinion, comes down to two fundamental causes. The first is the establishment of an individualistic and competitive system driven by the oligopolistic power and the imposed economic model itself. The second, on the other hand, is endogenous and enigmatic: although Mexican society tries to group itself in terms of community, identity, class, political or unionistic social orders, it has never
been able to reach unity. Its understanding demands accepting that
Mexico’s history is that of the tradition of betrayal (from Malinche to
Obregón) and that, for this reason, more than any other Latin American
country, its subjectivity has introjected and perpetuated the archetype of
biblical fratricide. The struggle of Cain and Abel is Mexico’s constant
internal struggle for power, which oscillates between a patriotic attitude
and a malinchista one; between the independence and reform movements
of the nineteenth century and the revolutionary one of the 20th century
versus the fraudulent administrations that handed over the national
patrimony to the imperialist power of the day (like the current NAFTA).
The betrayal, then, was not eradicated and so requires a deep incision, one
that crosses all the sedimented layers, to make it visible.

As we have seen briefly regarding the three countries chosen, social
fragmentation is not the exclusive result of the imposition of the neoliberal
market system but also a consequence of the crises of its own
Foundational Narratives that allowed it to enter. Therefore, I understand
that any impulse to de-legitimize the dominant economic system must
consider a rhetoric that unveils, confronts and simultaneously corrects that
underlying utopian ambition in conflict. This explains my interest in
investigating manifestations that, while retaining the impulse to
delegitimize the dominant system, do so outside of a dialectical rhetoric;
that is, towards the outer edges of discourse, understood as the language of
logic that expresses a tendency towards historical totality. In my opinion,
it is about considering the possibility of a project of epistemic
emancipation in which re-narrations are vehicles of de-totalization.

A proposal of this kind involves an enunciative shift from the
traditional Latin American geopolitical ethical position to multiple body-
political expressions in which the crisis of that project is inscribed in the
concrete life of its survivors and descendants. The shift from discourse to
re-narration is the symbolic manifestation of what happens at the public
face when social movements decide to act outside state bureaucracy. From
this point of view, this study highlights the performative role played by the
production-reception of non-commercial cinema in this dynamic, as an
expression of interculturality and as an instance produced from epistemic
independence.

Argentina, Cuba and Mexico present, according to my cultural analysis
of their respective film products of recent years, responses disjointed from
the neoliberal advancement, despite having supposedly shared the same
continental utopian imagination. Although these are countries colonized
by the same imperial force, and which rose as emancipated nations under
the bourgeois-Creole impulse, their utopian excuses are different. That is,
in short, what facilitates or hinders its inclusion in the neocolonial system, especially dominated by the United States and international corporate capitalism in the last century, while at the same time it determines, towards the turn of the millennium, its recovery or failure as a counter-hegemonic project capable of proposing a new form of self-sustained intracontinental relationship.
A POSSIBLE POIETIC MODEL

1. THE MYTH OF IMPOSSIBLE EXTERIORITY: THE EUROPEAN MONOLOGUE AS RHETORIC OF THE MODERN/COLONIAL WORLD SYSTEM AND THE PLACE OF UTOPIA

1.1. Modern epistemology and the analogical cosmogony

What would have happened if the person of the Renaissance had not understood The Revolution of the Celestial Spheres, by Nicolaus Copernicus, as the symbolic act by which Europe self-assigned the right to dominate nature, bodies and consciences? If, on the other hand, that person, contemplating the immensity that was presented to them, would have managed to define themselves with a little humility, how might the outcome have been different?

One might think that the basic rupture that this idea represented placing people as the center should have inspired another idea – that of a new humanity – without giving secularized continuation to the medieval hierarchies that justify human reign over beasts.

If the Copernican studies had served as a good example, we would have already assumed a concept of the relative, the inter-relational and the hierarchically disorganized back in 1543, just 50 years after the beginning of the conquest of America.

If the person of that time had understood themselves as an element in movement, part of the greater universal constellation, that abyss created by the sudden cosmic de-theologization would not have led to the deification of a central subject, who would later organize the world to their ‘image and likeness’.

