Narrative Tendencies in Latin American Fiction Cinema (1998-2008)

Uses and Transgressions of the "Classical Model"

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Introduction

Despite the recent, significant increase in the body of academic work dealing with Latin American cinema, it is still difficult to find studies that offer insights into the *narrative* tendencies and practices of the region's fiction films. It is to this overlooked niche that my research originally set out to contribute.

This general intention was coupled with the premise -borrowed from the work of Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson (1985)- that the dominant Hollywood model of film narration has had the double effect of acting both as a transnational standard *and* a motivating factor for the creation of distinguishable, oppositional styles (379). This statement resonated with my own knowledge (both empirically *and* academically gathered) of Latin American film production and consumption practices, especially during the second half of the 20th century.

Those of us interested in the study of Latin American cinema have learned that important "alternative projects" in the region's film history have been modelled to counter (or at least distance themselves from) the ideological, aesthetic and industrial traits of Hollywood. I also knew -having experienced it firsthand as a Latin American- of the hegemonic presence of Hollywood in our media, as well as the increasing appropriation strategies of it by new generations; fostered in great measure by the emergence of new production technologies and the decline of oppositional, ideology-driven movements.

Hollywood, therefore, appeared to me at the time of this project's conception as being inextricably related to the contemporary history and development of Latin American cinema. It seemed valid enough then, to use it as a starting point, or frame of reference, from which to study recent Latin American fiction films

More specifically, I was interested in determining *if* and *how* a sample of features from Latin America were imitating, rejecting or re-adapting the conventions of the "classical model" of fiction film narration which the Hollywood industry has helped to popularize all over the world.

This main objective was underpinned by the views of authors such as García-Canclini (1995) and Martín-Barbero (1993), which led me to hypothesize that Hollywood's influence in our region's film production goes through the same process of creative filtering and mixture that characterizes so many aspects of Latin American reality.

In fact, this notion of narrative "hybridization" was first developed by Angel Rama, who built on the similar notion of "transculturation" as a visibly Latin American perspective that explicitly recognized the region's culture in general as being the product of permanent, ongoing transcultural dynamics; while implicitly acknowledging the creative agency involved in achieving original re-elaborations of cultural norms, behaviors, beliefs and objects (1982: 33-34).

The incorporation of cultural and post-colonial concepts made me aware of the implications of studying *Latin American* cinema from a *Hollywood-centric* perspective, urged me to refine my stance on the subject, and helped me to complement an initiative that, until then, was mostly concerned with film narratology.

The result is the following dissertation. Its main objective remains to study the narrative characteristics of a sample of Latin American fiction films, with emphasis on their particular relation to the classical model. This task, however, is now meant to go beyond the field of narrative analysis. Enriching my work with the views and opinions of the films' main authors (the writer/directors), I ultimately seek to gain knowledge of the ways in which filmmakers from the region react to narrative hegemony in their own work.

Chapter 1 establishes the conceptual framework for this enquiry. In it, I attempt to locate my project within the broader landscape of Film Studies; as well as introduce the basic notions of narrative theory at the root of my analysis. The chapter also explores the relationship between Latin American and Hollywood film, addressing the ongoing debate about "dominant" and "peripheral" cinemas. I conclude this part of the dissertation by providing a summary of the theoretical discussion surrounding the topic of "cultural hybridity", before going on to justify its particular appropriation in this study.

Chapter 2 outlines the methodology behind the project, explaining its alignment with the "Case Study"-research design, and presenting my own argument on how it may transcend (to a moderate extent) the specificity of its cases. The method of narrative analysis is also addressed in this chapter, with a breakdown of the main elements that I look for in the films' narrative texts in order to compare them with the different models of fiction film narration.

Chapter 3 is intended to complement the more theoretical content of the preceding parts by offering the reader a general overview of the regional and national contexts from which the films of the sample were selected. In it, I track the historical evolution of cinema in Latin America, with particular attention to the wave of "alternative" cinematic projects that emerged in the 1960s and 70s, and their legacy to current filmmaking practices in the region (and the world). A brief history of the national cinemas of Costa Rica and Colombia is also provided in this chapter, in an effort to accurately locate the chosen films within a definite stage of their country's filmic development.

Chapter 4 & Chapter 5 can be regarded as the *results* of the present research, as they include the individual narrative analyses of the films from Costa Rica and Colombia, respectively. Each of the reports is divided into three parts: a summary of the film's content, a description of its structure and the actual application of film narrative theory that allows me -in conjunction with the information gathered from

the interviews with their writer/directors- to interpret the film texts as evidences of imitation, rejection or re-elaboration of the classical model.

Finally, in *Chapter 6*, I try to synthesize the knowledge gained throughout the research to offer my conclusions about the processes of narrative hybridization and the contesting of narrative hegemony that can be extracted from my work. My closing remarks, however, are directed to point out the new research questions that emerge or remain unanswered by my initiative, and suggest possible avenues for future research projects interested in furthering this modest contribution to the study of narrative analysis in Latin America cinema.

1. Theoretical Considerations

1.1 Location within Film Studies

Allow me to start by defining the *attitude* of the present study. "Attitudes", explains Lars Mjøset (2008), are the practical philosophies towards social science that emerge and evolve by the scientist selectively choosing elements from a specific theoretical background, and applying this conceptual framework to the research he or she conducts on society.

Although Bordwell and Carroll (1996) do not explicitly use the term "attitude", they make a similar statement when referring to the "large-scale trends of thought" that have dominated the academic discipline of Film Studies since the 1970s: subject-position and culturalist theory. I shall now offer a brief summary of these general theoretical outlooks, before I move on to explain their connection to this work.

1.1.1 Traditions of "Grand Theory"

According to Bordwell, *subject-position theory* was based on the principles of structuralism and post-structuralism; essentially inquiring about the psychic and social functions of cinema. Film was held to be a *semiotic* system representing the world through conventional codes and addressing the spectator as a split subject, queuing a process of conscious and unconscious interaction (1996: 6-7). For many theorists that championed this approach, film (through its technology, narrative structure, enunciative processes, and particular representations) served as a tool for dominant ideologies and the construction and maintenance of their social order. Thus, from this perspective, "alternative" or "oppositional" filmmaking is viewed as an attempt to deconstruct the ideological underpinnings of dominant cinema, countering hegemonic efforts to consolidate stable and unitary notions of "self" and "society/culture", through the portrayal of alternative identifications (1996: 8).

The *culturalist* trend, on the other hand, marked a shift towards the study of the cultural dimensions of film. Perhaps the best known manifestation of this approach in social sciences was the emergence of "Cultural Studies", which views culture as a site of struggle and contestation between different groups with varying levels of power. Culture is therefore conceived as networks of institutions, representations and practices, all of which produce *differences* -be them of class, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, or others. (1996: 10)

In contrast to subject-position theory, the culturalist trend in Film Studies holds that people do not passively allow their subjectivity to be entirely shaped by the symbolic representations of film; but rather that they are *active* participants in the process. Furthermore, the main objects of study for culturalists are not the *texts* themselves, but the *uses* made of the texts by their audiences (Ibidem).

Even though culturalism emerged as a response to subject-position theory in Film Studies, Bordwell advices not to see the two trends as direct opposites. In fact, the author points out that there are "deep continuities of doctrine and practice" between the two schools (1996: 13). Perhaps the most significant common ground is that both subject-position theory and culturalism represent what Bordwell calls "Grand Theories", meaning "their discussions of cinema are framed within schemes that seek to describe or explain very broad features of society, language and psyche" (1996: 3).

In the same sense, each rests upon several substantive premises about the nature of society, history, mind and meaning that can be traced back to nineteenth-century intellectual traditions (1996: 26). Stressing their underlying similarities, Bordwell lists four approaches or "reasoning routines" that are common to the "Grand Theory" aspirations of both the culturalist and subject-position stances:

- *"Top-down inquiry"*

This refers to research that, rather than formulating a question, posing a problem, or trying to come to grips with an intriguing film, takes as its central task the proving of a particular theoretical position by adducing films as examples (1996: 19). Thus,

the selected theory/doctrine ("top") is projected "down" onto the films in a manner that *confirms* that which the theory states.

The main criticism made by Bordwell to this habit, is that it constitutes an "institutional routine" which demands that every argument be founded on previous, larger assumptions about the same matter. For the author, however, the researcher doesn't always need a "highly elaborated theory of ideology or culture in order to talk enlighteningly about a particular film or historical process" (1996: 21).

- *"Argument as Bricolage"*

Here the critique is directed to the tendency of many film studies to combine concepts from widely diverse intellectual traditions, often resulting in a incoherent patchwork of ideas, any of which may be altered or removed according to the researcher's needs. In Bordwell's words, "the risk of selectively borrowing *pieces* of theories is that the scholar may miss exactly those portions of one source that contradicts the assumptions of the others" (1996: 22).

- *"Associational Reasoning"*

According to the author, both subject-position theorists and culturalists tend to shy away from inductive, deductive, and abductive reasoning, relying instead on what he calls "unconstrained association" of ideas (1996: 23). This relates directly to the previous point, as the "juggling of terms, names, and reference encouraged by the "bricolage strategy" result -via associational reasoning- in a mixture of parallels, interpretative leaps and nifty but unsupported conclusions (1996: 25).

- *"The Hermeneutic Impulse"*

Intrinsically linked to "top-down inquiry", the "hermeneutic impulse" refers to the actual interpretation of films as concrete evidence of the given theory -or amalgam of theories- which has been applied onto it. The objection in this case is that, according to Carroll, scholars believe they are producing theory, when in fact they are "merely contriving interpretations of individual films, albeit in arcane, "theoretically" derived jargon" (1996: 42).

Furthermore, Bordwell believes that interpretation of films by scholars follows a set of reasoning routines which do not depend on any abstract theory. Thus, even when practitioners believe that their readings are somehow *supporting* the selected theory, their interpretations often simply serve as "allegories or figurations from the theory from which they issue" (1996: 26).

1.1.2 Points of Convergence

The shades of Grand Theory traditions are hard to deny in this research. As I shall detail in the following pages of this chapter, both the "subject-position" (in the form of *narratology*) and "culturalist" trends (in the form of *cultural* and *post-colonial studies*) have a considerable influence in this study's conceptual framework:

By regarding films as "texts" open to semantic and syntactic levels of analysis (one of structuralism's main contributions to our discipline), the narrative study of film performs the basic activity of the social-philosophical attitude: the systematic reading of texts in order to extract specific knowledge that, in turn, may be used to shed light on the essence and workings of a broader category (in this case, film narrative as a whole). Furthermore, these interpretations -regardless of the model in which they are grounded- are examples of the "critical re-constructions of earlier classics" that characterize Grand Theory and the socio-philosophical attitude. Indeed, this very chapter is in itself evidence of those re-invocations of theoretical canons that we as a researchers must acknowledge as the "roots" or "foundations" of our own work.

Likewise, by arguing that the creation of fiction film narrative in Latin American cinema is a site of creative "struggle" and "hybridization" between a dominant "foreign" model and autochthonous sources, the study has *also* landed within the sphere of theoretical influence of the culturalist trend and its aforementioned disciplines of cultural and post-colonial studies. As explained earlier, here the attention doesn't rest on texts *per se*, but on the particular *uses* made of them by a contesting group. Still, those uses represent "cultural manifestations" that, just as

texts, one can attempt to understand or explain through an existent body of related theory.

Having outlined these common points between my research and the two main traditions of Grand Theory within contemporary Film Studies, I would now like to direct my attention to the key aspect by which this study seeks to *distinguish* itself from them, and the alternative attitude to which it explicitly aims.

1.1.3 Points of Divergence

What makes "Grand Theories" "grand", explains Bordwell, is *not* that their application in the present is firmly anchored in dominant academic traditions from the past, but rather the nature of their ulterior objective: the ideal of contributing to a great conceptual framework that defines the essential components of their science, and can thus be applied to study and understand every and any social phenomenon within that realm.

In Film Studies, this kind of "grand theorizing" is often visible. Early analyses of narrative, like those of Greimas and Levi-Strauss, sought to "disclose a generative matrix of narratives, the elementary articulations of the story form, which would in turn provide a model for a universal narrative grammar." (Stam et al., 1992: 19). More contemporary narratology can also be related -although perhaps less explicitly- to this desire to account for and understand the basic elements and operations within all narrative texts.

This type of approach (or as Mjøset would call it, *attitude*) towards both object *and* field of study can lead to totalizing notions and high claims of knowledge which I would like to avoid. I have not set out to discover any essential "truths" about something as broad and diverse as Latin American fiction film narrative. Neither do I expect my modest findings and observations to engross a broad theoretical framework that may offer a "stable" understanding of contemporary film narrative in Latin American cinema. This homogenizing and axiomatic tendency is not compatible with

an analysis that acknowledges the dynamism and heterogeneity of film practice in the region, and which is more interested in delving into what makes these ten films' narrative *unique*, rather than standard.

Likewise, I have tried to distance myself as much as possible from the reasoning pitfalls outlined in point (1.1.1). Although it is obvious that I am applying certain theoretical frameworks in my analyses, this is no way an attempt to prove or validate them. Simply, they are used as tools that help me achieve a better understanding of the films and answer the key question of my research:

How is the classical model of fiction film narration being appropriated or rejected in contemporary films from Latin America?

Rejecting "top-down inquiry" and the "hermeneutic impulse", films are not presented as supporting evidence for a given theory, but as cases worthy of being studied *in themselves*, for the sake of offering insights into a dimension of our region's cinema that has been traditionally overlooked.

As for the two remaining points, they prove much trickier to avoid. Being this a research dealing with both narratological and cultural aspects of cinema, it is inevitable to include different theories from both fields, in effect creating a theoretical "patchwork". However, I have tried to minimize "*Argumental* bricolage" by carefully selecting the different theories that make up this framework, looking for compatibility between the sources.

Naturally, conceptual differences and counter-points will always surface, even within the same subject. When this happens, I have tried to *address* the debate instead of concealing it (section 1.5. would be a good example of this). If anything, I believe it provides a more comprehensive picture of the topic at hand. As a final measure against ambiguity, I explicitly state what I understand and adopt as the working concepts for this research. Through the approaches mentioned above, I trust I am able to produce knowledge from an uncommitted application of theory, rather than from the arbitrary association of ideas and concepts.

1.1.4 Middle Level Research: The Third Option

I believe my approach to be consistent -at least in its *intention*- to what Bordwell calls "middle level research": a third, more discreet trend "which tackles more localized film-based problems without making such overarching theoretical commitments" (1996: 3). This type of studies strives to achieve in-depth knowledge of specific phenomena, and propose theor*ies* (as opposed to an all-comprehensive, all-applicable *Theory*) that attempt to answer more manageable, small-scale questions of both empirical *and* theoretical import (1996: 27,58).

> Middle-level research programs have shown that an argument can be at once conceptually powerful and based in evidence without appeal to theoretical bricolage or association of ideas. Moreover, these programs have demonstrated you can a lot without films besides interpreting them. In particular, we do not need to understand a film by projecting onto it the semantic fields "privileged" by this or that theory. Most important, the middle-level research programs have shown that *you do not need a Big Theory of Everything to do enlightening work in a field of study.* (1996: 29) -Italics are the author's-

Middle-level research and its corresponding "piece-meal theorizing" (Carroll, 1996) are examples of what Mjøset calls the *contextualist* attitude. Here, "theory" is not regarded as an axiomatic model, but as the contextual explanations of earlier, similar cases, which can then be used in the explanation of new ones. Thus, the insights obtained through research are not intended to be projected onto the broad landscape of Social Science in general, but rather compiled in "local research frontiers": particular areas of study within which similar situations of interest are inscribed (2008: 39). It is in these cumulative and well defined areas of knowledge that different explanations can face each other in the generation of new theories. Indeed, Carroll believes that it is this dialectical, pragmatic approach which should be at the core of film theorizing:

> Theories are framed in specific historical contexts of research for the purpose of answering certain questions, and the relative strengths of theories are assayed by comparing the answer they afford to the answers proposed by alternative theories. These conceptions of theory evaluation is pragmatic because: (1) it compares actual, existing rival answers to the question at hand (rather than every logical conceivable answer); and (2) because it focuses on solutions to contextually motivated theoretical problems (rather than searching for answers to any conceivable question one might have about cinema).
> (1996: 56)

Having already described the main similarities and differences of this research with the "culturalist" and "subject-position" trends in Film Studies, I would like to end this section by stating once again my rejection to their aspirations of "Grand Theory". The *specific* knowledge that I gather through my analysis of the study's sample is not intended to prove or disprove any *general* body of theory about the essence and workings of fiction film narrative, or about cinema in Latin America. Instead, and in step with the objectives of middle-level research and the contextualist attitude, I try to come up with descriptive and contextually-grounded answers to my specific research question.

It would seem that whatever knowledge I am able to produce about fiction film narrative in Latin American cinema is strictly limited to my ten cases of study and cannot be extrapolated any further. I shall comment on this issue in the next chapter, where I will explain my research design and address the issue of *generalization* (see point (2.2.3). Nevertheless, as a middle-level research, I have not set my aim towards *scope*, but *depth*. Hopefully, by providing a detailed understanding of these particular cultural/filmic phenomena, I will contribute to a much neglected "area of knowledge" where -despite their specificity- my answers can be of use to future researchers dealing with similar cases or questions.

1.2 The Narrative Analysis of Film

Although this could be viewed as one of the "re-elaborations of previous theoretical classics" that characterize the socio-philosophical attitude described earlier, I will use this section to go over the basic concepts and precedents of film narrative analysis on which this study is founded. Especially relevant is point (1.2.4.), where I elaborate on the notion of film as a semiotic construct, and outline the main "layers" on which I focus my analysis.

1.2.1 The Film Text

Film narratology is the study of narrative within the film text. This deceivably "simple" definition, however, contains notions that have been the subject of study and debate for generations of scholars. The idea of "*film as text*", for one, is indebted to the tradition of semiotic structuralism, which I will address later. In short, it allows us to study cultural representations -such as films- as semantic constructions; webs of signs organized into finite discourses intended to achieve communication.

Analyses of this kind depart from the texts themselves, examining their structure and content as closely and systematically as possible; often answering their specific research questions through an adaptation of concepts, models and procedures that were first developed within the fields of linguistics, semiotics and literary studies (Larsen, 2002: 117).

The notion of "*film text*" is equally complex. The term seems to imply the acceptance of a film as a single text, when perhaps it is more accurate to think of a film as made up from a multitude of them. As Robert Kolker points out, any event that produces meaning can be considered "a text" if we are able to define its boundaries, internal structure and our responses to it, since a text can only be considered as such when it has fulfilled its communication objective by being perceived by someone (1998: 12).

Following this logic, a single film that has gone through the process of production, distribution, exhibition and viewing, comprises several elements that may well be considered "texts" in their own right. The options are endless: Every single frame of the physical photographic support of a film can be considered and analyzed as a text; as so can the particular economic and social circumstances that influenced its production, or the audience's perceptions of the product.

As Kolker notes, this plurality is unified by certain established ways in which a film is shot and pieced together. Thus, by examining the internal structure of the film narrative, we can discover a great deal about what films expect of us and we of them (Ibid: 15). Likewise, by regarding the cultural, political and economical elements that surround the film as texts themselves, we are able to further our understanding of how and why those "established ways" are perpetuated or contested.

The importance of looking into this latter *social* level of textuality -as opposed to focusing solely on the traits and dynamics of the narrative text (see 1.2.2. below)- is that we gain insight as to why the "classical Hollywood model" continues to be the main referent of our region's film practice, be it as a pattern to emulate or transgress. In doing so, we also challenge commonly accepted notions of what fiction film narration "is" or "should be", and broaden our perception of our local, "peripheral" cinemas as sites of dynamic, complex mediations between (apparently) foreign influences and tradition, expectations and reality, awareness and intuition.

Back to the topic at hand, film textuality is now acknowledged as a "plural, complex, simultaneously static and changing event, produced by the filmmakers who put it together and the audience members who view it" (Kolker, 1998: 15). This multitude of analyzable "texts within a text" can be related to Metz's notion of a film's "*textual system*": a dynamic act of production rather than a stable product of meaning or, as the author further describes it:

> ...(a) perpetual possibility of a finer, or else less apparent structuration, of a grouping of the elements into a new configuration, of the registration of a new significatory pressure which does not annul the preceding ones (as in the unconscious, where everything is accumulated), but complements or in another cases distorts and complicates them, (...) this pressure, this 'activity', comes into play not only inside a textual system but for any one film between each and the next one to be discovered; or, if its thought that there is only one such system in all, then the analyst will never complete his exploration of it and should not seek any 'end'. (1982: 29)

Despite this range, there are certain levels of a film's textuality that can act as "meeting grounds" with many of the rest. Such is the case of the film's *narrative*, which I will now move on to discuss.

1.2.2 The Narrative Text

Narrative, as Peter Larsen reminds us, has a double essence. It acts as a fundamental, cognitive frame that allows human beings to organize their experiences and make their world intelligible; but it is also a specific type of textuality that occurs across all kinds of media and in a variety of discursive forms (2002: 123).

As to what narrative *is*, luckily there is no shortage of explanations. Such theoretical richness is the product of the interests of different authors in different aspects of an already multi-faceted subject. Stam, Burgoyne and Flitterman-Lewis offer a definition that, they believe, synthesizes the work of various theorists on this topic:

> Narrative can be understood as the recounting of two or more events (or a situation and an event) that are logically connected, occur over time, and are linked by a consistent subject into a whole. (1992: 69)

For Edward Branigan, narrative is a way of experiencing a group of sentences, pictures, or any other symbols which together attribute an implicit beginning, middle and end to something. Thus, it is in essence a global interpretation of changing data measured through sets of relationships governed by causality and transformation (1992: 4).

Whatever the definition one chooses to accept, the "narrative nature" of fiction films is hardly worth arguing. More importantly is the definition of what constitutes the "narrative text" within a film, for it is *that* dimension of "narrative as text" that this study hones in on. For Mieke Bal, the concept can be understood through the following set of interconnected notions:

- The *actors* of a narrative are those agents that *perform actions*.
- To *act* is to *cause or experience an event*.
- An *event* is a *transition of one state to another*.
- A *fabula* is a series of *related events experienced or caused by actors*.
- A story (understood here as "*plot*") is a fabula presented in a certain manner.

Thus, a "narrative text" is that by which an external agent relates a story (as the combination of elements outlined above) in a particular medium, such as language, imagery, sound, or a combination thereof (1997: 5).

This definition touches mainly upon the *content* of the narrative text: a series of events that occur in specific places and during a specific time span; which are linked by causality (as opposed to casualty) and viewed in relation to human projects which they either further or impede (Larsen, 2002: 125). It does, however, also refer to its *form*, as the specific "manner" and "medium" through which the content is expressed.

1.2.3 The "What" and the "How"

This differentiation between the content and the expression of narrative is inherited from the structuralist movement that came to prominence in the 1960s. This approach was modeled after key Saussurean dichotomies (like the distinctions between *langue* and *parole*, the *signifier* and the *signified*, or the *syntagmatic* and the *paradigmatic*); the linguist's view of language as a "structural whole" which generates its own units and their mutual interrelations; and his emphasis on the underlying rules and conventions of language rather than on the surface configurations of speech exchange. (Stam et al; 1992: 18)

Thus, structuralism was founded as a theoretical grid through which *behavior*, *institutions* and *texts* are seen as analyzable in terms of an underlying network of relationships; the crucial point being that the elements that constitute the network gain their meaning from the relations that hold between each other (Ibidem). Back to the topic at hand, Chatman reminds us of how structuralism proceeds when analyzing narratives:

> Structuralist theory argues that each narrative has two parts: a story (histoire), the content or chain of events (actions, happenings), plus what may be called the existents (characters, items of settings); and a discourse (discours), that is, the expression, the means by which the content is communicated. In simple terms, the story is the what in a narrative that is depicted, discourse the how. (1978: 19)

Pre-dating the structuralists by almost 50 years, the Russian formalists also theorized about this dichotomy. For them, a narrative was comprised of "*fabula*" and "*syuzhet*". The notion of "fabula" relates more closely to the description of narrative content that has been presented so far. In the words of Boris Tomashevsky, the fabula -or "story"[1]- is the aggregate of mutually related events that are reported in the work. These events may always be told in their original causal and chronological order. However, the syuzhet -or "plot"- is the actual arrangement of the events of the fabula in the work, and may or may not follow such order (Lemon & Reis, 1965: 66-7).

From a formalist standpoint, the fabula does not exist *per se*. Rather than being materially present on the film's images or soundtrack, it is an *imaginary construct* that we, as viewers, re-assemble through assumptions, inferences and personal interpretations made as we perceive the film through the plot. In Saussurean terms, we can say that the syuzhet is the "signifier" of the filmic sign, that which is explicitly presented to us through images and sounds; while the fabula corresponds to the "signified", the meaning which the perceiver attaches to that sign.

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[1] Once again (and in order to avoid confusions ahead) it must be noted that, unlike the formalists, Bal does not use the term "story" as a synonym of "fabula", but to refer to the notion of "plot/discourse/expression/syuzhet".

Thus, narrative is not held as a hermetic and stabilized text containing the "ingredients" that have already been mentioned (time, space, chain of events linked by causality, etc); but rather as an *activity*: a dialogical process between the narrative text and its perceiver, in which the perception of the fabula is regulated by its specific presentation in the plot.

N.J. Lowe comes to enrich this discussion conceptually -even if he does make it more confusing terminologically- by introducing a completely different definition of "plot". For this author, "plot" is much more than the actual presentation of the fabula, it is a *property* of the text that engages the reader/spectator in a *narrative game*[2]:

> Plot, then, is something texts do inside our heads in the action of reading. (…) It is a rearguard action fought by texts against the power of the reader and their own openness and indeterminacy –an attempt to seize control of the cognitive activity of reading, by playing directly to the mental structures we use for our construction of experience. And it is a property specific to fictional texts because its operation depends essentially on coding a constructed universe (a fictional world) in linear form (a text). (2000: 33-4)

What Lowe's notion of "plot" generates is what Bordwell calls the "viewer's activity" in the fiction film. As mentioned earlier, the spectator interprets the available information provided by the syuzhet and the film's "style" (see 1.2.4.) to reconstruct a coherent fabula using organized clusters of knowledge called "schemata", which guide our hypothesis-formulation (1985: 31). Along these same lines, Branigan proposes his own definition of film narrative:

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[2] Lowe's actual definition of "plot" being: "the affective predetermination of a reader's dynamic modelling of a story, through its encoding in the structure of a gamelike narrative universe and the communication of that structure through the linear datastream of a text." (2000: 33)

> Film narrative is a way of understanding data under the illusion of occurrence; that is, a way of perceiving by a spectator which organizes data as if it were witnessed unfolding in a temporal, spatial and causal frame. In understanding a film narrative, a spectator employs top-down and bottom-up cognitive processes to transform data on the screen into a diegesis -a world- that contains a particular story, or sequence of events. "Story" data takes two forms: declarative knowledge ("what" happens) and procedural knowledge ("how" it is witnessed and known). (1992: 115-6)

The crucial point to be made, then, is that the narrative text is not limited to the story and the plot, but requires an active viewer applying cognitive schemes to decode them. I shall come back to the relationship between fabula, syuzhet and the viewer's activity later on in this chapter, when I will refer to the role of "schemata" in the perception of the "classical format". (see 1.3.4.)

So far, I have essayed a preliminary approach to this work's key object of study: the narrative text in film. Through the presented theory, I have attempted to provide a general picture of what narrative is and what it consists of, in order to clarify which of its components I will be paying attention to in my analyses.

In the broadest of terms, I could say that these are the *content* of the narrative (understood here as the "story", or the chain of events taking place in time and space, linked by causality and played out by particular characters with distinct motivations) and the *expression* of the narrative (the specific way in which the content is expressed in the film form). What I propose now is to further refine this distinction through the optic of semiotic structuralism which -as I mentioned earlier- provides an important theoretical foundation for this study.

1.2.4 The Semiotic Structure of Narrative

As Seymour Chatman argues in his book "Story and Discourse", the "simple distinction between expression and content is insufficient to capture all elements of the communicative situation" (1978: 22). For this reason, he subdivides these initial

categories by distinguishing between their *substance* and *form*. Chatman poses that if narrative is indeed a "semiotic structure"[3], it would be possible to understand it in terms of a *form and substance of expression*, and a *form and substance of content*. Applying this classification, the author comes up with the following diagram (1978: 24):

Figure 1.

	Expression	**Content**
Substance	Media insofar as they can communicate stories. (Some media are semiotic systems in their own right.)	Representations of objects & actions in real & imagined worlds that can be imitated in a narrative medium, as filtered through the codes of the author's society.
Form	Narrative discourse (the structure of narrative transmission) consisting of elements shared by narratives in any medium whatsoever.	Narrative story components: events, existents, and their connections.

The last row of Figure 1 shows what has been explored so far. The "form of expression" in a narrative is its *discourse* (or *plot*/*syuzhe*t): the actual arrangement and representation of what lies in the plane of content. And what lies in that dimension or "form of content" is the *story* (or *fabula*): the totality of events, actions, characters, time and space frames that can be selected, arranged and represented in the discourse.

The previous row complements this distinction. The "substance of expression" is the material nature of the elements of the discourse. In language, explains Chatman, this would be the actual sounds made by voices as they speak, or the marks on paper that form words.

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[3] The author conditions the "semiotic nature" of narrative to being independently meaningful, that is, able to convey meaning in and of itself, separately from the story it tells (1978: 22). On the other hand, narrative is regarded as a "structure" inasmuch it fulfills the requirements of "wholeness, transformation and self-regulation". A narrative is a "whole" –he explains- because it is constituted by elements that differ from what they constitute, and are logically connected to manifest a discernible and unitary organization. "Transformation" relates to the process in which a narrative event is taken from its abstract level of existence (i.e. the *fabula*) and transformed into a explicit representation. And finally, "self-regulation" refers to the way in which a narrative "maintains and closes itself" to any other element that does not belong to it or comply with its laws (1978: 21).

In film, this classification relates closely to Bordwell's definition of "style" as the system of cinematic devices and techniques (misè-en-scene, photography, frame composition, sound, montage, etc) that permits the syuzhet (plot) to be told through the medium of film[4].

Finally, we have the "substance of content", described by the author as the "whole universe, or, better, the set of possible objects, events, abstractions and so on that can be "imitated" by an author" (1978: 24). Such notion can be tracked as far back as to the *Poetics*, where the different genres of the day (tragedy, epic poetry, comedy etc) were all seen by Aristotle as being "modes of imitation" of the real world, although of different objects within it, and through different means and manners (Bywater trans; 1954: 3).

To recapitulate: the "substance of content" is the entire, infinite wealth of material from the "real world" -as well as any imaginary one- from which an author selects the elements that will constitute the fabula ("form of content"). This chosen material is in turn arranged and expressed through the plot ("form of expression"), which adjusts and works jointly with the codes of the specific media selected to tell the story ("substance of expression"). This semiotic breakdown of the narrative text can be visualized more clearly with the help of Chatman's following diagram (1978: 26):

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[4] Nonetheless, Bordwell warns us about regarding style solely as the technical vehicle for the dramaturgy of the syuzhet. Although they commonly operate jointly to provide information to the viewer in order to construct the fabula, it is also possible that stylistic choices digress from the purpose of the syuzhet and induce narration themselves. Bordwell vindicates the role of style in narration by including it in his own definition of "narration" as "the process whereby the film's syuzhet and style interact in the course of cueing and channelling the spectator's construction of the fabula (…) It would of course be possible to treat narration solely as a matter of syuzhet/fabula relations, but this would leave out the ways in which the film's texture affects the spectator's activity." (1985: 53)

Figure 2.
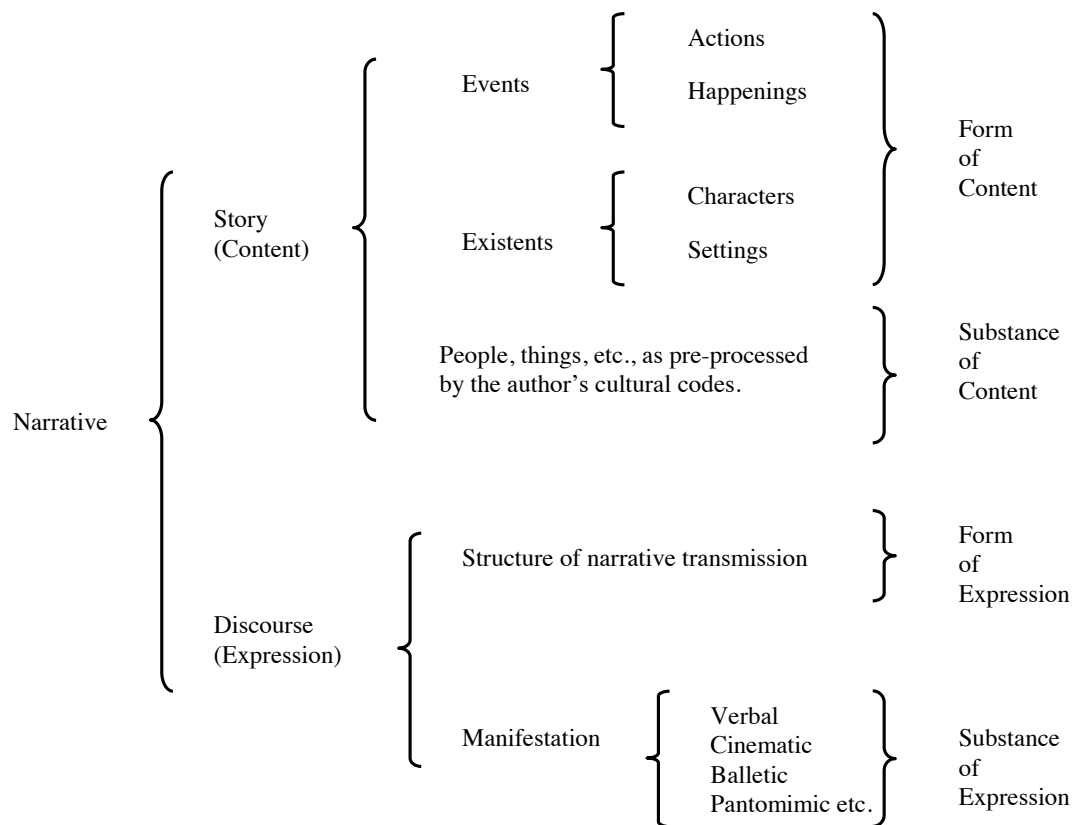
The model outlined above is useful to this research in the sense that it provides a clear view of the main constitutive planes of the object of study as a "semiotic structure". In turn, it allows me to identify and narrow in on the aspects that most interest this research. For instance, I can now state that this study is concerned with three of the four main planes of the narrative text, analyzing the elements of their fabulas (form of content) the characteristics of their plot (form of expression), and the principal sources of inspiration behind both, according to the opinions of the film's writer/director as its "main author".

I believe this latter knowledge can be included within the category of "substance of content". If we go back to Chatman's definition of this last concept, we see that it is an extremely broad one, encompassing all possible real and fictional materials (objects, events, personality traits, locations, etc) that can be "imitated" by an author

to form his/her particular narrative. Furthermore, in Figure 2, Chatman refers to these materials as being "pre-processed by the author's cultural codes".

From this perspective, it is possible to argue that the explicit and/or implicit conventions of the dominant model of fiction film narration are part of that "universe" of materials and influences from which Latin American filmmakers can draw upon to create their stories. Similarly, we might be able to place the phenomenon of cultural hybridization (or, "*mestizaje*") among the "cultural codes" through which the author filters such influences. These, of course, are not statements, but hypotheses that needed to be confirmed or disproved on a case-by-case basis by the directors themselves.

The clarity with which Chatman's model outlines the main "semiotic layers" of the object of study, makes it a suitable theoretical reference from which to pose and explore these questions. Nevertheless, in the next chapter I will further narrow my focus and list the *specific* elements within these broad categories that I'll be looking into when conducting my analyses. (See section 2.3.)

1.3 The Classical Model of Narration

The "classical" model of narration is perhaps *the* most important -yet problematic- concept to define for this research. It is crucial to understand what is meant by it, since it acts as the narrative frame of reference against which the analyses of the sample are contrasted. However, as we will see in the following pages, its nature and definition continue to be as elusive as they are debatable, even after the centuries gone by since its original formulation by Aristotle.

In this section I attempt to provide the reader with concrete descriptions, proposed by well-established theorists, of what classical narration in the fiction film mainly consists of. The objective is not to reach a "final" definition, but to obtain a clearer picture of this contentious, abstract notion through alternate points of view. Later, in

point (1.3.2), I will direct my attention to the particular relationship between the classical model and "Hollywood".

1.3.1 What is "Classic"?

That appears to be the first question one should try to answer when dealing with the concept of "classical narration". In his book "Classical Plot and the Invention of Western Narrative", N.J. Lowe offers the following definition:

> I use the word classical in its regular ahistorical sense to mean a way of doing things that, while not mandatory, is sufficiently paradigmatic for it to be either consciously accepted or deliberately rejected; a way, moreover, enshrined in certain canonical exemplars at the source and centre of the genre or tradition; and which, while perhaps obsolete in practice, is still perceived as a mainstream, orthodox, accepted way to proceed. (2000:61)

Thus, when speaking about narrative -and more specifically, narrative *in the contemporary Western world*- the answer to what "classical" is must be traced back to the instances deemed as its "originating sources". Although Aristotle's *Poetics* is widely recognized as the primordial theorization of classical narrative, Lowe reminds us that the ideas which the philosopher elaborated in that work "were around long before" him, present in the actual *practice* of Hellenistic narrative literature (2000: 61-2).

The cornerstone of what we today consider "classical", is what Aristotle considered "the *proper* construction of the Fable or Plot" (Bywater trans. 1954: 23), based on his analysis of the corpus of Greek literature then available to him. Lowe summarizes what Aristotle elaborated in *Poetics* 7-14 as the three main principles that should govern an "ideal narrative":

- *Economy*

The term "economy" relates to the tendency to "minimize redundancy" or, in other words, to make as much of the contents of the narrative "count", or play a significant role in the progression of the story. This concept is connected to the notion of narrative as a "whole": a self-contained and hermetic unit, bound together internally

by links of probable and necessary consequence ("causality"). Economy warrants "wholeness" inasmuch all of the information from the story world presented in the plot is indispensable to achieve its unity and closure (2000: 62-5).

- *Amplitude*

"Amplitude" has to do with the *scale* of a narrative which, according to Aristotle, should be as broad (meaning *as packed with actions*) as possible without loosing its intelligibility as a whole. Tying the previous concepts together, then, "a classical plot is (…) more satisfying if it can sustain the principles of narrative economy on the largest scale available –in effect, to build the most capacious narrative universe permitted by the form" (2000: 68).

For Lowe, the range of classical techniques evolved to meet this challenge can be classified in three categories: *Variety*, which entails the subdivision of the plot into episodes with their own internal closure; *sense of direction*, which refers to the instilled awareness in the reader of the guiding unity and ultimate destination of the narrative; and *pacing*, having to do with the author's postponement of the all-important "grand finale" while at the same time keeping the reader's interest by playing on his anticipations [5] (2000: 68-73).

- *Transparency*

The concept of "transparency" refers to the "duty" of the classical narration to conceal all traces of its own existence; that is, to erase all of the artifices of storytelling and become a temporary "real world", closed to all worlds outside it. This naturalistic illusion has become the norm of modern narrative, although it is widely (and purposely) breached in "naïve, subclassical storytelling and in self-reflexive and postmodern modes" (2000: 74).

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[5] The author mentions three "essential qualities required of classical pacing". They are "escalation" (the increasing affective intensity of the plot), "target releases of narrative energy" (a sudden "twist" in the plot that changes the direction of the events), and "suspense" (the purpose of which is "to focus the reader's attention on certain *blanks* in the emerging picture, and then to retard the release of those pieces until the latest possible stage in the narrative" (2000: 71-2).)

Although the information conveyed above addresses only the origins and basic requisites of "classical narrative" as formulated by Aristotle, the following points will show just how much these principles hold when transferring the concept to the domain of fiction film. Next, I will introduce the concept of "Hollywood" and talk about how this industry systematized the "canonic format" into what we now refer to as the "classical model" of fiction film narration.

1.3.2 From the "Canonic Format" to the "Classical Model"

The "canonical story" has become a "narrative prototype" which manifests itself across different types of media and contents in our Western (and Western-ized) cultures. At its most basic level, it can be understood through the definition of narrative itself which has been presented so far: a textual representation of a series of logically connected events occurring in time and space, unified by a coherent subject and revolving around human goals. For Tzvetan Todorov, this elemental story can be further explained as the *causal transformation* of a situation through five stages:

(1) a state of equilibrium at the outset;
(2) a disruption of the equilibrium by some action;
(3) a recognition that there has been a disruption;
(4) an attempt to repair the disruption;
(5) a reinstatement of the initial equilibrium. (in Branigan, 1992: 4)

This view is shared by David Bordwell who points out that, at the level of the fabula, canonical narration is characterized by a reliance on character-centered causality and goal-oriented action; while its syuzhet follows a pattern of establishing an initial stage of affairs which gets violated and must then be set right (1985: 157). According to this author, there is one mode of fiction film narration that conforms to

the principles of this "canonic format" above any of the rest. He dubs it the "classical mode", of which Hollywood[6] is the prime and most influential example.

Hollywood film production is considered "classical", as it has traditionally relied on notions of "decorum, proportion, formal harmony, respect for tradition, mimesis, self effacing craftsmanship, and cool control of the perceiver's response -canons which critics in any medium usually call 'classical'" (Bordwell et al; 1985: 4). Indeed, already we can see several parallels between the authors' description of Hollywood cinema and the classical narrative principles sketched in the previous point.

As the author points out, a classical system or "model" of fiction film narration is thus formed when these preferences are translated into a set of norms that will both characterize and set limits upon individual creations at a technical, stylistic and narrative level. This model of *film practice* in turn sustains and is sustained by a corresponding model of *film production*: "a characteristic ensemble of economic aims, a specific division of labor, and particular ways of conceiving and executing the work of filmmaking" (Ibidem; 1985: xv).

In other words, we must understand that the application of this specific model of film narration was not a "purely creative project", but that it developed through time to fulfil and perpetuate the economic interests of the studio system of *production*. Based on this premise, we should also realize that the pervasiveness of Hollywood's narrative model in other cinemas of the world is more the "by-product" of a market expansion imperative, rather than the direct objective of a "cultural domination" agenda.

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[6] Many things can be understood from the term "Hollywood", the most obvious perhaps being the actual geographical site where the great American film studios based themselves at the beginning of the 20th century, and which later became one of the largest (and arguably, the *hegemonic*) film industries in the world. For the purposes of this study, what I will be referring to when talking about "Hollywood" is the general filmmaking tradition (especially in regards to *storytelling*) that this mainstream industry has developed and popularized throughout the years.

In their book "The Classical Hollywood Cinema", Bordwell, Janet Staiger and Kristin Thompson provide a comprehensive historical account of the principles that dominated the Hollywood film industry during its "studio era" and which, according to the authors, "still hold sway" over contemporary film production (1985: 368). These norms, as will be shown next, are deeply rooted on the concepts of "classical narration" and the "canonic format".

1.3.3 Characteristics of the "Classical Model"

According to Thompson's, the most elemental principle of classical fiction film narration is that of "clarity of comprehension". What this means is that everything should be well defined and easy for the spectator to grasp: from the traits, conflicts and objectives of the characters, to the cause-and-effect logic that drives the story (1999: 10). This, I believe, has much to do with the importance that Aristotle banked in being able to appreciate at once both the object as a unitary "whole" and its constitutive (and properly arranged) parts[7].

Co-operating with this demand for *clarity* is the classical principle of "unobtrusive craftsmanship"; meaning all of the technical and narrative devices of the film must work in a seamless, realistic way to provide the perception of an objective, unmediated reality unfolding before the spectator. This, of course, is a direct application of the principle of "*transparency*" which was explained earlier in this section.

Another one of the basic norms of classical fiction film narration is that of *unity*. A unified narrative is achieved when the different events and actions are linked by a

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[7] In Aristotle's own terms: "Again: to be beautiful, a living creature, and every whole made up of parts, must not only present a certain order in its arrangement of parts, but also be of a certain definite magnitude. Beauty is a matter of size and order, and therefore impossible either (1) in a very minute creature, since our perception becomes indistinct as it approaches instantaneity; or (2) in a creature of vast size -one, say, 1000 miles long- as in that case, instead of the object being seen all at once, the unity and wholeness of it is lost to the beholder". (Bywater trans. 1954: 24-25)

cause-and-effect logic, meaning "a cause should lead to an effect, and that effect should become a cause for another effect, in an unbroken chain across the film" (Thompson, 1999: 12). This notion of "unity" seems to be closer related to what Lowe calls "*sense of direction*", the classical technique which impresses on the reader (in this case, the viewer) the guiding unity and ultimate destination of the narrative.

The factor that drives the character to follow that causal chain is called "*motivation*", perhaps the most definitive element in classical fiction film narrative. Motivation conjures unity because it justifies the story material and its presentation in the plot (Bordwell et al. 1985: 19). In essence, motivation is the *narrative thrust* that can be generated by an impersonal event beyond the control of any character (i.e. a natural disaster); or derive -as in most cases of classical narration- from the characters themselves[8]:

> In virtually all cases, the main character in a classical Hollywood film desires something, and that desire provides the forward impetus for the narrative. Hollywood protagonists tend to be active, to seek out goals and pursue them rather than having goals simply thrust upon them. Almost invariably the protagonist's goals define the main lines of action. (Thompson, 1999: 14)

These "main lines of action" mentioned by Thompson, translate into the *double plotline* that is also characteristic of the classical Hollywood film, each containing its own goal, obstacle and climax. One of these plotlines usually deals with a romantic relationship between a man and a woman, while the other involves another sphere of action: work, war, a mission or quest, or other personal relationships (Bordwell, 1985: 157). Peter Larsen calls these the "personal" and "public" projects, respectively. In

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[8] It must be noted, however, that there are several forms of "motivation" at work in a film. The one I have mentioned here is perhaps the most common, and which Bordwell calls *compositional* motivation. Through it, the narrative elements are justified in terms of their relevance to the needs of the story (e.g. The hero embarks on his journey *because* he must rescue an abducted beloved). He also mentions *realistic* motivation as the instance where the spectator interprets narrative material based on notions of plausibility derived from his/her conception of how "the real world works". *Transtextual* motivation refers to how we justify certain elements on transtextual grounds such as genre tropes; like "accepting" a character suddenly bursting into song while watching a musical. Finally, Bordwell cites *artistic* motivation as the rare instance where the perceiver decides something is present simply for its own sake; to appeal, shock or focus attention to the form and material of the artwork. (1985: 36)

classical film narration, these are interwoven in such a way that the characters' success in their "public project" is often a pre-requisite for the completion of their "personal project" (Larsen, 2002: 128).

Moreover, the double (or multiple) plotline can be seen as an example of both the "*variety*" and "*suspense*" techniques, both of which aim to achieve the maximum "*amplitude*" of a classical narration: The "amplitude" of the classic Hollywood fiction film has been normalized, in terms of its duration, to a standard length that ranges from 90 to 120 minutes. The multiple plotline makes this amplitude possible. Its very presence segments the narrative into distinct but complementary "episodes" (variety), which in turn dilates the events of the plot to fill the targeted duration and retards the closure of the main story (suspense).

Also inherent to most classical fiction film narratives is the element of pressure; more specifically: the pressure experienced by the characters to accomplish their objectives. This is usually presented through a dramaturgical device known as the "*deadline*" (also known as "the ticking clock"), which stipulates the time frame that a character will have to achieve or fail to achieve a goal. The deadline defines the limits, structure and causality of the narrative, and, in doing so, determines the duration of a film:

> It should be evident that the deadlines function narrationally. Issuing from the diegetic world, they motivate the film's durational limits: the story action, not the narrator, seems to decide how long the action will take (...) Moreover, appointments and deadlines stress the forward flow of story action: the arrows of the spectator's expectations are turned toward the encounter to come, the race to the goal (...) Deadlines and appointments thus perfectly suit classical narration's emphasis upon eliciting hypotheses about the future. (Bordwell et al., 1985: 45-46)

When, eventually, the classical fiction film narrative reaches its end, it must have attained *closure* in all of its main and secondary plotlines. The causal chain that has driven the action is logically terminated; so that no more major causes are left "dangling" (Thompson, 1999: 12). The dramatic action has therefore reached a "final effect": the successful (or unsuccessful) completion of the character's projects.

In general, classical narration in the fiction film can be understood as being *omniscient*, *highly communicative* and *moderately self-conscious*. This means that (a) no character has a complete knowledge of the story; only the narration is fully aware of itself; (b) the classical narrative conceals relatively little from its audience other than "what will happen next"; and (c) the narration seldom displays its recognition that it is presenting information to the audience (Bordwell et al., 1985: 25)[9].

Naturally, these principles may vary depending on generic conventions (i.e. the increased concealment of information in a "detective movie", or moments of self-consciousness in a musical or comedy when a character directly addresses the viewer); and the temporal progression of the syuzhet, which systematically shapes and fluctuates narrative properties across the film. Examples of this latter instance occur when plot construction influences the "overtness" of the narration:

> In the opening passages of the film, the narration is moderately self-conscious and overtly suppressive. As the film proceeds, the narration becomes less self-conscious and more communicative (…) The end of the film may quickly reassert the narration's omniscience and self-consciousness. (Bordwell et al, 1985: 25)

…Or when space is manipulated within the syuzhet for distinct narrative purposes:

> Most important is the tendency of the classical film to render narrational omniscience as spatial omnipresence. If the narration plays down its knowledge of upcoming events, it does not hesitate its ability to change views at will by cutting within a scene and crosscutting between various locales. (Bordwell, 1985: 161)

It is through the particular uses of space, time and narrative devices mentioned above, that the classical fiction film constructs what seems to be an independent story world that exists even before narration steps in and starts conveying it to us, the spectators. In the following point, I shall direct my attention to this last link in the

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[9] These particular formulations derive from Bordwell's skepticism about the figure of the "narrator".
However, I shall elaborate on this further ahead (see sections 2.3.3 and 2.3.4), where I will explore the concept of "narration" and state my approach towards it in this work.

chain: the viewer's reconstruction of the fabula through schemes of narrative comprehension.

1.3.4 Narrative Schema and Viewer Activity

From what has been presented so far, classical fiction cinema can be understood as *an aesthetic system of norms* which derive from previous narrative canons viewed as "classical" in the Western world. In turn, these norms have generated their respective set of "cognitive protocols" that cue and guide the spectator's participation in the achievement of the film form (Bordwell et al. 1985: 8):

> The spectator comes to a classical film very well prepared. The rough shape of the syuzhet and fabula is likely to conform to the canonic story of an individual's goal-oriented, causally determined activity. The spectator knows the most likely stylistic figures and functions. He or she has internalized the scenic norm of exposition, development of old causal line and so forth. The viewer also knows the pertinent ways to motivate what is presented (...) On the basis of such schemata the viewer projects hypotheses. (Bordwell, 1985: 164)

Schemata -or "schemas", as Branigan calls them- are arrangements of knowledge *already possessed* by a perceiver and that are used to predict and classify new sensory data (1992: 13). This concept, explains the author, is based on the assumption that knowledge is not a list of unconnected facts in our minds, but that it is *organized* into categories. Thus, the knowledge that we as viewers have amassed through time and the repetitive perception of "classical film narratives" has been organized into particular "sets" (schemas) which we use to simultaneously (a) *understand* new narratives presented to us by finding patterns of recognition, and (b) *formulate assumptions and expectations* in the viewing process.

An example of how ingrained the classical norms and format are in our minds, is the fact that our main narrative schema is almost identical (in terms of logic progression) to the five stages of the canonic story proposed by Todorov:

Figure 3.

Todorov's 5 stages of the canonic story	Classic narrative schema (Branigan, 1992: 14)
1. a state of equilibrium at the outset;	1. Introduction of settings and characters; 2. Explanation of the state of affairs;
2. a disruption of the equilibrium by some action;	3. Initiating event.
3. a recognition that there has been a disruption;	4. Emotional response or statement of a goal by the protagonist;
4. an attempt to repair the disruption;	5. Complicating actions;
5. a reinstatement of the initial equilibrium.	6. Outcome; 7. Reactions to the outcome.

For Branigan, this schema shows that the spectator tends to remember a story in terms of information stated as propositions, interpretations and summaries, rather than by how it was presented or its surface features (1992: 15). As to the actual *application* of the schemas, the author believes that its neither *even*…

> Information from a text is sorted and measured by a schema against other kinds of knowledge base. The result is that certain information in a narrative is elaborately processed and assigned to a hierarchy in working memory according to relative importance, while much else is discarded. (Ibid)

…nor *continuous* along the film:

> …an individual's attention does not spread equally through a narrative text but works forward and backward in an uneven manner in constructing large-scale, hierarchical patterns which represent a particular story as an abstract grouping of knowledge based on an underlying schema. (1992: 16)

Since this study does not concern itself directly with the subject of narrative comprehension and the viewer's activity, I will not go on to list the different types of schemas that authors like Branigan and Bordwell have explored in depth in their own work. My intention with this broad overview of the topic was to once again acknowledge the role and importance of the spectator as a part of the narrative process; while at the same time showing that classical narrative norms and formats have effectively shaped the way generations of viewers in the Western world perceive (and as I am arguing: *reutilize*) fiction film narrative. In the following section I will elaborate on this statement, as I examine the inherent dangers of applying a Western,

hegemonic frame of reference (with Hollywood as its prime example) to the peripheral, Western-*ized* context of Latin American cinema.

1.4 The Hollywood Referent: a brief discussion

Particularly relevant to this work, is the commonly made distinction between the cinema of Hollywood and that of the rest of the world. A model that, for Lucía Nagib, "unwittingly sanctions the American way of looking at the world, according to which Hollywood is the centre and all other cinemas are the periphery" (2006: 30).

This dichotomist perspective is heavily based on the "dominance" that Hollywood films have enjoyed all around the globe during great part of the 20th century. As was mentioned earlier in this chapter, this "dominance" can be explained in terms of the industrialization of film production, the resulting "commoditization" of the film work, and the expansion to external markets that characterize globalized economy.

But what has essentially been an economically-driven phenomenon, has also had a profound impact in the cultural sphere. For millions of people around the world, Hollywood acts as a true "filmic hegemon" in that it has subconsciously been assimilated (through its extensive presence in the global film offer) as their main reference for what cinema is. The acceptance of Hollywood as "*the* center", however, automatically renders all non-Hollywood cinema to a peripheral (and implicitly, subordinate) position.

Many film theorists -like Nagib- fervently advocates against the perpetuation of this division in Film Studies. Academic works that make a separation between these categories, or that study examples of so-called "peripheral" or "world" cinemas *in relation to* the Hollywood model, are seen by the author to…

> ...reinforce the idea that Hollywood is the centre not only of world film practice but also of theory. The result is that other cinemas of the world are of interest insofar as they adopt a 'different aesthetic model of filmmaking from Hollywood' (ibid). The Hollywood aesthetics is thus confirmed as the general paradigm for the appraisal of all other cinemas even though, as one would expect and is acknowledged by the author himself[10], they 'do not constitute a homogeneous film practice'. (2006: 31)

This theoretical dependence to Hollywood, continues Nagib, denies a "positive existence" to all other cinemas of the world, which are thus made incapable of generating independent theory. Instead, she argues for a model in which the Hollywood tradition ceases to be the single "centre" of film history and analysis (the hegemonic reference that all other cinemas look to resist or distinguish themselves from) and becomes just another important element of Film Studies, to be given "major, minor or no attention depending on the object in question" (2006: 34).

In this new approach, every film representation is a centre of attention in its own right (following Stam and Shohat's (1994) proposal of a 'polycentric multiculturalism'), "interconnected with each other according to their relevance at a given historical moment, regardless of whether they originate in the first, second or third worlds" (2006: 35).

At this point I must make clear that, although my research does in fact require the contrast or comparison of Latin American fiction films against the theoretical framework of the "classical model" of narration popularised by Hollywood, this is in no way an attempt to prioritise the latter. As much as I agree with the views of authors like Nagib and Dudley Andrew (among others) about the necessity to move past the Hollywood-centric inclinations of Film Studies, I also firmly believe that studying contemporary Latin America cinema (and of the *fiction* genre especially) *without* addressing or at least acknowledging the considerable influence that Hollywood has had on it, would be to provide an incomplete and inaccurate picture of our region's filmmaking "realities".

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[10] Here, Nagib is quoting the work of authors John Hill and Pamela Church-Gibson (2000)

According to Nagib, the discourse of Hollywood's dominance "contains a few questionable generalizations. It does not specify, for example, whether 'dominant cinema' refers to box-office revenues or number of viewers. It also fails to spell out the exact time and place of this dominance" (2006: 30). In response to this, I would argue that in Latin America *in general*, and regardless of the development of its particular national cinemas, Hollywood has maintained dominance in terms of the *presence* of its products in our countries' theatres against that of local productions[11]. High attendance and box-office figures are just the logical result of a market presence that can go from "high" to "overwhelming" in comparison to the local supply.

As to the periodization of this dominance, it is for another study to try to pinpoint, although I share Nagib's opinion that it became more evident during the later half of the 20th century. In fact, I believe the appearance and massive spread of television, from the late 50s to date, is one more of the factors that contributed to affirm the influence of Hollywood's productions in many countries of our region, where the television offer has *also* traditionally been filled with American products.

Overlooking Hollywood's effects on our local audiovisual contexts would be like trying to study the 20th century history of our Latin American countries as independent or unaffected by the political and economic influence of the USA. Whether we like it or not, these two regions have been closely linked over time, even though the terms of those exchanges have often been controlled by one the parts.

What this study enquires upon then, is just one small aspect of the *cultural* relationship between the two bodies, based on the assumption that the dominance of Hollywood in our region (as explained above) has not gone unnoticed or unanswered. More specifically, what I am saying is that the work of contemporary Latin American

[11] For many us with the empiric knowledge of living in countries with an incipient film industry and whose cinematic offer has been traditionally dominated by Hollywood, this may seem like a fact beyond discussion. However, there *are* notable exceptions (or at least, attenuated instances) to this rule. Such is the case of those countries in the region that have achieved a more developed audiovisual industry (such as Mexico, Cuba, Brazil and Argentina) and have been able to provide a local film and television offer to compete against Hollywood's.

filmmakers living in a cultural context dominated by Hollywood products has been influenced by the "classic" narrative canons which the American film industry has popularized and positioned over time.

I would like to think that my approach to the subject is not a programmed disposition to subordinate Latin American film practice to Hollywood, but a responsible interpretation of the general socio-cultural context of our countries. For this research, Hollywood -as the main source of fiction films during past decades- becomes a *necessary* reference to understand our region's recent incursions in the genre, but a reference nonetheless.

The true "centers" of attention here are the Latin American films themselves, their particular narrative contents and structures, and the reasons behind these creative choices. According to Nagib's proposed new paradigm, where the reference to Hollywood ("none, minor, or major") would depend on the object of study, I'd say that my specific topic (narrative in the fiction film) and the localization of my research (Latin America), justify its presence in my work.

1.5 "Hibridity" and its application in Film Studies

Throughout its fairly recent history, the discipline of Film Studies has found nourishment in the contemporary currents of thinking of other fields of knowledge such as the Arts, the Humanities and the Social Sciences. Thus, it should not come as a surprise that the concept of *hybridization* -itself a term appropriated and popularized in past years by Cultural Studies- appears as one of the main axes of this work.

In the present academic context, analyzing *if* and *how* contemporary Latin American filmmakers are combining their unique stories and styles with the "classic" narrative conventions of the dominant Hollywood model may seem as much a study on film narrative as on "hybridity".

However, the popularity of the notion of hybridity seems to have brought on a kind of complacency in which it is frequently employed, but seldom explained or contextualized. This situation accounts for heated academic debate and the "anti-hybridity backlash" (Pieterse, 2001) of recent years. It has also convinced me of the need to adequately address this subject, as it is central to my own research.

1.5.1 Cultural Studies, Globalization and the "Hibridity Boom"

"Hybridity" has proven to be an exceptionally plastic term. Its original biological meaning referred to the combination of two distinct species of plants or animals to create a new -*hybrid*- being. From that seminal usage, hybridization and its "family of concepts" (García Canclini, 2005) have been used to address the contact and interrelations of everything from human beings to musical genres and culinary practices. García Canclini´s definition sums up the essence of what we have come to accept as "hybridization" in the context of Cultural Studies:

> I understand for hybridization socio-cultural processes in which discrete structures and practices, previously existing in separate form, are combined to generate new structures, objects and practices. (2005: xxv)

These situations of mixture, it seems to be agreed, have been common and ongoing throughout history, ever since different human groups came in contact with one another. The Latin American example is a case in point. Most of our region's current population is the product of the cross between our American, European, African and Asian ancestors. It was within the process of conquest and colonization of the "New World" that the figure of the "mestizo" first arose. From the latin *mixticius*, it literally means "the mixed"[12].

A term originally used by the Spanish colonizers to label the offspring of European-Indigenous relations, the term has gradually shed its racist connotations and

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[12] http://www.m-w.com/dictionary/mestizo

become more of a celebratory reference to the combination of ethnic and cultural strains within our region:

> The recognition of the mestizaje that constitutes Latin America does not refer to something that happened in the past, but what we are today. Mestizaje is not simply a racial fact, but the explanation of our existence, the web of times and places, memories and imaginations which, until now, have been adequately expressed only at a literary level. (Martín-Barbero, 1993: 188)

In this recent context, "mestizaje" has effectively turned into a synonym of hybridization, "in both the biological sense (production of phenotypes as a result of genetic crossovers) and the cultural sense –mixing of European habits, beliefs, and forms of thought with those originating from American societies" (García-Canclini, 2005: xxxii).

Furthermore, authors like Martín-Barbero see in the recognition of mestizaje the only way to adequately approach and study the cultural phenomena that take place in Latin America:

> Once we take as the starting point of observation and analysis not the linear process of upward social progress but mestizaje, that is, mestizaje in the sense of continuities in discontinuity and reconciliations between rhythms of life that are mutually exclusive, then we can begin to understand the complex cultural forms and meanings that are coming into existence in Latin America: the mixture of the indigenous Indian in the rural peasant culture, the rural in the urban, the folk culture in the popular cultures and the popular in mass culture. (1993:188)

Even if we accept hybridization as a historical and ongoing process, the current global landscape has made it all the more conspicuous. As Jan Pieterse notes, "the pace of mixing accelerates and its scope widens in the wake of major structural changes, such as new technologies that enable new phases of intercultural contact. Contemporary accelerated globalization is such a new phase" (2001: 27).

Thus, we arrive to a concept that has come to be intimately linked with that of hybridization. From this perspective, sketched by Pieterse, the social aspect of

globalization is foregrounded. It becomes, mainly, the "conceptual frame" for intercultural contact and articulation, that is: for hybridization (as explained above).

At the same time, this phase is acknowledged as being the product of "*major structural changes*", which here can be understood as the broader economic and political implications of the globalization process; "*contemporary*", in the sense that it is not the result of an evolutionary process but the latest in a series of similar "waves" throughout history; and "*accelerated*", in that the possibilities for hybridization become comparatively higher due to what Harvey calls "time-space compression":

> (...) referring to the rate of transport of people, sound, pictures and any other forms of information including, of course, money. In his analysis (Harvey's) they do not just happen because of scientific development or some neutral technological evolution. They are driven by the process of capital accumulation, that is, the specific social form of those strategies that organize the world economy. (in Friedman, 1994: 196)

This is yet another common agreement in Cultural Studies: that globalization, as García-Canclini points out, accentuates modern cross-cultural contact by creating world markets for material goods, messages and migrants (2005: xxxv). According to this author, what differentiates these current processes from what he calls the "classic modalities of fusion" (those which have derived from migrations and commercial exchanges through history) is the presence of contemporary cultural industries -like mass media-, which have allowed a greater rate, range and possibilities of hybridization in comparison to those of the past.

This study is, to a great extent, inspired on the perspectives outlined above. Like I mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, the history of film and its theoretical study is a comparatively recent one, dating back to just over one century. As such, it has been framed and *shaped* by the contemporary processes of globalization.

Extrapolating these notions to the discipline of Film Studies, one could argue that films -and more specifically to this research, the *cinematic narrative models* that they contain- are just one more of the many "cultural goods" that flow across the world. Under this system, and responding to clear economic interests, movies originating

from a dominant source such as Hollywood are transferred in high rate and volume to its peripheries (Latin America being one of its main external markets) through a wide range of distribution and exhibition channels.

Following this same logic, it could be said that the utility of films -like that of most other goods- expires the moment they are consumed. Another way to look at it would be to argue that these types of cultural products do not just get exhausted, but that in specific circumstances and performed by particular social actors, they undergo a process of re-utilization that could be described as an act of *hybridization*.

In other words: that local, "peripheral" filmmakers make use of those cultural goods that originate from a hegemonic center, by consciously or unconsciously extracting some of its features (in this case, "classic" narrative canons) which they later choose to imitate, subvert, or adapt and combine with their "own" set of principles, aesthetics and creative materials.

It is *these* operations which the present study refers to when it talks about "hybridity": the sampling, filtering, and *mixing* between filmmaking structures and practices that could be considered separate and different ("theirs" and "ours") and that result in new filmic representations.

1.5.2 On Hybridity, Cosmopolitanism and other demons…

So far, I have tried to elaborate on one of the central thesis of this research, and provide the basic theoretical discourse that I believe can be used to sustain it. Now, I wish to offer a *counterpoint* to the commonly accepted ideas that I have outlined regarding "cultural hybridization" and its workings in our globalized society.

Through this contrast of positions, I intend to reach a more "balanced" understanding of the notion of "hybridity" and assess the validity of its usage in the context of this study. For this purpose I will turn to the work of Jonathan Friedman and his critique of the hybridity and globalization discourse in contemporary cultural and post-colonial studies.

A good synthesis of his thoughts on the matter can be found in his article "From roots to routes" (2002). There, Friedman "suggests that the current discourses of globalization in anthropology, cultural studies and post-colonial studies are expressions and elaborations on a specific socially positioned perspective that has become a contender for a new ideological representation of the world" (2002: 21). Thus, as it has come to be perceived as a function of "globalization", the notion of hybridity is also called into question:

> It is said that globalization has changed the world profoundly. It is dismantling our old categories of place, locality, culture, even society. The contemporary world is one of hibridity, translocality, movement and rhizomes. Is this an intellectual development or discovery that the world has really changed, i.e. before we were local but now we are global, or is it the expression of the experience of (…) academic elites, travelling intellectuals, an experience that is presaged by the representations of CNN and other internationalized media as well as in the spontaneous representations of international networks of media managers, politicians, diplomats and 'high end' non-governmental organizations (NGOs). (2002: 26)

For Friedman, globalization is not a unique phenomenon that humanity is experiencing *now* as a result of an "evolutionary progress". According to the author, the globalization process in itself is nothing new, for there have been periods or stages of globalization throughout history[13].

This perspective can help avoid the automatic labeling or perceiving of occurrences -such as "hybridization"- as intrinsically *modern* (or *postmodern*) phenomena just because they are taking place today. It reminds us that they have *also* happened before our time, surrounded by *different* circumstances, of course, but as a product of some of the same large-scale historical processes.

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[13] This he calls the "global systemic perspective", where globalization is understood in primarily economic terms, as the massive transfer of capital from a hegemonic center to its peripheral centers (which become "new potential hegemons"), in periods where the hegemonic center is declining (Friedman, 2004: 182). This economic shift is naturally accompanied by the political, technological, social and cultural changes that we have come to identify as "globalization".

So, to bring these ideas closer to this study, it could be argued that "hybridity *in film*" is a "modern phenomenon" since film itself is a recent technology and we can be certain that it wasn't until this last century that man started experimenting with its unique language and possibilities.

However, we must be aware that, in *this* context, "hybridity" stands for a set of creative practices in which a subject combines "foreign" materials or guidelines with his own to produce a new cultural representation. This notion of "artistic" or "creative" hybridization evidently goes well beyond the appearance of film, for it has been a recurring element in all of the Arts, and of cross-cultural contact in general. Therefore, we should be careful not to immediately think of hybridity in film only as a product of our contemporary global reality, but more as a "current version" of an ongoing tradition.

To Friedman however, the issue is far more complex than this fairly obvious observation. As seen from his earlier quotes, the author sees hybridity not so much as an actual *fact*, but as a part of the dominant *discourse* that has been weaved around the idea of globalization. This discourse, he argues, is all about the *transcendence of borders*, starting with those of the nation-state, which in this ideology "is understood as the source of most of the evils of modernity, especially essentialism and its twin offspring, nationalism and racism" (2004: 181).

As Friedman observes, this discourse calls for a transition from small and simple units of organization, to larger and more complex ones (from *local* to *global*), as well as a desire to escape all forms of fixed or grounded identities, and to belong to something higher or more expansive (2004: 182). Consequently, a notion such as "hybridity" becomes of paramount importance to this way of looking at the world, for it is commonly associated with the crossing of boundaries and the dissolving of "pure", "essentialist" categories.

In order to spot the real "vices" behind what would seem like an otherwise acceptable discourse to adopt, Friedman position urges us to ask ourselves two critical

questions: *who* is saying it? and *why*? According to the author, the discourse of cultural globalization is a product of what he calls a "*cosmopolitan agenda*":

> ...one based on a moral classification that divides the world into dangerous classes and locals, on the one hand, and liberal and progressive world citizens, on the other. This popular and proliferating discourse is not, I suggest, an internal theoretical development within any particular social science. On the contrary, it is the spontaneous self-understanding of those who occupy a certain position within the contemporary world system in transformation. (2004: 182)

Friedman explains that, in periods of strong globalization, certain *elites* (from the academic, business, media and political spheres, for instance) tend to "cosmopolitanize" themselves. What this means is that, thanks to the possibilities and mobility granted by their social and economic status, they choose to situate themselves *above* the world, where they can encompass the diversity that lies below without being an actual part of it, except in the sense of being able to consume it in the form of products" (2004: 191).

It is *this* perspective -the cosmopolitans' "view from above"- that Friedman believes has become the commonly accepted approach to globalization in recent years. Such discourse, he argues, is not the result of formal theoretical enquiry on the realities of cross-cultural situations or on the experiences of those subjects who actually live them, but it is rather based on the impressions and language of those in positions of *power* within the system.

What this basically translates to, is that "our" notions of a "global, unified society" as something positive, or the benefits of "openness" and "interconnectedness" (to name a few) are not really "ours", but originally "theirs": the discourse of a managerial class seeking to generalize it in order to maintain the system and their position in it.

This claim echoes the notion of "cultural hegemony", where the ideologies from a dominant group are transplanted (often *imposed*) to others, and, with time, become "naturalized"; that is, absorbed and accepted as "common sense" or approved

knowledge. Hence, according to the author, the same can be argued about the notion of "hybridity":

> The discourse is then, positioned. It is the discourse of global elites whose relation to the earth is one of consumerist distance and objectification. It is a bird's-eye view of the world that looks down upon the multiethnic bazaar or ethnic neighborhood and marvels at the fabulous jumble of cultural differences present in that space. Hibridity is thus the sensual, primarily visual, appropriation of a space of cultural difference. It is the space below that becomes hybridized, even if, for the people that occupy that space, reality is quite different. (2002: 28)

Naturally, Friedman does not pretend to deny that there are cases in which subjects from one culture appropriate cultural objects from another and integrate them to their particular set of life strategies (2002: 23). What he does dispute is the *a priori* labeling of such a situation as "cultural hybridity", especially when *the subject involved in the cross-cultural operation does not even recognize it as such*. In other words: when the social actor is not even *aware* that he or she is combining elements from different cultural sources, then the nature of the new product as "hybrid" is something that *we* impose upon it.

Hybridity, for the author, is a *conscious* choice, be it identity-wise, or creatively. Therefore, any identification as "hybrid" beyond such an awareness is merely "hibridity-for-us" (2002: 24): the projection of our own perception, one which reveals adherence to the discourse that Friedman criticizes, as it is "us" trying to make sense of the instances of cultural mixture that we observe from the *outside* and presuming that they are conscious activities of a transcultural, globalized world.

Furthermore, this discourse of "culture hybridity" is predicated upon what Friedman believes is an inaccurate concept of culture; an approach that has become almost second nature for many in the Social Sciences, and particularly for those of us working in Film Studies and narrative analysis. I refer to the notion of cultural products *as texts*, which implies the belief of culture as a "substance" containing properties that can be mixed or blended with those of other cultures (1994: 208). He explains:

From the global point of view, culture is a typical product of Western modernity that consists in transforming difference into essence (...) Its starting point is the awareness of specificity, that is, of difference, of different ways of doing similar things. Where difference can be attributed to demarcated populations we have culture or cultures. From here it is easy enough to convert difference into essence, race, text, paradigm, code, structure, without ever needing to examine the actual process by which specificity comes to be and is reproduced. (1994: 207)

Under this light, culture generates an *essentialization* of the world: it defines and confers certain qualities ("essence") to certain groups, and categorizes (thus *divides*) upon them. Therefore, the resulting notion of cultural hybridity (or "creolization" as Friedman refers to it here), ends up being a contradictory term which asserts the very essentialism it tries to contest:

On one hand, it expresses the idea of border-crossing, mixture, and highlights the composite nature of cultural identities or objects. But on the other, it is based on the assumption that this mixture occurs between "pure" categories (categories which contain an essence that makes it what they are and sets them apart from the rest), thus implicitly perpetuating division. According to the author, "in the struggle against the racism of purity, hibridity invokes the dependent, not converse, notion of the mongrel. Instead of combating essentialism, it merely hibridizes it" (quoted by Pieterse, 2001: 226).

Furthermore, presses the author, this particular approach does not correctly represent the crucial dimension of culture: the social *practices* that created the specificity of the groups in the first place, and those that maintain it through time. This tendency "literally flattens out the extremely varied ways in which the production of meaning occurs in the contested field of social existence." (1994: 207).

It is only in this realm of practice that "true" hybridity can be found, for it is a *social act* rather than a *cultural fact*. For Friedman then, hybridity boils down to an exercise of self-identity that demands awareness of the disparate origins of the sources being hybridized, "a recognition that must be maintained as part of the

identity of the bearers of this 'objectively' mixed culture in order for the creole category to have any validity over time" (1994: 209).

Conversely, the "problem" with the dominant notion of hybridity resides in the fact that it's often *not* a self-identification by the social actor, but the criterion of an observer or "classifier", who expresses his own identity by *a)* identifying instances of "mixture", and *b)* explaining this as part of a global phenomenon (1994: 210).

1.5.3 "Hibridity" in this study: a personal commentary

Rather than feeling "attacked" in my academic beliefs, I find Friedman's arguments enlightening and, surprisingly, not that opposed to the ones that form the conceptual backbone of this research. This section is intended to contrast the latter with the former, provide my own commentary, and relate it directly to my subject of study.

Perhaps the starting point to the concern of theorists like Friedman is that hybridity has become a "widespread hype"; a popular label to attach to everything from human beings to cars and films, without a proper understanding of its meaning and connotations. I too recognize that it derives from a desire to move beyond a world of "purities" and "borders" (ideas many of us have learned to abhor due to the injustices perpetrated in their name) to one with less. Although I can relate in general terms with this ideal, I must distance my study from some of its implied notions.

- *The illusion of purities*

First on the list, is the idea that hybridity occurs between "pure categories". I agree with Friedman that assuming this would just be using the same essentialist logic that the notion of hybridity looks to oppose.

Earlier in this chapter, I quoted García Canclini's definition of "cultural hybridity" as the combination of discrete structures or practices to create new ones. However, this author (like many other advocates of the term) acknowledges that what he refers

to as "discrete structures" are a result of previous hybridizations and therefore cannot be considered as "pure" points of origin:

> One way of describing this movement from the discrete to the hybrid, and to new discrete forms, is the "cycles of hybridization" formula proposed by Brian Stross, according to which we move historically from more heterogeneous forms to other more homogeneous ones, and then to other relatively more heterogeneous forms, without being "purely" or simply homogeneous. (2005: xxv)

A way to illustrate this last point is by relating it to my empirical claim of hybridization[14] as the particular ways in which current Latin American filmmakers combine a foreign narrative structure with their own contents and alternative aesthetics (Stam & Shohat, 1994). Although the study accepts the possibility of such mixtures, it also understands that no source of creative material can be regarded as the exclusive product or property of any one group. As Lúcia Nagib notes:

> Can one really isolate foreign from local components of an art work? Could not the imported form itself be the result of multiple influences, often originating in the same regions that now import them back? (2006: 33)

So, for instance, a key element in this study such as the "classical Hollywood model of fiction film narration", cannot be taken as a "pure" or "original" contribution of this industry, when experts like Thompson and Bordwell acknowledge that its basic principles "were being worked out before filmmaking was centred in Hollywood, and, indeed, many of those principles were first tried in other countries" (2003:43).

Nevertheless, we can argue that, with time, it became what Stross calls a "more homogeneous form" and was incorporated into a vast majority of Hollywood's products, gaining popularity through mass distribution until the adopted model became inextricably linked with the industry. Thus, the "classical Hollywood model"

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[14] Later, I will provide a distinction of the "sets of claims" that the notion of hybridity entails, according to Pieterse (2001).

or any other set of institutionalized creative guidelines must be seen in this light; not as "pure categories", but as points of reference that can be contrasted or combined with other "more or less homogeneous" cultural manifestations.

All in all, I believe that the misconception of pure categories when talking about hybridization (especially of the cultural type) is not so common in academia as much as in the other spheres (politics, business, media, etc) in which this and other "globalization terms" are frequently tossed around without delving deeper into them, an analytical exercise that most of academic thought demands. Equating "external vices" with the general outlook of academy on the matter (as Friedman implies) is unfair.

Being aware that there are no pure categories, however, does not imply a shift to the *other* end of the spectrum, that is, to readily agree that we live in a world where all culture is of a hybrid nature and thus, that differences and boundaries have disappeared or lost their strength. The first part of that statement is contradictory (if *everything* is hybrid, then everything is *the same*, therefore nothing is "*hybrid*" anymore); and the second, a naive assumption that has become the primary reason for criticism against the notion of cultural hybridity. The next point addresses these issues of limits and asymmetries in power.

- *The role of boundaries*

First of all, I must clarify that although this study believes in cultural hybridity, it does not intend to minimize or overlook the presence of boundaries, differences, and asymmetries. On the contrary, it understands that the acceptance of hybridity *requires* the acceptance of boundaries. Friedman judges this as hybridity being a "dependent notion" on the very ideas it tries to contest. But personally, I share Nederveen Pieterse's view that *without* the reference to boundaries or differences, studying hybridity is meaningless…

> Meaningless not in the sense that it would be inaccurate or untrue as a description, but that, without an existing regard for boundaries, it would not be a point worth making. Without a reference to a prior cult of purity or boundaries, a pathos of hierarchy and gradient of difference, the point of hibridity would be moot. (2001: 226)

Boundaries, hierarchy, difference… There is no shortage of these in Film Studies. It would be difficult for anyone to deny that our discipline shows a marked tendency to distinguish, categorize and even *rank* -consciously or unconsciously- based on terms of national, ethnic, gender, ideologic and aesthetic characteristics (among *many* others) present in films.

If we visualize the art of filmmaking, in its endless creative possibilities, as a vast territory with no internal or external limits, then Film Studies would be an intricate conceptual grid that is placed over this field of creative action, often not by the actors, but by outside observers. This is reminiscent of Friedman's position of "hybridity" being just one more of those categories "imposed from above".

Personally, I can't deny that it is. Hybridity *can* be just another referential term appropriated by Film Studies to help us understand a specific film practice. And yes, if our theoretical designation of this practice as "hybrid" is not coupled with the acknowledgement of the author as such, then the subjectivity of the categorization is greatly increased.

However, if we accept that talking about hybridity is only pertinent to the extent it refers to the ways in which social actors relate and perform in a boundary-ridden structure, then I believe the concept is not only valid, but *crucial* to appreciate the varied ways in which filmmakers move around a creative territory crisscrossed by the *other* conceptual divisions that theory has set upon it.

Therefore, "hybridity in film", in my view, is useful in the sense that is a notion *of* the theoretical system, to describe how choices in the practical (limit-less) field of creation *translate to the theoretical (segmented) plane of Film Studies*.

- *Issues of power*

It is precisely in asymmetric relationships like the one between Latin America and Hollywood, that the notion of hybridity acquires most relevance. As I mentioned in the previous points, my acceptance of the concept does not imply a belief in a world where boundaries are being increasingly weakened (if not *erased*), or where cultural interaction occurs between "equal" parties.

Such a position would only prove Friedman's appraisal of "hybridity" as an elitist concept detached from social reality. Other theorists like García-Canclini, also warn us against this perspective when he points out that a pitfall of hybridization is that it can suggest an easy integration of cultures, without giving adequate attention to contradictions in the process, or to that which resists being hybridized (2005: xxiv).

It is this "overly pleasant" view of hybridization which I try to avoid. To do so, I intend to follow the advice of authors like García-Canclini, Pieterse, and Friedman himself, by focusing not merely on the actual evidences of creative mixture within the films; but also analyzing them in relation to the specific *terms* or *conditions* which may have influenced their formulation. In other words, one must understand that it is not *hybridity* which is the real object of interest, but the *processes of hybridization*:

> In this way one can acknowledge the extent to which these processes are destructive, and recognize what is left out of the fusion. A theory of hybridization that is not naïve requires a critical awareness of its limits, of what refuses or resists hybridization. (García Canclini, 2005: xxxi)

Thus, rather than using the notion of "hybridity" to minimize or conceal boundaries, I am using it to *call attention to them*. The specific types of boundaries I am pointing to, refer to the three "sets of claims" that hybridity entails, according to Jan Pieterse (2001: 238):

1. The *empirical* level ("hybridization happens")

Here, hybridization refers to concrete film *practices*, understood mainly as the uses and/or elaborations that current Latin American film authors make of the dominant ("classic") narrative structure that has been popularized by Hollywood fiction films,

and its combination with other "local" narrative materials or influences. In this context, the boundaries in question are those between *predominantly foreign* and *predominantly autochthonous* narrative sources, insofar as we acknowledge that these are not hermetic categories.

2. The *theoretical* level ("acknowledging hybridity as an analytical tool")

In this plane, I recognize that my previous categorization of a film practice as "hybrid" is a referential notion which I am using to describe how those practical choices in the field of creation translate to a *theoretical* framework. I also appreciate that the subjectivity of that notion is increased when the actor does not share the observer's opinion of his/her work being an instance of hybridity. The boundaries in focus here are the other conceptual categories that abound in the chosen body of theory which, when applied to the practical plane, often "cut through" the cultural manifestation.

3. The *normative* level ("a critique of boundaries and valorizations of mixtures, under certain conditions, in particular relations of power")

Here, "boundaries" translate to the *differences*, *tensions* and *complexities* that are present between the social actors of cultural hybridization. This level looks to specify and comment on the particular relationships of *power*, and issues of (a-) *symmetry* and (in-) *equality* that can be identified in the process. Without this plane, there is a high risk to reduce the interpretation of the art/cultural form to a cosmopolitan discourse of planetary reconciliation (García-Canclini, 2005: xliv).

1.6 Summary

I reach the end of this chapter hoping I have managed to provide the reader with a clear and concise presentation of the main theoretical concepts on which this study is built. As expressed earlier, this knowledge has been stated not in order to *prove* or *disprove* it through my research, but to serve as a frame of reference in the generation of *new* knowledge -however small this may be in comparison.

Such "new knowledge" must be understood as the insights that this research is able to yield about its objects of study, and which can be indexed in two main fields of academic inquiry. On one hand is film narratology, which provides the most immediate frame of theoretical reference and tools through which to break down and analyze the narrative characteristics of the selected films. On the other hand is the area of cultural studies, which comes to enrich the narrative analyses by proposing to understand the texts' traits from the perspective of cultural appropriation and hybridity in their Latin American context.

Having established this, I would now like to move on to the following chapter where I will detail the methodological design of this research, and the specific manner in which I carried out the narrative analyses.

2. Methodology

2.1 Overview

To understand the ways in which Latin American filmmakers are using the narrative devices of the classical model, my research proposes to compare these conventions with the ones present in contemporary fiction films from the region.

Studying the entirety of Latin American films from the last decade is a task evidently beyond any regular research initiative. However, I intend my analysis of *specific* movies to provide insight into some of the narrative tendencies currently at work in the *broader landscape* of the continent's fiction film production.

This approach may seem to imply that I am accepting the existence of *a* "Latin American Cinema" as a homogenous filmmaking entity. This, of course, is not so. My study is deeply rooted in the perception of Latin America as a socially heterogeneous and dynamic setting, where filmmaking styles and practices can be as rich and diverse as the cultures that coexist within the region.

However, this awareness of Latin American filmmaking as a broad array of multi-faceted creative manifestations that cannot be homogenized under "all-inclusive" notions, seems to contradict my intention to provide some new knowledge about the region's film practices. It has already been established that my central concern is to offer an in-depth narrative analysis of the ten selected films; however, in this chapter I will argue that it is still possible for my research to go beyond the specificity of its cases and be illustrative of a larger reality.