The inclusion in – or the exclusion of – a map with two-dimensional cartographic categories and reading criteria prefixed by power and profit would not have been possible either. In fact, in such a scenario, how civilized would those pre-Columbian cultures that worshiped the sun have seemed! Probably there is no more rational custom than acting to preserve the order of cosmic existence. This is explained in the heliocentric model,
although, ironically, it is one of the most determining theories of the
historical supremacy of Western science and consciousness.

However, the passing of time does not take away the revolutionary
character of Copernicus' thought. No one can deny that the Earth revolves
around the sun but, more than five centuries ago, the moral dimension of
this empirical truth remains denied. A holistic reading that integrates
human life to the rhythms of the universe should reject any flat, unequal,
asymmetric and motionless explication. Because, if it is true that Europe
receives sunlight when America is shadowed, it is also true that, when the
Earth spins, always on time, everything is reversed.

This, however, has obviously not been the plot of the story.

In *The Order of Things* Michel Foucault reminds us that before the
Enlightenment, the thought that we understand today as ‘Western’ had a
lot in common with the operational model of those societies that
Eurocentrism categorized as ‘primitive’. The author says that in this
thought, which he calls an “analog system”, the divisions between the
imagined and the scientifically proven were fluid. An integral symbolic
system reinforced and maintained as a source of sociability meaning,
linked society with itself and with nature; one *épistémè*.

The French author calls *épistémè* the ways in which the basic
epistemological structures of a culture are organized in systems,
establishing codes that govern customs and knowledge (Foucault 1971,
11-13). Each *épistémè* is relative in both the historical object and its claim
for knowledge of the world and has an internal coherence that is
understandable within the given culture or the ethnic group that governs it.

According to Foucault, that analogue *épistémè* would have been buried
by modern *épistémè*, with its universal, scientific and individualistic
principles from which he tried to account for all experience and question
all differences.

According to Jürgen Habermas in *The Philosophical Discourse of
Modernity*, Modernity can be fully explained by reference to internal
factors of Europe; that is to say, attending the socio-political changes that
arose in the XVII century in the European north by means of the processes
of Reform, Enlightenment and the French Revolution, which were then
consolidated in the Industrial Revolution. Since then, Modernity is
characterized by the idea of History in terms of equality, freedom and
perpetual progress, which is built on the foundations of order and reason;
by the universalization of knowledge that places expert knowledge in
control of cultural competences and understanding of the social; and,
finally, by administrative mechanisms linked to the State that atomize the
identity and direction of the collective (Haberman 1987, 1-22).
However, we can consider whether this increasing rationalization of
the world-life did not lead to the separation of the individual from their
ties with the natural and sacred.

Already in our contemporary society, globalization – the supremacy of
the bourgeois economic power at the planetary level – legitimizes itself as
the naturalization and the affirmation of that modern *epistemè* in the
collective conscience, the reason why it is also the object of strong critical
expositions.

Habermas and other theorists who defend the modern project argue
that the problem is not in the ideals of Modernity, but in its
implementation. Specifically, a modern ideal denied by capitalist
economic logic has been to subordinate the economy to politics in terms of
participatory democracy, inclusive and committed to human rights (civil,
economic, social and cultural). Other authors, more critical of the
sociocultural consequences of the modern paradigm in terms of what it
considers ‘human’ and those same rights, argue that it is in its Eurocentric
and scientistic epistemology that the logical bases of this predominance of
economic rationality are found, from which it becomes impossible to think
about freedom, equality and fraternity (Adorno and Horkheimer 1947, 1-
32). For these thinkers Modernity created a crisis when it was affirmed
that it could only materialize in ‘modernization’, which implies a single
type of rationality, a single model of science and social development that
denies the libertarian ideals of modern reason and essentially, its critical
attitude. It is also the process of consolidation of the bourgeois monopoly
that structures the administrative systems of the State around forms of
specialized knowledge that exclude the popular politically, economically
and culturally. “Since then, the popular subject has been defined by what
he lacks in order to be modern … Thus, the popular is infantilized and
controlled” (Martín Barbero 1998, 15-16).