As a first step to partially bridge the gap between "the specific" and "the general", I have selected my sample from two countries whose history and production figures allow me to represent stages of cinematic development found across the region. My argument is that one can roughly locate any Latin American national cinema within

three broad stages (I call them *"initial"*, *"intermediate"* and *"advanced"*), depending on the level of development of their film industry. Although this is a subjective approach, I tried to base my categorization on both qualitative and quantitative criteria.

I chose my home country of Costa Rica as an example of a film industry in its *"initial"* phase of development. With less than 20 fiction features throughout its history, the last decade has witnessed Costa Rican film production gradually shifting from the sporadic and predominantly artisanal projects that have characterized it, towards a more regular and professionalized structure.

Colombia was selected to represent those countries of the region with an *"intermediate"* development of their national cinemas. These are industries that have traditionally maintained a continuous feature film output thanks to stimulating factors like the existence of a considerable national audience, academic and technical schools to form its professionals, and state policies directed to promote its film production.

The few examples of comparatively more *"advanced"* film industries in Latin America (namely Argentina, Brazil, Mexico and Cuba) present a higher volume of production, a strong internal market, and well established mechanisms for local film production, exhibition and distribution. They also benefit from the distinction of having produced feature films that have achieved critical and commercial success at an international level, earning them prestige and higher resources to further develop their industry.

This last category has been excluded from the present study, as I feel that academic interest in Latin American cinema has traditionally focused on these more consolidated national cases, consistently overlooking (or given very limited accounts of) the comparatively "smaller" cinemas in the region.

Thus, my project directs its attention to a sample of films from two national cinemas that become cases of study themselves and -as I will elaborate later on- can act as "typologies" that allow me to relate my findings to a wider range of cases with

similar characteristics. It is within this general framework that I conduct my analyses of five films from each of the two countries, breaking down and studying their main narrative traits and comparing them with the theoretical conventions of the classical model. The following figure illustrates this general design:

Figure 4.

	Costa Rica "The Initial Stage"	**Colombia** "The Intermediate Stage"
Existing body of theory concerning fiction-film narration.	Film 1: "Caribe"	Film 1: "Apocalipsur"
	Film 2: "Password"	Film 2: "La sombra del caminante"
	Film 3: "Mujeres Apasionadas"	Film 3: "Los niños invisibles"
	Film 4: "Marasmo"	Film 4: "Bolivar soy yo"
	Film 5: "Asesinato en el Meneo"	Film 5: "La vendedora de rosas"

There were four main aspects that influenced this selection. First, I decided only to pick movies which I had previously watched. Second, their release dates had to adjust with the time frame of study set by the research (1998-2008). Third, the movies had to be available in a format that would allow me the repeated and practical access required by an analysis of this nature[15]. And lastly, even though I was going to deal with a limited number of films (10), I wanted this sample to have as much scope as possible.

That is why I selected movies which -in my opinion- showed distinct and interesting narrative strategies to convey their stories, and that could be demonstrative of the different uses of the canonical model (imitation, rejection or adaptation) that I wish to look for and indentify in Latin American fiction films. I shall come back to this point in section (2.2.4) of this chapter, where I'll address the issue of subjectivity in the sample selection.

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[15] Film narrative analyses demand an in-depth and repetitive viewing of its subject of study. This is why I opted for movies I could obtain in a VHS or DVD format.

2.2 The Case Study Research Design

So far I have used the term "case study" to describe the methodological *structure* of my work, the *cultural products* that it will specifically analyze (the selected films), and the overarching *categories* of national cinemas where I suggest those films can be located. Before I go any further then, I think it is necessary to adequately define this concept and explain its function in this research.

2.2.1 Is it a "Case Study"?

A *case* in the context of Social Science research can be almost any unit of analysis: a person, a group, an entire community, or specific cultural manifestations (such as *films*). What defines a "case study", then, is not what it regards as its objects/subjects of inquiry, but its *intention* towards them. As Allan Bryman (2004: 48) notes, what truly characterizes this type of research design is its approach, aimed at reaching a *detailed* and *contextual* understanding of one -or a small number- of cases.

In this sense, this project could indeed be categorized as a Case Study, as it looks to provide an *in-depth* look at the narrative profile of each of the ten films of the sample, comparing their characteristics to those of the classical model. The element of *context* is also an essential part of my initiative. Without it to act as a "counterbalance" to the specificity of the film narrative analyses, there is a danger of ending up with sterile knowledge, isolated from the very social circumstances that gives it meaning.

Here it's pertinent to remember that the Case Study approach should be considered as a conceptual design or "framework" particularly suited to answer research questions regarding inter-connections between events or patterns of behavior, and between these and wider issues; all of which benefit from a detailed understanding of their context and their evolution over time (Bryman; "Case Study": 2005).

I believe that my main research question is an example of those Bryman describes as "best suited" for a Case Study design; since it searches precisely for what he calls *"inter-connections between events"* by sifting through the films' narratives to identify their particular similarities, differences and adaptations to the classical model of fiction film narration popularized by the Hollywood industry. In doing so, it also relates to *"wider issues"* such as the processes of cultural hybridity and the creative resistance of hegemony that these film practices could evidence.

As mentioned earlier (and also in accordance to Bryman's view); my research question benefits from a detailed, *contextual* understanding of its cases of study. In fact, the results of these individual film analyses can only acquire their *full* meaning when contrasted to the particularities of their context: the stages of "cinematic development" in which I propose their industries of origin can be inscribed.

This in turn relates directly to Robert K. Yin's definition of the case study as an "empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident" (Yin, 2003: 13).

As the author points out, the case study design can be helpful when the researcher deliberately wishes to cover contextual conditions that he deems to be highly pertinent to his object of study. I believe this to be my case, as the ultimate objective of my research is to understand how a hegemonic model of filmic narration is appropriated by audiovisual creators who are *outside* the dominant structure, but very much *within* its range of economic, cultural and creative influence.

Furthermore, my study is based on the perception of filmmaking not as a "hermetic" act; but as one *permeated* by the social circumstances already mentioned. Such an approach blurs the lines that separate the *product* from its *context*. This would be yet another argument in favor of the adoption of the Case Study design, since -like Yin points out- it directs its attention to those "grey areas" where the object of study and its circumstance influence one another.

2.2.2 What type of "Case Study" is it?

Having explained the basic arguments of why I view my research project as a case study, I will now go on to extend this definition according to R.K. Yin's categorization.

To do so, I must first distinguish what *kind of cases* my project is dealing with. Yin (2003) proposes five main types, based on the objective of their selection. These are: the *critical case*, aimed at testing a well formulated theory; the *extreme* or *unique case*, worth studying due to its rare or intrinsically interesting nature; the *revelatory case*, which provides an opportunity to examine something previously unavailable to study; the *exemplifying case*, that captures circumstances of a situation; and finally, the *longitudinal case*, used to analyze how things change over time.

I consider that the ten Latin American fiction films I chose can be categorized as *exemplifying* cases. As explained earlier, I believe that the narratives of recent fiction films of the region contain "evidence" of certain appropriations of an external model, which may be better understood when studying them against the backdrop of their particular national industries. This "evidence" can be seen as what Yin calls the "circumstances of a situation"[16], which may be then extracted and interpreted through the case study design.

Next, I must distinguish what *type of Case Study* my proposal entails. Yin presents four alternatives: the "Holistic" studies *a single case*; the "Holistic/Embedded" looks at *a case within a case*; the Multiple Case Study analyses *more than one case*; and the "Multiple Case Study/Embedded" deals with *cases within other cases*.

It could be argued that my project is an example of a "Multiple Case Study", as it will conduct individual narrative analyses of ten different cases. However, as I have tried to explain, I do not wish to approach the films as "isolated occurrences", but as

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[16] The "situation" understood here as the appropriation of a dominant model of film narration by peripheral filmmakers.

manifestations *belonging* to the particular social circumstance of their industry of origin. By viewing these two national film industries as cases in themselves, and the films as a product and *part* of those cases, my research would fall under the *"Multiple Case Study/Embedded"* category proposed by Yin. This can be illustrated using the same basic outline presented in Figure 4:

Figure 5.

	Case Study A Costa Rica "The Initial Stage"	**Case Study B** Colombia "The Intermediate Stage"
Existing body of theory concerning fiction-film narration.	**Case Study A1** *"Caribe"*	**Case Study B1** *"Apocalipsur"*
	Case Study A2 *"Password"*	**Case Study B2** *"La sombra del caminante"*
	Case Study A3 *"Mujeres Apasionadas"*	**Case Study B3** *"Los niños invisibles"*
	Case Study A4 *"Marasmo"*	**Case Study B4** *"Bolivar soy yo"*
	Case Study A5 *"Asesinato en el Meneo"*	**Case Study B5** *"La vendedora de rosas"*

Now that the "Multiple/Embedded" nature of my case study has been determined, I will now go on to discuss two of the most sensitive aspects of this design.

2.2.3 The Issue of Generalization

Perhaps one of the most controversial aspects of case study research is the validity of generalizations made from a single case or a small sample. This debate could be summarized by the question: *How can a single case possibly be representative so that it might yield findings that can be applied more generally to other cases?*

According to Bryman, the first step to get pass this dilemma is for the researcher to understand that there is no such thing as a "typical case" which we can use to represent a totality. In other words, it would be a mistake to judge a case study in statistical terms, viewing it as a "sample of one" (2004: 51).

This is especially true when dealing with something as vast and heterogeneous as filmic creation. Each film is *unique*; not just because of its particular characteristics (story, visual style, mode of narration, etc) but because they each have been shaped by cultural, economic, personal and creative circumstances that are *never* exactly the same.

It would be foolish to think that any of the films of my sample is entirely representative of its national industry, let alone of such a complex notion as "Latin American Cinema". So, if the "external validity" of the Case Study research design is so restricted, how is it that I can aspire to offer any insight beyond the particularity of my individual cases?

The answer lies in the *purpose* of the case study. Contrary to other types of research -like the survey, for instance- case studies are *not* meant to be representative, and their finding are *not* intended to be generalized to larger populations. Instead, the followers of this design aim to generate an intensive examination of their cases, in relation to which they then engage in a theoretical analysis. As Bryman points out, the crucial question in Case Study research is not whether the findings can be generalized to a wider universe, but how well the researcher *generates theory* out of the findings (2004: 52).

In other words, what is most important in a case study is the quality with which the researcher is able to relate theoretical arguments to the data, be it to *test* a theory or *propose* one. Like Julia Brannen notes, we shouldn't ask if it's possible to generalize from a case, but rather *how far* we can extrapolate knowledge from that case to theory ("Generations": 2005). Thus, choosing the case study approach does not necessarily mean giving up all attempts of substantive generalization.

In his argument defending the possibilities of generalization in sociological interpretive studies, Malcolm Williams (2000) states that interpretive research engages, knowingly or unknowingly, in what he calls "*moderatum*" generalizations: the everyday inductive reasoning by which aspects of "X" (the *specific* case of study)

can be seen as instances of a broader, recognizable set of features (i.e. the social context to which it belongs):

> The 'order' of human social life needs some form of communicative cement, stocks of phrases, expression or languages themselves, and it is these that the interpretivist needs to understand to be able to 'say something' (...) thus everyday generalisations are what it is that the researcher wants to understand, and of course if she can understand them she will know something of the cultural consistency within which they reside and is then able to make her own generalisations about that consistency. The interpretation of an action or utterance leads to an understanding of why it happened. This in turn will tell us something of its antecedents, which will be at least partially social. (220)

It is based on this logic that I can propose that certain aspects of the films' narrative texts may be viewed as concrete signs of a complex social phenomenon occurring outside the text: the creative reaction of a peripheral group to the narrative hegemony of the classical model.

And since it can be argued that this social phenomenon is not only *national*, but *regional*; one could press the point further and propose that the findings have a *moderate* connection with these broader context, regardless of their uniqueness. To refine this assumption, however, I have come up with the categories of cinematic development explained at the beginning of this chapter. The objective behind this is to be able to relate the results of the film analyses not only to the cinemas of Costa Rica and Colombia, but also to general, "open" typologies that could serve as examples of *similar* or *comparable* Latin American film industries.

At this point, it is necessary to address the issue of "theory generation". As I have stated repeatedly, it is not my goal to produce "guidelines" aimed at disclosing knowledge about the essence or workings of "Latin American Cinema" as a whole. Instead, I believe that the contextualist approach to theory and knowledge is more compatible with the aspirations I have for my research.

According to Mjøset (2008), scholars who follow this attitude view theory not as definitive axiomatic models, but as the contextual *understanding* of interacting motives. This knowledge is drawn out from the *explanation* of cases which the

researcher deems relevant or worth studying, and is organized in "local research frontiers": cumulative areas of knowledge where theories are built; in my case, the fields of Cultural and Film Studies. Thus, "theory" is seen as the accumulated explanations of earlier, similar cases, which can then be used in the explanation of new ones. The *specific* knowledge extracted from these individual cases is therefore not aimed at proving or disproving the *general* body of theory, but mainly to engross the overall understanding (or questions) we have of that particular area of study.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the contextualist attitude appears to coincide with Bordwell and Carroll's call for "piecemeal" or "middle-level" research in Film Studies: inquiries that borrow from the theoretical as well as the empirical, that refuse to understand films by projecting onto them semantic fields privileged by this or that theory, and that seek to produce knowledge based not on subjectivity, ideology, or culture in general but rather of in-depth research on particular phenomena (1996: 29)

Not surprisingly, Bordwell mentions film narratology as a "thriving middle-level area" and emphasizes that "the most established realms of middle-level research have been empirical[17] studies of filmmakers, genres and national cinemas. This tradition has been enriched by gay/lesbian, feminists, minority and postcolonial perspectives, along with researchers who have begun to bring to light films, filmmakers and Third World cinemas long ignored by orthodox film history" (1996: 27).

I consider that my project follows these principles, mainly by trying to provide a detailed and contextual understanding of its specific objects of study, without attempting to prove or disprove any particular body of theory. I also hope that, through the "moderate generalization" approach, my work is able to offer insights beyond the uniqueness of its cases which may be of help for future researchers when tackling similar instances or research questions.

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[17] Here, I reproduce Bordwell's own definition of empirical inquiry being "one which seeks answers to its questions from evidence available outside the mind of the inquirer. Film history is empirical in just this way; but so too are all varieties of film criticism, which base their interpretations on evidence intersubjectively available within the texts" (1996: 34)

2.2.4 The Issue of Subjectivity

At the beginning of this chapter, I gave the reader a brief explanation of the main criteria I used to select the films of my sample. Two factors were entirely *practical*: the movies had had to be released within the time frame defined for the research (1998-2008), and they had to be available in DVD or VHS format.

The two remaining standards were far more *subjective*. First, I decided to choose movies that I had previously watched, and therefore had already some knowledge about. Second, given the small size of the sample, I chose films that -in my opinion- used distinct and interesting narrative strategies to convey their stories and that could be demonstrative of the different usages of the canonical model I was looking to identify.

Since then, it worried me that the high degree of subjectivity present in this logic may affect the validity of my results. If I "handpicked" the films based on pre-acquired knowledge of them (namely, that they *adjust* to the assumptions I wish to present), then I am essentially "rigging" the process to fit my particular research objectives. This concern could be interpreted as being influenced by the principles of "Grounded Theory", which requires of the researcher a disposition to "discover" ideas in data without imposing preconceptions; to generate theory *through* data rather than testing ideas formulated *in advance* of data collection and analysis (Dey, 2004: 80).

However, that original concern was changed by the ideas of authors that have sought to debunk some of the common "myths" surrounding case study research. First, it is necessary to address the notion that case studies are only good for generating hypotheses, especially when this "theory-building" is carried out at the end of the research process. Eckstein (1975) for instance contradicts this view, asserting that case studies are actually better for *testing hypotheses* than for producing them.

Flyvbjerg goes further than that by saying there is a direct relationship between the ideas we wish to test and the selection of our cases, depending of the degree of "generalizability" we want our research to have (2003: 425). For Flyvbjerg, the

potential to generalize from the findings of a case study can be enhanced by what he calls the "strategic selection" of its cases. From his description of the different classes of selection strategies, I identify my original criteria as an example of what he calls an "Information-oriented selection". Its purpose, explains the author, is to maximize the utility of information from small sample*s* or single cases, which are selected on the basis of *expectations about their information content* (2003: 426).

Flyvbjerg goes on to specify the different types of cases that the "Information-oriented selection" usually draws from. This typology now allows me to complement the original perception of my cases of study as of the *"exemplifying"* kind proposed by Yin. Instead, Flyvbjerg talks of "paradigmatic" cases, and describes them as those which are chosen to "*develop a metaphor* or establish a school for the domain that the case concerns" (2003: 426).

I believe this definition synthesizes the nature and intention of this research: I have selected a methodological design (with its corresponding cases) that may grant it some level of metaphoric value. In other words, I have consciously chosen cases which may act as "references" to which other cases with similar characteristics may be related or compared within the area of Film Studies.

But although the *purpose* of paradigmatic cases can be clearly defined; their *essence* (what *makes* them a "paradigmatic") is much more elusive. Flyvbjerg concludes that the choice of what the researcher views as "paradigmatic cases" is very much based on *intuition* and that -although selecting them should not be discredited on the grounds that it is an intuitive decision- the researcher's choice will be held accountable by other members of the scholarly community to which he belongs, in the sense that it must be *sensible* or *explicable* to other practitioners (2003: 427).

2.3 The Method of Narrative Analysis

As I have stated before, this research follows in the footsteps of narrative semiotics or "Narratology". For Mieke Bal, Narratology is a type of *theory*, understood as a systematic set of generalized statements about a particular segment of reality (in this case, *narrative texts* of all kinds), which help us to understand, analyze and evaluate narratives. (1997: 3)

In the previous chapter, I mentioned that the phenomenon of film can be broken down into a variety of analyzable "texts", if we agree to define this concept as any "finite, structured whole composed of language signs" (Bal, 1997: 5), or as Kolker puts it, any event that makes meaning, as long as we can define its boundaries, internal structures and our perception of it (1998:12).

To avoid this ambiguity and narrow down on what really interests this study, the first thing that must be done is to *define* the specific "narrative text" I look into when analyzing the films of my sample, thus separating it from the other multiple layers of equally "narrative" material that can be studied through the film (such as the physical, the stylistic, the contextual, the economical, etc). For this purpose, I use Bal's previously introduced notion of the "narrative text" as a web of the following interconnected elements:

- The actors of a narrative are those agents that perform actions.
- To act is to cause or to experience an event.
- An event is the transition from one state to another state.
- A fabula is a series of logically and chronologically related events that are caused or experienced by actors.
- A story is a fabula that is presented in a certain manner.

- And along these same lines, a *narrative text* is a text in which an agent relates a story in a particular medium, such as language, imagery, sound, buildings, or a combination thereof. (1997: 5)

Bal's view of the "narrative text" coincides with the formalist approach to narrative described in the theoretical framework, which supports a tripartite distinction between the broader, narrative material known as "fabula"; the actual account of that material (which Bal calls "story" but that I will continue to refer to as "plot"); and the concrete, analyzable "text" (in this case, the film) through which the previous two are perceived.

With my "object of study" adequately defined, I will now proceed to identify the main elements which I focus on and interpret when observing the films. The following sections offer a brief account of these key components, ordered according to the narrative "layer" to which they belong: "fabula" and "story". However, it is important to note, as Bal does herself, that this distinction is merely for analytical purposes, for in reality these two levels are inseparable and dependent of one another (1997: 7).

2.3.1 The Fabula

So far, it has been established that the "fabula" is the content that is worked into a story through a series of interconnected events acted or experienced by actors. Thus, the first step of the analysis is to break down each of the film texts into their basic narrative units or "*scenes*" -that is, the events that occur in a specific location and time frame- in order to identify and extract such content.

The main benefit of this technique is that it makes the object of study more "manageable", if only at the level of the analysis' organization. It is through the close and detailed study of those "sub-units", that one can acquire a better understanding of the film "as a whole". Furthermore, the very act of *recognizing* a scene implies an initial identification of two of the essential components that make up the fabula: time and space. Next, is a brief description of the specific elements that are accounted for when studying each of the films' scenes:

- *Events*

According to Bal, "events" are changes of state in the narration and, as Chatman distinguishes, they can either be "actions" or "happenings": *actions*, being those instances in which a character (or "actor") directly provokes the change in state, and *happenings* being those state transitions experienced -but not caused- by the character.

- *The link between the events*

Attention is also given to how events are (or are not) linked to one another. This particular interest is rooted in the importance of "causality" as the organizing principle of classical narrative; that is, that one event causes the next one, in a continuous chain along the narrative, leading up to its completion. Furthermore, I try to establish whether the connection between the events is, as Chatman puts it, a causal "necessity" or, on the contrary, a more "contingent" relation, where there is a depiction of events that succeed one another, but do not owe their existence to each other. (1978: 47).

- *Characters*

Naturally, an account of the actions in a narrative demands an account of their performers: the "actors" or "characters". Here, it must be stressed that the defining essence of a character is that it performs actions that are functional to the narrative, in the sense that they drive it forward in one way or another.

However, characters are not just analyzed in terms of their actions and functionality to the narrative, but also in respect to their set of *traits*. This generates a "paradigm" as described by Chatman; a virtual set of similar or distinct characteristics and attitudes, that allows for the comparison and contrast between (and even *within*) the narrative actors. This approach, explains the author, helps to preserve "openness" (as opposed to seeing characters as fixed, finite entities) and treats characters as autonomous beings, not just plot functions (1978: 119).

Also helpful is the fact that knowledge of the "psychological make up" of the characters allows me to contrast my observations against the template of the "classical character" which, as described in the previous chapter, is branded by clarity and precision in its traits and motivations.

- *Space*

As we know, characters and events in the fabula develop in definable *spaces*, be them real or imaginary[18]. Formalist analyses have produced rich, in-depth looks at how space is conveyed through the visual language of film, giving special attention to questions of position, composition and movement (among others) of individual shots and the elements within it. Although I appreciate the knowledge that this type of segmentation offers us about the ways in which film operates, I choose to focus on a different communicative dimension of the narrative space.

As Mieke Bal explains, "it is (…) possible to make a note of the place of each fabula, and then to investigate whether a connection exists between the kind of events, the identity of the actors, and the location. The subdivision of locations into groups is a manner of gaining insight into the relationships between the elements." (1997: 215)

Following a structuralist principle of binary opposition, the author stresses the importance of accounting for the contrasts between locations and/or the borderlines between them as "predominant ways of highlighting the significance of the fabula or even of determining it" (1997: 133). Thus, I don't just plot the different spaces as "backgrounds" of the actions, but also pay special attention to how they are portrayed, what are the connections of the main characters to the particular setting, and what are the essential differences and/or similarities between the locations.

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[18] Here it is interesting to note Chatman's view that it is only *narrative time* that contains *events*, whereas *narrative space* contains the *characters* or "existents": "Events are not spatial, though they occur in space; it is the entities that perform or are affected by them that are spatial". (1978: 96) However, since in the vast majority of cases there is a direct correspondence between the elements (the event, the specific time in which it is occurring, the character performing or experiencing it, and the place where he or she is doing so), I chose not to apply Chatman's distinction unless the characteristics of a particular scene demanded it.

In short, this in an attempt to disclose the "semantic content" of the narrative space, much in the same way as it is done with the characters of the films. Indeed, there are instances when locations are not just plain spatial frames for the occurring action, but also charged with narrative meaning (or "thematized", as Bal calls it), becoming almost characters in themselves. In these cases, space "becomes an 'acting place' rather than the place of action. It influences the fabula, and the fabula becomes subordinate to the presentation of space. The fact that 'this is happening here' is just an important as 'the way it is here', which allows these events to happen" (1997: 136).

This statement is especially relevant to a study of films from Latin America, where traditionally, the stories are tightly linked to a specific space (or set of related spaces) which act as a "mirror" of the larger social reality they are attempting to portray. One just needs to recall "Cidade de Deus" or "Amores Perros" -two of the most influential Latin American films from the same time period as this study's sample- to realize how the nature of its characters and events are practically inextricable from the context of that infamous Brazilian *favela*, or the underbelly of México City. Michael Chanan agrees:

> Apologists for globalization are given to argue that the world economy is now so integrated that the particularities of the local and the framework of the nation-state are increasingly irrelevant; place, on this reading, is a matter of the reduction of difference to background decoration. This is not what you see in Latin American cinema. Instead, what you get is a continuing imperative to bear witness to local histories which takes us to the interstices, the margins, and the peripheries. (in Dennison & Hwee Lim (Eds), 2006: 49)

It is precisely this *active* role of space in the narrative, more than its passive use as a backdrop, which interests this study.

- *Time*

I left the element of "time" for last in this brief account because I believe it acts as the main connecting factor between the fabula and the "plot", which will be addressed in the following section. A first distinction is in order, then, between the "time of the

fabula" which I will henceforth call *fictional time*, and the "time of the plot" that I'll refer to as the *discourse time* of the film.

In the viewing and breakdown of the films in my sample, I limit myself to two main activities when studying the element of "time": First, I register the *fictional* time frame in which the events of the individual scenes are happening. Secondly (or I should rather say, *simultaneously*) I record the *discursive* sequence in which the scenes are shown in the film, along with their specific duration. This ultimately allows me to reconstruct the time-line of the fabula, a particularly useful tool when analyzing films where fictional time is not portrayed chronologically in the plot.

By themselves, the registries of fictional and discourse time do not yield much information about the narrative workings of a film. It is only when the relationships between these two dimensions are explored, that the richness and complexity of narrative time comes into sharp focus. In the next section, I will talk briefly about the three time relations -as proposed by Genette (1970) and summarized by Chatman (1978)- that I use to add *nuance* to the interpretation of time in the films of my sample.

2.3.2 The Plot

The concept of story/plot/discourse is intrinsically bound to that of *time*, since a story is but the presentation of the fabula in chronological time and in a particular ordering or "sequence". As Chatman argues, this relationship between fictional and chronological time poses a series of questions:

> How is the story[19] anchored to a contemporary moment? When is the beginning? How does the narrative provide information about events that have led up to the state of affairs at that moment? What are the relations between the natural order of events of the story and the order of their presentation by the discourse? And between the duration of the discursive presentation and that of the actual story events? How are recurrent events depicted by the discourse? (1978: 63)

Although I don't set out to answer each of these questions explicitly, I do apply Genette's approach to the analyses of narrative time in my analyses, mainly as a way to shed some light on the structure and characteristics of the films' plots. This consists of looking into the categories of *order*, *duration* and *frequency*:

- *Order*

As mentioned above, the concept of "order" is the very essence of the story/plot; determining the specific arrangement in the chronological time-line of those events that occur in the fabula, or fictional time. Within this category I distinguish between the *chronological*, *anachronous* (as with flashbacks and flashforwards) and *acronychal*[20] sequencing that Genette suggests. Needless to say, this procedure is done for each of the narrative strands or "story lines" of the film, defining points of overlapping, parallel or independent development.

- *Duration*

Here, attention is given to the relation between the duration of the events in the fictional time-line *vis-à-vis* chronological extent of the text. Chatman mentions five possibilities: (1) The *Scene*: where unity of time is achieved as fictional time and discoursive time are equal; (2) *Ellipsis*: when the discourse halts, but fictional time remains running; (3) *Summary*: when the discursive time compresses -and is therefore, shorter than- fictional time (with the obvious example being here a

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[19] Chatman's term for "fabula".

[20] The author defines this term as the instance where there is "no chrono-logical relation (even inverse) between story and discourse. The grouping is either random or based on principles of organization of other kinds of texts –spatial proximity, discursive logic, thematics of the like." (Chatman, 1978: 65)

montage); (4) *Stretch*: when the discursive time appears longer than the actual fictional time, as is the case with *ralenti* or "slow motion"; and (5) *Pause*: when the fabula time stops, even though the discourse continue. An example of this last, less usual device is when there is a "freeze-frame" or a "black screen" that virtually "stops" the fictional time, while a narrator comments as a voice-over, thus advancing the discourse. (1978: 68-75).

- *Frequency*

Bal explains Genette's concept of frequency as the "numerical relationship between the events in the fabula and those in the story" (1997: 111). Here, then, the key phenomenon is the *repetition* of fabula events across discursive time. Within his category, Genette makes four further distinctions (in Stam, 1978: 78):

(1) *Singular*: a single event from the fabula is presented a single time in the discourse. Naturally, all those events that are not repeated (a vast majority) conform to this classification; (2) *Multi-singular*: several discursive presentations of a repeating event in the fictional time. An example of this type of frequency would be a film with a fictional span of 5 days, where its character is shown waking up 5 times during the film; (3) *Repetitive*: a single event in the fictional time is presented various times in the discourse; and (4) *Iterative*: a single discursive presentation of various events in the fabula. I believe an illustration of this last case in film would be the use of a "split screen" to show two or more events from the fabula at the same time.

Evidently, and as with the sub-types of "duration" mentioned earlier, these sub-types of "frequency" are only applied to my analyses when the particular narrative device they describe is employed in a film.

2.3.3 Levels of Narration

One final aspect under study within the films is their levels of narration. As Mieke Bal explains, a story can only become a narrative text when it is "told" in a particular medium. The entity which relates these signs cannot be identified with the

"filmmaker". Rather, the artist withdraws and calls upon a fictitious spokesman, an agent technically known as the *narrator* (1997: 8).

This narrator, however, can operate at different levels within the narrative text. Perhaps the most common -yet less discerned by the general viewer- is that which Edward Branigan (1992) calls "extra-fictional narrator", which has a clear presence in the text but is not part of the fabula or "story-world". Here now is a brief description of this and other types of "narrators" commonly found in fiction film:

- *The extra-fictional narrator*

This figure is similar to what Seymour Chatman calls the "Implied Author": the organizing principle that controls -from outside the fiction- what the viewer is going to see and the order and manner in which we are going to see it (1978:148). In a mystery film, for instance, the extra-fictional narrator is that external agent which generates suspense through the use of narrative and technical devices, such as "retardation" or a specific framing or editing that conceals the identity of the killer.

- *The non-diegetic narrator*

The non-diegetic narrator is present inside the fictional construct of the film, but does not have an active part in the story-world. A popular example of this type of narrator are George Lucas' written preludes to his "Star Wars" saga ("A long time ago, in a galaxy far, far away…"), in which the viewer is given basic narrative information with which to "frame" the following action. A non-diegetic narrator can also be verbal, as is the case in traditional "voice-of-god" documentaries, or as in "*Y tu mamá también*" (México, 2001), where an invisible narrator refers to the characters and events in a seemingly omniscient manner.

- *The diegetic narrator*

On the other hand, the diegetic narrator is an active character inside the story-world (or *diegesis*) who can address events in which he or she has participated. As Larsen explains, "narrators of this type manifest themselves whenever characters in the story-world tell each other about their experiences" (2002: 130). This transfer of

information can be done through dialogue with another character, or by allowing the character to report and comment on narrative events through the use of "voice-over" in the film's soundtrack.

This is what Chatman plainly calls the "narrator", who may or may not have a corresponding "narratee": another character within the story world to whom the story is being told. Using Robert Zemecki's "Forrest Gump" (USA, 1994) as a well-known example; the character of Forrest functions as the salient diegetic narrator, telling passages of his amazing life to a cast of "narratees" waiting in a bus stop alongside him.

- *Character narration*

Story characters can also convey information not only through their own voices, but also through their actions. This is called "character narration", of which Branigan refers to three main types:

(1) *External focalization*: occurs when we as viewers follow a character as he goes about his or her life and interacts with other characters and situations. We are looking at the character "from outside" (hence the term "external"), but we understand that we are in his or her world; that it is this particular character who is the source of our knowledge (Larsen, 2002: 131). (2) The opposite *internal focalization*, takes place when we adopt the character's subjective perspective of the story-world, as in "point-of-view" shots. (3) Finally, in *deep focalization*, the audience has audiovisual access to the character's most inner sphere, as when we are shown thoughts or dreams going on in his or her mind.

2.3.4 "Narrators" or "Narration"?

Naturally, all these forms of narration are not mutually exclusive. Practically all films show most (if not all) of them occurring simultaneously or at different moments throughout the narrative. David Bordwell, however, believes narration in the fiction film should not be regarded as a phenomenon driven by "narrators" (which to him

connotes a *human* agency), but understood as the "organization of a set of cues to the construction of the story. This presupposes a perceiver, but not any sender, of a message" (1985: 62). Especially problematic for this author is the figure of the "extra-fictional narrator" or "implied author":

> ...this construct adds nothing to our understanding of filmic narration. No trait we could assign to an implied author of a film could not more simply be ascribed the narration itself: it sometimes suppresses information, it often restricts our knowledge, it generates curiosity, it creates a tone, and so on. To give every film a narrator or implied author is to indulge in an anthropomorphic fiction. (1985: 62)

I disagree in part with this last point. Adopting Bordwell's view of narration as a "sender-less message" would imply denying its essence as a communicative process in which someone (sender) tells something (message) to someone else (perceiver). The author justifies this by saying there is no point in placing this classic communication paradigm as the fundamental process of all narration, only to grant that most films (especially those that follow the "classical mode") systematically efface or conceal this process through the techniques of "unobtrusive craftsmanship" (1985: 62).

The fact still remains, however, that narration is, first and foremost, a human act of communication, and as such cannot exist if any of its essential parts is missing. Fiction film narration is not an isolated process that "just is", but a message purposely created by a collective author to convey information at different levels. If we decide to follow Bordwell's suggestion and understand narration as an organization of a set of cues for a perceiver to construct a story, then we would *still* be forced to address *who* or *what* is behind that particular organization.

In his book "Coming to Terms: The Rhetoric of Narrative in Fiction and Film" (1990), Seymour Chatman discusses this very point, objecting to Bordwell's argument that film has no agency corresponding to the narrator, and that film narrative is best considered as a kind of work wholly performed by the spectator (124). Chatman

responds to this by simply pointing out how narrative agency ought not to be linked to a human entity, as Bordwell is inclined to do:

> If we argue that "narrator" names only the organizational and sending agency and that that agency need not be human, as the dictionary tells us it need not, much of Bordwell's objection seem obviated, and we are spared the uncomfortable consequences of a communication without a communicator - indeed, a creation with no creator. We need *some* theoretical concept to explain the preexistence of what Nick Browne calls the "authority which can be taken to rationalize the presentation of shots".

In my analyses, I try to suppress the concept of "narrators" (so as not to indulge in the "anthropomorphic fantasy" that Bordwell criticizes), instead using Branigan's term of "levels of narration". In any case, the theory behind the names remains the same, and so did my intention to apply it to my own work.

I agree that the narrative analysis of film should not be concerned exclusively with "narrators" or levels of "narration", but I believe it would be equally mistaken to dismiss such an important element of the communicative process entirely. As Larsen points out, narrative analysis is always centrally concerned with how a given narrative applies these several modes of narration. A narrative derives its distinctive character not only from its presentation of various events and characters to the audience, but also from the specific ways in which the information about these events and characters is organized, and how the audience is addressed (2002: 131).

2.4 Summary

In this chapter, I have tried to offer the reader an adequate description of both my research design and method, with special detail on the particular narrative elements I looked for when conducting my analyses. I would like to end by saying that, although the methodology of this work is clearly influenced by the categories and typologies of narrative theory, the objective of this research is not to *impose* these classifications onto its cases of study, but rather to use them as a "frame of reference" through which I may advance towards a better understanding of the texts.

This understanding, however, can't be obtained by narrative theory alone. Like Mieke Bal argues, the point of narratology isn't to prove the narrative nature of an object of study, nor should it strive (as it traditionally has) for the distinction, delimitation and classification of all things narrative. The point of narratology, continues the author, is to *understand* the narrative text as an expression of culture, and itself as a *perspective* on that culture (1997: 222).

As I've mentioned before, I have tried to complement my narrative analyses with other "frames of reference" that assist me in looking past the films as mere texts (an inherent pitfall of narratology), and more as the unique cultural products that they really are. Among such aids are the views and opinions of the films' directors about their work, and the valuable input of Cultural Studies theories through which we can better grasp the logic and dynamics of cultural appropriation and hybridity (see Chapter 1) that I believe are at work in Latin American fiction film. Furthermore, the next chapter provides the reader with a general overview of the national contexts of production from which the films of the sample originate. It is my hope that, through these complementing frames, my work is able to gain perspective of the films as narrative *and* cultural texts.

3. Regional and National Contexts

3.1 Overview

Almost four decades have passed since the notion of a "New Latin American Cinema" (NLAC) emerged in our region; a movement of filmic practice based on the ideology of a "Third Cinema". Today, both these terms and the projects they designate have developed substantially from the original definitions and objectives laid out by its founders.

The NLAC movement, as Michael T. Martin reminds us, was never a spontaneous, autonomous, unified or monolithic regional project (1997:16). Nonetheless, it provided a unify*ing* banner under which very different films, from very different national contexts could be understood and studied as aspects of a common socio-political agenda. However, with the disappearance of the global order that gave rise to it, the NLAC movement has become even more diffused.

As film practice in Latin America travels forward in time, the more conspicuous point of reference that was the NLAC movement becomes progressively smaller in the distance. With no broad, encompassing categories to act as "markers" of our regional cinematic tradition, what we are left is the vastness of individual cases.

What, then, of the concept of "national cinema"? To me, the term and the articulation it implies are as debatable as that of a regional project. Yet, just like the NLAC, it can be regarded as an effort to provide a basic common denominator to what would otherwise be an unconnected range of filmic representations.

More than homogenizing *categorizations*, "the national" and "the regional" can be used as *contextualizations* (historical, political, cultural, etc) of specific works under study. The present chapter is dedicated to the presentation and discussion of these two

main frames of reference. Through them, the cases at hand can be further understood as products of a particular cultural backdrop, instead of as isolated texts.

I shall start by going over the concepts of "Third Cinema" and the "NLAC" which I briefly outlined above. I do so, not only because chronologically they represent the clearest and most recent attempt for a regional, "alternative" movement of film practice, but also because their legacy extends to this day, effectively influencing the content and form of many contemporary Latin American films, including some of my own sample.

Next, in sections 3.3. and 3.4., I will offer a summarized overview of the *national* film contexts from which the cases of my sample originate: Costa Rica and Colombia. In doing so, I look to provide a picture of the historical circumstances of production that, just like the Hollywood model or the NLAC ideology, may have helped shape the films themselves.

3.2 Cinema in Latin America: Historical Perspectives

Just a few years after its invention in 1895, film was already present in Latin America. Since then, argues Julianne Burton-Carvajal, the creation of "local cinemas" became both an indicator of development and a tool for the construction of national identity in our countries (1998: 579). According to the author, its mass nature made film the most important media for the registry of popular culture, the creation of own images, and self-representation to the rest of the world.

In this early period of the region's cinematic development, certain cultural elements (such as customs, music, social classes, etc) were chosen and prioritized as the main components of the national image. Clear examples of this were the films from Mexico's "golden era" of the 30s and 40s, which enjoyed wide distribution and popular success throughout the region, often becoming the *dominant* cinema, even over Hollywood production.

In Mexico's case, points out Burton-Carvajal, the project of creating a *national* identity turned into a *trans-national* phenomenon, as other Latin American countries responded positively to images and discourses that -although not entirely *their own*- contained a series of common cultural references, most notably: language. For the first time, people had access to films in Spanish, made by other Latin Americans, and portraying elements to which they could directly relate.

Still, the proposed "national identities" built through film were highly selective and exclusive of any element that "did not fit" with the idealized image of the nation they wished to portray. This begins to change after WWII when, in the context of a politically polarized world and repressive regimes, the ideology of "Third Cinema" emerges. Here, filmmaking is politically and ideologically oriented to *challenge* the dominant views about national identity by denouncing situations of social injustice and oppression that had been traditionally ignored. The following section elaborates on the details of this ideology and how it infused film practices in the region, even to date.

3.2.1 A Cinema of Subversion

The "Third Cinema" project represents one of the main (or at least one of the most studied) contributions of Latin America to the theory and practice of world film. It was a phenomenon that marked the development of filmmaking in our region, influencing the way in which many filmmakers, audiences, theorists and state authorities understand film and its purpose in our societies.

However, as I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the "Third Cinema" project has changed significantly from its original formulation of the late 1960's. And the reason why it is possible to state this so surely is because its pioneers composed a set of seminal documents in which they publicly declared the intentions, motives, ideologies and traits of the movement they were proposing.

When we read these statements of purpose -or "manifestos"- and contrast them to what we understand and experience today as "Third Cinema", it becomes clear that some original elements remain, while others have not withstood the test of time. I shall come back to this in the following point, and focus now on the origins of the concept.

To understand the original notion of Third Cinema we must recall the turbulent political and social climate of the "Cold War", namely the conflict between the two opposing poles of economical, military and cultural power at the time: capitalism and socialism. Third Cinema is a direct product of this divided world, the child of a clear anti-capitalist ideology.

The two men credited with being the founders of the movement are Argentinean filmmakers Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino. In 1969, they wrote the essay "*Towards a Third Cinema: notes and experiences for the development of a cinema of liberation in the Third World*". From the very title of this primordial document then, "Third Cinema" was linked with two key notions: that of the "*Third World*" (understood as the "underdeveloped" regions of the world"), and the goal of *liberation*.

The ideal of liberation through cinema was related to the struggle of classes between "the powerful" and "the oppressed", which socialism demanded. For these theorists, cinema -"the most valuable tool of communication of our time"- had been reduced to yet another commodity within the scheme of capitalism. Films were destined to satisfy only the ideological and economic interests of a powerful class: "the lords of the world film market". Third Cinema was intended to break away from this pattern and become a cultural spear point in the "people's" revolution to eradicate the stratified societies brought about by capitalism:

> Third Cinema is, in our opinion, the cinema that recognizes in that struggle the most gigantic cultural, scientific, and artistic manifestation of our time, the great possibility of constructing a liberated personality with each people as the starting point –in a word, the decolonization of culture. (Solanas & Getino in Martin (Ed); 1997: 37)

In short, Third Cinema sought *social liberation* through the *subversion* of the dominant capitalist practices of cinematic production, distribution and exhibition. This integrated set of practices were seen as the hegemonic "System" that ruled the Hollywood industry ("First Cinema"), but which even permeated the "author's cinema" (or "Second Cinema") commonly found in Europe and parts of Asia. For Solanas and Getino, the distinctive characteristics of national cinemas had progressively been effaced by the imposition of the Hollywood film model:

> In our times it is hard to find a film within the field of commercial cinema, including what is known as "author's cinema", in both the capitalist and socialist countries, that manages to avoid the models of Hollywood pictures. (…) The placing of the cinema within U.S. models, even in the formal aspect, in language, leads to the adoption of the ideological forms that *gave rise to precisely that language and no other* (…) The 35mm camera, 24 frames per second, arc lights, and a commercial place of exhibition for audiences were conceived not to gratuitously transmit any ideology, but so satisfy, in the first place, the cultural and surplus value needs *of a specific ideology, of a specific world view: that of the U.S. finance capital.* (Ibidem, 1997: 41)
> -Italics are the authors'-

Thus, according to the authors of the manifesto, *real* alternatives to "the System" were only possible if one of the following two requirements were fulfilled:

- making films which the system could not assimilate and which are foreign to their needs.
- making films that directly and explicitly set out to fight the System.

Of course, this kind of cinema *outside* and *against* the System could only be a cinema of liberation and revolution: a *Third Cinema*. Its key characteristics can be viewed in direct opposition to those of the traditional film industry, as outlined by Burton-Carvajal (1998: 587-588):

Figure 6.

Mainstream, "First" Cinema	Opposing, "Third" Cinema
Focuses on the exchange value of the work (profit).	Focused on the use values of the work (social benefits, social *change*).
Is based on a complex production structure.	Opted for a simplified, *artisanal* form of production.
Uses professional, highly specialized crew and cast: Production team regarded as a "*machine*".	Almost always included non-professional, multi-functional cast and crew: Production team regarded as a "*guerrilla unit*".
Strives for a formally "polished" product.	Intentionally crude in form, "imperfect", "unfinished".
Privileged genre: Fiction	Privileged genre: Documentary
An essentially *passive* experience. Designed as "spectacle" to momentarily "escape reality".	Called to *action* and the *transformation* of an imposed, oppressive reality.
A cinema of *characters*, of individuals.	A cinema of *themes*, of masses.
Massive exhibition and distribution.	Limited, often times *clandestine* exhibition and distribution

Other Latin American thinkers/filmmakers of the period wrote their own manifestos; sharing the same basic ideals of a revolutionary cinema, and elaborating upon them. A few years before Solanas and Getino's statement, Argentinian Fernando Birri had opened the theoretical reflexion on Latin American cinema with his essay "Cinema and Underdevelopment" (1962). Similarly, in 1965, Glauber Rocha had stated that the "Aesthetic of Hunger"[21] was the defining trait of Brazil's *Cinema Novo* ("new cinema"). Julio García Espinoza from Cuba made his famous call for an

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[21] For Rocha, the great tragedy of "the Brazilian" (which can be extended to "the Latin American") was not the hunger brought on by the practices of colonization, but the fact that the colonizers and, indeed, many of those actually starving, could not *understand* this hunger. Thus, he proposed an "Aesthetic of Hunger", in which he states that the most noble manifestation of the hunger of the colonized is *violence*: Cinema Novo was to show that the "normal" consequential behaviour of the starving, was violent; for "only when confronted with violence does the colonizer understand, through horror, the strength of the culture he exploits" (Rocha in Martin (Ed), 1997: 60). Here again, filmmakers from oppressed, colonized societies are called into *action*: "to film the truth, to oppose the hypocrisy and repression of intellectual censorship (…) to place their cameras and their profession in the service of the great causes of our time". (Ibid: 61)

"imperfect cinema" in 1969, and Bolivian Jorge Sanjinés (1978) reflected on the possibilities of participatory, communal filmmaking.

Taking the theoretical concepts of "Third Cinema" as their guiding principles, these and many other filmmakers across the region attempted to articulate a *trans-national* movement of filmic practice across Latin America. A critical, politically active cinema intended to counteract the dominant models, while truthfully depicting the region's reality. This is what came to be known as the *Nuevo Cine Latinoamericano*, or "New Latin American Cinema" (NLAC).

3.2.2 From Ideology to Pratice: The NLAC

As mentioned earlier, cinema in Latin America had traditionally been used as a tool to construct and popularize a *national* imaginary or "identity". But the advent of the NLAC superimposed a *continental* and revolutionary agenda to the existing mandate of reasserting the nation in cinematic terms (Burton-Carvajal, 1998: 580). This regional project was founded on the commitment to the marginalized masses found all across the Latin American nations and seen as…

> ...socially, economically, ethnically, and often culturally 'other'. Regarded as voiceless and socially invisible, they were perceived to require the intervention of self-appointed mediators to give them voice and visibility. For three decades this shared 'social imaginary' was constitutive of the supraregional and pan-nationalism that the New Latin American Cinema movement both catalysed and reflected. (Idem)

Despite the best wishes and efforts of its exponents, however, the NLAC never quite achieved its expectations of becoming a stable, unified and transcontinental project. As Michael T. Martin points out, its development as a cinematographic movement and oppositional practice has been *uneven* temporally, formally and spatially across the various Latin American cinematic traditions. Although filmmakers aligned with the NLAC ideology shared common thematic and aesthetic concerns, their strategies of representation remained as diverse as the social groups and hybrid cultures that are characteristic of our region (1997:16).

The NLAC also faced more practical obstacles to its development. For one, its obvious relation with leftist principles meant that filmmakers working within this tradition were subject to censorship and/or persecution, especially from repressive military regimes that abounded in the region. Also, it would be hard to deny that the progressive weakening and eventual collapse of socialism caused some of the core revolutionary values of the movement to loose their strength, appeal or pertinence.

Not surprisingly, it has been Cuba (the withstanding "socialist regime" in the continent) which has continuously acted as a sort of "last haven" for the movement, through the sponsoring and formation offered by institutions like the Cuban Cinematographic Institute (ICAIC) and the International School of Film and TV (EICTV).

Faced with the new global paradigm, the NLAC and "Third Cinema" itself was almost forced to evolve and adapt to the new political and cultural conditions. Like Ana Maria Lopez points out, this type of cinema was designed to go against commercial imperatives. However, the NLAC did have a desire for a different kind of industrialization:

> To make the cinema strong, to encourage sustained production, to maintain and raise popular interest in the cinema: these were all concerns of the NLAC that could not be addressed from the margins, but that demanded discussion in the context of the mainstream national cinematic production, state protection and its commercial possibilities. (in Martin (Ed); 1997:152)

Lopez observes that the NLAC "gradually found itself incorporated into mainstream -albeit somewhat modified- commercial operations" as a result of its understandable efforts to reach an audience and take its message to the people (Ibidem). More industrialized and technically mediated models of production, and an emphasis towards national and international exhibition and distribution, were two of such adopted strategies.

3.2.3 Third Cinema Today

Such a shift in the concept of Third Cinema and its related applications can be explained by three factors that, according to Roy Armes, all cinemas from the Third World share, regardless of their national, gender, linguistic or ethnic categories:

- The dual impact of colonial/neo-colonial historical and contemporary practices,
  which translate into underdevelopment and dependency.
- The enduring and defining influence of Western culture (e.g. the dominant models of filmmaking).
- The determinacy of capitalist production and distribution practices.
  (In Martin (Ed); 1997:20)

These factors have led to a necessary re-conceptualization of the notion of "Third Cinema". Ella Shohat and Robert Stam propose four categories of the different filmic products that might be considered today as "Third Cinema":

1. A core circle of "Third Wordlist" films produced by and for Third World people (no matter where those people happen to be) and adhering to the (original) principles of "Third Cinema".

2. A wider circle of the cinematic production of Third World peoples (…) whether or not the films adhere to the principles of Third Cinema and irrespective of the period of their making.

3. Another circle consisting of films made by First or Second World people in support of Third World peoples and adhering to the (original) principles of "Third Cinema"

4. A final circle, somewhat anomalous in status, at once "inside" and "outside", comprising recent diasporic hybrid films (…) which both build on and interrogate the (original) conventions of "Third Cinema". (1994:28)

From these perspectives, the scope of Third Cinema has certainly broadened (and, in my opinion, become *enriched*) by "new features" such as an optional distancing from the revolutionary principles laid down in the original manifestos (2), and the elaboration and/or contestation of those seminal guidelines (4).

Nevertheless, we should not undervalue the influence that those ideological statements still hold over the reflection and practice of cinema in Latin America. Like I have argued throughout this work, the process of cultural hybridization (sampling, combining, dismissing, re-creating, enhancing) is virtually hardwired to all aspects of creative expression in our societies; film practice included. I believe that the early manifestos of Third Cinema and their ideas have undergone this very same process. Although the majority of the new generations of Latin American filmmakers work well within the rules and demands of a market system, many of them have managed to extract the most elemental value behind the those revolutionary documents, and successfully combine it with foreign and local models, technologies, styles and contents.

To me, this salvaged "core principle" is the concern and commitment of Latin American filmmakers to use their craft to portray, explore or denounce -with different levels of explicitness and activism- situations which they perceive as negative in their particular societies, or at a larger scale. In short: the *social awareness* ingrained in a great majority of Third World productions.

3.3 Cinema in Costa Rica

The films, history and study of Central American national cinemas has been commonly eclipsed by the interest that has been focused (often from the *outside*) on the comparatively larger and more developed cinemas of the continent, such as Mexico, Brazil, Argentina or Cuba. In this sense, "Central American cinema" is a concept that has been largely overridden by the broader category of "Latin American cinema". Costa Rican film and the rest of its Central American counterparts, remain, to this day, a periphery within a periphery.

This, however, has been gradually changing. Despite the emphasis of the Film Studies academy on the traditional case studies mentioned above, the increase of local interest in the audiovisual field (both professionally and academically) has lead to

more and more Central Americans involved in the research and analysis of their national cinemas. Film scholar Maria Lourdes Cortés forms part of this group, having compiled a comprehensive history of Costa Rican cinema ("El Espejo Imposible"; 2002) which I proceed to summarize for this section.

According to Cortés' research, film was present as a novelty in Costa Rica as early on as 1897; a symbol of the country's modernization. The first images of Costa Rica shown in the local theatres were shot by foreigners; and it was until 1913 that nationals started producing films themselves. Manuel Gómez Miralles and Armando Céspedes are credited as the first national filmmakers, producing several news reels over the following years which documented important events of the time. From this point on, film would continue to be used in the country predominantly for news and documental purposes.

Fiction film production, however, has been historically scarce and sporadic. The first national feature ("*El Retorno*") was produced in 1930, followed by 25 years of inactivity. It was until 1955 that another motion picture was made ("*Elvira*"), the first Costa Rican film with a synchronized soundtrack. Also from that year is "*Milagro de Amor*"; at once the first musical and colour film in the nation's cinema history. Still, 12 more years had to pass for the next feature film to come along, an artisanal project by folklorist Miguel Salguero entitled "*La Apuesta*", in 1967. With production spaced so far apart, national fiction films have traditionally been perceived as much of a novelty by the local audience as they were in their origins.

The 1970's witnessed a turning point in the development of the country's cinema with the creation of the Costa Rican Center for Cinematographic Production (CCPC). The Center fostered a constant flow of documentary productions during the next decades, based on the institutional motto to "give voice to those who have none" (2002:101). This fell in line with the ideals of "Third Cinema" (articulated by Solanas and Getino just one year earlier, in 1969) which encouraged the filmmakers of the region to denounce and seek to change situations of injustice in their societies.

Within a few years of its creation, the CCPC produced 75 documentaries in 16mm film about topics of public interest. It also opened the door to an entire generation of local filmmakers like Victor Vega, Carlos Freer, Victor Ramirez and Ingo Niehaus[22], among others. The social and ideological orientation of Costa Rican film would become transnationalized in the late 70's, when the political climate of the region set the conditions for the emergence of a "cinema of liberation".

During this period, Central America was in turmoil; a subcontinent plagued with social and armed conflicts. In Nicaragua, the *Sandinista* front was fighting to overthrow the corrupt Somoza regime. Similarly, in El Salvador and Guatemala, guerrilla groups opposed oppressive and oligarchic governments. These social struggles proved a fertile ground for the creation of revolutionary films.

Spared from the scourge of war and with a relatively more stable and prosper climate, Costa Rica effectively became a "centre within a periphery" by facilitating the production of its neighboring countries. Local company "Istmo Films"[23] collaborated in the creation of various projects that portrayed the ongoing revolutionary projects of the zone[24]. Perhaps the most recognized of these was the co-production of "*Alsino y el Condor*" (Nicaragua, 1982); a story set against the backdrop of the *Sandinista* revolution and which was nominated for the "Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film".

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[22] Niehaus later wrote and produced the fiction film "*Password*", which is analyzed in this work.

[23] Founded, among others, by Oscar Castillo, whose film "*Asesinato en el Meneo*" is analyzed in this work.

[24] The first of them was "*Patria libre o morir*" (1979) a documentary produced by Istmo Films about the revolution in Nicaragua. Later, with the *Sandinistas* in power, the company went on to co-produce "*La Insurrección*" (1980) alongside Chilean writer Antonio Skármeta and German filmmaker Peter Lilienthal; a docudrama relating the popular revolt of the town of León. Also from 1980, is "*El Salvador, el pueblo vencerá*", an underground film that documented the violent repression of the El Salvadorian government against their people, and the plight of the local revolutionary movement. Istmo Films also shot a historical documentary about the invasion of the region by the American filibusters in the 19th century ("*La Guerra de los Filibusteros*", 1980); and, through their relationship with Peter Lilienthal, co-produced a series of documentaries and pieces about Central America for German television. (Cortés; 2002: 225-233)

In the late 70's, Costa Rica experienced a severe economical crisis which affected local production, particularly that of the State supported CCPC. According to Cortés, this resulted in several filmmakers going from the public sphere to private sectors, such as advertisement or the creation of their own companies. This weakened State production and financing, ushering in a new era of personal, independently developed film projects.

From 1983 to 1987, five national features were shot and released, making it one of the most active and stable moments in the country's history of fiction film production. These were "*La Negrita*" (1983), "*Senda Ignorada*" (1983), "*La Segua*" (1984), "*Los Secretos de Isolina*" (1986) and the publicly acclaimed "*Eulalia*" (1987)[25].

After this last film, 14 years would have to pass for the next local feature to come along. Despite this prolonged dry spell, however, a veritable "audiovisual boom" was gestating. During this time, video technology is introduced, making it possible for more people to develop their projects. Oscar Castillo pioneers the production of local TV series, which helps popularize national audiovisual products. A new generation of video/filmmakers emerges, who will later re-activate the country's fiction film production[26]. The "Costa Rican Film and Video Showcase" is founded, providing the only opportunity for many to show their work to an audience.

These are just some of the events that fomented the growth of a national audiovisual medium that, although absent from the local theatres in the form of feature films, continued to yield products directed mainly to television and different public and private institutions.

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[25] There are a few recurring figures that were able to overcome the limitations and challenges of a small, underdeveloped industry like Costa Rica's, to produce more than one fiction feature. I refer here to filmmakers such as Miguel Salguero ("*La Apuesta*", "*Los Secretos de Isolina*"), Ingo Niehaus ("*La senda ignorada*", "*Password*") and Oscar Castillo (producer of "*La Segua*" and "*Mujeres Apasionadas*", and director of "*Eulalia*" and "*Asesinato en el Meneo*".

[26] Among these, Hilda Hidalgo, Andres Heidenreich ("Password"), and Esteban Ramírez ("Caribe")

This stage also marked a change in the topics that had been traditionally addressed in the media, reflecting the renewed national sensibilities towards themes as migration, the role of women in society, ecology, and the cultural heritage of ethnic minorities. Previously, fiction films had shown a tendency to romanticise the past and the rural background of the nation; an approach that gradually gave way to a more critical portrayal of the realities of Costa Rican everyday life. This is visible even in a comedy such as "*Asesinato en el Meneo*" (2001), the film that restarted the production of national features after 14 years, and which satirizes the corruption present at different levels of Costa Rican modern society.

This study focuses on the Costa Rican films that were produced during the following 5 year period; starting with "*Asesinato en el Meneo*" and followed by "*Password*" (2002), "*Mujeres Apasionadas*" (2003), "*Marasmo*" (2003) and "*Caribe*" (2005). To date (2008), five more fiction films have been produced but not yet released (See Figure 7, below) which means that more features have been made during the last 7 year span than in all the previous history of Costa Rican cinema ("Centro" & "Cinergia"; 2008).

Figure 7.

Title	Year
1. El Retorno	1930
2. Milagro de Amor	1955
3. Elvira	1955
4. La Apuesta	1968
5. La Negrita	1983
6. Senda Ignorada	1983
7. La Segua	1984
8. Los Secretos de Isolina	1986
9. Eulalia	1987
10. Asesinato en el Meneo	2001
11. Password	2002
12. Mujeres Apasionadas	2003
13. Marasmo	2003
14. Caribe	2005
15. El Cielo Rojo	TBA
16. El Camino	TBA
17. Del amor y otros demonios	TBA
18. El Rey del Cha Cha Chá	TBA
19. Agua Fría de Mar	TBA

This more regular production has been achieved mainly by the financial support that private investors and institutions like "Cinergia"[27] have granted to local film initiatives. Other relevant factors are the increased presence of professionals in the field (generating a constant flow of projects), the facilitating potential of new technologies and the access to circuits of trans-national cooperation and coproduction. This has all resulted in a stage of unprecedented growth and development of Costa Rica's film industry; an incipient national cinema that, as Maria Lourdes Cortés comments, is always producing "its first film" (256).

3.4 Cinema in Colombia

According to the list compiled by Credencial Historia magazine ("Listado", 2004), by the time that the first national feature film was being exhibited in Costa Rica ("El Retorno", 1930), Colombian cinema had already produced 15 features of its own; among historical, argumental and fiction films. This is more than the total release of Costa Rican features *to date*, and serves as an early point of comparison of the level of the two nations' cinematic development.

However, Colombian cinema also experienced prolonged periods of inactivity, as "Caminos de Gloria" (1929) was followed up until 12 years later by "Flores del Valle" (1941), the first national sound film. Credencial Historia explains this decline by stating that "the Colombian initiative had been crushed in part by the boom of Mexican cinema, and by the lack of resources that discouraged the intrepid who wished to make cinema in Colombia"[28] ("Años", 2004). The practical difficulties of consolidating a stable national industry, coupled with the hegemony of a foreign film offer, are a reminder that Colombian cinema has been, like most other Latin American

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[27] "Cinergia" (created in 2004) is the first and only fund directed to contribute to the development of audiovisual projects in Central America and Cuba. http://www.cinergia.org/

[28] Translation is my own.

cases, in a peripheral position in relation to more thriving production centres such as Mexico, Argentina and, of course, Hollywood.

But it was political issues during the late 1940's that dramatically marked the future of the entire Colombian society (and its cinema, as an inextricable part of it), and whose repercussions are still felt to this day. The aptly named historical period of "La Violencia" ("The Violence") was triggered by the assassination of Liberal Party leader Jorge Gaitán, in 1949. As John King chronicles, this event lead to riots and bloody uprisings across the country that claimed over 200,000 lives over the next decade (2000: 207).

Even after the main conflict was ended thanks to a pact between the Liberal and Conservative parties in 1957, political division had already spawned insurgent guerrilla groups like the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the National Liberation Army (ELN), whose activities would continue to fuel the climate of civil unrest from the 1960's and into the present day. This continuous social turmoil -with its consequences of violence, death and underdevelopment- has been a powerful thematic influence in Colombian cinema; and it is visible (with varying degrees of explicitness) in all five films of this case study's sample.

For critic Hernando Martínez, Colombian cinema before and during the years of "La Violencia" usually dealt with "melodrama, costumbrism, folkloricism and nationalism, as expressions of cultural values which rarely addressed the real or imaginary necessities of the popular classes, which sooner or later rejected it" (in King; 2000: 208). In what can be regarded as a backlash to this tendency, the 1960s and 70's saw a number of projects -mainly in the form of documentaries- that explored and denounced conditions of social inequality in Colombian society.

Regardless of their shared concern, the style of these new filmmakers remained varied, with some aligning with the principles of the then emergent "Third Cinema" (Carlos Alvarez); the discipline of visual anthropology (Marta Rodríguez and Jorge Silva); or more polyphonic and satirical approaches like those displayed in the work of Luis Ospina and Carlos Mayolo (Ibidem; 208-210).

But even this apparent "social awareness" in Colombian cinema had a backlash of its own. John King explains that 1971's "Ley de Sobreprecios" ("Surcharge Law") subsidized national short film production by raising admission prices and dividing this surcharge between the producer, exhibitor and distributor. "When faced with such an avalanche of new projects, the government set up a quality control board to decree which films should command the maximum surcharge of three pesos at the box-office" (Ibidem; 211).

During this time, some films were produced which, in the view of critics like Luis Ospina and Carlos Mayolo, irresponsibly exploited the misery of its subjects of study (e.g. children of the street) "not in order to understand or overcome it, but rather to receive the box office percentage" (Ibidem; 213) and international recognition that could be garnered from tackling a sensitive social subject. Ospina and Mayolo dubbed this "pornomisery", and went on to produce the mockumentary "Agarrando Pueblo" (1977) in which they satirized the tendency.

At the end of the 1970s, the focus of state incentives turned from shorts to feature film production. In 1978, the Cinematographic Fomenting Company, or "FOCINE", was founded. According to King, FOCINE offered "advanced credit to film projects of up to 70% of the total cost, with low rates of interest. It also offered credits to buy film equipment and stock. Nearly all the feature films made in the 1980s have had support from FOCINE. And the number of films increased dramatically, averaging about ten a year between 1980 and 1985, from an earlier base of almost zero" (Ibidem; 211-212).

In total, 29 feature films were produced under the direct auspice of FOCINE until its closure in 1993; a period that, in John King's opinion, promoted "film-making of uneven quality: some poor commercial work, but also several innovative features by established directors and newer talents (…)" (Ibidem; 215).

Indeed, along with films by recognized filmmakers such as Francisco Norden ("Cóndores no entierran todos los días"; 1984), Carlos Mayolo ("Carne de tu carne"; 1983) and Lisandro Duque ("Milagro en Roma"; 1988); this phase included the first projects of a new generation of directors -such as Sergio Cabrera ("Técnicas de duelo"; 1988) and Victor Gaviria ("Rodrigo D"; 1990)- which would soon mark a new turn in Colombia's national cinema.

The disappearance of FOCINE threatened to put an abrupt halt to the regular feature film production of previous years. However, the listing of Colombian features compiled by Credencial Historia ("Listado"; 2004) show that, despite the absence of State support, production remained stable, with 14 films released between 1993 (the year of FOCINE's closing) and 1997, when Law 397 created a new Joint Fund for Cinematographic Promotion, (known as "Proimágenes en Movimiento") aimed, once again, at the support and development of the Colombian film industry ("Proimágenes"; 2008).

However, in that short span from 1993 to 1997 before Proimágenes came to be, the situation of Colombian cinema was far from critical. Gaviria's "Rodrigo D" had already made history as the first Colombian film to make it into the official selection at the Cannes Film Festival, earning critical praise and attracting international interest for Colombian cinema. Sandro Romero notes how this accomplishment was followed up by projects like Cabrera's "La Estrategia del Caracol" (1993) and Felipe Aljure's "La Gente de la Universal" (1993), films that were commercially successful within their country, and which had positive critical reception in film festivals abroad ("Cine"; 44).

Rounding off the efforts of Colombian filmmakers during the lack of State support, are a number of international co-productions like Phillipe Toledano's "Bésame Mucho" (1995), Jorge Ali Triana's "Edipo Alcalde" (1996), and Cabrera's "Ilona llega con la lluvia" (1996), among others ("Listado"; 2004). Sandro Romero sums up the activity during this period as follows:

> Colombian directors who really had something to say through a film camera devised every possible way of moving on, and many of their films are examples of revitalization and the public's acceptance. I don't believe it was the disappearance of Focine that made it possible for our country's cinema to find its north, but rather the fact of not having anything else to blame: it was a matter of committing to the projects until the very end and continue to produce with a new efficiency[29] (Ibidem; 41).

As we already know, however, this context wouldn't last much longer. In addition to "Proimágenes" and its Funding for Cinematographic Development ("FDC"), Law 814 was passed in 2003, dictating a series of norms for the promotion of cinematographic activity in Colombia ("Proimágenes"; 2008). Minister of Culture María Consuelo Araujo describes the objectives behind the new regulation:

> The law bets on the decentralization of culture and cinema; on gradually turning film production in Colombia from a Quixotic crusade for a few inveterate dreamers, into an industry that is not only profitable, but also sustainable. With it, the National Government devised investment incentives and mechanisms whose goal is to integrally develop the sector and foster the chain of film production (…)[30] ("Largometrajes"; 2005: 7).

With the help of these two main State supports ("Proimágenes" and the "Film Law"), Colombian cinema has experienced an unprecedented boost in production, with 68 feature film releases from 1998 to 2008, and currently over 120 projects in different stages of development ("Proimágenes"; 2008).

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[29] Translation is my own.

[30] Translation is my own.

It is precisely from this "period of prosperity" that my research takes its sample of 5 Colombian films; a mere 7% of the nation's total production, in comparison with the Costa Rican sample, which covers 100% of the national releases during the same time.

Still, it is not the presumption of this study to suggest definitive conclusions about the narrative workings of an entire national cinema, regardless of the statistic coverage of its sample. As I have explained previously, the focus of this research is not set on being "representative" of a larger reality, but on offering a detailed and *contextual* understanding of the selected film narratives. I trust that this chapter has managed to provide the reader with a general view of the historical contexts of production at a regional and national level; a view that will hopefully be complemented in the following pages through the study of the specific films.

4. Film Analyses: Costa Rica

Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 include the narrative analyses of the 10 feature films of my sample. These are organized by country (first Costa Rica, then Colombia) and chronologically, based on the year of their original release. Each one of the case studies is made up of three segments: a summary of the story (or "synopsis"), a general description of the film's structure or "plot"[31], and the analysis itself.

Regarding the synopses, I wish to say that I am well aware that the story of practically any film can be condensed into a 1- or 2- paragraph description. I, however, have chosen to offer a more detailed outline of the narratives. International distribution of Latin American fiction films is still very limited (even within the region), which means that there is a good chance that many readers of this study have not seen the films being discussed. By providing a more in depth summary of the films, I hope to give those readers an adequate background to understand the subsequent references.

Perhaps more importantly, these synopses give a concise account of characters, events, subplots and details that would likely be omitted in a more condensed abstract, but that are *necessary* material to my analyses.

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[31] Although I use the word "description", the reader will be able to see that these segments are in fact part of the analysis of the films.

4.1 "Asesinato en El Meneo"
Year: 2001
Country: Costa Rica
Written and directed by: Oscar Castillo
Maureen Jimenez & Samuel Rovinsky, co-writers.
Run time: 92 minutes.

4.1.1 Synopsis

The film opens at a popular dance club called "El Meneo" ("The Wiggle"). Congressman Armando Melendez is arguing with his date, an attractive brunette called Mercedes. He tells her that he didn't intend to marry that woman, and that he only proposed in order to extort more money from her father. "That woman" is Sofia, a young college girl, who comes into the club and confronts Armando about his plan. Furious, both Sofia and Mercedes slap him and storm off.

Detective Gato Mejia and his date (co-worker Paulette) are also at "El Meneo". They kiss passionately on their way to the men's room while, elsewhere, a hand ominously prepares to inject a syringe. When Mejia and Paulette burst into the bathroom, they find Armando lying on the floor with a syringe on his neck. Club owner Regina wants to avoid a scandal and asks Mejia to take care of the situation. He calls Sanchez -his boss at "The Eye" detective agency- who hurries to "El Meneo". Sanchez orders Mercedes, Sofia, Regina and singer Yefri to stay back for questioning; and orders the rest of the people to go. He also calls Sofia's father to let him know that the congressman is dead and that his daughter is one of the suspects. Then, he tells the group it is time to sum up the facts.

At this point, the story jumps to the past, where a series of things are revealed: Sofia's father, Manuel, is the wealthy owner of "La Fragua", an investment company. Alberto, his son and right-hand man, tells him he's worried about Sofia hanging out with the "wrong crowd" and advices his father to keep her under surveillance. Sanchez and Mejia are hired for this purpose and witness how Sofia gets romantically involved with Armando. Sanchez also discovers the congressman's corrupt motives: he is being paid by Manuel's rival company to extort him into selling them "La

Fragua". The detective also learns about a mysterious man who is in on the plan of bringing down Manuel, and leaves little boats of folded paper wherever he's been.

Meanwhile, Mercedes (a dance instructor) is revealed to be Manuel's mistress. She uses this influence to convince Manuel into letting her have her own TV show. Eventually, Mejia and Sanchez find out that Mercedes is really Armando's couple and that she is videotaping her encounters with Manuel to blackmail him. First, however, Armando's traffic of influences is paying off and "La Fragua" comes under attack by the press. Alberto persuades his father to consider their rival's buy out offer, and he is finally revealed to the viewer as the "mysterious man" behind the operation.

Soon after, Manuel is appalled when the detectives reveal to him that Armando has proposed to his daughter. He orders Alberto to get Armando and Sofia there right away. Sofia arrives first, still refusing to believe Armando is only using her. Manuel tells her she needs to know the truth, and they tie and gag her so she can listen to their conversation from the adjacent office.

When Armando arrives, Manuel accuses him of being behind the campaign to discredit his company. Armando calmly accuses him back of cheating to his wife. Manuel tells him he will never marry his daughter and Armando proposes that they pay him in exchange for walking out of her life. Manuel agrees. After Armando is gone, Manuel and Alberto untie Sofia. She runs away, crying. Manuel tells his son that Armando must be stopped. Alberto replies he will take care of it.

Later, when Alberto pays the detectives for their services, Sanchez notices the paper boat that he leaves behind. He ties it together with the other two he has collected during the investigation and realizes Alberto is implicated in the plot against "La Fragua". With the case closed, however, Mejia plans to celebrate by taking Paulette out to "El Meneo".

Thus, the story jumps back to the "present", with Manuel and Alberto arriving at "El Meneo" and demanding Sanchez to let Sofia go. The detective replies that all of the people there, including both of them, are suspects of Armando's murder. Then, to

everyone's surprise, the congressman emerges from the bathroom, looking groggy and with the needle still stuck to his neck.

Through his flashback, it is revealed that Armando was in the bathroom about to give himself a shot of insulin (the fact that he is diabetic is suggested throughout the movie). When he hears noises outside, he walks over to close the door, only to be knocked unconscious by Mejia and Paulette bursting into the bathroom. The syringe ends up in his neck, due to the position he was holding it in when he gets hit.

Faced with this blunder, the detectives let everyone go. Outside, a starved beggar tries to mug Manuel, Sofia and Alberto. Immediately, a police squad comes out of nowhere and apprehends him. Armando is interviewed by the media stationed outside and gives a speech about how the country is being taken over by thieves and wrongdoers who jeopardize its honest citizens.

Finally, as Manuel and his family are about to drive off, Sanchez catches up to them and gives Alberto the paper boats in front of his father. Alberto is taken aback and tries to deny they are his. Manuel gives him a disappointed look and tells him to drive. They leave, and the story ends with Sanchez, Mejia and Paulette chatting and walking down the street.

4.1.2 Plot Description

The plot of "Asesinato en el Meneo" (AEEM) is divided into three broad segments that function as a three-act structure. The first one (15:28 in length) takes place at the dance club and involves the presentation of the main characters and the initiating event: the "murder" of Armando Melendez.

The "second act" consists of an extended flashback segment (over 60 minutes) relating the events of the multiple sub-plots that supposedly lead to the murder and the rest of the occurrences presented in the first act. These embedded stories are:

- The plot against Manuel and his company, orchestrated by his son Alberto and his rivals, and carried out by corrupt congressman Armando Melendez and his associates.
- Armando's love affair with Sofia, aimed at extorting money from her father.
- Manuel's affaire with Mercedes, and her blackmail to get her own TV show.
- Regina's bribing of Armando in exchange for the release of an impounded plane; in turn arranged by Yefri to obtain money from Regina to finance his CD.

These four subplots crisscross throughout the second part of the film and are weaved together by the investigation being carried out by the detectives, which could be regarded as another storyline in itself.

The third and final segment of the narrative (approximately 6 minutes) returns to the "present" timeline to resolve the main crisis that was introduced in the "first act" (Armando's apparent death), as well as the subplot dealing with Alberto's betrayal. By this point, the remaining storylines have already reached closure through the events shown in the first and second segments[32], and the narrative is effectively concluded.

4.1.3 Analysis

To understand the parodic traits in the narrative of AEEM, we must first look into the genre conventions it caricatures; most notably those of the "detective film". According to David Bordwell, the viewer in this type of film presupposes the basic fabula as consisting of a crime and its investigation. More specifically: the cause, commission, concealment and discovery of a crime, the investigation, the solution of the crime, the identification of the criminal, and the consequences of this

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[32] -Sofia ends her engagement with Armando (I act) after she discovers he used her to extort her father (II act).

-When Manuel pulls Mercedes' program from the air, she threatens to make their videos public if the show is not reinstated (II act). Through a dialogue in the III act, we find out that Mercedes still has her program.

-Regina pays off Armando in the I act for the favour he carried out for her (shown in the II act).

identification (1985:64). As for the arrangement of this fabula throughout the plot, the author points out that:

> The fundamental narrational characteristic of the detective tale is that the syuzhet withholds crucial events occurring in the "crime" portion of the fabula. The syuzhet may conceal the motive, or the planning, or the commission, or the crime (an act which includes the identity of the criminal) or several aspects of these. The syuzhet may commence with the discovery of the crime, or it may start before the crime is committed and find other ways to conceal the crucial events. In either case, the syuzhet is principally structured by the progress of the detective's investigation. (Ibidem)

As we can see, AEEM plays with these conventions at both the level of its fabula and its plot. It presents itself -as early on as its title[33]- as a story that will revolve around a crime. Following the structural characteristics of the genre, the narrative conceals key aspects about the triggering incident (see figure X), prompting to ask *who killed Armando Melendez, and why?*
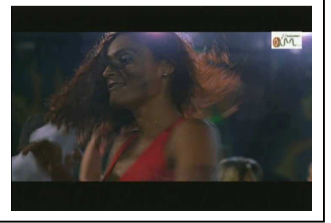
These two questions are accepted by the viewer as the premise of the film; and we set out to elucidate the mystery, again as the genre demands, through the investigation that the detectives have previously conducted on the apparent suspects. The plot then shifts our attention from sub-story to sub-story, in what we believe is the customary hunt for clues which will aid us in forming hypotheses about the motives and the culprit of the crime.

Although we know that we are essentially looking at a *comedy* (evident from the light, humorous treatment and the gags that pepper the film), we still expect the payoff that we have come to associate with the detective tale: the solution of the crime. Herein lies the main transgression of AEEM to the narrative principles on which it is based.

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[33] Translated as "Murder at 'El Meneo'".

Figure 8.

These screenshots show how Armando's "murder" is conveyed at the beginning of the film:

Armando makes his way to the restroom.	Mejía and Paulette exit the dance floor and kiss as they approach the restroom.	The action is intercut by shots of people dancing…
…and a hand preparing to inject a syringe. The identity of the "killer" is thus concealed.	Mejía and Paulette enter the restroom abruptly.	As they lay on the floor, the couple "discovers the crime".

The revelation that there has been in fact *no crime* is the ultimate joke of the comedy; this one directed *at* the viewer, since it means that our efforts to piece up the "mystery" have been moot. From the standpoint of "classical narration" this also means that there is a fundamental gap between this revelation and all the events that have preceded it. In other words, there is no *causality* tying the events which we have witnessed through the investigation, to the initiating incident/resolution of the narrative. Thus, the *unity* of the story can be put into question, since the film contains two unrelated fabulas (albeit with the same cast of characters): one dealing with the events at "El Meneo", and the other with the investigation carried out earlier.

In this sense, it could be argued that AEEM takes advantage of the conventions of the detective genre to provide itself with narrative thrust, without ever really being a "detective film". Its true nature lies beyond generic plot devices and can be best identified in the *contents* of the fabula; more concretely in the events and situations revealed to the viewer in the second act. According to Maria Lourdes Cortés,

Asesinato en el Meneo" is told in broad strokes, like a caricature. Its aesthetics and dramaturgy contain a stereotyped deformation of the characters and situations, with a humoristic and critical intention. By exaggerating and degrading what is hierarchically superior, the caricature induces reflexion, at the same time it provokes the spectator's laughter. (Cortés, 2002: 283)[34]

What the film satirizes through caricature is the corruption that takes place at "high levels" of Costa Rican society; mainly the abuses of political, economical and sexual power that are illustrated in the different subplots I have already outlined. This "deformation of the hierarchically superior" (the portrayal of "the powerful" as corrupt, perverted and petty) can be seen as an example of what Stam and Shohat call "carnivalesque subversions":

As theorized by Bakhtin, carnival embraces an anticlassical esthetic that rejects formal harmony and unity in favor of the asymmetrical, the heterogeneous, the oxymoronic, the miscegenated. Carnival's "grotesque realism" turns conventional esthetics on its head in order to locate a new kind of popular, convulsive, rebellious beauty, one that dares to reveal the grotesquerie of the powerful and the latent beauty of the "vulgar". (1994: 302)

The "carnivalesque", then, can be said to be present in AEEM not only in the treatment of its subject matter, but also in the way it subverts principles that are considered "classical" of the detective genre concretely, and of fiction film narration in general. A misleading premise, a development that does not actually develop the initial conflict, a closure that is reached through casualty instead of causality, the preference for the absurd over realism; these are just some of the more noticeable reversals of "conventional (narrative) aesthetics".

Take also the definition of classical narration in the fiction film as being "omniscient, highly communicative and moderately self-conscious" (Bordwell et al., 1985: 25). As explained in 1.4.iii, this means that only the narration is fully aware of itself, that it conceals little from the viewer other than "what will happen next", and that it seldom recognizes itself as narrating a story to the audience.

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[34] Translation is my own.

AEEM seems to comply with the first part of this statement (omniscience), since only the extra-fictional narrator -seen by Bordwell as *narration itself*- has a full knowledge of the story being told. Narration in the detective film is also comparatively less communicative than other genres, actively withholding and retarding the transmission of fabula information. However, AEEM goes even further than these generic devices by concealing the crucial fact that it is *not* the crime story it sets up to be. As for its self-awareness, the film's narrative contains moments in which it parodically recognizes itself as such:

Figure 9.
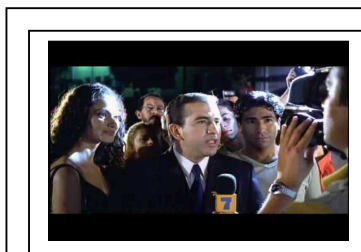
Figure 9b.

A reporter informs his viewers that police intervention came "in the nick of time, just like in the movies".

Sanchez breaks the "fourth wall" by addressing the audience directly at the end of the film:
"'The Eye' never sleeps."
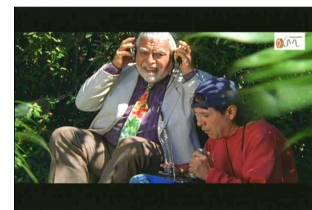
Sanchez and Mejía experience technical difficulties as they spy on Sofia and Armando with their surveillance equipment.

But perhaps a more subtle auto-reference lies in Sanchez and Mejia's investigation -repeatedly interrupted and incomplete- as a metaphor of the film's conscious efforts to deceive us (see figure 9b). Cortés explains:

> Through Sanchez and Mejia's investigation we tap into the central story that revolves around power -political, economical- and sex, undoubtedly another kind of power (...) This storyline is revealed to us through the detectives' knowledge, therefore, our access to it is fragmented and blurry. We never clearly understand the details of the corrupted world in which the characters move, nor the shady dealings in which they engage. It's like our knowledge depended on the strange equipment that the detectives use -a mixture of mad inventions and children toys- that filter and distort the information.[35]
> (285: 2002)

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[35] Translation is my own.

Finally; an important point for this study to consider is if the traits that are identified through my personal analysis of the film are in fact creative strategies intentionally applied by the author(s), or if they are to be regarded as subjective interpretations based on theoretical premises. At the core of this research interest is to determine whether or not there has been a willing compliance or violation of classical narrative guidelines. According to director Oscar Castillo, he and his co-writers closely followed rules that can be considered, if not "classical"[36], at least *typical* of mainstream fiction film narration:

> The narrative of this film was very carefully planned. It derived from years of experience and knowledge of certain structures. It's all there: the triggering incident, the plot points, a continuous pace to keep up the viewer's attention… I also move back in time after having established the conflict, continuously giving the audience clues and maintaining their expectation until the very end. There is nothing casual about how we chose to narrate the story.[37]

Although the deception surrounding Armando's "murder" was a conscious decision (in fact the keystone of the entire narrative), this was not regarded by the writers as a break with the principles of the detective genre or its related "classical canons". This because, in Castillo's view, he and his team did not subscribe to one specific narrative model or genre, nor were they interested in transgressing any given principle as an act of "resistance". Instead, he highlights the multiple sources of inspiration that are amalgamated in his film:

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[36] By the notion of the term that this study employs. (See section 1.3.)

[37] Interview with Oscar Castillo, April 2007. Translation is my own.

> I did not intend to follow any particular model, but it's possible that I subconsciously did, based on all the movies I've seen in my life. Through the years, you learn to borrow from many different sources, whether you realize it or not. 'Asesinato en el Meneo' contains elements from many types of films: From my love of Italian comedy, to the thriller, the farce, the slapstick, the detective film… the challenge of this mixture is to come up with a new, coherent product. (…)
>
> I think this blending of genres made the story more interesting and entertaining to the public which, at the end, it's the main objective of film (…) After having made revolutionary, guerrilla-style cinema[38], I learned that, first and foremost, the audience has to be entertained. And it is within this entertainment that we as filmmakers must try to induce them towards reflection. Whatever your motivation is to make a film, it must necessarily be inserted within an attractive and entertaining audiovisual language, both in terms of form and content. [39]

Ultimately, the working of AEEM should become clear. Its main objective, as the author himself acknowledges, is to *entertain* its audience while presenting a satirical commentary on the topic of corruption. One could argue that the weight of this entertainment (understood here as the maintenance of the viewer's attention and interest) rests in great measure on the narrative conventions of the detective genre, especially at the level of the plot -or structure- of the film; while the fabula itself serves a more rhetorical function.

Also worthy of mentioning is the "filmic syncretism" that can be identified in AEEM and that Castillo confirms in his appreciations. A self proclaimed "devourer of cinema", the director and his film illustrate a tendency which is of central interest to this study: the creation of something "new and coherent" from old and often conflicting elements. AEEM can hardly be called "oppositional cinema", yet its carnivalesque and eclectic features stand as examples of the operations (both deliberate *and* casual) that peripheral filmmakers carry out with the wide array of materials that reach them from foreign "cinematic centers".

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[38] Castillo was actively engaged in this "cinema for liberation" during the 1970s. (See section 3.3)

[39] Interview with Oscar Castillo. Ibidem.

4.2 "Password"

Year: 2002
Country: Costa Rica
Written and directed by: Andres Heidenreich
Ingo Niehaus, Tobias Ovares, Anabelle Ulloa,
co-writers. Based on a story by Ingo Niehaus.
Run time: 92 minutes.

4.2.1 Synopsis

The film opens with a faceless man browsing an internet page which advertises "the youngest girls on the web". He scans a picture of a young, half naked girl and uploads it.