‘Outside of the West’, this process of differentiation is reproduced
through colonialism, reducing all cultures and societies of the world to a
manifestation of European history and culture. In this sense, as Enrique
Dussel understands it, Modernity becomes universal through the expulsion
of otherness from the realm of the possible (“Europe, modernity and
Eurocentrism”). Thus, the rational theory of the world can explain
everything when positivistic science is imposed as the logic that achieves
the synthesis and reconciliation of the fragmented. From that point on the
illusion of a unity of the modern world would be enshrined in the basis of
what I call the “myth of impossible exteriority”: nothing exists outside the
progress of modern civilization.
The question to ask is: What is the material need that organizes this epistemological structure? According to Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri in the Marxist perspective, capitalist expansion inevitably takes on the political form of imperialism because capital does not operate within the confines of a fixed territory and a given population, but always overflows its limits and incorporates new spaces. The authors confirm that this is the way in which the structural transformations imposed by imperialist politics tend to eliminate all possibility of being ‘outside’, both in the dominant and subordinated countries (Hardt and Negri 2000, 221-239). In this way we can structurally explain the conception of modern inclusiveness and the myth of “impossible exteriority” that I propose.

1.2. The modern/colonial world system

What are the discursive means used in the construction and reproduction of this hegemonic worldview?

When one observes the crisis of life expectancy and the historical difficulties that Latin American countries face in generating social and cultural development within the world economic system, one can think of the possibility that, perhaps, Latin America is perpetuating a system whose conditions are inorganic to it. In my opinion, we need a more comprehensive view, broader categories that overcome the ‘conjunctural’ analysis typically applied to ‘crises’, to interpret the historical processes inherent in our underdevelopment in the context of global relationships of dominance.

Between the 50s and 70s within the Latin American intellectuality of the Southern Cone there emerged the “Theory of Dependency” from the debate started by the Argentinean Raúl Prebisch (1999). His central idea invited us to think about the dependence of the Latin American countries in terms of a global system of structural inequalities of center and periphery. It states that underdevelopment is the product of the relations of subordination to which certain countries submitted (through the complicity of local political-economic elites). This theoretical angle proposed two fundamental ideas to counter the hegemonic epistemology of modernization. The first is to oppose the conception of development as a series of progressive phases covered by each autonomous country in relation to the potentialities and limitations of its national economy in the face of an international market as a space of opportunities. The second is to reject the sociological explications that suggest that underdevelopment is due to the persistence of traditional institutional and cultural realities
which are ‘outdated’ in relation to the model of modern society in which development is possible.

Following these ideas, in the 70s, Immanuel Wallerstein developed the concept of ‘Modern System-World’, whose categories we will use below for this inquiry (Wallerstein 1979).

In “Creation of the modern world system” Wallerstein proposes studying capitalism as a world system, taking into account three key displacements for the analysis of the social. First, the basic unit of social analysis is the **world-modern system** because societies were and are structures created and shaped by processes on a global scale. This supposes leaving aside the society-state as a unit of analysis. Second, he suggests we focus on “a particular world system, the one in which we live: the capitalist world-economy” (Wallerstein 1979, 289), and third, that we expand the temporal perspective of analysis.

The perspective of this author questions the characteristics that, according to capitalistic power, identify the beginning of Modernity because they omit its **sine qua non** condition: colonization. Wallerstein explains then that if we identify Modernity with the consolidation of capitalism as an economic system, the conquest of America served the expansion of the areas in which it is possible to apply this particular form of economy. If, on the other hand, we say that the driving force of the progress of Modernity has been the development of science and technology – as the apologetic discourse affirms – we omit that its progress has been the result of an exchange with other cultures, such as the Chinese and the Arab, whose knowledge of navigation technologies, for example, were fundamental in the expansion of capitalism via ‘discovery’. Therefore, Wallerstein emphasizes that colonization was the first moment in which an economic connection was established on a planetary scale, what he calls a “capitalist world-economy” (Wallerstein 1979, 289).

In this sense, Enrique Dussel’s perspective on Modernity becomes relevant because he maintains that it is not only the rational process that celebrates Eurocentrism as a paradigm of progress, but also the violent victimization of the Other. According to this author, Modernity, as a new ‘paradigm’ of daily life, of understanding history, science and religion, is presented as the “first modernity” at the end of the 15th century with the dominion over the Atlantic. But in turn that old stage acts as a condition of possibility for the “second modernity”: that of the Enlightenment (Dussel 2000, 47). Dussel says: “Before the Cartesian *cogito ego* was articulated (I think then I am), the *ego conquiro* was produced (I conquer then I am)” (Dussel 2000, 48).