Andres stares at his TV in silence. He is watching a home video of his 13th birthday party. In it we see Carla, asking Andres (behind the camera) who he likes. The kids joke and cheer as Andres tells Carla he likes her. Meanwhile, Andres' parents are arguing in the hallway. His mom comes into the room and tells him they now have to move on as a family. As Carla's face fills the screen, Andres regretfully replies that he gave her his password.

The story then jumps back to Andres' birthday party. Yorleny, Carla's mother, arrives to pick up her daughter. We learn that Carla's father has left them. They have been evicted and are now forced to live with Yorleny's mother. The next day, Yorleny asks the principal of Carla's private school for a grant to let her finish the year there. The principal refuses and gives her time to make the payments she already owes. Meanwhile, Carla and her class are a having a lesson on how to use the internet. Everyone receives a password to access their computers, except her. When Carla arrives home, Yorleny and Ana -her grandmother- let her know that she will have to go to public school from now on.

One night, as Carla passes by her old school, she meets with the janitor and asks him if she can use the computer lab after everyone has left. He agrees. Afterwards, Carla asks Andres for his password. He is reluctant at first, but ends up giving it to her after she promises not to get them in trouble. Meanwhile, we are introduced to

Emilia, a housekeeper at the Excelsior Hotel. While cleaning up a room, she discovers the pictures of young girls in light clothing we saw in the first scene. She is startled by the guest, a man called Jimmy, who orders her to leave.

Back in the computer lab, Carla is logging on to an unauthorized chat room. There she meets "Peter", who tells him he is a boy from Toronto. While they start forming an online friendship, we find out that "Peter" is really Jimmy. When Carla sends him a picture of herself, "Peter" tells her he will be travelling to Costa Rica with his parents and asks her to meet at the Excelsior. Carla writes down the name of the hotel and the agreed time on the back of the photograph she scanned, but leaves it behind when she leaves. The next morning, Andres finds the picture with the note.

In the hotel, Erick and Maria -Jimmy's accomplices- tell Carla they are Peter's parents and invite her to their room to meet him. Once there, they drug her and she passes out. Jimmy arrives shortly after, puts on a clown mask and starts taking pictures of the semiconscious Carla. Elsewhere, a man whose login name is "Mr. Plutus" sees Carla's photograph on Jimmy's website. It advertises her as a 12 year old, guaranteed virgin. Mr. Plutus hits the "Buy" button and is later shown packing his suitcase.

Carla wakes up, still groggy from the drugs, and discovers she is being held at the gang's hideout by Erick, Maria, and a young crack addict called Jennifer. At the same time, Yorleny and her mother file a missing person report, but get little support from the police. Back in the hotel, Emilia discovers Carla's blue dress and remembers seeing her walking around the lobby the day before. She decides to hide it.

After Andres tells Carla's grandmother about the note he found on the back of the picture, Yorleny goes to the Excelsior to look for her, but the concierge (who also works for Jimmy) denies having seen the girl. Yorleny leaves her phone number just in case, but the concierge throws it away as soon as she leaves. Emilia picks it up without him noticing it.

Eventually, Andres finds out that his father knows about Carla's kidnapping, as he is the lawyer of Jimmy's organization. He runs away to look for Carla in the Excelsior, but is kicked out by security. Worried about people snooping around, Jimmy orders Erick to deliver Carla to their client and get rid of her after he is done. Unwilling to kill Carla, Maria comes up with a plan and asks Jennifer for her help.

Emilia finds a note in Jimmy's room specifying the time and place accorded for Carla's delivery to Plutus. Finally, she decides to call Yorleny and let her know that Carla will be brought to the Excelsior that afternoon. Meanwhile, as they struggle to get Carla ready for her drop-off, Maria manages to convince Erick to help her.

Yorleny is now in the hotel's lobby, looking out for any sign of her daughter. At the same time, Ana is back at the police station, pleading for the cops' intervention. At Andres' house, we revisit the second scene of the film, where he regrets giving Carla his password. His mother informs him that they will leave the country for the next few weeks and orders never to mention Carla again.

The hotel manager finds Carla's dress in the cleaning room and berates Emilia for hiding it. Yorleny spots her daughter's dress and confronts the women, demanding them to tell her where Carla is. Simultaneously, Erick arrives at the hotel and pulls a hooded girl out of the car. Maria drives away and Erick escorts the girl up to the room where Mr. Plutus is waiting for her. Erick then goes to Jimmy's room and forces him at gunpoint to give him the money. Jimmy replies he's not dumb enough to keep it there.

Meanwhile at the station, the police are finally mobilized and drive off in their patrol units. By now, Plutus realizes that the girl he ordered has been switched, and storms out of the room dragging Jennifer behind. He walks up to where the hotel manager and Yorleny are still discussing and demands his money back, showing a picture of Carla and saying that is the girl he paid for.

Seeing this, Yorleny starts screaming and beating Plutus. Two gunshots are heard coming from upstairs, just as the police arrive outside the hotel. Finally, Yorleny collapses on the floor, crying hysterically.

Maria parks the car in an abandoned industrial site, places an unconscious Carla on the ground and drives away. The girl comes to and notices the music box that Maria and Erick had given her as a gift from "Peter" before they drugged her. She gets up and hurls it away, angrily. The film ends with Carla walking away, looking for a way back home.

4.2.2 Plot Description

"Password" originated as a personal initiative of producer Ingo Niehaus to contribute to the fight against the sexual exploitation of minors in Costa Rica. As such, it was first intended as two 1-hour episodes that could be shown in high-risk communities as part of an information and prevention campaign. The idea behind this format was that the episodes would serve as an audiovisual aid to stimulate the discussion of the problematic during a series of forums organized by the "CONACOES"[40] (Fonseca & Lao, 2001: 103).

However, during the development stage, the production team decided to make "Password" a single, 90 minute long film which could *still* be shown in two halves when needed, but that could also be marketed as a feature film on cinemas, television and DVD[41]. Thus, Password's plot is clearly divided in two main parts, as director Andres Heidenreich describes himself:

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[40] The Costa Rican National Comission Against Sexual Exploitation.

[41] Interview with Andres Heidenreich, May 2007. Translation is my own.

> My first proposal was to organize the story into a 90 minute script that had what we could call the "classic" characteristics of a screenplay: an argumental premise, a detonating incident, a first, middle and final plot twist, and an ending. It was very important for me to have a strong plot twist at midpoint in the film which could raise the stakes for the rest of the story. In our case that was the girl's kidnap. This was also useful thinking ahead to a future exhibition in two 1-hour parts: that event would then serve as the first episode's "cliff-hanger". Narratively, the story is divided between what happens before and after the kidnapping. [42]

Irrespective of this strong middle point, "Password" also displays the three-act structure that Heidenreich intended. The main parts of the film's plot can be broken down as follows:

- An introduction or "hook" comprised by the two opening scenes: one that shows Jimmy uploading a picture of a girl to his website, and the other of Andres watching the video after Carla has gone missing. Jimmy's scene establishes the "present" time line, while Andres' represents a "flashforward" of events to come, opening a series of questions to the viewer.

- The "first act" begins immediately afterwards, in Andres' birthday party. It introduces the main characters, sets up Carla as the protagonist, presents the detonating incident (the abandonment by her father) and its consequent conflict: Carla having to leave her school. Faced with this situation, the protagonist sets out to achieve her objective: to gain access to the internet though her former school's computers. The end of this act is marked by the accomplishment of that goal, as Carla manages to obtain the password from Andres (21:00).

- The "second act" ranges from the previous event, passing through the climactic "mid point" mentioned earlier, and ends with two important, consecutive events: On one hand, Maria's realization that she cannot go on with Jimmy's plan (1:10:00) and on the other, Emilia calling Yorleny to let her know about Carla's abduction (1:12:00).

- Finally, the resolution of the story or "third act", narrates the consequences of those two events, leading up to the confrontation between the characters in the hotel, and Carla's release by Maria.

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[42] Ibidem.

Next, I will analyze these segments of the plot in greater detail and explain the significant narrative difference that exists between Password's first and second "halves".

4.2.3 Analysis

As outlined above, the first part of the film exhibits several traits of canonical fiction film narration. As the principle of *clarity* demands, the elements of the story and the causal link between them are well defined and easily grasped by the viewer. The disruption of the equilibrium is simple: The father and main provider of the household runs away with a new love. This forces the mother and her daughter to leave a house and a school they can no longer afford.

From this point on, the story focuses on Carla and the effects that this new reality has on her (what Todorov calls the "recognition of the disruption"). Feelings of loneliness and estrangement are the girl's main motivation to accomplish a very clear goal: to palliate those emotions by chatting online and meeting friends there. Making the character more complex is the fact that Carla lies, manipulates and sneaks around to accomplish her objectives. Nevertheless, her proactive and motivated nature establishes Carla not only as a main character, but as the *protagonist* of the story; that is, the one whose actions drives the narrative forward.

Another classical narrative characteristic present throughout the film is the element of *pressure*. Like Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson explain, appointments and deadlines stress the forward flow of story action, turning the expectations of the viewer towards the upcoming encounter or the race to reach the goal (1985:48). The initial part of "Password" includes two such moments. The first is a *deadline*, set by Andres when he finds out that Carla has been visiting unauthorized websites. Andres tells her he will change his password the next day, giving Carla a definite term to achieve her objective at that point in the story: to send "Peter" a picture of her.

Immediately afterwards, an *appointment* is introduced as Jimmy lures Carla to the Excelsior Hotel. As Bordwell et al. described, the expectations of the viewer are now focused on this pivotal moment of the fabula, since it represents an imminent danger to the protagonist that she is not aware of. In addition, these pressure devices "perfectly suit classical narration's emphasis upon eliciting hypotheses about the future" (Ibid). "Password" is not an exception to this norm, as we are lead to formulate our own assumptions about the outcome of the encounter.

When this situation is resolved by the gang's kidnapping of Carla (40 minutes into the film), even a degree of *closure* is achieved, in the sense that the causal chain that has driven the narrative so far has reached a logical -although not necessarily "satisfactory"- termination. The new status of the protagonist is the direct result of her own choices and actions, coupled, of course, with the intervention of an antagonistic force represented by Jimmy and his accomplices.

It is here that we can confirm that the project's originally intended two-episode format has been transplanted to the make up of the feature film; as the plot-twist of Carla's abduction functions as a chronological and narrative mid-point. This event marks a *new* disruption of equilibrium, generating a separate conflict and causal chain that must be followed through. Although the same could be said from any other major plot-twist in a film's narrative, "Password" does so while its protagonist is effectively "suspended" from her role.

From the moment Carla is kidnapped until the end of the film, her character plays no active role in the progression of the story. Drugged and restrained, she is powerless to affect the events that unravel around her. By this point, however, the viewer is emotionally invested in the character (in large measure, due to the protagonic traits exhibited in the first half of the film), and she continues to be the focus of our expectations; the main one of these, evidently, being the desire to know what will become of her.

Still, Carla goes from being a main actor in the narrative, to functioning as an "objective" for the rest of the key characters: Her family and Andres attempt to find her, Jimmy and his gang seek to conceal and profit from her, and Plutus wants to have her. So even though Carla's *actions* do not dictate the course of the second half of the film, she is the essential driving force behind it. The logical question to ask, then, is: how does the narrative in "Password" continue to flow in the absence of its protagonist?

The answer lies in the use of the multiple-plotline structure that is also a characteristic of classical fiction film narration. The second half of "Password" consists of several different sub-plots that narrate situations and events that are related, in one way or another, to the abduction of the main character. These are:

- Emilia's discovery of the crime and her tip off to Yorleny.
- Yorleny and Ana's efforts to find Carla.
- Andres' intention to help with Carla's search and the revelation that his father is part of the criminal group.
- Mr. Plutus "purchase" of Carla and his impending arrival.
- Jimmy's hostile relation with his accomplice, Erick.
- Carla's confinement in the gang's hideout.

By this point, we as viewers know there are only two possible outcomes to the new conflict: either Carla will be delivered to her "buyer" or she will not. Narrative thrust is achieved by jumping from one sub-plot to another; and our attention is engaged as we search each of them for clues of what that ending will be.

What is interesting about the second part of "Password" is that the causal links that push the story towards its resolution are few and performed by supporting characters. Contrary to canonical fiction narrative where the protagonist is the creator of its own fate, here it depends entirely on others, as we can see in the following synthesis of the main plotline:

- **Conflict:** Carla is kidnapped to be prostituted.
- **Causal Link 1:** Cued by the note on Carla's photograph, Andres and Yorleny enquire about her in the hotel.
- **Causal Link 2:** Andres finds out his father is implicated with the kidnappers.
- **Causal Link 3:** The increasing risk of discovery makes Jimmy take the decision to dispose of Carla after her first client.
- **Causal Link 4:** Maria opposes this measure and plans to let Carla go.
- **Resolution:** Maria releases Carla.

Director Andres Heidenreich backs this appreciation, and addresses the issue of the "leftover" narrative material, which constitutes the bulk of the film's remaining 48 minutes:

> One of the things we discussed the most was Carla ceasing to have a protagonic role and have other characters assuming that function. This is part of what I call a "faux dramaturgy"; a series of events that do not relate directly to the main action, but that the spectator perceives as such. The actions of Andres after Carla is kidnapped don't resolve anything. Nor does the actions of Yorleny, for instance. Who really determines the outcome of the story is the character of Maria, who decides to spare the girl. Her actions are the only real links between the conflict and the conclusion. However, the outside world also plays a part. And that's where we introduce elements that are typical of the detective story, like the maid discovering the kidnapping and tipping off the mother, like the kid wanting to find his friend, like the lawyer who we find out is working for the band, etc.[43]

The concept of "*faux* (false) dramaturgy" coined here by Heidenreich, indirectly references the canonical model of fiction film narration, or to be more specific, our expectations about said model. Recalling Thompson's statement, the principle of *unity* calls for a classical narrative to be made up of a series of events and actions connected by a cause-and-effect logic; meaning "a cause should lead to an effect, and that effect should become a cause for another effect, in an unbroken chain across the film" (1999: 12). This does *not* occur in "Password", although the viewer follows the narrative with exactly that expectation.

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[43] Ibidem.

As mentioned earlier, our attention is maintained as the film jumps from subplot to subplot, because we assume that the events being portrayed will be logically connected with others to come and, more importantly, to the final solution of the conflict. Perhaps the most obvious example of this can be seen in Emilia's plotline; where we are led to hypothesize that her discovery and warning of Carla's abduction will eventually result in the girl's liberation. However, the only thing Emilia's intervention directly causes is Yorleny's presence at the hotel during the climax scene which, as we know, does not influence the resolution of the story.

If we sift through these parallel sub-stories in search of the events that follow a cause-and-effect logic and that derive in Carla's release, we will end up with the summarized version of the fabula which I have already outlined. The fact that the rest of the film's narrative material does not fit into this chain, however, does not mean it is inconsequential. Quite the contrary, it serves well defined purposes. First of these, is what Heidenreich calls the film's "faux dramaturgy", which is the maintenance of the viewer's attention in the absence of a protagonist to drive the action.

Equally important is the film's social commitment to explore some of the causes, consequences and situations that surround a negative aspect of Costa Rican reality. This goes back to the origins of the project, since it was intended precisely to raise awareness of the topic of child prostitution and lead to its reflexion and discussion. In the director's opinion this proved to be a challenge for the film in its local market:

> Costa Rican idiosyncrasy, which influences our audiovisual dramaturgy and the way we understand the conflicts of our reality, tends towards presenting "pretty things" (...) This happens because if you choose not to face reality, you are forced to construct a substitute and palliative for it. What we adopt then, is the "perspective of the beautiful", which is how Costa Rica is marketed and seen from abroad: as a peaceful, touristic paradise. The Costa Rican doesn't like to be confronted with his reality. [44]

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[44] Ibidem.

This general tendency may help explain the "softened" ending of the story. As Heidenreich notes,

> When Carla ends up being left in the dumpster you conclude she has been through a very negative experience but, on the other hand, she was saved from a worse one. She is not a total victim. This was Ingo's more optimistic, balanced outlook. I am more realistic. These types of situations in Costa Rican society don't usually have a 'happy ending'. [45]

Whether the ending of "Password" can be considered a "happy" one or not, is up for discussion. Nonetheless, it *is* an attempt towards a satisfactory *closure* of the main and secondary plotlines[46] that is typical of fiction film narration. Heidenreich himself acknowledges that the film's narrative was in fact influenced by Hollywood cinema and "classical dramaturgy"[47], and calls attention to the creative stigma that such an admission often carries:

> In Latin America, there is often an ideological urge to deny the influence of Hollywood. It is part of a political agenda to react against it instead of analyzing and understanding how it operates (...) I think the Latin American filmmaker should learn from Hollywood cinema and its history. We have a desire to be avant-garde without first understanding how the "classical" works. There is a difference between appropriation and imitation. We imitate, we don't appropriate. We repeat, we don't construct. The difference between the two is that when you appropriate, you are consciously applying a particular external knowledge to your work, often adapting it to fulfill your needs. Imitation, on the other hand, is indiscriminate repetition. [48]

What makes "Password" an interesting example of appropriation, then, is not just its purposeful and unapologetic use of "classical" canons in order to gain narrative

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[45] Ibidem.

[46] There is, however, one subplot which resolution is debatable. I am speaking of the conflict between the characters of Jimmy and Erick. In their last scene, Erick points a gun to Jimmy, while Jimmy tries to convince him to hand it over. During the climactic confrontation between Yorleny and Plutus in the lobby, two shots are overheard. This strongly hints at the face-off between Erick and Jimmy we saw earlier. Based on the last thing we saw of them, it can be interpreted that Erick shoots Jimmy. It could also be argued that the subplot is left unresolved, since we never know exactly what happened between the characters.

[47] Interview with Andres Heidenreich. Ibidem.

[48] Ibidem.

structure and strength (in the words of its director, "it is more practical to build upon a successful formula than to try to invent one with limited time and resources" [49]).

But at the same time, what sets this film apart from mechanic imitation is precisely that it applied such principles to its own accord, subordinating them to its topic and concrete social objective. Perhaps the clearest evidence of this strategy is the abrupt suspension of the protagonic character halfway into the film, and with it, the transition from a classical, action-driven progression, to one reliant on plot mechanisms. Here, the transgression of the model (better understood as the choice not to follow through with it) obeys to the project's higher commitment to accurately portray a reality in which its already vulnerable victims are rendered powerless and often abandoned to their fate.

4.3 "Mujeres Apasionadas"

Year: 2003
Country: Costa Rica
Written and directed by: Maureen Jimenez
Claudia Barrionuevo, co-writer
Run time: 92 minutes.

4.3.1 Synopsis

"Mujeres Apasionadas" tells the story of four very different women: Marielos, a forensic examiner; Beatriz, a news anchor; Aurora, a young artist; and Cecilia, an investment banker. One day, each of the characters receives a message from a lawyer. They are informed that artist Mario Curi's workshop will be dismantled and their presence is requested to pick up some personal belongings that have been found there. The message surprises all of them, prompting fleeting memories of a traumatic event.

One by one the women arrive at Mario's workshop. They recognize each other from four years ago and are apprehensive about having being summoned there. The

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[49] Ibidem.

guard overlooking the moving tells them that the lawyer is running late, and asks them to wait until she arrives. Another woman shows up, calling herself Ines. She tells the others that she is there to pick up a portrait Mario did for her when they were lovers. The group starts talking and it is revealed that Marielos, Beatriz, Cecilia and Aurora were also Mario's lovers, all during the same period. Ines asks them if they knew he was married. They admit they did.

The group starts drinking wine and reminiscing how each of them met and became involved with Mario. Aurora's affaire with him began when he was her tutor at the university. Cecilia pursued Mario after he dropped by her office to meet with one of her colleagues. She conceals this, however, telling the rest that it was Mario who showed interest and initiated their relationship. Beatriz explains that their fling was purely sexual, and started when she did a piece about him for her news show. And Marielos explains that Mario and her met by chance at a bar and hit it off immediately.

Marielos and Mario are shown having a deeper relationship than the rest; him being especially fascinated by her relationship with death and her passion for life. Marielos weeps as she tells the others he always made her laugh, except for the night in which he revealed he was married. Aurora comments that was the night he died. The rest become uncomfortable and Ines asks if they were all there. After some discussion, the women decide it is finally time to talk about what happened. Marielos starts the story:

She and Mario had travelled to a beach hotel for Easter. There, Mario tries to confess two secrets to her, the first being he is married. Marielos is devastated. But before he can go on to tell her the other secret; they are interrupted by Cecilia knocking on the door. By coincidence, she happened to be in the same hotel and is surprised to see Mario's motorcycle there. Beatriz and Aurora comment on how furious she looked. They both admit they were also there when Cecilia knocked on the door. Aurora had find out Mario would be staying in the hotel that week and decided to spy on him. Beatriz, on the other hand, was already in the hotel. After a

fight with her husband, she gets drunk at the bar and decides to leave. As she is driving away, she sees Mario's motorcycle and pulls up to investigate. Just then she sees Cecilia walk over and follows her.

The four women confront Mario, who is speechless and having difficulty breathing. Cecilia is livid, blasting off insults and accusations against him. Mario says he is not feeling well and staggers to the bedroom. Cecilia follows him shortly afterwards and find him lying on the floor. Marielos tries to revive him with Aurora's help, but it is too late. Mario is dead. This is the traumatic event that each of them recalled at the beginning of the story.

The women calm down and come up with a plan. With Marielos' supervision, they clean up the villa and dispose of all traces of their presence there. They leave Mario's body to be found by the cleaning lady the next morning, and make a promise never to talk about the matter. Back in the house, Marielos tells the group that the autopsy revealed Mario had a heart problem which he probably knew about. Ines confirms to the group that he was indeed aware of it.

Years before, Mario tells Ines that there is something wrong with his heart and that he needs a bypass surgery. Ines pleads with him to go to the US right away and get an operation, but he refuses arguing he is too busy with his upcoming exhibit. Later on, when Ines must travel to Italy during Easter for business, she asks Mario to come with her but he declines once again. She tells the others that was the last time she saw him alive and that since then, she has been haunted by guilt and doubts about his death. The four women are mortified as they realize Ines is Mario's widow.

Ines goes on, telling them that she confirmed Mario's betrayal only recently, when she finally felt strong enough to come back to the workshop. There she found evidences of Mario's involvement with each of them, and decided to gather them there to find out who had been responsible for his death. She reveals her real name - Daniela- and says she never imagined they had all been there or that they had tried to

save him. She tearfully thank them for clearing things up, as she can now finally end her mourning and let go off her anger and doubts.

Suddenly, the door slams open, startling them. It turns out to be the guard who lets them know the lawyer will be late. Daniela tells him he can stop pretending now and dismisses him for the night. The women laugh nervously, saying they thought it was Mario's spirit playing a trick on them. The mood lightens and the group start joking about the bond they share, which makes them "practically sisters". The story ends as the women move out to the yard, drinking wine and proposing toasts, among other things, "for all women", "for love", "for life and passion", and finally, "for us".

4.3.2 Plot Description

"Mujeres Apasionadas" is a film that relies heavily in the use of "flashbacks" to narrate the events of its fabula, and in doing so, opts for a non-linear brand of storytelling. This narrative device is first used as a series (8) of quick inserts when the main characters receive the message asking them to go to Mario's workshop, and then again when they meet there and recognize each other. These inserts are really shots of each of the characters during the climactic scene of Mario's death. They not only serve to establish a common link between the characters being presented, but they also functions as "clues" for the viewer of events to unfold. In a structural sense, the inclusion of these shots in the "first act", suggest that the story is setting itself as a "mystery" or "puzzle" to be gradually solved by the viewer.

Starting on the 25th minute and with the main characters gathered in a single location (Mario's living room); the narrative alternates between that time/space and four flashback sequences where each of the women reminisce about how they met Mario and the details of their love affaire with him. This "first batch" of flashbacks ends approximately 20 minutes later with Marielos' sequence, and her mention of the night in which Mario died.

Back in the "present time line" a discussion ensues and the women decide to talk about the events of that night. This cues the "second batch" of flashbacks, portraying how the four women end up in the same place with Mario, and culminating with his death. This marks the climax of the story and the end of what could be called the "second act".

The narrative continues as a single unified flashback well into the "third act". It shows the reaction of the characters to Mario's death (which tie in and explain the inserts mentioned earlier), presents a montage sequence in which they clean up the evidences, and ends with the women parting ways.

However, it takes yet another character-specific flashback to resolve the story; that is Ines/Daniela's revelation that she is Mario's widow and the one who planned their meeting. With this unsolved element dealt with, and Daniela's cathartic absolution of the main characters, the story finally reaches closure.

4.3.3 Analysis

The general narrative progression of "Mujeres Apasionadas" closely resembles that of the canonical story. The film opens with a presentation of the characters; immediately followed by an event (the arrival of the message) that, for an unknown reason to the viewer, generates an emotional response and a disruption of their initial equilibrium.

This outside event also provides them with an immediate goal (to go to Mario's house) that effectively sets the story in motion. This, however, represents a significant difference with classical guidelines, as the "protagonists" have no clear motivation at the start, and have the goal imposed upon them rather than setting it for themselves.

Alternatively, it could be argued that a motivation has also been set out for the viewer: to discover the event that links these four very different characters. This "hook" is rigged by the extra-fictional narrator inserting similar, dramatic "memory flashes" when each of the women receive the message.

The "concealed link" is hinted at further when the characters meet in the house and have quick memories of each other. Before the "first act" is over, the viewer is informed that the women have all been Mario's lovers, and that he is now dead.

At this point, it becomes fairly obvious that the event they went through together is somehow related to his death, and the new objective for the viewer is to find out exactly *what happened*. The extra-fictional narrator delays this information with the "first batch" of flashbacks mentioned earlier. These act as "mini-plots" within the larger story (each with their own beginning, middle and end) and deal with the characters' relationship with Mario.

The "second batch" of flashbacks constitutes another "subplot", this time dealing with the events that happened on the day that Mario died. Initially told from the point of view of each of the four characters, it becomes "unified" when all their paths converge in Mario's beach villa. This segment of the film can be seen as providing the "complicating actions" (Brannigan, 1992: 14) that are required in a "second act"; however they cannot be seen as what Todorov's calls the protagonist's "attempts to repair disruption", simply because they belong to a different (past) timeline to that when the disruption occurred.

As I mentioned earlier, the film is resolved only after the character of Ines/Daniela reveals that she is the one who planned the gathering in order to discover who of them had been responsible for her husband's death. When, after this, she ends up forgiving the other women for having had affaires with Mario, narrative closure is reached in two ways. First, the causal chain is completed between all the main events portrayed. The fabula can be thus re-arranged (in linear chronology) as follows:

- Mario tells Daniela about his heart condition.
- Daniela leaves for Italy, Mario stays back.
- Mario becomes involved, simultaneously, with Aurora, Cecilia, Beatriz and Marielos.
- Mario and the four women coincide in the beach hotel.
- While confronted, he dies from a heart attack. The women decide to keep it secret and clean traces of their presence.

- 4 years later, Daniela finds evidences of Mario's affaires in his workshop. She plans the meeting and decides to pose as another one of Mario's lovers.
- The gathering takes place and the women retell their story.
- Daniela forgives them and they share a moment of female solidarity.

Secondly, a "new state of balance" is achieved for all the characters involved. This ending also re-opens the discussion about the apparent lack of a proactive and motivated protagonist in "Mujeres Apasionadas". If we take a look at the outline presented above, we will see that the story begins and ends with one character: Daniela. She is the one who causes the meeting (and thus, the story) to happen; and she does that based on a very clearly stated motivation: "to find out what really happened that night".

It could also be said that this plan is an attempt to repair the disruption which she has experienced by her husband's suspicious death. Furthermore, it is only through her own personal closure that the film is finally resolved. It could be argued then, that Daniela functions as a sort of "concealed protagonist" who only becomes discernible when the underlying "mystery" of the story is solved. If we accept these arguments, then it's safe to say that the narrative of "Mujeres Apasionadas" is more canonical that it would originally appear. The author had this to say about the structure of the film:

> I felt the story was too plain, too linear. I was aware of the melodramatic content and I didn't want it to play on screen like a drawn out episode from a "telenovela". So we started thinking about ways to avoid that and make it more appealing, in a narrative and cinematographic sense. We decided not to tell the story from "A to Z", but to tell it from different points of view and alternate between them, each time learning a bit more through the eyes of the different characters. I wanted to give it an edge of mystery, keep the audience wanting to know what exactly happened with these women.[50]

By deciding to tell the story from the different points of view of its characters, "Mujeres Apasionadas" makes it necessary to address the topic of "levels of

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[50] Interview with Maureen Jimenez, June 2007. Translation is my own.

narration" (See 2.3.3). I have already mentioned the presence of what Branigan calls the "extra-fictional narrator", which can be understood as an organizing principle that operates outside the fictional story-world, and controls *what* we see and *how* we see it. Obviously, this level of narration occurs in every single film, from beginning to end; but I believe it is important for a narrative analysis to note the instances in which this usually "invisible" process becomes more conspicuous.

Such is the case of the short flashbacks that are inserted in the first act when the characters receive the message, and later when they recognize each other in Mario's house. As explained earlier, these function as very clear "cues" for the viewer's activity of narrative re-construction. Extra-fictional narration becomes evident when the time/space continuity of the fabula is purposefully interrupted by these non-diegetic "breaks":

Figure 10.

| Screenshot A | Screenshot B | Screenshot C |

Example of explicit extra-fictional narration in "Mujeres Apasionadas": screenshot B shows the inserted break in the time/space continuity between screenshots A and C. The insert is also accompanied by a dramatic sound effect which creates an analogous disruption in the film's soundtrack.
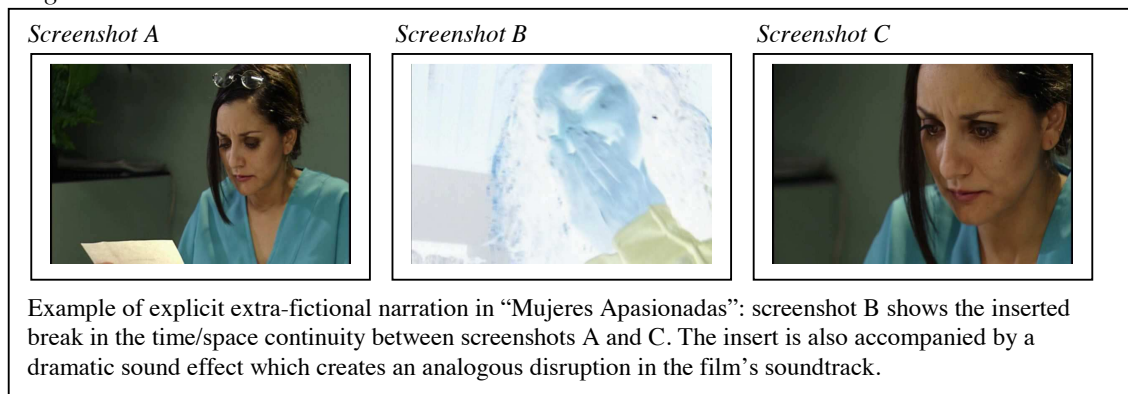
These same inserts serve a dramatic purpose, at another (simultaneous) level of narration. The shots can be interpreted as the characters' fleeting, unpleasant memories brought up by something in their world (the letter, each other). As such, they provide insight as to what is going on in their minds, and constitute an example of what Branigan calls *deep focalization* in "Character narration".

A final comment about the inserted shots is that they are taken directly from the climactic scene that (although chronologically previous) will be presented later on in the film. This can be explained through Genette's concept of "*repetitive frequency*",

in which a single event in the fictional-time is presented more than once across the discoursive-time for dramatic effect.

The "second batch" of flashbacks contains another intersection between the concepts of "frequency" and "levels of narration". As each of the four main characters sit around the living room and talk about the events of the day in which they converged in the beach hotel, they turn into diegetic narrators; orally retelling a situation in which they directly participated.

As the plot switches between that "present time/space" and the flashbacks in which the characters are *shown* acting out what they are telling, so does narration shift between the diegetic account and the *external focalization* of the character's experiences. When the same event is portrayed from the different characters' vantage points, we see another example of "repetitive frequency":

Figure 11.

An instance of "repetitive frequency": a single, key event in the fabula is presented three times in the discourse, within different character narrations. In screenshot A, Marielos recalls the moment in which Cecilia arrived at their beach villa; setting in motion the climax of the story. Later in the film, Cecilia herself narrates this moment (screenshot B). Finally, screenshot C represents the memories and narration of Aurora and Beatriz, who were also witnessing the scene.

The last topic I would like to refer to in this analysis has to do with the film's treatment of its content, and the common perception of "Mujeres Apasionadas" as a *melodrama*. According to David Bordwell this genre entails a narrative that is highly communicative of fabula information, specifically that pertaining to characters' emotional states (1985: 70). This style is evident at many moments throughout the film (perhaps the best example being the "first batch" of flashbacks) in which we as

viewers have direct access to the characters' intimate moments and emotions. However, when further describing the category, Bordwell has this to say:

> Whereas the detective story emphasizes the act of unearthing what already occurred, the melodrama typically relies on a firm primacy effect, plays down the curiosity about the past and maximizes our urge to know what will happen next –and, especially how any given character will react to what has happened. (Ibid)

"Mujeres Apasionadas" doesn't fit easily in this particular definition because -like the "detective story" that the author mentions- it includes plot operations that are aimed at retarding a payoff based on what has *already happened*, and therefore does play with our curiosity about the past. Furthermore, while the structuring of the plot was a explicit choice made by the writing team, that was not the case with the melodramatic slant of the story:

> The nature of the film as a "melodrama" was not a conscious one. It simply derived from the story and also from the actresses during the rehearsals, when they came up with certain emotional responses to the material that was not originally on the script. What we did want to do was a sort of "romantic thriller" with some elements of comedy, because there are a series of situations and events that are intended to make the audience laugh.[51]

I don't think that this film's narrative can be considered as "hybrid" just because it combines elements from different genres; a common occurrence in practically all films. However, I do believe it is interesting to see how, once again, a narrative applies most classical guidelines and even genre conventions without it author(s) consciously setting out to do so. And this is something I will venture to explain in the last chapter of this thesis.

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[51] Ibidem.

4.4 "Marasmo"

Year: 2003
Country: Costa Rica
Written and directed by: Mauricio Mendiola
Based on a short story by Antonio Caballero
Run time: 84 minutes

4.4.1 Synopsis

Luz Angelica is a young, innocent girl from a rural Colombian town. The film opens with her travelling in bus to Barranquilla, where she plans to start a new life.

Lupercio is a violent and corrupt guerrilla commander. When a local drug dealer fails to pay his monthly tribute, Lupercio and his men murder his pregnant wife. The dealer then hires "El Turco" Nayib, a soldier and paramilitary, to hunt down and kill Lupercio.

Feeling the pressure of the army, the paramilitaries, and the drug lords pursuing them, Lupercio and his unit decide to retreat to the jungle and join the group of Commander Ernestico, an intellectual and idealist revolutionary. On their way, the group robs a small convenience store owned by Consuelo, a sensual and voluptuous woman who lives with her mother. Following Lupercio's trail, Nayib arrives to Consuelo's town. They meet and get romantically involved.

Meanwhile, in the guerrilla's jungle camp, Lupercio complains to Ernestico about the harsh living conditions they have to endure and asks to be left in charge of the supplies. Ernestico refuses, angrily accusing him of demeaning the revolution through robbery and his dealings with the drug trade. The conflict between the two groups turns critical when Ernestico surprises one of Lupercio's men criticizing his leadership. Ernestico shoots him in the head, but the bullet also hits the kitchen's gas tank, blowing up their supplies. Lupercio confronts the commander, and it takes a gun to his head to force him to back down.

Nayib gets a call from an associate telling him that his assault group is ready and waiting for him. He agrees to meet them in two days time in a nearby town. Consuelo

decides to run off with him. The next day, she and Nayib board the same bus where Luz Angelica is travelling to Barranquilla. The dislike between the two women is as immediate as the attraction between Nayib and Luz Angelica. Consuelo drinks heavily throughout the journey and eventually passes out. Nayib takes advantage of this and makes a pass at Luz Angelica. Although appalled at first at the crude nature of Nayib's sexual advances, the girl is clearly infatuated by him and the two of them end up kissing during one of the bus' stops. This leads Luz Angelica to decide not to stay in Barranquilla, and continue on the same bus route that Nayib and Consuelo are taking.

With no supplies or money left, Ernestico reluctantly resorts to highway robbery. At night, they stop Nayib's bus and force everyone out. Nayib is quick to stash the large sum of money he carries inside Consuelo's CD-player.

Outside, the guerrillas start mugging the passengers. A group of them take Consuelo aside and rape her. Lupercio recognizes Nayib as the paramilitary who is after them, and Ernestico orders to shoot him. Nayib proposes a deal to the commander: he will tell them where he hid his money if Ernestico lets him have sex with Luz Angelica before he dies.

Ernestico accepts and forces Nayib to take the girl right there on the side of the road. When he is unable to get an erection, he is taken aside and Ernestico orders his young son Rocky to rape her instead. Nayib tries to escape, but he is captured, beaten down, and thrown beside where Luz Angelica is being raped. As Nayib watches, he fantasizes of making love to Luz Angelica in a sunny meadow. When Rocky is done, Ernestico demands to know where the money is. Nayib lies about its location. When the money doesn't show up, Lupercio executes him.

Finally, the guerrillas drive off. Consuelo spits on Nayib's body while some of the passengers try to console Luz Angelica. Consuelo drops her CD-player as she staggers back to the bus, opening the lid and revealing the money inside.

The next day, Lupercio ambushes Ernestico and kills him. Some time later, however, Lupercio and his men are having drinks at a bar when several hooded hit men in motorcycles drive by and massacre them. Elsewhere, the drug dealer reads about Lupercio's death on the papers. He smiles, pleased. Then, he starts to weep.

265 days after the events of the bus' hijack, Luz Angelica is being rushed off to a delivery room. Consuelo is at her side but is asked by the doctors to remain outside. She watches anxiously as Luz Angelica gives birth to her baby. Consuelo cries, at once joyful and concerned. Overwhelmed, she turns around and walks away.

4.4.2 Plot Description

The progression of events in "Marasmo" is presented in a predominantly linear fashion, with two notable exceptions. To identify them, we must first agree that the opening scene of the film -where Luz Angelica is shown riding on the bus while reading the letter sent by her friend Nuria Esther- establishes the "present" timeline of the fabula.

From here (just 2:37 into the film) the narration jumps to a series of flashback scenes which introduce the main characters and portray the events leading towards the initially established "present". Namely:

- The introduction of Nayib and Lupercio as protagonist and antagonist.
- The murder of the drug dealer's wife as the detonating incident that will set the protagonist (and the antagonist) in motion.
- The presentation of Luz Angelica and Consuelo as opposite poles with a common trait (their desire to physically escape their reality)
- And the setting of the conflict and power struggle between Lupercio and Ernestico.

It is until minute 45 of the chronological run of the film that the narrative catches up with the "present time line", when Nayib and Consuelo board the bus that Luz Angelica is also riding to Barranquilla. This marks the end of what could be call the "flashback segment", which comprises 50% of the film's total running time.

From this point on, the narrative progresses linearly in "the present", portraying the romantic triangle between Luz Angelica, Consuelo and Nayib, and culminating with the climactic scene of the bus' hijack by the guerrillas.

The three scenes that follow (the murder of Ernestico by Lupercio; the killing of Lupercio and his men by masked assassins; and the drug dealer's realization that Lupercio is dead; in that order) are normal progressions of "the present" into the immediate or near narrative "future", through the common tool of the ellipsis.

This seems to be confirmed by comparison with the next and final scene of the film. In it, an extra-diegetic text informs us that the events shown belong to a separate timeline, 265 days (Luz Angelica's gestation period) in the future. Whereas the ellipsis is an often discrete operation that does not interrupt the flow of the narrative, here the text forces a pause in the narration and underlines the omitted portion of time; pointing to the nature of the scene as a "flash-forward". It is this "flash-forward" (only 3 minutes in length), along with the "flashback segment" mentioned earlier, that represent the two main breaks in the linearity of Marasmo's narration.

4.4.3 Analysis

The concept of "marasmo", according to the Merriam-Webster's dictionary and the Royal Spanish Academy, describes paralysis and stagnation in the physical or moral aspect[52]. Director Mauricio Mendiola chose it as a metaphor of the decay of his native Colombian society:

> When I studied psychology at the university I learned about "marasmic mothers"; mothers that by failing to provide actual and emotional nourishment to their children, allowed them to die. I compare this condition to that of a nation that fails to protect its citizens and leaves them at the mercy of highly powerful and violent armed groups. [53]

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[52] As searched for in www.m-w.com and www.rae.es

[53] Interview with Mauricio Mendiola in the "Making of" featurette. "Marasmo" DVD. Translation is my own.

This overarching allusion to social immobility and the failure to move forward, could serve as an interesting justification as to why Marasmo's narrative does not achieve the progression we have come to expect from a "classical story".

In Marasmo, the "state of equilibrium" (which Todorov names as the first stage of the canonical narrative) is debatable, especially if we relate it to the character which appears to be the protagonist of the story: Ismael Nayib. The "initial order" for Nayib, is *disorder*, as he is caught in the bloody conflict between the guerrilla and the army. This seems to be illustrated in his first scene of the film, where he walks among the bodies and wreckage caused by his unit's confrontation with Lupercio's men.

This sort of senseless violence between the armed groups and against innocent civilians is something that the author witnessed as a child and continues today, almost 50 years later. It is precisely this lack of progress which inspired Mendiola to make the film and give it that connotation through the title[54]. Narratively speaking, the only "state of equilibrium" we can indentify in "Marasmo" (and more specifically, for the protagonist) is one of ongoing pursuit and deadly confrontation.

The second stage of the classical story calls for a "disruption of the equilibrium by some action". However, in "Marasmo", it is not the protagonist's "equilibrium" which is broken, but that of a secondary character. I am talking about the murder of the drug dealer's wife by Lupercio. The recognition of the disruption (the third stage) is instant, and this becomes the catalytic event that leads the drug dealer to hire Nayib to kill the antagonist, thus providing him of a clear motivation and setting him in motion to accomplish his objective. It could be argued that the character of the drug dealer virtually "transfers" the preceding three stages which he has experienced directly, onto an otherwise passive and unmotivated main character.

The fourth stage revolves around the efforts of the protagonist to restore the initial state of events, and it is here, in what we could call the "second act" of the film, that

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[54] Interview with Mauricio Mendiola, February 2008. Translation is my own.

the narrative strays the most from classical principles. As soon as Nayib gets in contact with the female characters, his mission becomes diluted, as he seems more driven by lust or attraction to the women than by his previously established objective to hunt down Lupercio.

This becomes especially evident during the sequence where Consuelo and Nayib coincide with Luz Angelica in the bus. This segment of the film (almost 11 minutes in total) is practically an "alternate narrative", focusing on the "romantic triangle" that forms between the characters, but completely suspending the progress of the main conflict.

It must be noted, however, that I am arguing this based on the actions of the protagonist alone. Up to this point, the rest of the main characters are behaving according to their initial motivation and functions: Consuelo and Luz Angelica both are trying to leave their towns and look for a different, more exciting life. At the same time, they provide the story (and the protagonist) with very clear, opposite takes on femininity; the "*femme fatale*" versus the "*femme fragile*" (Cortes, 2005: 30). Ernestico and Lupercio represent another dichotomy: the idealism of the revolution *vis a vis* its corruption. Both these characters function as antagonists to Nayib as well as to each other.

The climax of the film also marks the most acute separation of the protagonist from his original objective or, at the very least, from the attitude that is expected from the classical main character. When the guerrillas hijack the bus and Nayib comes face to face with his antagonist(s), we can see that the success of his mission is unlikely. Outnumbered and held at gunpoint, it appears difficult (in this type of *realistic* story) that he will be able to kill Lupercio and make it out alive to cash his reward and have some sort of "happy ending" with the woman he finally chooses.

However, it is Nayib's actions *in the face of failure* that prevent his final redemption as a "classic protagonist". When faced with certain death, he asks to have sex with an already distraught Luz Angelica as his final wish. By doing so, he

demonstrates his abandonment of the original objective established in the first act, in favour of a completely different one that has been introduced just briefly before. Furthermore, the request itself is objectifying and inflicts violence on a character that he, as a protagonist, would be expected to protect.

This detachment from the common "heroic traits" of the main character is exemplified almost immediately afterwards when Nayib attempts to run away while the guerrillas watch Rocky rape Luz Angelica. Still, we as viewers get a strong impression that this particular treatment of the protagonist has been a conscious choice of the author, with a final comment on his behaviour in Consuelo's resentful spat.

With the death of the protagonist, the final stage of the canonical story is fulfilled by secondary and emergent characters: these are the masked assassins that kill Lupercio and his men. Naturally, the death of the drug dealer's wife cannot be reverted, so it is impossible to reinstate the initial equilibrium. However, her murder is *avenged* -the dealer's prime motivation- and a *new balance* is achieved. The drug dealer himself is shown to come to this realization in the penultimate scene of the film, where he is both relieved and saddened at the resolution of the conflict.

Once again, it is interesting to note how the situation that drives the majority of the story -or at least the one that initiates and effectively closes it- has nothing to do with the character of Ismael Nayib. Just as the drug dealer appears to transfer his stakes to Nayib at the beginning of the story, the end of the films sees him experiencing the outcome of a task that others have carried out for him. It could be concluded then, that "Marasmo" has no protagonist in a classical sense.

This is important, of course, because the presence of a motivated protagonist is the corner stone of the classical model of fiction film narration. Without motivation, there is no narrative thrust or sense of direction to the story. What happens in "Marasmo" is not that the main character is not motivated to an end, but that he radically *switches*

motivations along the way (from "killing Lupercio" to "having sex with Luz Angelica") while the rest of the story continues its original path.

This ambiguity, plus the retardation of the primary plotline in favour of a secondary one[55], may affect the feeling of *unity* of the story and the *clarity of comprehension* for some viewers, both of them pillars of the "classical model".

The narrative characteristics of "Marasmo" that I have outlined can be best understood by looking into the history of the project. Writer/Director Mauricio Mendiola had this to say about the writing process:

> The writing of "Marasmo" was a very whimsical, personal process that does not conform to any fixed, American models. Even though I have books on dramatic theory, I didn't care to apply them. I just wrote the script as it came to me. To do so, I departed from a short-story by Antonio Caballero which narrates the events you see in the climax scene. From there, I just filled in the gaps with the characters' backstory.
> (...)
> I'm drawn to what I call "centripetal" or "centrifugal" narratives... multiple story lines that stem out from, or converge on a central event. I prefer a fragmented narrative to a uniform, linear one... And "Marasmo" has a little of that... you have this one event where the fates of all the main characters meet.[56]

This creative decision, I believe, holds the answer as to the "fracture" in "Marasmo". Mendiola includes the events and motivations of Caballero's short story in the climactic scene of his film; but there is *weak causal link* between this existing narrative content, and the protagonist's mission that *he* adds as "backstory" in the first act. This, in turn, results in a film narrative that differs from classical canons in the

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[55] I believe that this should not be confused with what Larsen calls the "public" and "private" projects of the main character. As explained in Chapter 1, films that follow the classical narrative model usually have two or more plotlines, one dealing with the main task of the protagonist ("public") and the other with his/her personal or romantic sphere ("private"). Although "Marasmo" does have multiple plotlines, it differs from the classical use of them in one key aspect. In the canonical model, each narrative line has its own goal, obstacles and resolution; and they are woven in such a way that, for the protagonist to achieve his personal objectives, he must first succeed in his "public project". As I've explained, this is not the case with "Marasmo", where the main character opts for one *over the other*, and does not succeed in either.

[56] Interview with Mauricio Mendiola. Ibidem.

ways I have described above. According to Mendiola, he had no conscious intention to either adhere to or distance himself from those particular guidelines:

> I don't seek to distance myself from the "classical model", because you cannot totally separate yourself from something that ingrained in your mind. But I also think that that style is disappearing now, because there are no more "classical stories" being written... there are only structural rules that are followed as classical. Those stories, those characters... they have dissipated because the world itself has changed. [57]

By the author's own account, Marasmo's narrative was not a planned, by-the-manual exercise, but the product of a driving, personal desire to comment on a troubling reality of his native country. In this sense, the film seems to be unwittingly closer to the ideals of the socially-aware "Third Cinema", than to the principles of the classical model of fiction film narration:

> I am aware of the flaws of "Marasmo", but it was a story I felt I needed to tell... I experienced the conflict as a child in Colombia, and I also saw it through my mother's eyes, who witnessed how her beloved country became a hellish place. This is a critique to the Colombian guerrillas, and how they failed to make any changes, even when they had the chance to, back in the 90's. It was simply something I felt I had to do.[58]

Thus, it could be argued that the true guidelines of this film are not narrative conventions, but what Stam and Shohat call "poetics of disembodiment" (1994): creative strategies and representations that arise (not necessarily in a conscious way) from a feeling of displacement, of being physically distant from or emotionally alien to a particular cultural circumstance.

As is the case with migrants and exiles, who "exist simultaneously" in their culture of origin as well as within that of their host, Mendiola was moved to make a film about an aspect of Colombian society that deeply concerned him, even though he had been physically removed from that reality for many years.

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[57] Ibidem.

[58] Ibidem.

Whether or not "Marasmo" can be considered as the first example of a "diasporic film" in Costa Rican fiction feature-film history is up for discussion, however. According to Stam and Shohat, diasporic films question the coherence of "national identity" by calling attention to the fault lines between gender, class, ethnicity, religion, etc., that arise from migration (p. 318). "Marasmo" does not engage in these comments, limiting itself to being a film entirely *about* Colombia, but shot *in* Costa Rica with local actors. Nonetheless, beyond its content, the *project itself* is a valid example of the exploration of the "identitary complexities of exile" (Ibid.) from the author's perspective.

4.5 "Caribe"
Year: 2004
Country: Costa Rica.
Written and directed by: Esteban Ramírez.
Ana Istarú, co-writer.
Based on a story by Carlos Salazar Herrera.
Run time: 92 minutes.

4.5.1 Synopsis

The film opens with the following legend: "*The Costa Rican ecological conflict that this film recreates is inspired on actual facts*".

Vicente is a Cuban biologist who owns and runs a banana plantation in the Caribbean coast of Costa Rica. He leads a happy, peaceful life with wife Abigail until one day, a young woman called Irene arrives to their house. Irene tells Abigail she is her half-sister and reveals that their estranged mother has passed away. Irene stays with them for some days, and a bond starts to form between the women. Eventually, Irene finds herself out of money and decides to return to San José, but Vicente offers her an administrative job at the plantation.

Meanwhile, the community is torn by the arrival of an American oil company that is preparing to start their offshore drilling. Although some see it as a source of jobs and wealth for the region, Vicente and community leader Ezequiel try to make the

people understand the dangers that oil exploitation pose to their way of life. The town agrees to demand the government to settle the matter through a popular vote.

Shortly after, the company that buys Vicente's products informs him that a recent crisis is forcing them to terminate all contracts with their suppliers. Instead, the company offers to buy the plantation from him. Vicente refuses, even though he is behind on his mortgage payments and risks losing his land. The biologist is upset by the turn of events, but decides to keep it to himself, darkening his mood. At the same time, he is approached by Sanabria, a lobbyist for the oil company, who tells Vicente they wish to hire him to divulge the "right information". Once again, he declines.

Abigail and Vicente's marriage start to deteriorate. Vicente resents not being able to have time alone with his wife due to Irene living with them. To complicate matters further, he and Irene are now attracted to each other; while Abigail begins to form a friendship with a fisherman called Jackson. One day, while Abigail is out shopping, Vicente and Irene have sex. Although regretful at first, this results in an ongoing secret affaire.

With the referendum close at hand, the entire province seems to be campaigning for or against the oil drilling. Feeling they are losing the vote, a company official named Lloyd orders Sanabria to do whatever is needed to tilt the balance in their favour. This includes hiring a group of thugs who threaten a local fisherman so that he doesn't speak out about how the exploration is ruining the fishing industry.

To everyone's surprise, Vicente suddenly changes his position and supports the oil company during a public debate. Later, he admits to Irene that he is working for the company in order to get the money he needs to save his land.

By now, Abigail is suspicious about Vicente and her sister, so she insinuates to Irene that she should return to San Jose. That same night, a tearful Irene lets Vicente know she is pregnant with his baby. The next day, when it is his turn to speak at a meeting in favour of the oil company, Vicente tells the attendants they must each make their own minds about the subject and walks off. Sanabria reminds him of the

money they have already paid for his services, and Vicente replies he will give it back as soon as he can.

Vicente and Irene discuss their future. He tells her he wants them to have the child and be together, but Irene is not so sure. She is disappointed of him for having sold out to the company and regrets their lies to Abigail. Finally, they decide they must tell her the truth.

Before that, however, Vicente arranges to sell half of his land to the company that used to buy his products. When he arrives home that night, he finds Lloyd waiting for him. Vicente tells him to leave, saying they have nothing to talk about. Lloyd lets Abigail know that Vicente is a "traitor" that works for him now. Unshaken, Abigail replies she knows everything his husband does and asks Lloyd to leave. As he exits, Lloyd tells Vicente he doesn't owe him anymore.

Finally left alone, Abigail demands to know what is happening between them. Vicente and Irene confess about their affaire and Irene's pregnancy. Abigail is shocked and runs off into the plantation, crying. Vicente tries to catch up with her, followed by Irene. He stumbles through the jungle and the rain, disoriented, crying out to Abigail. By now, she has reached Jackson's cabin and begs for his help. The fisherman hugs and tries to console her.

As Vicente comes out of the jungle and approaches the cabin, two gunshots are heard and he collapses to the ground, bleeding. Abigail runs to him, but he dies in her arms. She cries and holds on to his body, while Irene falls to her knees and sobs. Jackson watches the scene in silence.

The film ends with a musical montage showing Ezequiel and a group of townsfolk on the beach, dancing and singing in celebration. This is followed by a shot of Irene and Abigail sitting together on the beach, while a toddler plays close by in the surf. The image fades to black and the following text is shown:

"*Thanks to popular pressure, and due to the lack of compliance with technical and legal requirements, on the 28th of February of 2002, the Costa Rican government declared the US oil company's project as "environmentally unviable". In September of 2003, the oil company demanded a 57 million dollar indemnification to the Costa Rican state. The company has since abandoned this lawsuit but insists on continuing their operation.*"

4.5.2 Plot Description

Of the five Costa Rican films under study, "Caribe" presents the most linear narrative of all, following a single, continuous timeline from start to finish. The significant characteristic of the film's structure then, is the bifurcation of the fabula into a main double plotline: one focusing on the romantic triangle formed between Vicente, Abigail and Irene; the other dealing with the social conflict that arises from the possibility of oil exploitation, and its effects on the protagonist's life. The "personal" plotline dominates the film, in terms of the number of scenes and time devoted to it. On the other hand, the more "social" plotline provides *variety*, as it encompasses several sub-stories; namely:

- Vicente's moral conflict between supporting the cause he believes in and working for the company to alleviate his financial problems.
- The community's division regarding oil exploitation and the build up towards the referendum.
- The dealings between Lloyd, the company official, and Sanabria, their lobbyist. This sub-story also portrays the company's bribes (as with Vicente) and intimidation (as with "the fisherman") to accomplish their objectives.
- Ezequiel's role as the opposition leader and the consequences on his family life.
- The fishing crisis, represented by Jackson dwindling business.

In the following section, I will attempt to explain how these two major plotlines operate jointly to give the narrative of "Caribe" a marked "classical" feel.

4.5.3 Analysis

According to David Bordwell, "usually the classical syuzhet presents a double causal structure, two plot lines: one involving heterosexual romance (boy/girl, husband/wife), the other line involving another sphere –work, war, a mission or quest, other personal relationships. Each line will possess a goal, obstacles, and a climax (…) In most cases, the romance sphere and the other sphere of action are distinct but interdependent. The plot may close off one line after the other, but the two lines coincide at the climax: resolving one triggers the resolution of the other" (1985:157-158).

"Caribe" is a film that displays this characteristic; with a main character (Vicente) involved in both a "personal" and a "public" project (Larsen, 2002:128). As outlined before, the "public" or "social" plotline revolves around the possible settlement of an oil extraction company in Vicente's community. The company's arrival and initial exploration provides the "disturbance of the equilibrium" that sets this plotline in motion, motivating Vicente to accomplish a clear objective: to stop the company's settlement.

It could be said that this plotline is *social* on two levels: first, it deals with the actions of the protagonist in his public life; and secondly, it is a *collective* crusade in which the character plays an important role, but cannot solely determine its outcome. This is underlined by the nature of the conflict and by the presence of other "sub-stories" lead by secondary characters; the most important of these being the one dealing with the popular vote and in which the community itself is the protagonist.

Nonetheless, the plotline still predominantly focuses on the character of Vicente and his ensuing moral conflict between standing against the company or selling out to them to settle his debts. These financial problems can be considered as the main "obstacle" that Vicente faces in this part of the film's narrative. In classical fashion, he is initially defeated by it (as he accepts to work for the company), but is eventually redeemed when he resolves his internal conflict and quits. However, this decision also

seals his fate, leading to the plotline's climax where he is apparently murdered on the company's orders[59].

Although it may appear that the protagonist dies without having accomplished the objective of blocking the company's operation, I've already argued that this was a collective task which the main character could not have carried out on his own. Thus, the plotline is resolved in spite of his absence, when the community wins the vote against the oil exploitation. Closure is achieved not only because the objective is reached, but also because the main character amends his error before he dies. In this way, the plotline manages a balance between the protagonist-driven story that characterizes "classical" fiction film narration, and the "cinema of the people" and social conflict that was a staple of Latin American "Third Cinema". Director Esteban Ramírez addresses the social overtones of his work:

> I've always been an admirer of Costa Rica's Caribbean coast. I wanted to make a film about the region, paying homage not only to its natural beauty, but also to its atmosphere, its people, its way of life. Once there, I discovered the ecological conflict, which I though it was fundamental to document. I think it is important to show things that are rooted in the culture where the story is being portrayed. This movie is not only about the ecology, but also about Costa Rican democracy and how we were able to stop an American company though the legal system. [60]

The other major plotline, dealing with the protagonist's personal life, is slightly more difficult to fit into the "classical" scheme. Clearly, there is a state of equilibrium (Vicente's happy marriage with Abigail) that is disrupted by the arrival of Irene to their home. However, once this element is introduced, the protagonist's behavior is ambivalent throughout the rest of the film. Although he initially wants to restore the balance and have Irene leave the house, he eventually falls for her and this ceases to be an issue.

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[59] This is never explicitly revealed in the film, but is heavily implied by two events: First, the group of thugs that intimidate the fisherman suggests the company's propensity to use violence. Secondly, Lloyd's visit on the same night of the murder ends in an ominous note ("you don't owe me anymore").

The new conflict is given by the fact that Vicente is now torn between his love for two women. This means that the protagonist is posed with not one, but two sets of mutually exclusive objectives and motivations (to be with Abigail *or* to be with Irene)[61] . In narrative terms, each one is the protagonist's main obstacle to achieve the other[62]. Although the ambiguity of intentions is not typical of the "classical" main character, in this case the alignment to the narrative norm is sacrificed in favor of a more realistic approach to the emotional conflict between the characters.

Also contrary to the classical norm explained earlier by Bordwell, is the fact that the climax and resolution of the two plotlines are not significantly related. The "personal" story reaches its dramatic highpoint when Vicente and Irene confess their relationship and pregnancy to Abigail. This event is almost immediately followed by Vicente's murder, which constitutes the climax of the "social" plotline. The causality between these two events is weak, however, since the first does not *cause* the second (it is really Vicente's breach of his contract and debt to the company that motivates his murder), but merely "flows" chronologically into it.

Similarly, Vicente's death does not logically lead to the resolution of the "social" plotline represented by the community's triumph in the referendum. Although part of this more "public" storyline, his murder does influence the conclusion of the "personal" strand of the narrative, as it is possible that the shared traumatic event played some part in the sisters' apparent reconciliation at the end of the film[63]. This

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[60] Interview with Esteban Ramirez, June 2007. Translation is my own.

[61] This dilemma is comically illustrated in the fabula itself, when housekeeper Marva asks Vicente to choose if he wants to have chicken or fish for dinner. Unable to pick one, Malba tells him that in life we should be able to decide between one thing and the other. Vicente looks at her, judging the meaning of her words. Melba settles the matter by telling he should pick "fish, of course!"

[62] Not to over-objectify the female characters, it must be noted that they also experience a conflict similar to the one described for the protagonist. Irene is shown tormented by feelings of guilt, torn between her loyalty to Abigail and her feelings for Vicente. And despite Abigail's love for her husband, she is also increasingly drawn to an "outside" character (Jackson).

[63] Although this is a subjective appreciation, it seems more probable that the climax of the "personal" plotline (Vicente and Irene's revelation of their affaire) leading to the same conclusion.

ending is open to the viewer's interpretation, in contrast to the more explicit conclusion of the "social" plotline. Yet, the two resolutions share a common theme, as explained by Ramírez:

> We live in a continent that unfortunately has many inequalities, but also has many interesting, positive stories that should be told; stories that end up well, without being trite "happy endings". The end of "Caribe" is geared precisely to that... Hope. On one hand we see the triumph of democracy. On the other, we see that there is new life and forgiveness between the two women... we don't know how much or when it occurred, but it is suggested. [64]

Despite the departure from some of its norms, the "classical" model did in fact influence the narrative of "Caribe". According to its director and co-writer, he opted for this particular way to tell the story for two main reasons: first, his admiration and pre-existing knowledge of Syd Field's screenwriting manuals (themselves based largely on the principles of the canonical story and classical fiction film narration). Secondly -and perhaps more significant- is the fact that he adopted the model as a deliberate strategy to make the film more accessible to a wider audience:

> Most Hollywood movies are bad, but they maintain your attention: something happens, the protagonist has an objective, that objective has certain obstacles, etc... I used that model in order to reach a mass audience who is used to watching this type of Hollywood cinema. One of my main objectives was for this movie to be successful with its audiences, so I chose the tools needed to achieve this goal... following this model is one of the safest ways to try to procure it. This doesn't mean that for a film to be successful it can only be done in this particular way. Nor does it mean that applying the model restricts creativity. There is plenty of room for inspiration... in the visual aspect and in the actors' performances, for instance... the model simply tells you what scenes to place where, what function they have and how they push the story forward.[65]

I believe Ramirez's words are significant in the sense that they portray the reality of many "peripheral", Latin American filmmakers. The presence of Hollywood productions in our screens is so dominant in relation to local material, that the

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[64] Interview with Esteban Ramírez. Ibidem.

[65] Ibidem.

"classical" model on which most of them are structured becomes both a prime narrative influence for authors *and* the "norm" expected by the general audience.

As Andres Heidenreich (director of "Password") commented earlier in this chapter, the adoption of the model, when not subconscious, is often a *practical* choice rather than a creative one. It spares the need and effort to come up with an alternative (a relevant issue for projects with limited time and resources to be developed), and it constitutes a "tried-and-true" template that, although does not guarantee success, is geared towards the likes and expectations of a wide public. In the case of "Caribe", Ramírez views the appropriation of the model in precisely this light:

> Caribe's main objective was to tell a personal story rooted in Costa Rican reality, which could be enjoyed by as many people as possible, both inside and outside our country. Based on that, we incorporated certain elements; "commercial" elements if you will, that would help us achieve that objective.[66]

Singling out the reasons for a film's success can be tricky, and certainly not for this study to determine. But the fact of the matter is that "Caribe" fulfilled the expectations expressed by its author. Critically acclaimed both inside and outside Costa Rica[67], it is considered by many to be the "best" national feature film so far, in terms of technical quality, performances and the treatment of its content. In addition to the acknowledged strategy of employing a "classical" narrative approach, another one of the elements that were incorporated to potentially engage a larger audience was the natural beauty of the film's locations.

Even from the title itself (meaning "*Caribbean*"), the film gives a prominent role to the particular space on which the story unravels. Not only is the "social" plotline intimately linked with its setting, but the action in general occurs largely on exteriors. This, plus over 20 transitional shots of the local landscape and multiple references to

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[66] Ibidem.

[67] The film earned several recognitions in the 30th Ibero-American Film Festival in Huelva (Spain), including "Best Picture". It also won Ramírez a "Best Director" award at the 15th Latin American Film Festival in Trieste (Italy). Source: http://www.caribelapelicula.com/en/awards.htm

its culture and ethnicities, makes the Caribbean coast not just a backdrop for the story, but a supporting character in it.

Recalling the quote by Mieke Bal, space in this instance "becomes an 'acting place' rather than the place of action. It influences the fabula, and the fabula becomes subordinate to the presentation of space. The fact that 'this is happening here' is just as important as 'the way it is here', which allows these events to happen" (1997: 136).

Figure 12.

| One of several transitional shots of the Caribbean landscape. | A common *mise-en-scene* throughout the film: the interiors and natural exteriors become one by setting the action on the open porches and spaces that characterize local architecture. | Exteriors like the beach and the jungle are chosen are the background for key fabula events. |

As the director previously mentioned, the choice to give such narrative "weight" to the fabula's setting, obeyed to his esteem for the region and his desire to document one of its ongoing and important social problems. It is undeniable that this film shows a clear intention to bring to the forefront what has historically been the most marginalized of the Costa Rican provinces, as well as extolling its natural and cultural patrimony.

In this aspect, "Caribe" gravitates towards what Michael Chanan calls the "continuing imperative" of Latin American film "to bear witness to local histories which takes us to the interstices, the margins, and the peripheries" (Dennison & Hwee Lim (Eds), 2006: 49). Yet, the specific portrayal of locations in "Caribe" also serves the more practical function of generating feelings of proximity in local audiences, while at the same time exploiting its exoticness to the foreign public:

> In Costa Rica, you are practically forced to make films that can also be sold abroad. If you make a movie that takes place within four walls, perhaps it won't have much of a comparative advantage. It would have to be dramatically outstanding. A film like "Caribe", on the other hand, will probably appeal to audiences that do not have access to our type of locations and therefore see it as something "exotic", attractive… At the same time, your local audience appreciates it because they identify with what is being shown. [68]

Just like the inclusion of "classical" narrative guidelines seeks to make "Caribe" more accessible to a mass audience, elements like a "universal" love story, striking locations and a multinational cast[69] aim for cross-border appeal. But as director Esteban Ramírez suggests himself, "Caribe" represents an interesting midpoint between various ranges: "For one, it tells a very human and personal story, but it also documents a social and political reality. It uses certain elements of mainstream, commercial film, but at the same time deals with a very un-commercial topic, like ecology. It seeks to entertain the audience, but it also has a distinct ideological premise; a voice and style that are my own and which could be related to "author" cinema"[70].

But can this convergence of objectives, contents and modes (a feature exhibited by all of the films analyzed so far) be considered a valid instance of "narrative hybridity"? I shall elaborate my position on this matter in the final chapter of this research, after studying the characteristics of the Colombian films, up next.

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[68] Interview with Esteban Ramírez. Ibidem.

[69] While the supporting actors in "Caribe" are Costa Rican, the three main characters are played by Cuban actor Jorge Perrugorría and actresses Cuca Escribano (Spain) and Maya Zapata (Mexico).

[70] Interview with Esteban Ramírez. Ibidem.

5.   Film Analyses: Colombia

5.1 "La Vendedora de Rosas"

Year: 1998
Country: Colombia
Written and directed by: Victor Gaviria
Carlos Henao & Diana Ospina, co-writers.
Run time: 110 minutes.

5.1.1 Synopsis

It is the night before Christmas Eve. Tired of her mother beating her, Andrea (a little girl of 10) runs away from her home in a Medellín slum and makes her way to the city center. Meanwhile, we meet Mónica (13), an orphan who sells roses on the street. Like most homeless children, Mónica and her group of friends (Judy, Claudia and "Cachetona") are addicted to sniffing glue. When she does this, Mónica hallucinates about her beloved late grandmother. When Andrea shows up in their street, Mónica recognizes the child as her neighbour, and invites her to spend the night with them. The girls quickly incorporate Andrea to their group, giving her part of their roses to sell.

We are also introduced to Don Hector and his small gang of thieves. Among them is Zarco, a violent young man who kills another one in cold blood just to steal his watch. Back in the girls' street, Judy drives off in a friend's car despite Mónica's warnings. She agrees to be fondled by the man in exchange for money. Mónica walks down the street and meets a drunk older man. After chatting with him for a while, he lets her have his watch as a Christmas present. Mónica shows it to her friends and tells them she plans to give it to his boyfriend Anderson as a gift.

The girls leave for 70th street, where Anderson and a bunch of other boys work as dope pushers. Mónica discovers him flirting with Marcela, an older girl who is a friend of Claudia's. Mónica confronts Anderson about this, but he tells her she is the

only one he's interested in. Meanwhile, Judy sells Marcela a greeting card she stole from the man's car and they scheme how to give it to Anderson behind Mónica's back. When she finds out about this, Mónica slaps Anderson and gets in a fight with Marcela. Judy arrives, egging Mónica on. Mónica pulls her aside and asks why she betrayed her. Judy replies that Anderson doesn't love her and is only using her to get sex. Mónica slaps her and walks down the street in tears.

Milton, a friend of Mónica who is constantly strung out, sees her crying and offers her some of his glue. While they are getting high, Andrea comes running down the street followed by a man who wants to rape her. Mónica and a couple of pushers come to her aid. The man flees, chased by the boys, while Mónica accompanies Andrea back home to get her clothes. Mónica continues to sniff glue along the way and has a vision of her dead grandmother as the Virgin Mary, floating at the side of a bridge. Mónica cries as the image glides away, asking why she left without her. Andrea comes over to comfort her, telling her is just a hallucination. She grabs her friend and pulls her away from the ledge.

A new day breaks as the two girls arrive at the slum. Andrea tells Mónica she will fetch her clothes and drop by her house later. "Shorty", a cousin of Monica's and member of Don Hector's gang, sees her walk by and calls her over to chat. Zarco snatches Mónica's watch and offers her the one he stole in return. Shorty tries to object, but he is clearly intimidated by Zarco. He tells Mónica to grab Zarco's watch and get out of there. The girl leaves, upset, while Zarco comments he'll give the new watch to his nephew.

Meanwhile, Andrea sneaks into her house but is caught by her mother, Magnolia, who berates and hits her for staying out all night. Andrea complains about her favoritism towards her younger sister. Magnolia leaves for work and orders Andrea to stay put. A neighbour advices Magnolia not to treat her daughter so badly so she doesn't run off to live on the streets. As soon as her is mother is gone, Andrea starts packing up her things. She steals a pair of roller- skates from her sister and leaves.

Mónica arrives at her sister Viviana's house. She scolds Mónica for the state she's in but lets her come inside, much to her husband's dislike. Mónica discovers that her grandmother's old room has been torn down and is now only a pile of rubble. Viviana asks her to spend Christmas Eve with them, and Mónica agrees. She lays down to sleep and dreams about a happy Christmas party in her grandmother's place.

Later that day, Mónica trades the watch that Zarco had given her for a bunch of fireworks. At the same time, Zarco gets furious when he notices that water has gotten into the watch he stole from Mónica. When he spots the girl walking down the street, he beats her and asks for his old watch back. Mónica tells him she doesn't have it anymore, but Zarco threatens to kill her if she doesn't get it back.

Scared, Mónica goes back to the city where she meets Claudia getting high on glue. She joins her and they start lighting up the fireworks. That night, Andrea finds Mónica on the street and convinces her to go home. Back in the slum, Zarco and Shorty pull up a taxi to rob it. However, things get out of hand when Zarco stabs and kills the driver. Shorty confronts him for this and they get in a fight. Zarco cuts Shorty's hand and he runs away. Shorty tells Don Hector what just happened and they all agree it is time to deal with Zarco before he gets them in more trouble.

When Andrea returns home, her mother is happy and relieved to see her. She tells the girl she loves her and wants her back home, promising not to beat her again. Andrea asks if she will be punished for selling her sister's skates, but Magnolia tells her not to worry about them. Meanwhile, Mónica huddles up in a corner of the rubble that used to be her grandmother's room. She pours a large amount of glue into a plastic bag from which she starts to breathe in and out. Soon, Mónica has a vision of her grandmother waving at her.

Close by, Zarco is being chased by his own gang. He shows up and tries to hide among the rubble. When she sees Mónica, he asks her for his watch and starts kicking and stabbing her while she lies on the ground. Mónica continues to hallucinate, walking closer and closer to where her grandma waits for her with open arms. Don

Hector and his men close in, forcing Zarco to flee. They shoot at him as he runs away. Mónica finally reaches her grandmother and they embrace. She smiles and passes out as the old lady lifts her in her arms. Mónica stares at the firework-filled sky and closes her eyes.

The next morning, a group of kids is playing football in the street. One of them kicks the ball to the river and they find Zarco's corpse on the banks. Another group of children walk through the rubble and find Mónica's body, lying on the ground and with blood on her chest. The film ends with the following text: "*150 years ago, Hans C. Andersen wrote a tale about the very same girls called "The Little Match Girl"*."

5.1.2 Plot Description

"La vendedora de rosas" relates events as they occur chronologically in the story world between the nights of a 23rd and a 24th of December. Perhaps the most interesting feature of the film's structure is the sparse distribution of the key events of the fabula across its approximately 110 minute duration. By "key events" I am referring to the situations and actions that push the story *forward* towards its climax and resolution. Excluding the necessary introduction to the main character and her context[71], the key events are the following:

- 18 minutes into the film: Zarco kills a man on the street and steals his watch.
- 24 minutes into the film: Monica receives a watch as a gift from a drunk on the street.
- 49 minutes into the film: Zarco takes the watch from Mónica by force and gives her the one he had previously stolen.
- 82 minutes into the film: Mónica trades the watch Zarco gave her for a bunch of fireworks.
- 83 minutes into the film: Zarco discovers that water has leaked into the watch he took from Monica.

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[71] The first five minutes of the film outline the basic information about the main character: Mónica is an orphaned child of the street who sells roses and is addicted to sniffing glue.

- 86 minutes into the film: Zarco confronts Mónica and tells her she must get his watch back or else he will kill her.
- 108 minutes into the film: As he flees from his gang[72], Zarco discovers Mónica getting high on glue and stabs her.

The causal chain that drives the story to its conclusion revolves around the actions of what seem to be a *protagonist* (Mónica) and an *antagonist* (Zarco). In the following point, I will revise the validity of this classification based on the "classical" standards used by this study. What is clear, however, is that the fate of the main character is in fact sealed by Zarco and a preceding sequence of 6 events.

The remaining bulk of the film is dedicated to show the other situations that Mónica and the rest of the numerous cast of characters encounter in their everyday lives. Narration during this part of the film is not focused solely on the protagonist, but shifts from one group of characters to another as their paths crisscross on the streets of the city. The resulting "vignettes" hold little or no relation to the causal chain listed above, as they serve another purpose altogether. Next, I will try to explain this function and the reason behind the "dilution" of the central plotline within the complementary narrative material of the film's diegesis.

5.1.3 Analysis

Narrative events, explains Seymour Chatman, have not only a logic of causal connection but also one of hierarchy, meaning that some are "more important than others" (1978: 53). Events like the ones listed above are what Chatman -using a distinction originally made by Roland Barthes- calls "*kernels*"; the *major* events that make up the causal chain which drives the story onward. In addition, a narrative also contains a series of *minor* events -or "*satellites*"- that although not crucial to the

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[72] It can be argued that Zarco finding Mónica at this point is the result of the actions that led to him running away from his gang. In this case, a new "key event" would have to be added previously: Zarco stabbing his fellow gang member Shorty, 101 minutes into the film.

advancement of the plot, serve to fill in, elaborate and complete the structure laid out by the string of kernels, like "flesh on a skeleton" (Ibidem; 54).

Furthermore, the author points out that satellites can be anticipatory or retrospective of later or earlier key events (Ibidem; 55) I would add that they can also be altogether *unrelated* to kernels, and stand as "mini-stories" in their own right. As I mentioned above, I believe that the majority of this film's narrative is made up of scenes and events that could be considered "satellites", as they do not advance the causal chain, but rather work by accumulation to offer the viewer a comprehensive picture of the social context in which the characters move. Writer/director Victor Gaviria stresses this aspect of his work:

> Describing the reality of these children was more important to me than to structure a rigid chain of events that lead to an outcome. The scenes are adrift, in the sense that there are not many cues or links between one and the next. The four or five key events that lead to the climax and ending (which is Monica's death) are dispersed across the narrative, but it's what's shown between them that really matters: the portrayal of the every day life of the children of the street (...) The priority here was to re-create a universe. That narrative universe didn't have to be propelled from one place to another. Just going from one scene to the next is enough to continuously construct and expand the portrait of this world. The objective was not "what happens at the end" but what you as a viewer came out feeling or understanding about that universe.[73]

This statement indicates that causal narration in "La vendedora de rosas" is subordinated to the goal of accurately describing a particular reality. In this case, one could argue that Chatman's distinction is inverted, with the satellites being in fact "more important" to the film's objective than the (now dispensable) kernels. This change of perspective also urges to re-examine the notion of satellite events/scenes as disjointed vignettes, seen as satellital because they are outside (and thus, inferior to) the causal chain. In this film in particular, the so-called "satellite" scenes have their own principle of cohesion: even if one event doesn't lead to the other through

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[73] Interview with Victor Gaviria, March 2007. Translation is my own.

causality, they are in fact bound together by their shared *descriptive* function. Therefore, we could see them more as a continuous, non-causal *plotline*, rather than like isolated narrative blocks. Moreover, the fact that causality is absent does not mean that the plotline lacks its own inherent type of thrust, as Gaviria himself points out:

> Narrative theory teaches us that all elements should be in function of a driving force which pushes the story forward until its completion. However, this film is based on the element of "reality" or "daily life", which doesn't necessarily flow towards something. Daily life rests upon itself. This doesn't mean it is inert. It impregnates the scene with life and movement, even if it's not oriented to an objective. When I discovered the dynamics of Colombian street reality, I focused myself on its stories because they inherently contain basic dramaturgical elements: conflict and impulse. When you live on the street, you don't have pause or time to reflect on your actions. You have to keep moving to survive. I feel very attracted to these stories where "movement", physical and dramatic, is part of these people's everyday reality.[74]

I believe that this compulsory "movement to survive" which is evident in the film, should not be confused with the "classical" element of *motivation* by which a main character actively pursues something he/she desires, effectively turning him or her into a traditional "protagonist". Motivated actions are conscious, internally generated, and geared towards a highly specific goal; whereas the "impulse" that Gaviria refers to can be best understood as a kind of *inertia* determined by the circumstances, instead of by the character themselves.

Naturally, this doesn't mean that the main and other characters of the film do not display motivation in their actions. Perhaps the clearest example of this is the girls' attraction to clothes and knick-knacks (not to mention their addiction to glue), which impels them to work, steal or prostitute themselves. The difference with "classical" narration, however, is that "La vendedora de rosas" doesn't rely on this element to guide its characters or drive the narrative towards its conclusion. This highlights the intention of the film's author to realistically portray the characters as drifting along

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[74] Ibidem.

with everyday life on the streets, perhaps busied with minor tasks and goals, but without a grand, ultimate or clearly identified objective.

Although not a "classical" protagonist in what respects to motivation, Mónica is undoubtedly the main character of the film, since the termination of her story is what gives overall *closure* to the narrative. This is especially significant considering that, according to what has been presented so far, narration in "La vendedora de rosas" tends towards *expansion* rather than conclusion. In this case, closure is not reached in the "classical" manner by which the character strives and finally achieves its goal, but simply by the termination of Mónica's life as a result of a previous chain of related events. This seems to point to the film's inspiration on "reality", where only death - and not just the fulfillment of a task- can put an end to a life story.

Also collaborating to achieve a *satisfying* closure is the death of Zarco. While other characters face the consequences of their "negative" actions in the film, Zarco has the distinction of generating the main causal chain in his interaction with Mónica, which in turn sets him up as the film's "antagonist". After he kills Mónica, Zarco becomes what Thompson calls a "dangling cause"; meaning that his fate must be addressed in order for the narrative to reach a final effect. Zarco's death at the hands of his own gang may follow a causal string of its own, but it still serves to successfully close the main event chain. Two other aspects of the story that contribute to this satisfying sense of finality are Mónica's dying vision in which she is finally reunited with her beloved grandmother, and Andrea's return home and reconcilement with her mother.

Overall, the differences of "La vendedora de rosas" in respect to the "classical" model carry more weight than its similarities. It may be argued that the film complies with Bordwell's general definition of classical narration as being "omniscient, highly communicative and moderately self-conscious" (1985:160), even employing traditional devices such as deadlines and appointments. However, without the presence of fundamental elements such as an underlying "canonical story", a motivated and goal-oriented protagonist, or a strong principle of causality to tie the different parts of the plot together, this film's narrative cannot be considered to follow

the "classical" pattern. Backing up this appraisal is Gaviria himself, who confirms his deliberate distancing from traditional narration:

> I distrust the screenwriting models because they take cultural experiences from all over the world and homogenize them into a foreign cultural structure that is a product of very different industrial, moral and narrative values. There is much to learn from classic structure, but we must constantly challenge it with other ways to tell our stories… social reality, popular culture, orality… these are excellent sources of inspiration. My films are more the product of compiling oral accounts than observation; people of the streets who have told me their fantastic stories, which I then attempted to recreate as accurately as possible through film. Their accounts are free from any outside theoretical models and follow a logic and style of their own.[75]

Here we start closing in on the true nature of this film's narrative strategy, which keeps *oral tradition* at its core. Orality, according to Stam and Shohat, is one of the "archaic sources" which artists of the so-called "Third World" can use to create products that are alternative to traditional, "Western" esthetics. Eurocentric thinking, explain the authors, values literacy over orality, as it tends to equate the "*non*-literate" with the "*ill*iterate" (1994: 298). "La vendedora de rosas" reverses this hierarchy by subordinating the literary, orthodox principles of Western narrative tradition; while at the same time taking the oral accounts of an urban, marginalized (and barely literate) group and using them both as its content and main structuring principle.

"To give voice to the voiceless" has become somewhat of a trite expression to refer to the objective of a film (documentaries in particular) to portray the reality of a socially relegated group, often by having its members addressing the subject through description, narration, or the registry of their everyday lives. "La vendedora de rosas" fulfills this goal by using real children and people of the street to convey an accurate picture of their lives through a re-enactment based entirely on their own words and experiences:

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[75] Interview with Victor Gaviria, March 2007. Translation is my own.

> I spent a lot of time talking to the children. They told me many different stories about their lives on the streets. I then took those stories and incorporated them in the script, trying not to transform or embellish them. The same thing happened with the characters... I created them based on the traits of the people I was going to work with. I adapted to them and not viceversa. In actuality, they are not playing characters, but being who they really are.[76]

However, in addition to being used as the main source for the events and situations that the film narrates, orality also allows the marginal group to directly express particular views on life and their reality in the forms of statements and dialogues throughout the film[77]. The film's director explains the reason behind this choice:

> I never aligned with the militant ideology of the left, nor with the type of cinema that derived from it. I've wanted my films to be dialogical, instead of dialectical. When you deal with people and characters that are socially excluded, you find that they have developed a philosophy about life and their own exclusion which is at once poetic and pathetic. For me, it is important that the viewer reflects about the world that I am showing them, but it's equally important to show that world reflecting about itself. When these characters think about their experiences and share their "truths" with us, it makes them transcend the limitations of their reality and generates empathy in the audience.[78]

In this sense, "La vendedora de rosas" more closely resembles the principles of "art cinema narration", which stands in opposition to those of the "classical" model. These so-called "art films" dispense with the canonic mandate of focusing the viewers' expectations on a goal-oriented and time-restricted causal chain. Instead, they favour the portrayal of "real" subject matter and contemporary psychological problems, opting for a mise-en-scene that emphasizes verisimilitude of behaviour as well as of space and time (Bordwell;1985: 206-7).

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[76] Ibidem.

[77] A reader who has watched the film may recall an illustrating exchange between Mónica and Chinga, an even younger boy who leads a gang of street thieves. When Mónica advices Chinga to buy a pair of shoes instead of spending his money on glue, he replies: *What good are shoes when you don't have a home*? (Translation is my own)

[78] Interview with Victor Gaviria, March 2007. Translation is my own.

Gaviria himself recognizes the influence that "art cinema" had in his work with an almost identical description:

> As filmmakers from the Third World we are indebted to Italian Neorrealism because they set the foundations for a cinema concerned with showing the reality of the socially marginalized and giving them a voice. They did this with an exquisite aesthetic and a careful mis-en-scene that always paid attention to the spatial setting of their stories, mirroring or enhancing the internal dimension of its characters. I tried to apply this in my film, always showing the kids within their real, physical context of the streets and the slums, underlining that moving paradox of being alone while at the same time surrounded by people.[79]

The adherence of the film to this style of narration may also be used to explain the nature of the main character. According to Bordwell, the typical protagonist of the art film lacks the clear cut traits, motives and objectives of its "classical" counterpart. Art cinema narration's "open-ended" approach to causality often downplays the protagonist's causal projects and motivations, while emphasizing what appear to be "insignificant" passages in the story. This presents the main character as sliding passively from one situation to the other, tracing out an itinerary which surveys the film's social world (1985: 207).

Regardless of its non-classical treatment of the protagonist, art cinema is deeply concerned with the expressive portrayal of character and his/her circumstance. Mónica is a clear example of this, functioning as the subjective gaze through which we learn about the world of Medellín's street children, but also being the viewer's closest "subject of study" herself. Bordwell tells us that narration in art cinema presents psychological effects and then leads us in a journey of exploration for its causes; cueing us to watch, listen and analyze everything from what the character says, thinks or feels, to the way in which it behaves and interact with the surrounding world (1985:208).

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[79] Ibidem.

"La vendedora de rosas" does just that, presenting a whole cast of characters and allowing them to behave and express themselves as they would do in their unmediated reality, in the very same places and situations they encounter on a daily basis. Among these, the character of Mónica stands out for being, as I have already mentioned, the most available "case study" for the viewer. In the process of learning about her life and inferring the reasons behind her behaviour and feelings of abandonment (what Bordwell refers to as the art film's "*inquiry into character*"), we delve into the conditions of misery, neglect and abuse that are common to *all* the members of her group and which constitute the reality that the film sets out to portray.

5.2 "Los Niños Invisibles"
Year: 2001
Country: Colombia
Written and directed by: Lisandro Duque
Run time: 85 minutes.

5.2.1 Synopsis

A man -the narrator- sits in front of a computer, typing. Through voice-over, he says he will now tell us a story of his childhood from which he still hasn't recovered. The story flashes back to when he was 8 years old, in the rural town of Ambalema. His name is Rafael and he is in love with his next door neighbour, prissy Marta Cecilia (MC). After overhearing that MC will be getting an X-ray, Rafael refuses to believe that his heavenly MC is as human and mundane as the rest of us.

One day, Rafael is talking with his friends Fernando and Gonzalo about the perks of being invisible. Rafael imagines it is the perfect way to get close to MC and confirm her unearthly nature. Gonzalo tells them there is a witch man passing through town that is selling a booklet on how to become invisible. Rafael attends his show later that day, but the witch man's assistant refuses to sell him the booklet, claiming it is full of black magic. The man tells him to come back after he has made his First

Communion, as then he could confess and be forgiven for his sins. Rafael waits around until the assistant gets distracted, grabs one of the booklets and leaves.

After reading the dark tasks required by the spell, Rafael realizes he must take his First Communion before going any further. His mother throws him a party after he is done, which Rafael takes as the perfect opportunity to see MC eating cake and determine whether she is human after all. MC rejects the cake and candy because she doesn't want to get pimples or get dirty, but Rafael interprets this as proof of her being above worldly pleasures.

Rafael enrols the help of his friends in the experiment. The booklet states that if the person backs down or doesn't complete the spell correctly, he will remain invisible for ever. The three swear to go through with it and they each set out to obtain the required objects. Fernando must get the gizzard of a black, stolen chicken; Gonzalo must kill a cat and take out its heart, and Rafael must get a scapular and throw away the holy image of the Virgin Mary. His friends are shocked, but Rafael assures them their sins will be forgiven after they confess. The kids decide to conduct the experiment on the night of the national beauty pageant, when the entire town will be gathered in the square watching it in on TV.

While preparing for the experiment, Rafael accidentally drops a picture of MC that she had given him as a gift. MC finds it lying on the street and picks it up with a sad face.

Fernando is the first to complete his task correctly by robbing and killing the black hen. Gonzalo, however, is unable to kill his pet cat, so he grabs the heart from a bowl of chicken innards his mother keeps on the fridge. The night of the pageant, the three friends meet in the town's cemetery. Despite being told that not even 10 confessions could erase the sin of desecrating a blessed image of the Virgin, Rafael takes it out of the scapular and throws it away. He then places the heart and the gizzard inside the pockets of the scapular and smashes them down with a stone.

Rafael puts the scapular on, but his friends remark they can still see him. After accusing each other for not doing things the right way, they conclude that maybe they can see him because they did the experiment together. They decide to test it on the town the next day.

The next day, Rafael and his friends misinterpret a series of events as signs of his invisibility. At breakfast, Rafael's mother plays along with her son's fantasy and treats him as if he were truly invisible. Rafael then tries to stand in a large man's way to see if he will stop. When he doesn't, the child believes it is due to his transparency. Later, the friends decide to take it up a notch by spying on a young woman bathing in the river. The woman notices Rafael, but being an exhibitionist, continues to bathe in front of him. In a final test, Rafael is urged by his friends to walk right past the cinema usher and go into the theatre. Being on strike, the usher does nothing to stop Rafael, which the kids take as the ultimate proof of his invisibility.

The "reality" of his new condition sinks in and Rafael starts feeling anxious about being imperceptible. This is worsened by MC walking airily past him without a word, a reaction to her picture's snub. Later that day, in MC birthday party, Gonzalo takes the girl aside to let her know Rafael's feelings and all they have done because of her.

Marta Cecilia goes out to look for Rafael, who is sitting in the shadows, upset. She calls for him, pretending not to see him. Rafael stands before her and the girl touches his faces. She then removes his scapular and throws it away, saying she can see him now. MC grabs Rafael's hand and they walk together back to the party. Fernando and Gonzalo watch on and rush over to retrieve the scapular.

In the party, Rafael and MC are shown eating and laughing. The narrator states that all the dangers he put himself into were not in vain, as he was finally able to satisfy his curiosity. The story returns to the same room where it begun, but now the computer keyboard is being typed on by an invisible writer. The narrator says that being invisible makes you feel sad and insignificant, which is a feeling that takes over him from time to time; perhaps a lingering effect of the experiment conducted long

ago. Finally, the invisible man stops typing and exits the room, turning off the light behind him.

5.2.2 Plot Description

The first and final scenes of "Los niños invisibles" (showing the diegetic narrator typing in front of a computer) are set in the "present timeline", and serve as a brief prologue and epilogue to a story which is told entirely through a long and continuous *flashback*.

Instead of periodically cutting back to the initial sequence, the voice-over statements of the narrator throughout the film remind the viewer that what we are seeing is the retelling of past events. This results in a linear structure in which the past timeline is often overlapped (but not interrupted) by narrative information of the "present" through the film's soundtrack. I shall illustrate this strategy a bit later, when I touch on the topic of "levels of narration".

More important to my study than the overall structure of the film, however, are the distinctly "classical" features that it displays. As several of these traits are functions of the plot itself, I have opted to keep the present point short and move directly to their analysis, where I will sustain my view of "Los niños invisibles" as the most "classical" fiction film narrative of this study's sample.

5.2.3 Analysis

I shall start my analysis by pointing out that "Los niños invisibles" fulfills the elemental classical trait of having a protagonist-driven fabula; that is, a story which is propelled by a strongly motivated main character who faces a series of obstacles in order to accomplish a clear objective. Evidently, I am referring to the character of Rafael, his quest to become invisible, and his goal to determine whether his beloved Marta Cecilia is an earthly or a heavenly being.

Like almost all classical "heroes", Rafael encounters *facilitators* along the path to his objective (his friends Fernando and Gonzalo being the most instrumental for the task at hand) as well as a number of *deterrents* that must be overcome or circumvented; from the watchful eye of their elders to the Church-induced fear of damnation. It is actually the element of *fear*[80], more than any other "physical" character, which acts as an antagonistic force throughout the film, effectively countering the characters' efforts to achieve their goal.

Another classical characteristic of the film's narrative is the division of the protagonist's story into two simultaneous plotlines: one dealing with a "private project" like heterosexual romance (Rafael's desire to satisfy his curiosity and attraction towards Marta Cecilia); the second revolving around the protagonist's "public project" itself (Rafael's pursuit of invisibility). Following the classical canon, these two plotlines are intrinsically related, as success in the public endeavor is often held as a requirement to the completion of the private one.

Also present in the plot of "Los niños invisibles" is the *deadline*, a "device highly characteristic of classical narration" (Bordwell; 1985: 157) that provides thrust and structure to the narrative by setting a temporal limit for the character to causally reach a specific goal, and for the duration of the story itself. At the same time, they perfectly suit classical narration's emphasis of cueing the viewer's expectations and hypotheses towards upcoming action (Bordwell et al; 1985: 46). Rafael's need to receive his first communion before conducting the experiment, the obligation to collect the three items of the spell before the night of the pageant, and the mandate to not remove the scapular before nightfall, are just three of several appointments and deadlines that constantly push the action forward in the film.

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[80] Two apprehensions have significant weight in the story. First, the already mentioned fear of mortal sin and damnation that convinces Rafael to take his First Communion and, later, almost leads him to quit the experiment. This is prevented only by the other, more poignant fear to back out from the experiment or disobey its rules, as this would result in "staying invisible for ever". Peer pressure may be argued as another kind of "fear", frequently coercing the boys to act, in order to avoid mockery and accusations of cowardice.

Yet another classical feature is the film's strong reliance in the element of *causality*, which strings together the events and situations presented in the plot through a logic of cause-and-effect. This is particularly evident in the "third act" and closure of "Los niños invisibles", which depend on the logical conclusion of a previous sequence of events. After the boys complete the spell at the cemetery (the end of the "second act"), they decide to test Rafael's invisibility the next day. A series of situations then unfold which are construed by the children as proof of their success, but which actually have a rational (and *causal*) explanation based on previously narrated events. Examples of this are:

Figure 13.

The bathing girl does not react to Rafael's presence. This is explained by her previously spotted exhibitionism and ratified by her confession to the priest, here in V.O.	The barber appears not to see the boy making faces at him. A later shot reveals that he has been murdered due to the communist beliefs he has stated throughout the film.	Marta Cecilia walks past Rafael without looking at him. She is in fact ignoring the boy, after having found the picture she had given to him laying on the ground.

Aside from being causally motivated, these and other instances[81] of the film have a common denominator: their logic is clear to the viewer even if it's not to the characters experiencing them. This is a manifestation of classical film narrative being, in Bordwell's words, *omniscient* and *highly communicative*; meaning that the narration "knows" more than all the characters and conceals relatively little of this knowledge to the viewer, aside of what will happen next (1985: 160).

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[81] Rafael sneaking past the cinema manager "undetected" is seen by the boys as the definitive proof of his invisibility. However, this too has an explanation rooted on what has been narrated so far: The manager has expressed his disgruntlement with the cinema owner for not raising his salary, to which the communist barber advices him to stand up for his rights. This is the causal link that explains him going on strike and letting anyone go into the theatre without paying.

Furthermore, the author tells us that classical narration is *moderately self-conscious*, as it seldom acknowledges its own address to the audience and fluctuates between moments of "overtness" and "covertness" (Ibidem). These three defining characteristics can be identified in "Los niños invisibles", especially when we analyze the different levels of narration that are at work throughout the film. Let us consider the following condensed example; which also marks a turning point in the story:

Figure 14.

Screenshot A	Screenshot B	Screenshot C
Rafael studies a poster of the digestive system. The Narrator (V.O.) states his desire to find out whether MC had the same noisy, disgusting organs as everyone else.	Gonzalo informs his friends about the witch man who is selling booklets on how to become invisible. They comment on the advantages of invisibility while Rafael sits in silence.	Intercut scene: Rafael imagines himself invisible, standing close to MC and smelling her neck.

What we can see illustrated in screenshot A, is the overlapping that I mentioned in the previous point between the "present" timeline represented by the voice-over statements of an adult Rafael (the "Narrator"), and the "past" timeline in which we see the events of the story occur. *Diegetic narration* is brought to the forefront[82] whenever the "Narrator" speaks, since he is a character who inhabits the story-world (diegesis) and is relating events and situations which he experienced directly.

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[82] I use the term "forefront" to stress the image of different levels of narration operating simultaneously, although with different intensities at different moments. In the case illustrated by (A) for instance, *Character narration* is also in play, as we follow the protagonist as he goes about his life and interacts with other characters and situations ("*external focalization*", as Branigan calls it). "*Internal focalization*" occurs shortly afterwards, when narration adopts the character's subjective perspective, as when Rafael watches the picture of Marta Cecilia and then the poster of the digestive system. Also, "*Extra-fictional narration*" is *ever present*, if we understand it as the organizing force of the "Real World" that has controlled and defined what the viewer is seeing and how we are seeing it.

Narration here is highly communicative in the sense that the Narrator explicitly describes the feelings and thoughts of the main character. At the same time, however, his interventions remind the viewer of the nature of the film as a mediated account (even if by a *fictional* character, at first impression) and narration becomes more self-conscious as it "displays its recognition that it is presenting information to the audience" (Bordwell et al. 1985: 25).

This diminishes in the moment captured by screenshot B, where the weight of narration shifts from the diegetic Narrator to the characters of the story. In this case, Gonzalo serves to deliver a key piece of knowledge that will change the course of the story. This is what Branigan calls "*Character Narration*", by which narrative information is conveyed chiefly through their voices and actions. When this level is most active, narration turns covert (less "self-conscious") and, in this case, remains highly communicative.

Finally, in screenshot C, we have an instance of what Branigan describes as "*deep focalization*"; a sub-type of Character narration through which we gain access to their inner most sphere, as when the film visualizes characters' thoughts or dreams (what we see here is Rafael's fantasy of being invisible and close enough to smell Marta Cecilia). Narration remains covert and transmissive, while also displaying the remaining classical trait of *omniscience*. Gonzalo and Fernando cannot be aware of what is going on in his friend's head, but *we do* because nothing escapes the narration's self-knowledge.

This is the same case described earlier, where the narration has disclosed certain causal links to the viewer which the characters themselves ignore. What this indicates is that the narration of "Los niños invisibles" is not limited to the partial memories and experiences of the diegetic Narrator, even though it is set up to appear that way by having the character introducing, narrating and concluding the account.

By the plot itself systematically filling in the "gaps" in the viewer's understanding of the fabula, every link of the causal chain falls into place and the action is logically

terminated. Narrative *unity* and *closure* are simultaneously achieved in "Los niños invisibles", as the story has followed a cause-and-effect principle from beginning to end and no major causes are left unresolved (Thompson; 1999: 12).

Although Rafael fails in his "public project" to become invisible (something that the viewer may anticipate from the offset given the realistic tone of the story); he succeeds in reaching his ultimate goal: to be near Marta Cecilia and satisfy the attraction and curiosity he feels towards her. The causal chain of the invisibility experiment ends in the only way it can[83], but the failure of the *method* is neutralized by the accomplishment of the *objective*. In this sense, the film displays not only the narrative closure described above, but also the conventional "*happy ending*" linked with the romantic plotline of a classical narrative, where the male and female protagonists are finally united.

Interestingly, the "epilogue" of the film addresses one "hanging cause" that the viewer may not perceive as such. When Marta Cecilia takes off the scapular from Rafael's neck and throws it away, she breaks a previously stated mandate of the experiment: the user must not take off the scapular until nightfall, at the risk of staying invisible for ever.

Of course, given the realistic portrayal of events so far, we dismiss the transgression and believe it to be without consequence. Thus, the main story ends without the viewer feeling there is an unresolved issue. Nonetheless, the "epilogue" of the film re-opens this point by showing us a now invisible narrator, who surmises that this recurrent condition is probably a lingering effect of having broken the rules of the experiment.

This might be interpreted as a late validation of the (black) magic world that the story exploits, but rationalizes in its third act. Also, the scene may be seen as an

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[83] I will address the last scene or "epilogue" below.

encapsulation of the *symbolic* dimension of the film, as explained by director Lisandro Duque himself:

> What drew me to the story was that element of child innocence that makes you believe that the impossible is possible. Also, I liked the metaphor of children as invisible beings in many societies, where they are often viewed as small, annoying things that nobody pays real attention to. One of my main aspirations was to make people reflect about the feeling of insignificance; to refer the viewer to those moments in which we ourselves feel invisible, to our government and to our fellow human beings.[84]

Another aspect of classical narration that the film adheres to is the use of the "canonic story" structure. As I have presented earlier in this work, Todorov explains that this "core narrative" can be defined as the causal transformation of a situation through five stages: (1) a state of equilibrium at the outset, (2) a disruption of the equilibrium by some action, (3) a recognition that there has been a disruption, (4) an attempt to repair that disruption, and (5) a reinstatement of the initial equilibrium[85] (Branigan; 1992: 4). If we look to identify these general segments in the film's narrative, it becomes apparent that:

- (1) refers to the introduction of the main characters and their context, but more importantly, to Rafael's stated belief of Marta Cecilia as "pure and non-physical".
- Although not an action *per se*, the incident that breaks the "balance" and triggers the rest of the story (2) is Rafael overhearing that Marta Cecilia will be getting an X-ray, and his mom's explanation of it as a "photo of our insides".
- This new knowledge fills Rafael with curiosity and doubt (3).
- The experiment to become invisible is a direct attempt by Rafael to dispel his doubts about Marta Cecilia and confirm his opinion of her as a divine creature (4).
- Although his plan fails, Rafael is able to satisfy his curiosity and his fascination with Marta Cecilia remains intact (5).

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[84] Interview with Lisandro Duque, March 2007. Translation is my own.

[85] To be understood *not* as the return to the initial situation or "point of departure" for the narrative, but to the idle mode before a detonating incident. This stage can also be seen as the installment of a *new equilibrium*.

It is the accumulation of all the previously outlined traits which leads me to confidently affirm the "classical" nature of this film's narrative; or -at the very least- its close adherence to that particular model of narration. The opinion of the writer/director confirms this argument, and reveals that it is the product of deliberate appropriation:

> I am a very respectful worker of the techniques of traditional, scholastic dramaturgy. (…) As a screenwriter, once I am certain I want to pursue an idea, I am very careful to follow the canons of classical dramaturgy. And because I do that, I allow myself the license to transgress it at certain points, because I know exactly what I am doing. I can't accept a story that wants to be transgressive without even knowing the rules it is trying to break; overly spontaneous with no regard to method. Humanity has many centuries of storytelling and it is not in vain that the Aristotelian principles have been so efficient and successful. That's why it bothers me that there are people who view the Aristotelian narrative paradigm as a "property" of Hollywood. [86]

"Los niños invisibles" is an interesting example of how a distinctly Latin American story (inspired in fact by the author's own childhood experiences growing up in a Colombian rural town during the 1950's[87]) can be structured to follow "classical" guidelines without loosing any of its cultural specificity. This shouldn't come as either surprise or novelty, since like Duque points out, what we have come to consider as "classical narrative" is neither a modern development nor the exclusive province of any national cinema or industry. However, this particular analysis is important to the study in that it represents one of the few cases of the sample in which the *intention* of the author to *apply* the norms of the model can actually be evidenced in the narrative itself.

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[86] Interview with Lisandro Duque. Ibidem.

[87] Ibidem.

5.3 "Bolivar soy Yo!"

Year: 2002
Country: Colombia
Written and directed by: Jorge Alí Triana
Manuel Arias & Alberto Quiroga, co-writers.
Run time: 87 minutes.

5.3.1 Synopsis

The film opens with the following text: "*Simón Bolivar (1783-1830) led the war for independence against the Spanish crown of the current republics of Colombia, Venezuela, Ecuador, Perú and Bolivia; which he dreamed to see united as a single nation, "The Great Colombia".*"

The opening scene shows Simón Bolivar is sitting in a cell, reflecting on his life's unfinished mission. He is escorted out to the yard and meets his beloved Manuelita Sáenz on the way. They bid each other goodbye as he walks over to face a firing squad. However, when the squad leader is about to give the order to fire, Bolívar himself yells "Cut!", arguing that he didn't die that way. It is thus revealed that what we have seen so far is a historic *telenovela* about the life of the "Great Liberator".

The cast and production team is fed up with the infatuation that Santiago (the show's star) has developed with the character of Simón Bolivar. Santiago flatly refuses to tape the ending of the program and flees the set. The director blames the actor's outbursts on his break-up with Alejandra, the actress that plays Manuelita. Alejandra replies that Santiago is only in love with the idea of Bolivar and Manuelita. Finally, the director convinces her to go after Santiago and persuade him to come back.

During a production meeting, the show's doctor explains to the director and producer that Santiago has dangerously intertwined reality and fiction, which leads him to confuse himself with Bolivar and refuse to do anything that doesn't strictly comply with history. This is worsened by the fact that everyone around him treats Santiago as if he was actually Bolivar; from his mother and neighbours, to the

president of Colombia, who requests his presence in an upcoming summit with the other heads of state of the Bolivarian countries. He gladly agrees.

However, Santiago is constantly on the move, as the doctor and his team are trying to commit him to a mental institution. One night, he visits Bolivar's former residence, now a museum. There, he befriends the night man who tells Santiago that he has the chance to do what Bolivar never could: finish his vision of unity and peace.

Eventually, Santiago is caught by the doctor's team and checked into an asylum. The story is leaked to the press and the president himself calls the producer to ask if it's true. Surprised, the producer denies it and allows Santiago to leave the hospital in order to attend the summit.

Once there, the president gives Santiago the speech he wants him to read. However, when his turn to speak comes, Santiago calls for the restoration of the "Great Colombia" and denounces the presidents for using "his" name to justify the region's violence, corruption and underdevelopment. Santiago is then escorted away by a soldier, but he grabs his gun and takes the Colombian president hostage. He demands a ship and sets off up the Magdalena River, retracing Bolivar's last journey.

While he sails upstream, Santiago's ship is boarded by a group of FARC guerrillas, who address him as Bolivar and place themselves under his orders. Although Santiago tells them to leave, the guerrillas stay on the ship and begin to plot how to get rid of him and take the president as their own hostage.

Meanwhile, the Colombian public has become fascinated with Santiago's intention to coerce the Bolivarian governments to fuse into a single nation. People take to the streets, showing their support. Santiago's mother tells Alejandra to go to him, because Bolivar needs Manuelita by his side. Alejandra is allowed by the government to meet with Santiago, hoping she can convince him to conduct the new summit in Bogotá instead of on the ship, as he demands.

Alejandra is ferried to the ship and is welcomed by Santiago. He lets her know that he is aware that Bolivar died in 1830, but that life is not worth living without fantasy or imagination. Santiago tells her he cannot go back, because he now personifies the frustrated dream of an entire continent. Eventually, Alejandra convinces him to meet with the presidents in the capital, and they request a helicopter to take them all there.

Back in the presidential palace, the army is ready to detain Santiago as soon as he comes out of the chopper. However, he orders the pilot to land in Bolivar's estate, where he intends to conduct the summit instead. The armed forces and media quickly assemble outside the grounds.

Santiago locks himself inside a room, struggling to come up with a speech that will touch everyone's heart and make them understand the higher purpose of his actions. But meanwhile, the guerrillas improvise a martial trial and sentence the president to death. Alejandra tells Santiago what is going on and he realizes that, like Bolivar, he has been betrayed by all those around him.

Santiago manages to stop the president's execution with the help of Alejandra and the night man, holding the guerrilla captains at gunpoint. However, a warning shot fired to the air is interpreted by the army as an attack by the guerrillas, and they storm the grounds. As the battle between the armed groups rages on around him, Santiago is shown smiling eerily and looking around with blood rimmed eyes. This is intercut with several documentary images of Colombia's civil war.

Finally, we see Santiago lying on top of a heap of bodies and a Colombian flag, his head close to Alejandra's body. He utters a final monologue, bidding farewell to Colombia and to freedom. Then, he gasps the word "Cut" three times. A clapperboard enters the frame and is held in front of Santiago. We can see it bears the title of the film along with other technical notations. The operator claps the board and the film ends.

5.3.2 Plot Description

"Bolivar soy yo!" displays a linear fictional chronology which is altered only by Santiago's frequent delusions, where he perceives the *present* world and people around him as *past* situations and characters from Simón Bolivar's life. Nonetheless, these inserted shots do not represent a shift or "break" in the fictional timeline (as a flashback would, for instance), but an overlapping of the "real" and "fantasy" worlds of the main character, which serve to underline his madness (I will study these examples of "deep focalization" in the next point).

Although the story being portrayed in the film is that of Santiago Miranda, it is the historical character of Simón Bolivar who provides the protagonist with its most clear traits, motivation and objective: to accomplish the unfinished project of South American unity. In this sense, the main plotline of the film is as juxtaposed as Santiago's perception, constantly (and deliberately) blurring the line between the thoughts and actions of Santiago and those of Santiago-as-Bolivar.

The secondary plotlines are just as permeated by this duality. For instance, it becomes difficult to tell whether the romantic story we are witnessing is happening between Santiago and Alejandra, or between their representations of Bolivar and Manuelita. Equally hazy is the protagonist's treatment by other characters in the film (his own mother, his fans, the president, the guerrillas) who engage him as if he were indeed Bolivar, fuelling his delusion and actions. In the following point, I will continue my study of the film's plot and try to shed some light on how it conveys the *layered* nature of the film's narrative.

5.3.3 Analysis

As mentioned before, by assuming the persona of Simón Bolivar, the character of Santiago Miranda and the film narrative itself is infused with certain traits that are consistent with "classical" standards. The quest that Santiago embarks on, for instance, follows the same structure of the "canonic story" on which classical narration is based:

In the "*initial equilibrium*" stage, Santiago is disillusioned by the debasement of Bolivar's figure and dream, a situation he regrets to worsen by the superficial portrayal of the Liberator that he is forced to play on the TV show. The "*disruption of the equilibrium*" can be pinpointed at his first visit to Bolivar's former residence, where the night man makes him realize that he (Santiago Miranda) has the chance of finishing the project of continental unity that Bolivar never could. This exchange has an evident impact on Santiago ("*recognition of the disruption*"), who in the very next scene vows not to rest until he gives Bolivar's story the ending it deserves.

It is from this point on that the line between "Santiago" and "Bolivar" becomes even more blurry, with the actor adopting the historical motivation of the General as his own, and as a result becoming the driven and proactive protagonist that is typical of "classical" fiction film narration. The remainder of the film deals with the "*attempts to repair the disruption*", or to be more precise, Santiago's idealistic but naïve efforts to form the "Great Colombia" and thus correcting the negative equilibrium stated at the offset. The key difference with the canonic narrative template is that -as the viewer may foresee from quite early on- there is no realistic possibility for the protagonist to achieve his final goal. Instead, the causal chain generated by the main character builds up to an ending in which he not only fails to reach his objective, but dies in the process. This tragic resolution reflects what writer/director Jorge Alí Triana identifies as the central theme of his film:

I wasn't so interested in the story of the actor that gets lost in his character, as much as I wanted to explore the topic of Destiny. In this case, the actor knows exactly what will befall to his character and he attempts to change Fate, to finish what he knows the real Bolivar could not. The failure of the Bolivarian project marked the entire destiny of our region. It is our great tragedy. Things would be very, very different if the South American countries would have come together under one great nation. I am profoundly Bolivarian, and I think that if we don't unite, we'll never be able to overcome underdevelopment and misery. That was my motivation to do this film and that's its message. The figure of the actor serves as a metaphor for our own desire to complete Bolivar's project and re-write history.[88]

Triana's statement leaves no doubt about the rhetorical function of the narrative in "Bolivar soy Yo!" Although not as overt as the Soviet examples of Historical-Materialist narration which use "principles opposed to Hollywood norms that are frankly didactic and persuasive" (Bordwell; 1985: 235); the main plotline of this film is used to explore and repeatedly comment in favour of a particular socio-political idea(1): the unification of the Bolivarian states. Take the following speech from Bolivar himself, which Santiago insists he wants to quote "at the ending":

Santiago:

"The nations that I have founded, after a bitter and prolonged agony, shall rise from their eclipse to become states of a single, great nation: America." Don't you think that's wonderful? [89]

Santiago's allusion to an "ending", is just one of the film's multiple self-references as a *narrative*, as opposed to the illusion of an "unmediated reality" that is a convention of fiction cinema. Santiago views *history* as an ongoing *story* and surmises that, through his "channelling" of Bolivar, he may be able to change its course and outcome.

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[88] Interview with Jorge Alí Triana, March 2007. Translation is my own.

[89] Taken and translated from "Bolivar soy Yo!".

As a result, we have a character that is keenly aware of his own protagonic role, and who incorporates elements and people from his "reality" into his fantasy quest[90]. It is precisely this character-generated narrative (within a larger, "real" story world) which the viewer is cued to follow, and which highlights the film's address to its audience.

A recurrent device that the author uses to keep the viewer engaged in the reconstruction of Santiago's inner narrative is the overlapping of his "reality" with elements of Bolivar's history. This is accomplished through "character narration", as illustrated in the following figure:

Figure 15.

Screenshot A	Screenshot B	Screenshot C
Santiago (as Bolivar) confronts the presidents of the Bolivarian nations about the abuses they have committed in "his" name.	Narration shifts to *deep focalization* as we adopt Santiago's psychological point of view: he perceives the presidents as the Generals that betrayed Bolivar and kept him from achieving his goal.	Back to *external focalization*, Santiago is shown being escorted away from the presidents.

In addition, the strong rhetorical plane of "Bolivar soy Yo!" is directly related to its high level of "self awareness". The generally *overt* manner in which the film conveys its message and argues in favour of the project of regional unity, entails a recognition of its own address to the audience and, consequently, of its nature as a narrative vehicle. This is particularly evident when Santiago delivers his speech in the presidential summit (see Figure 15.), and in his final monologue where he quotes

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[90] Much in the same way as Cervantes' Don Quijote, which is referenced at the beginning of the film.

Bolivar (discussed below). These two interventions are mainly directed to us, his *extra-diegetic* audience, and summarize the author's intended message.

In yet another manifestation of "self consciousness", the director stresses the concept of a "*story within a story*" by including moments in which the narrative explicitly reveals itself to the viewer:

Figure 16.

In the first few minutes of the film, the viewer is lead to believe that what we are watching is a film about Simón Bolivar's life. However, this illusion is soon dispelled when we find out that the characters are in fact actors portraying roles in a historical soap opera. This screenshot marks the precise moment of this realization, when Santiago yells "Cut!" just before the character of Bolivar is about to be executed.

The highest point of narrative "self-consciousness" comes in the final image of the film. As Santiago lies dying, he gasps "Cut!" once again. A clapperboard with the film's name then enters the frame and signals the end of the shot. This not only transgresses the classical mandate of "transparency" (the concealment of the act and artifices of narration), but it negates the assumed autonomy of the entire preceding story world.

If we go back to Bordwell's definition of classical narration as being "omniscient, highly communicative and only *moderately self-conscious*", then we may agree that it is in this last aspect that "Bolivar soy Yo!" differs most from that tradition, despite the predominantly canonical fabula which I outlined at the beginning of this point.

Furthermore, I would insist that (saving the obvious differences) the essence of this film's narrative is actually *similar* to that of Historical Materialist narration (henceforth, "H.M."). Of course, "Bolivar soy Yo!" is a commercial product intended, first and foremost, to *entertain* its audience, and not to indoctrinate them in a particular political view. Nonetheless, like the H.M. tradition, the film displays a "tendency to treat the syuzhet as both a narrative and an argument" (Bordwell; 1985: 235). In fact, "Bolivar soy Yo!" functions in the same manner that H.M. films did; using its narrative content as a direct *example* of the point being argued, and coupling that with a strong rhetorical thrust (Ibidem; 241).

"Bolivar soy Yo!" is *-in its author's own terms-* a film that explores the negative, violent consequences that present-day Colombia (and by extension, the rest of the Bolivarian states) suffers as a result of the failure of Bolivar's integration project. The message it argues in favour of could very well be summed up in the following statement: "Division causes death and misery. Unity is our hope for progress". Jorge Alí Triana emphasizes his position:

> "Bolivar soy yo" was a film I did with a lot of humor, but also with a lot of pain. I am hurt by the atomization and the conflict that my country is experiencing. We are still engaged in a civil war. And I think that this division derives in great measure from the failure of the Bolivarian dream that this film touches upon. That was the great crossroads; the moment where our country could have one destiny or another. I was interested in exploring this from the historical and social perspective.[91]

The film's narrative mirrors this discourse by having a facsimile of Simón Bolivar setting out to correct the grim current reality of the region, only to be thwarted -once again- by betrayal and division. The bloodshed of the final scene, where the protagonist lies on top of a pile of dead guerrillas and army soldiers, just stresses the notion of "violence between brothers" that results from disunity.

It is actually in this last scene of the film, that the influence of H.M. narration comes across the clearest, due to its application of the Soviets' characteristic "intellectual montage". Whereas "classical" editing avoids jolts in the spatiotemporal continuity, H.M. narration actively use them to cue the viewer into filling in the (often unconventional) gaps in the montage of time and space. At the same time, the viewer must interpret the message being conveyed by linking and distinguishing the elements presented. This more connotative, poetic approach is in direct opposition to the "excessively obvious cinema" that derives from classical narration (Ibidem; 241-9):

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[91] Interview with Jorge Alí Triana, March 2007. Translation is my own.

Figure 17.

Screenshot A shows the moment in which the army enters the grounds of Bolivar's former residence, setting in motion the climax of the film. Regardless of our assumptions of what Santiago would do at this point, narration presents him in a close-up (B), grinning as he looks from side to side with blood rimmed eyes. A series of stock shots are then inserted in quick succession (Screenshots C & D are just two examples); all of them conveying images of war, destruction and death. The montage repeatedly jumps from Santiago's close-up, to these images, and to glances of the battle raging on in the grounds (E). Finally, in screenshot F, Santiago pronounces his last words as he lies with Alejandra on top of a pile of dead bodies and a bloodied Colombian flag.

I believe it's not necessary to offer an interpretation of the sequence, as I hope it's clear enough from what has been discussed so far. Rather, I have included the figure to illustrate to the reader the abrupt gaps in spatiotemporal logic, and the marked juxtaposition of elements that the film's director chose to use at this crucial point of the film (and *only* at this point).

The theory regarding the H.M. mode tells us that this type of "*unpredictable* narration" is used as a counterbalance to the *predictable* fabulas that dominated Soviet cinema, as, for example, those extracted from historical events whose outcome

was already known to the audience (Ibidem; 240). It certainly would be interesting to propose that "Bolivar soy Yo!" uses the strategy for that very same reason. Although the film is not a historical re-enactment *per se,* it bases much of its content on known passages of Bolivar's life.

Furthermore, one could argue that even if it's still not part of history, the viewer *already knows* (or at least, can accurately anticipate) the result of Santiago's idealistic quest, if only because it echoes that of Bolivar's. This view finds some support in the director's own claim that he was interested in exploring the issue of Fate, through a character that attempts to change the destiny of an entire region, despite being aware (like us) of its probable outcome.

In my opinion, the scene is a final reminder of the rhetorical investment of the film, which at this point chooses to minimize its narrative function and end on a strong *argumental* and *interpretative* tone. This, to me, is a tacit acknowledgement of the priorities of the work. "Bolivar soy Yo!" is a film with a clear position and an explicit intention to impress it on its audience. Narratively, however, my conversation with its writer/director revealed that there was no deliberate application of particular models ("classical" or otherwise) in order to achieve the film's goal. In Triana's own words:

> I am not in the least interested in the kind of cinema that the screenwriting manuals propose... the three act structure, the dictation of what goes where, the happy ending... It's a cinema in decline, which doesn't excite or surprise much anymore. I am indifferent to that model. The structure of my film derives from the story itself (...) I once described the film as a "tropical tragicomedy". It mirrors the intense 'mestizaje' that makes up our country. It has elements of the historical, epic genre, comedy, tragedy, melodrama, social commentary, etc. Its life itself... life doesn't have genres; we shift from state to state in any given day. [92]

Although all of the directors of this sample agree on the mixture of narrative genres and devices in any fiction film, Jorge Alí Triana is among the few to openly describe his work as being *hybrid* in nature. This is especially important considering the

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[92] Ibidem.

"cosmopolitan" vice (explained in the Theoretical Framework) of an observer externally applying such label to a cultural product. I shall come back to the topic of "narrative hibridity" in the last chapter of this thesis, where I will make a final evaluation of the films' narratives based on this often controversial concept.

5.4 "La Sombra del Caminante"

Year: 2004
Country: Colombia
Written and directed by: Ciro Guerra
Run time: 85 minutes.

5.4.1 Synopsis

A man saws down a wooden coffin and builds a chair out of the pieces. He fastens the chair on his back, puts on a pair of welding goggles and wanders the streets of Bogotá carrying people from place to place for a small fare. From this point forth, the character shall be referred to as "the man of the chair": MOTC.

Mañe is a one-legged man in his fifties. Due to his condition he is unable to find a job with which to pay his rent. His sympathetic landlady, Marelvis, is constantly giving him more time to come up with the money, but her brother -a retired army sergeant- dislikes Mañe and threatens to kick him out of their building. Mañe takes to the streets and tries to sell origami figures he makes himself, but a group of slackers mock and bully him every time he walks down their alley. In one of these occasions, MOTC witnesses the scene from down the street.

When the sergeant gives him a deadline to pay his rent, Mañe decides to pawn his small TV set. However, the slackers beat him up and steal it, leaving Mañe unconscious in the alley. MOTC finds Mañe and carries him to his tent in the outskirts of the city. There, he cleans Mañe's wounds, replaces his missing wooden leg and makes him drink a tea he prepares with the leaves of a small plant he keeps in a pot inside the tent.

The next day, the two men head back to the city. A thankful Mañe tries to engage MOTC in conversation, asking him about his life and how he ended up in Bogotá. MOTC remains silent. Soon after, they bump into a couple of policemen who confiscate MOTC's chair because he doesn't have a legal permit to use it on the streets. MOTC walks back to his tent, but Mañe goes to the police station and manages to get MOTC the permit he needs.

MOTC meets with Mañe in a park. They share a drink of tea in silence. MOTC reveals he doesn't know how to read, so Mañe reads the permit to him. After a while, Mañe mentions the effects that the tea seems to have on him. The world around becomes distorted and Mañe starts to hallucinate. He envisions himself after having killed his bullies, standing in the rain on his own two legs. When he comes to, night has already fallen but MOTC is still by his side.

The two men walk down the street, Mañe commenting on the "cool" properties of MOTC's plant. They stumble upon the sergeant, who starts insulting Mañe, but has a heart attack when he sees the person who is with him. MOTC grabs the sergeant, against Mañe's wishes, and takes him away. The next day, Marelvis thanks Mañe for saving his brother and offers to lend him money to pay his debt. She also tells him that the sergeant will be out of the hospital soon and that he wishes to thank his friend too.

A few days later, Mañe asks MOTC to accompany him to his building. Once there, Mañe tells him that the sergeant wants to meet him. MOTC gets upset, refuses and runs away. Mañe tries to grab him but only manages to hold on to the umbrella that MOTC uses to shield himself from the blazing sun. Upstairs, the sergeant gets a good look at MOTC's face and his lip begins to quiver. Without protection from the sun, MOTC collapses after a few meters. Marelvis comes out of the building, yelling that the sergeant has had another stroke. She asks Mañe for help, but he rushes over to MOTC's aid instead.

In the hospital, we see a doctor showing Mañe an X-ray of MOTC's skull. Later on, Mañe receives a call from the hospital telling him that MOTC has run away. Mañe goes to his tent and finds him lying there. He prepares some tea and tells him he knows about the bullet lodged in his brain. MOTC says he was shot in the head and left for dead but that, somehow, he survived. A group of Indians took care of him in the jungle until he recuperated and decided to come to Bogotá. It was them who gave him the plant whose tea keeps him alive.

After attending the sergeant's funeral, Mañe and MOTC talk about death and how it is all-present in their country. Mañe relates how he lost his parents and his leg when a group of guerrillas stormed their town and destroyed everything in their path. MOTC listens in uneasy silence and later tells Mañe they cannot see each other anymore. Mañe tries to stop him, begging MOTC to trust him, but he rebuffs him and leaves.

In an effort to win his friend back, Mañe steals MOTC's plant while he is out on the city. However, the gang of slackers takes it away from him as he walks down the alley. Guilty and desperate, Mañe helps MOTC look for a similar plant in different greenhouse across the city. They are unsuccessful. MOTC tells Mañe to look no further as he knows they won't find it.

MOTC tells Mañe he truly considers him a friend and does trust him. As proof, he shows Mañe a VHS of a newscast in which a reporter interviews the sole survivor of a guerrilla raid. The crying woman describes how "the killer" murdered her entire family without remorse, sparing only her old grandfather which he carried away as a hostage "on a wooden chair". Mañe looks appalled and asks MOTC why he is showing him that. MOTC falls to the floor, unconscious.

The doctor tells Mañe that his friend is dying from a haemorrhage in his brain. MOTC escapes from the hospital yet again and Mañe goes to look for him. However, MOTC has burned down his tent and left the city. Just after this, Marelvis finds the plant lying in a gutter near their building. Mañe takes the plant and sets out to track

MOTC before it's too late. He finally finds him lying on the grass in a wooded area, waiting to die.

MOTC asks to be left alone but Mañe replies he is his friend and doesn't care who he has killed. MOTC confesses that he was the leader of the group who raided his town. Mañe is shocked. The man goes on to explain that the sergeant and his men were closing in behind them and they decided to destroy the town as a diversion. However, things got out of hand and they started killing everyone, including Mañe's parents. After it was all done, his superiors punished him for the massacre by shooting him in the head. He had tried to start a new life in the city, but then he had met Mañe and the memories of all those he killed came rushing back. MOTC tells him the tape is the only proof of his crimes and that he showed it to him because he is the only person he could trust.

Mañe asks MOTC if he thinks he can forgive him. He replies that there can be no forgiveness for what he has done. MOTC gets up and staggers away, only to fall dead after a few steps. Recalling MOTC's only fear about dying, Mañe buries his body along with the tape and walks away. The film ends with Mañe limping down the city streets, his face fixed forward while he carries MOTC's plant in his hand.

5.4.2 Plot Description

"La Sombra del Caminante" relates its story in a linear, chronological manner. The first part of the film (15 minutes) introduces the two main characters and their conflicts separately, but their paths are united when MOTC helps Mañe after he gets robbed and beaten up by the neighborhood thugs. From this point on, the story moves along a *single* plotline for the remainder of the film, narrating the events that the two characters experience together (and as a direct result of each other's presence) during the following days.

The simplified narrative structure of the film (with no significant subplots or shifts in the space/time logic of the events of the fabula) indicates a project which is less

concerned with maintaining the audience's interest through plot manipulation; and more focused on exploring certain concepts (death, war, guilt, trust, forgiveness, healing) that emerge from the relationship between the two main characters and their past. This favoring of character over plot is characteristic of "art-cinema" (Bordwell; 1985), a mode of fiction film narration that as I will argue next, "La Sombra del Caminante" follows closely.

5.4.3 Analysis

Art cinema narration, explains David Bordwell, displays a series of traits that contrast with those of the "classical" tradition. At the core of this difference is the particular representation of "reality" that each model favors:

For "classical" cinema, "reality" is assumed to be a tacit coherence among events, a consistency and clarity of individual identity. Art cinema narration, on the other hand, questions this definition of the real, and strives to capture the aleatoric world of "objective" reality and the fleeting states that characterize "subjective" reality. It does that by using alternative aesthetic conventions. For instance, the strict principle of *causality* that dominates the "classical" model is loosened up by depicting the vagaries of real life, thus "de-dramatizing" the narrative by depicting both climactic and trivial moments. Consequently, the traditional causal structure of the plot gives way to a more episodic arrangement; with a more tenuous linking of events and significant "gaps" or "holes" in the presentation of the fabula (Bordwell; 1985: 206).

"La Sombra del Caminante" relies on a definite causal chain to progress its narrative and doesn't include major gaps in its syuzhet. However, the film does resort to another strategy through which art cinema slackens the tight causality of classical narration. *Contingency* or "chance", says Bordwell, generates the transitory, peripheral incidents around which art cinema narratives are often structured. In the same way that causality asks the viewer to use cause-and-effect logic to unify and make sense of a fabula, contingency appeals to the plausible improbabilities of "real life" (Ibidem: 207).

Indeed, it is chance -not causality- that brings about the *basic* event needed to trigger the film's central narrative. When MOTC *happens* to stumble across Mañe and decides to help him, he inadvertently re-connects their paths, prompting the characters' (and the viewer's) enquiry into their past and true connection. The element of contingency also plays a part in other important plot points, as when MOTC bumps into the police and has his chair confiscated (making it possible for Mañe to recuperate it and earn his trust); or more importantly, when Mañe looses MOTC's plant as a result of the bullies' random attacks (which causes the sharp decline in MOTC's health and cues the "third act" of the film). Equally haphazard is Marelvis' eventual finding of the plant, that motivates Mañe to go in search of MOTC and makes it possible for the narrative to reach its climax and resolution.
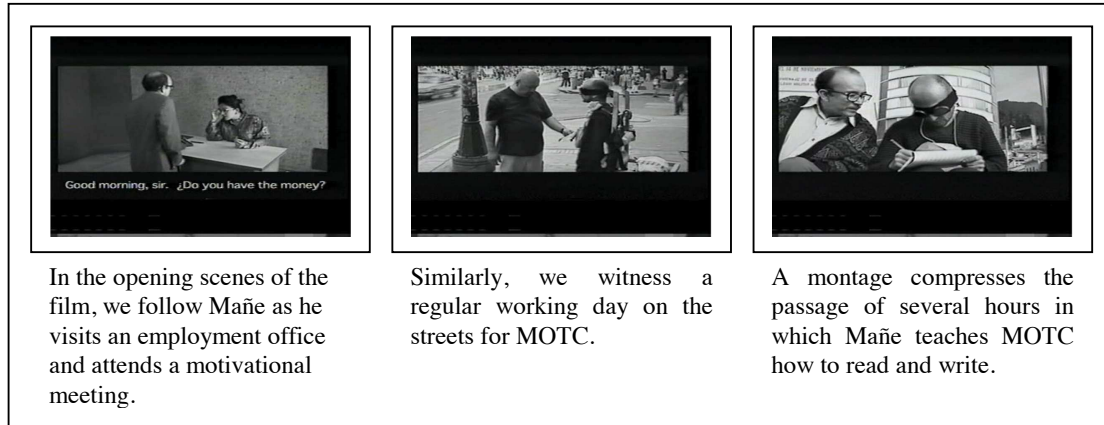
Interestingly enough, "classical" narrative norms are also active in the film; specifically in the form of explicit *deadlines* that structure and limit the dramatic progression of the syuzhet. Bordwell tells us that these devices are typically absent from art cinema narration, yet the film in question makes open use of them. A minor example of this is when the sergeant tells Mañe he's got "until Friday" to come up with the late rent or else he will be evicted; although the device is employed to full effect when Mañe looses the irreplaceable plant after it has been established that it the only thing keeping MOTC alive.

Nonetheless, I would argue that the film's narrative maintains its lean towards art cinema narration, effectively counterweighing "classical" elements with other, more salient alternative traits. Causality and deadlines -for instance- remain an important element for the progression of the story; but the active inherence of chance, the episodic structuring of the fabula[93], and the inclusion of apparently insignificant moments (see below) prevent it from becoming the *dominant* force in the narrative

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[93] What is meant by this is that the story can be perceived as a series of more or less autonomous "passages" or "episodes" (each of them with its own internal logic, sub-theme and character motivation), instead of as a chain of interdependent events linked by a clear cause-and-effect logic. I shall come back to this trait later on, when I talk about the profile of the film's protagonist.

and replicating the "tightly economical dramaturgy" (Ibidem) that is typical of the "classical" model.

Figure 18.

In the opening scenes of the film, we follow Mañe as he visits an employment office and attends a motivational meeting.	Similarly, we witness a regular working day on the streets for MOTC.	A montage compresses the passage of several hours in which Mañe teaches MOTC how to read and write.

Another manner in which I would argue that the narrative conventions of the "classical" and "art cinema" modes are combined and balanced out in this film, is in the portrayal of its protagonist. According to Bordwell, the prototypical characters of the art cinema tend to lack clear-cut traits, motives and goals. Thus, whereas the "classical" protagonist is highly motivated and races towards its objective, its art cinema counterpart is presented as sliding passively from one situation to another, tracing out an itinerary that surveys the film's social world (Ibidem).

I believe that the character of Mañe is an interesting blend of these two profiles. On one hand, he displays certain qualities (such as loneliness and a desire to feel productive) that fuel his drive to pursue specific objectives. The clearest examples of this are Mañe's efforts to pay his overdue rent (by looking for a job, selling his handicrafts, pawning his TV) and earn MOTC's trust and friendship (by getting the chair back, teaching him to read and write, and staging the robbery of MOTC's most valued possession so he could be the one to restore it later on).

These are all the deliberate, motivated actions that we have come to expect from a "classical" protagonist. However, the main character also resembles those of art cinema narration in the sense that "Fate" (understood in narrative terms as the element

of *contingency* discussed earlier) directly affects his actions and plans in a way that sends him -apparently without an overall aim- from one situation to the next. Using the same examples mentioned above, we see that Mañe fails to pay his debt due to "social circumstances" he has no power over (unemployment, discrimination against the disabled, crime). In the same way, his personal objective is thwarted by chance from the very beginning, as he unknowingly seeks the friendship of the man responsible of ruining his life.

Furthermore, it is through the main characters' (both Mañe and MOTC's) meandering narrative path that "La Sombra del Caminante" fulfills art cinema's principle of exploring and commenting on the reality it depicts. The film does it in various ways, with different levels of overtness: from using the streets of Bogotá as the physical backdrop for the story, to mirroring some of its social vices through the fabula (poverty, alienation, corruption, violence). Most of all, this film addresses the *human consequences* of Colombia's armed conflict, and it does so -as the mode is inclined- by focusing on the *characters* and their psychological fluctuations, which in turn enhances the symbolic dimension of the narrative (Ibidem: 206).

According to David Bordwell, the fabula in art cinema is often structured towards a "boundary situation". Thus, the impetus of the narrative is given not so much by the protagonist's motivation, as by his *recognition of an existential crisis*. The (relaxed) causal chain can then lead to a specific moment in the character's life where he finally becomes aware of fundamental human issues that prompt a psychological "point of no return": the "boundary situation" itself (Ibidem: 208).

This is precisely the case with "La Sombra del Caminante"; where the main characters face existential crisis of their own as they struggle against the feelings of *worthlessness* (Mañe) and *guilt* (MOTC) that stem from the physical and emotional scars left on them by their country's civil war. Parallelism, one of the mode's devices of choice, is also applied here as we are "impelled to compare agents, attitudes, and situations" (Ibidem: 207) and realize that Mañe and MOTC are really two faces of the same coin.

In a way that once again reflects the codes of art cinema, the film's narration continuously presents psychological *effects* in order for the viewer to "search" for its *causes* as the story progresses. Furthermore, "La Sombra del Caminante" does it exactly as the theory describes: by having the characters directly expressing their feelings (as Mañe does in the cemetery scene), by telling stories about their past (MOTC does it verbally and with the aid of the VHS tape), or by more subtle signs by which the characters reveal themselves to others and, inadvertently, to us (Ibidem). This last category includes *physical gestures* (as MOTC's reaction when he listens to Mañe's story) and "*associated objects*" that are charged with meaning (MOTC's chair, Mañe's paper figures, and a portrait of MOTC that a street artist sketches throughout the film).

These demands of expressive realism, also makes it common to dramatize what would be private mental processes like dreams, memories, fantasies or hallucinations (Ibidem). Such instances of "deep focalization" can also be found in "La Sombra del Caminante", as illustrated in the following figure:

Figure 19.

Mañe hallucinates after drinking MOTC's tea.
In the vision, he walks in the rain on his two legs after apparently having killed someone (weapons lay on the ground, alongside a bloodied arm). The identity of the victim is not revealed, but the hallucination/fantasy is a relevant example of the sort of "psychological effects" through which art cinema narration examines the nature of its characters.

After he realizes that Mañe is a survivor from the village raid he led as a guerrilla, MOTC starts seeing images of cemetery crosses coupled with the sounds of gunshots.
Again, narration presents the hallucination as a probable emotional consequence of the character's past life suddenly catching up with him.

At the same time that it cues the search for the psychological roots of the characters' actions and behaviour, the plot of "La Sombra del Caminante" uses those events to push the narrative towards a double "boundary situation": on one hand,

MOTC's realization that there can be no escape or forgiveness possible from his past sins; on the other, Mañe's inner handling of MOTC's revelation and death, which the author deliberately leaves open to the viewer's interpretation.

Bordwell points out that the syuzhet of the art film can confine itself to the "boundary situation" itself, providing prior fabula data by exposition; or lead up to the situation by dramatizing the pertinent causal chain (Ibidem: 208). In the case of "La Sombra del Caminante" there is a combination of the two. The film does convey a *pertinent* chain of events that leads to the "boundary situation" (which is delayed to function as the *climax* of the narrative); but the moment of recognition itself only takes place when a key piece of fabula information is disclosed through exposition: MOTC's explicit admission that he was responsible for the raid of Mañe's village.

Moments like this final revelation, the characters' conversation in the cemetery, and other noticeable stylistic devices (such as the choice of producing the film in black & white, the use of montage sequences and non-traditional camera angles), can be interpreted as instances of "overt narrational commentary" which, along with "objective" and "subjective" verisimilitude, form the three main schema of art cinema narration. In applying this particular frame of reference, adds Bordwell, the viewer looks for those moments in which the narrational act interrupts the transmission of fabula information and highlights its own role (what the author refers to as narrative "self-consciousness"). Therefore, the concept of "narrational commentary" refers to a "highly noticeable external authority" (*the film's author*) who overtly mediates and limits our knowledge of the narrative (Ibidem: 209).

Yet another way in which the control of the extra-fictional narrator becomes apparent in art cinema (and again, in "La Sombra del Caminante") is by its particular handling of the film's ending, which often refrains from divulging the outcome of the causal chain. Like Bordwell points out:

> ..the pensive ending acknowledges the narration as not simply powerful but humble; the narration knows that life is more complex than art can ever be, and -a new twist of the realistic screw- the only way to respect this complexity is to leave causes dangling and questions unanswered. (Ibidem: 209-210)

"La Sombra del Caminante" seems to align with this ideal. The film respects the complex social reality it comments on by avoiding explicit political stances against or in favour of any specific party, focusing instead on the *human dimension* of the conflict (the psychological and emotional repercussions of two characters caught in opposite sides of the same violence) and giving the viewer enough leeway for its interpretation. It is this "inquiry into character" -even over the exploration of the social setting- which, to me, is this film's "prime thematic material" and "central source of expectation, suspense and surprise" (Ibidem).

Writer/director Ciro Guerra, however, explains how the filmic end result is more the product of an open-ended process on his part, rather than of the strict application of narrative norms:

> In my personal case, I write in a very intuitive way, and once I have armed the structure of what I am looking to tell, I start being more rigorous at the formal level. I try to question everything and study different possibilities, which results in an exhausting writing process. I don't believe there are "pre-determined" narrative forms for specific types of stories, characters or themes. We all work with the same clay and each of us must find a way to model it. [94]

The author also acknowledges that even "alternative narratives", such as his film, are ultimately linked to the traditional narrative forms that they seek to differ from:

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[94] Interview with Ciro Guerra on: "Kinetoscopio"; Vol. 16, No. 77, Pg 11. Centro Colombo Americano, Medellín, Colombia. (Translation is my own)

> If you take the most seemingly "alternative" or innovative narratives and analyze them close enough, you will probably find classical elements within them. The more you try to distance yourself from the classical, the more you subconsciously end up returning to it. It's a model that is engrained in our minds. That's why I think it is interesting to play around with it, but it's impossible to entirely escape from. [95]

Thus, for Guerra, the challenge of "alternative" narration is not so much subverting the norms of the "classical" model, as much as being capable of *concealing* its unavoidable influence to a higher degree. This operation, according to the director, can only be achieved by a comprehensive knowledge of the model itself [96]; a view that echoes the perception that inspired this study and which Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson articulated in their seminal work: "The historical and aesthetic importance of the classical Hollywood cinema lies in the fact that to go beyond it we must go through it" (1985: 385).

5.5 "Apocalipsur"
Year: 2005
Country: Colombia
Written and directed by: Javier Mejía
Run time: 98 minutes.

5.5.1 Synopsis

Caliche, Malala, Comadreja and Pipe are a group of friends in their 20's. They are sitting at the side of a road at night, smoking weed and reminiscing about a mutual friend they call "el Flaco". A text follows: *"Between the years of 1989 and 1992, 25,000 people were killed in Medellin, most of them under 18. Some young people called those years the "Apocalipsur".*

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[95] Interview with Ciro Guerra, March 2007. Translation is my own.

[96] Interview with Ciro Guerra on: "Kinetoscopio" (Ibidem)

After shaving his head completely bald, Flaco arrives at a rock club where his friends are throwing him a farewell party. Brief flashbacks reveal glimpses of the history he shares with each of them. Malala, his girlfriend, takes him aside and tells him she got her period. Flaco hugs her, clearly relieved, but Malala looks sad. The group gives him a tray of cocaine as a parting gift and Flaco lets them know he wants them to be waiting for him when he gets back.

8 months later, Caliche gets ready to go pick up Flaco at the airport. He is joined in the trip by Malala (who is now his girlfriend), Comadreja, disabled Pipe, and "Mariguana", Flaco's pet iguana. During the journey, the friends joke around and talk lightly about their lives and the country's climate of violence and corruption. The story then jumps to the roadside setting of the film's opening, as Caliche recalls how he first met Flaco.

Through a flashback, we learn that Caliche was kidnapped and held ransom by former associates of his father, a powerful drug lord. The kidnappers keep Caliche inside a tiny cell, along with Flaco, a judge's son, who is being held there to blackmail his mother. While in captivity, the two of them give each other hope and form a strong friendship. One night, as the kidnappers are about to execute Flaco, a group of men working for Caliche's father break into the house, kill the extortionists and free the boys.

The group continues driving down the highway. They pull over to a nearby reservoir to take a break and Pipe suggests they should leave Mariguana there, as he knows how bad it is to depend on another person. This prompts a memory of him masturbating angrily with an inflatable doll while Flaco watches. After he is done, Pipe starts crying and Flaco comes over to comfort him. Malala also recalls being in the club's bathroom the night of Flaco's farewell party. She admits to a friend that she is in fact pregnant by Flaco, but will not tell him so that he doesn't cancel his trip.

Back on their way, the group comment about ongoing war in their country and their different points of view about it. This leads to them talking about the harsh reality of

living in a dangerous city like Medellín, and cues Comadreja's flashback. In it, he and Flaco get busted by the police after buying weed from their dealer. The captain locks them in the back of the police van and forces them to smoke the entire half kilo they are carrying as a punishment. However, Flaco and Comadreja are having a great time. As the cops pull up and prepare to beat them up, a robbery is committed nearby and the captain lets them go.

The friends make another stop at a roadside restaurant. Caliche tries to talk with Malala, who has been in a foul mood during the whole trip. She tells him she doesn't want to talk about it but admits it is related to Flaco's return.

Back in the club's bathroom, Malala's friend offers to accompany her to the abortion clinic, saying she -and half the city- has already gone through it a couple of times. She agrees and they go out for a drink. An overhead panning shot reveals Flaco and Caliche in the adjoining bathroom, having heard the entire conversation. Flaco starts to cry and tells Caliche not to say a word to him. They hug. After Caliche makes this revelation, Malala starts hitting him, angrily asking why he hadn't told her before. He holds her and manages to calm her down.

In a final, "collective" flashback, the group recalls a night out with Flaco. In it, they pick up a transvestite prostitute from the street and tell her that Flaco is a foreign friend who doesn't speak the language. They joke around and Flaco ends up making out with her to everyone's surprise and amusement.

Back in the roadside setting of the opening scene, Caliche argues with Comadreja for not "tying the thing down properly", and comments that Flaco had been very lonely and depressed during his stay in London.

The friend's van pulls up to a restricted forest area but they start making their way up the trail. They leave the van's door open by accident and "Mariguana" scurries away into the woods. We now realize that the gang is on the grounds surrounding the airport, lying on the grass talking and waiting for Flaco's plane to land. When it does, they make their way to the arrivals terminal.

It is there that they realize that "Mariguana" is missing and start blaming each other. Malala calms them down by saying its probably better for her to be free. The group waits around for Flaco but he doesn't show up. Finally, they are shown enquiring at an information desk.

The next and final scene shows the friends driving back from the airport with a coffin tied down to the roof of the van. Inside, the group looks sad and grim. "Mariguana" walks out of the woods and onto the pavement, crossing the road as the van approaches. Caliche sees it and brakes suddenly, causing the coffin to slip and fall forward. The van is showed at the side of the bridge. Below, a white bundle appears floating and drifting slowly down the river.

5.5.2 Plot Description

The plot of "Apocalipsur" is made up of three separate and clearly defined parts which are interweaved across the film. Re-arranged in the chronological order in which they occur in the story universe, they are:

- The events and situations that each of the characters has shared with "el Flaco" and which they recall in the form of *flashbacks*. These include Caliche's kidnapping, Comadreja's detention by the police and the scene in which Pipe vents his frustration on a sex doll. Malala's flashback shows her talking with a friend in the club's restroom, where she confides she is pregnant. This scene/memory is linked with another flashback from Caliche, where it is revealed that he and Flaco have overheard Malala's conversation. This block is completed by the character-narrated scene in the film's opening, where Flaco is shown shaving his head and meeting his friends in the club; and the "collective flashback" in which the friends remember the night they picked up a transvestite prostitute.

- The second plotline narrates the friends' journey from their homes to the airport on the day of Flaco's scheduled arrival. It starts with Caliche waking up and setting off with Malala to pick up Pipe and Comadreja; and ends with the film itself, when Flaco's coffin slides off the van and falls to the river. This group of scenes makes up the "road movie" portion of the story, showing what the characters experience as they physically move from point A to point B. I will elaborate on this segment in the following analysis, contrasting it with the model of classical fiction film narration.

- The third and final block is actually a single sequence which is intercut by the other two plotlines. It presents Caliche, Malala, Pipe and Comadreja at a roadside outlook, with the city of Medellín in the background. In this sequence (divided into 6 scenes or moments across the film) the group is shown talking about life, their memories of Flaco, and the trip they have just taken. From their conversation, we soon infer that this is taking place a few hours after the incident of Flaco's coffin. This instance of reverse chronology serves as a "hook" for the viewer, providing (heavy[97]) hints and complementary information of events that will be portrayed later on.

Next, I will explain why the narrative characteristics of "Apocalipsur" set it apart from "classical" guidelines and into a more character-driven formula, typical of two specific film genres: the "road movie" and the "youth film".

5.5.3 Analysis

The so-called "road movie" genre (which could be broadly defined as films that exploit the element of a *journey* as the organizing principle of their narrative) is arguably indebted to the "classical" tradition of Western narration. Dating as far back as oral epic poetry and its transcription in foundational texts such as the *Odyssey*, "classical" narratives have often chronicled the physical and inner journey of a strongly motivated "hero" as he/she faces and overcomes obstacles in order to reach an ultimate and well defined objective. Indeed, as it has been repeated throughout this work, it is this basic "canonic story" which lies at the core of the classical model of fiction film narration.

Despite such precedent, however, the genre remains essentially *counter-classical* at a variety of levels. Actually, David Laderman tells us that the fundamental impulse of the "road film" is its rebellion against conventional social norms and the embrace of the journey as cultural critique, where the act of travelling suggests a mobile refuge

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[97] For instance; the very first scene of the film corresponds to this block and, in it, we learn that Flaco was found dead, floating in the River Thames.
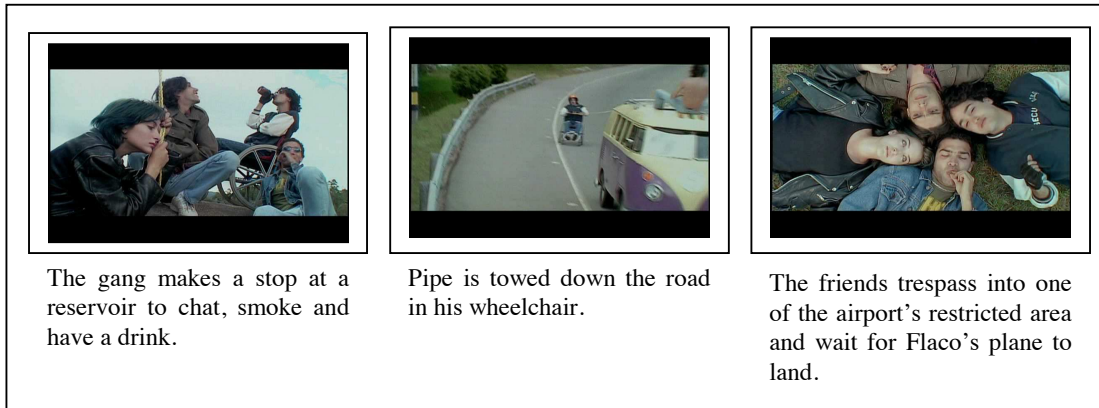
from social circumstances felt to be lacking or oppressive in some way (2002: 1-2). The nonconformity that the "road movie" seeks to portray is not only thematic, but is also often reflected in the narrative plane of the films[98]:

> (…) The road movie's open-ended narrative structure tends to venture beyond typical Hollywood terrain. Because road movie heroes are driven "to seek the freedom of the road as a refuge from a harrowing past, or to search for its exhilarating, liberating strength" (Lopez, 257), the genre's plot often carves out a rambling, picaresque narrative path. As a result, the road movie may not possess a clear-cut beginning, middle, or end; likewise, the genre often shifts gears regarding mood and plot with a certain disorienting, open-air free will. Generally it distances itself from the Aristotelian dramatic unities, in favor of the episodic style of Cervantes or Brecht. By foregrounding the journey in a nomadic vein, the road movie evokes a countercinema in relation to classical narrative (just as its themes generally tend to be countercultural).
> (Laderman; 2002: 17)

The quote above encapsulates the nature of this film's narrative. Let us first consider its characters and their motivations: "Apocalipsur" lacks a sole protagonist, opting instead for a cast of main characters; the *group itself* being the focus of the viewer's attention. In the "road film portion" of the feature (composed by the second and third blocks listed in the previous point), the friends set out to fulfil a quite mundane task: to pick their friend up at the airport. This appointment is pursued with no particular haste, and following exactly the "rambling, picaresque path" that Laderman mentions. Three evidences of this trait in the film's plot are the following:

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[98] Although Laderman's study focuses on the "*American*" road film, I believe that his analysis and comparison of the genre against the narrative conventions of what he calls "classical Hollywood", are analogous to my own objective to contrast the narrative of "Apocalipsur" (as a *Colombian* movie that bears many traits of the "road film" genre) with the "classical" model of fiction film narration (which, as I have already stated, cannot be considered as an exclusive product of the Hollywood industry).

Figure 20.

The gang makes a stop at a reservoir to chat, smoke and have a drink.

Pipe is towed down the road in his wheelchair.

The friends trespass into one of the airport's restricted area and wait for Flaco's plane to land.

Although this appointment to pick up Flaco is the immediate, *practical* reason for their trip, the theory concerning the genre discloses the underlying motives for which its characters most often take to the road. According to Laderman, "road films" usually derive from two (not mutually exclusive) narrative pretexts: movement *towards* something ("quest" road movie), which emphasizes roaming itself, usually in terms of some discovery; and movement *away from* something ("outlaw" road movie), typically emphasizing a more desperate, fugitive flight from the scene of a crime or the pursuit of the law (2002: 20).

"Apocalipsur" shows elements of both these strands; the most evident being the movement of the group *towards* something (in this case, the physical location of the airport and the eventual reunion with Flaco). The figure of "discovery" is also present, as the characters advance towards the realization of their friend's death, and with it, the end of a significant chapter in all of their lives. However, the film also displays a strong connection to the second pretext, in the sense that the group is in fact *fleeing*, not from the pursuit of the law, but from the generalized climate of violence that afflicts their lives.

As stated in the introductory text of the film, the conflict between the government, drug cartels, guerrillas, and paramilitaries claimed the life of over 25,000 young people during the late 80s and early 90s, in Medellín alone. This "oppressive social

circumstance" from which the friends seek "mobile refuge" stands as the overarching theme of the film, as director Javier Mejía confirms:

> The story of Medellín during the time of the drug trade has often been portrayed from the margins, mainly from the point of view of the criminal. I wanted to tell what my friends and I had gone through during that time, normal, young people who were caught in the middle but had nothing to do with the conflict. It is a fictionalized treatment of my own experiences and those of my friends (...) The message of the film, which was our own feelings at the time, is that we had to live life to the fullest because we never knew if we would end up dead from a car bomb or a shootout, like so many of our friends did.[99]

Furthermore, this motto of "living life to the fullest" fits in perfectly with the convention of the "road film" genre to portray its characters as rebellious against socially accepted norms and authority, and of exploring the "exhilarating and liberating" potential of life on the road. "Counter-cultural" motifs present in "Apocalipsur" include the extensive drug use shown throughout the film, the disregard for basic rules of road safety, and even the depiction of the "rock culture" to which the characters belong. The interplay of these three elements (speed, rock music, and psychoactive drugs) contributes to the road movie's essential youth rebellion drive and its desire to escape -or find a more authentic- reality (Laderman, 2002: 19).[100]

Another characteristic of "Apocalipsur" that aligns it with the narrative conventions of the "road film" genre is its particular use of *plot*. As it has been pointed out before, the "classical model" very often displays a focused cause-and-effect chain running linearly and uninterrupted throughout the film, constantly infused with a sense of urgency.

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[99] Interview with Javier Mejía, March 2007. Translation is my own.

[100] The scorn of the gang against their elders in positions of power (seen in their interactions with the police, or their views about the different groups of the Colombian conflict) can also be interpreted as "rebellious". However, Mejía explains that the real purpose of these events and dialogues was to avoid a "black-and-white" perspective about a highly complex situation; instead providing each of the characters with a different point of view about their reality. (Interview with Javier Mejía, March 2007. Translation is my own.)

In contrast, "Apocalipsur" takes a winding, protracted path where the events are not strung together by causality, but simply presented as *casual* passages of an everyday journey. This "episodic" structuring of the film's plot is accentuated by its jumps from one plotline to another, interweaving the road trip (present) with the characters' flashbacks (past) and their chat at the roadside outlook at the end of the day (future). As Laderman remarks, these regular shifts in time/space not only break with the traditional "*beginning-middle-end*" narrative structure, but also account for the changes in the film's content and mood, as the plot switches back and forth between comedic and dramatic episodes. Javier Mejía justifies this strategy:

> I believe that fragmentation is a generational thing. We were born into a world with 80 channels spitting out images non-stop and an MTV-style aesthetic… we are marked by structures that are less "classical". We have learned them, it's a part of who we are, and we don't need much explanation to understand things like shifts in space and time.[101]

The director also recognizes his deliberate combination of moods through the crisscrossing of the narrative blocks of the film:

> The structure wasn't obsessively meditated. It is more the product of my passion and my desire to make the film. What I did have in mind as a "narrative map" was that the content of the flashback scenes went from "intense and serious" to "light and funny" as the film advanced; while the scenes in the present time where the gang is shown talking in the city overlook, did just the inverse: from "light and funny" to a more "intense and serious" tone. [102]

All of the traits described so far point to "Apocalipsur" as being *counter-classical* in its narrative. Mejía himself acknowledges that he followed no particular guidelines when writing the script, opting instead for a more "intuitive" approach[103]. However, this also means that the "road film" conventions that are so salient in the film were applied as instinctively as was his departure from the traditional model.

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[101] Interview with Javier Mejía, March 2007. Translation is my own.

[102] Ibidem.

[103] Ibidem.

To complicate matters further, I argue that the "road movie" is not the only genre whose devices are present in "Apocalipsur", as it also displays a "cinematic image of youth" (Shary; 2003: 490) consistent with a category that has come to be known as the "teen film".

Although Shary's work focuses on "American youth films in the last twenty years of the twentieth century", his exploration of the genre is not only valid, but also relevant to this study and its hypothesis of Latin American filmmakers engaged in the mixture and re-elaboration of cinematic models popularized by a center of filmic influence like Hollywood. The author goes on to quote a study conducted by the Motion Picture Division of the Library of Congress, in which different film types are catalogued according to their main characteristics. The Hollywood "youth film" category -argues the report- comprises fictional work portraying aspects of the trajectory through adolescence; including high school years, peer pressure, first love, parties, and initial attempts at adulthood, along with strains in the relationship with family (2003: 494).

"Apocalipsur" is clearly not a typical "teen movie". Its group of protagonists is in their early 20s, and their context is one far removed from the tranquil, suburban setting that is often portrayed in Hollywood youth films. Nonetheless, "Apocalipsur" shares the same "cultural significance" that is unique to the genre. Youth films, says Shary, "question our evolving identities from youth to adulthood while simultaneously shaping and maintaining those identities" (2003: 492).

This film does precisely that by exploring a period of great personal importance in the lives of these young characters, in which the inner challenge of emotionally *becoming* an adult, is heightened by violent and uncertain circumstances that threaten the mere fact of *growing up* to be one. Thus, the narrative of "Apocalipsur" devotes considerable attention to portraying the "coping mechanisms" that the group comes up with to face this double task: from friendship, rebelliousness and juvenile humor, to drugs, sex and rock & roll.

Of all the characteristics of film types that have been mentioned in this analysis, it seems that it is this "core value" of the "youth film" that was applied more deliberately by the author. Although Mejía claims to have followed an "intuitive approach" when creating the content and structure of his narrative, it is clear from his statements and the film itself that he was strongly motivated to tell a story which mirrored the events and feelings that he and his own group of friends experienced during that same period in their lives.

This *conscious*, *personal drive* is analogous to the genre's objective to examine the development of identity during youth; even though the director did not perceive it as such. Similarly, it has been confirmed that the resemblance of "Apocalipsur" to the conventions of the "road film" (and thus, its distancing from "classical" narrative norms) was mainly the incidental result of the author translating his message and real-life experiences onto the film.

As the reader has undoubtedly noticed by now, circumstantial or "unconscious" application of narrative norms is a recurrent theme in the films that have been analyzed in this study. But what does this say about the strategies of appropriation and hybridization that I argue are part of the fiction filmmaking process in Latin America? Are *deliberate* instances of narrative play more valid than apparently *random* ones? Can we even accept a concept such as "narrative hybridity" to refer to the combinations of influences, models and norms in fiction films? I will now offer my answers to these questions, based on the knowledge gathered through the study of my specific cases.

6. Concluding Remarks

One of my strongest motivations to conduct this research was the chance I was given to learn more about a field that bridged my academic and professional interests, and no doubt that of many others as well. As a Latin American and a screenwriter myself, I was enthusiastic about the prospect of looking closely into different films of my region, discovering the intricacies of their narrative texts and discussing them with their authors.

At a moment in which fiction film production is undergoing an unprecedented boom across our national cinemas, new prospective filmmakers have created a strong demand for the unique knowledge that is gained from listening to the experiences of colleagues that have successfully developed their own projects[104]. This study wanted to provide just such insight for practitioners and scholars alike, not just by deconstructing the object in order to understand how its parts function together, but by offering an account of the authors' approach to the creative process.

Thus, for fellow screenwriters, the research was intended to have a practical use: to serve as a reference document of theoretical concepts and personal views that would hopefully guide or inspire the creation of new projects. While for the academy, it represents a contribution to an area that, as I've mentioned before, has been lacking the attention it deserves. Latin American Film Studies have traditionally been focused on the historical and socio-political aspects of the region's cinema, but showed little interest in analyzing the narrative richness of its films.

I thought I could bridge this gap through a hypothesis based on the Cultural Studies concepts of "hybridization" and "resistance of hegemony". An assumption which proposed that US media dominance in the region (namely, mainstream Hollywood's)

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[104] The proliferation of peer-held conferences, workshops and courses seem to be a clear indication of this.

was actively contested by our filmmakers' appropriation of one of its more commonly employed codes: the "classical" model of fiction film narration.

More than a "recap" of the preceding work, this chapter offers my personal views on the main questions raised during this research, and explains why and how my perception of the hypothesis and its implied notions evolved in the process. Before I go on to do so, however, I must first address one basic finding:

6.1 Two Paths

Two tendencies can be extracted from the film analyses according to the specific stance of the authors in relation to the classical narrative model and its presence in their work. One is marked by *awareness*; that is, the deliberate transgression or compliance with the model. The other consists of the opposite: the *unwilling* or "subconscious" usage or rejection of these principles.

6.1.1 Awareness

Let us first turn our attention to the cases that revealed a *conscious* connection to the model. From the Costa Rican sample, "Password" and "Caribe" were two examples in which the writer/directors acknowledged the direct influence of "classical" guidelines in the process of elaborating their narratives.

As detailed in my analyses, these two films share not only a reliance on canonical conventions to structure and propel their stories, but also the fact that their authors chose to apply those "classical" elements to their work based on the model's proven effectiveness to appeal to a wide audience. Similarly, both Heidenreich and Ramírez defend their work as instances of appropriation and adaptation of the model, as opposed to being strict imitations of it.

This is, in fact, evidenced in the films. As I pointed out, "Password" makes strong use of traditional fiction film dramaturgy in its first half, which is later deliberately

renounced (and feigned) in order to offer a more realistic portrayal of the victimization of minors by sexual exploitation rings -the project's main objective from its inception.

"Caribe", too, is heavily influenced by the mainstream, both aesthetically and structurally, with a narrative clearly divided into a double plotline; one dealing with the protagonist's public quest, and the other with his personal romantic conflict. From the author's comments, however, we learn that these elements were purposefully used to enhance the entertainment and market potential of a film that, just like "Password", revolves around a pointedly social and ideological premise.

The only example of deliberate subversion of "classical" norms among the Costa Rican films was found in Oscar Castillo's "Asesinato en el Meneo". The narrative supports itself on the generic premise of a "detective film" and, according to the author, was carefully modelled after the structural standards of mainstream fiction film narration. However, its defining characteristic is the parodical transgression it subsequently engages in of both narrative and socially accepted representations.

Moving on to the Colombian sample, within it I was also able to identify instances of both conscious appropriation *and* rejection of the dominant narrative model. "Los Niños Invisibles", for example, manages to tell a story set in 1950's rural Colombia which closely follows the overall structure and devices of canonical fiction film narration. According to author Lisandro Duque, such application of traditional guidelines -and even its occasional transgression- was a careful exercise that stemmed from his conviction in the model's "universal" efficiency and value.

The opposite case was illustrated by Victor Gaviria and his film "La Vendedora de Rosas", where the author stated his rejection to what he perceived as "homogenizing formulas" of traditional film narrative, striving instead to accurately describe the reality of street children in Medellín through the re-enactment of their own oral accounts of marginality. The result is a film which follows its own rules of causality and pace, based on what the author calls the "inherent impulse of everyday reality".

A separate mention within the "conscious tendency" goes to Ciro Guerra's film, "La Sombra del Caminante". Realizing the challenge of sidestepping the powerful influence of traditional narration, Guerra advocates an "alternative" style based not on *a priori* rejection of "classical" norms, but rather on a comprehensive knowledge of the model in order to subvert it in the most aware and successful manner possible.

6.1.2 Unawareness

On the opposite side of the spectrum we find those films that, according to analysis, display appropriation or rejection of "classical" narrative standards, yet can be judged to do so in an *intuitive*, non methodical way, based on the interviews conducted with their authors.

Perhaps the clearest example of this situation was evinced by the Costa Rican film "Marasmo", which displays a series of departures from the traditional model; most notably, the absence of a well defined, consistent protagonist. Such a break with the model, however, didn't respond to a creative choice by writer/director Mauricio Mendiola, but more to his acknowledged open-ended approach to the writing process.

Also within the Costa Rican sample is "Mujeres Apasionadas", by Maureen Jimenez. Although the central idea for the project was to narrate the romantic entanglements between five women and a man, the writing team decided to re-arrange the elements of the fabula into an episodical and non-linear structure which would make the film more narratively engaging to the viewer. What is more interesting about the case, though, is the fact that the end product ultimately yields a canonical story and displays genre conventions of "melodrama" and the "detective film" which were not foreseen or purposely intended by the authors.

A different situation is presented by Jorge Alí Triana's "Bolivar soy Yo!" Just like fellow Colombian director Victor Gaviria, Triana openly expresses his rejection to what he views as the type of schematic narration fostered by traditional screenwriting manuals, and states his preference to let the story and its structure manifest

themselves freely, in all its possible variety and contradiction. Not surprisingly then, despite the author's disavowal of what can essentially be understood as "classical" narrative guidelines, the analysis of his film shows that it in fact follows many of the basic principles of said model (along with others like the Historical Materialist) which the author did not consciously tapped into.

Finally; another writer/director who admitted an intuitive approach in the construction of his film's narrative was Javier Mejía. With "Apocalipsur", the author focused on the task of retelling his personal story as a youngster living in Medellín, following no particular guideline other than his own vision on how he wanted to structure the fabula. Yet in the process, my analysis shows that Mejía managed to create a decidedly *counter*-classical narrative, while at the same time unconsciously aligning with traits commonly associated with genres such as the "road movie" and the "youth film".

Figure 21.

Films	"Aware" relation to the "classical" narrative model		"Unaware" relation to the "classical" narrative model	
	Appropriation	Rejection	Appropriation	Rejection
1. Password	●			
2. Caribe	●			
3. Los niños …	●			
4. AEEM		●		
5. La Vendedora..		●		
6. La Sombra …		●		
7. Marasmo			●	
8. Mujeres …			●	
9. Bolivar soy yo!			●	
10. Apocalipsur				●

Having tallied the results then, it is possible to see that the ten film narratives of the sample are quite evenly distributed between the two positions, with a slight advantage of the "deliberate" category over its opposite (6 vrs 4). We can also note that the *appropriation* of the model (both intended and unintended) is the overall dominating tendency in the sample with, again, 6 cases, as opposed to 4 films that evidenced its rejection and/or subversion.

6.2 It's all about free will (or is it?)

The reader may wonder about the ultimate purpose or significance of determining whether narrative operations in films are intentional or unintentional exercises. For starters, we must note that virtually all aspects of human activity can (and *are*) appraised using this very same dichotomic perspective. From medicine, psychology and law, to everyday human interaction… the answers to the question of whether we act with foresight and freewill are of *key* importance to the way we re-act to said action. When the act is considered "negative", for instance, awareness often hardens our response; while absence of intent attenuates it or prompts us to seek the underlying reasons or causes for the behaviour.

Obviously, there is no such thing as a clear-cut "right" or "wrong" when it comes to artistic expression. Certainly, it was not this study's objective to pass judgement on the particular narrative handling of its cases; something best left to film criticism. What it *did* set out to do was breakdown, analyze and identify the main characteristics of the films' narrative texts, with an special interest in their interplay with a dominant narrative pattern generally perceived as foreign. Similarly, the issue of "awareness" (and lack thereof), was not meant to be approached in terms of positive or negative; but rather -as I mentioned before- to achieve a better understanding of some of the dynamics behind the creative processes at work in so-called "peripheral" filmmaking.

6.2.1 Knowledge is Power

The instances of *deliberate* appropriation seen in this study were rooted in the authors' notion of the model as a "tried-and-true" template that could help them conform the structure and certain elements of their project's content to the dominant narrative schema of a mass audience. In other words; make their narrative texts resemble the traditional pattern that, in theory, most people are accustomed to see and enjoy, not just in their country but worldwide. The filmmakers perceive this as a step towards improving the film's possibilities of "success", be it understood as

commercial profit and/or the communicative goal of reaching as many people as possible with their message.

Of course, it would be up to the discipline of audience research to prove the empirically accepted notion that the classical model is indeed the hegemonic narrative schema of a majority of the public in a particular country; but I believe that the simple confirmation that film authors from the "periphery" accept the "classical" model as a way of *enhancing* the potential of their project, is a telling sign in favour of this argument. Furthermore, this study has also shown that even for the cases where conscious rejection or subversion of the model takes place, the writer/directors of these films also share the view of canonical narration as a highly useful and influential tool, ultimately incorporating certain elements of it to their own work.

There is a strong element of *practicality*, then, in the decision to utilize the traditional narrative pattern. The popularity and knowledge of the model makes it an obvious choice for filmmakers to base their work on, and at the same time it implicitly dissuades many to experiment with its alternatives. With less ideological enthusiasm for radical oppositional approaches, and most films projects falling well within the sphere of influence of market and audience concerns, it is not surprising that the model is generally perceived as a "safe bet". While it may not ensure success, its application is widely accepted and, perhaps more importantly, it avoids the considerable (and risky) creative challenge of generating a different -but equally effective- variant.

The ubiquity of the "classical" model is hard to ignore. Recent Latin American cinema is filled with projects that deliberately transgress its norms as a subversive exercise (as illustrated in this study by "Asesinato en el Meneo"), decline it in favour of exploring the story's particular characteristics ("La Vendedora de Rosas"), or the author's own personal style or "voice" ("La Sombra del Caminante"). However, the fact remains: to engage in these strategies is to indirectly call attention to the referent from which these films narratives seek to distinguish themselves.

6.2.2 Ignorance is Bliss

This leads us to the next point: the *casual* presence of "classical" narrative elements in some of the cases of study, which I believe constitutes evidence of a real tendency in the broader landscape of Latin American fiction film production. We can try to understand this seemingly random creative act from two perspectives.

The first one proposes the same reasoning as for deliberate appropriation. It is based on the notion that the dominant presence of Hollywood and mainstream US products in the region's media has shaped the way in which local audiences (filmmakers included) perceive -and prefer- audiovisual narration. To unwilling apply the model can then be understood as a "reflexive manifestation" of this pervasive influence; the reproduction of a pattern which the author has subconsciously interiorized through ongoing exposure. It is also this approach that supports the argument for narrative "hybridization", as the mixture is assumed to take place between "local" and "foreign" cultural agents and elements.

Even if one accepts (as this research has from the beginning) that "classical" narration is *not* an exclusive product of Hollywood, but a technique that was adopted and popularized worldwide by *their* industry; this would still be positioning the model as an "external" influence that was radiated and "introduced" to the periphery.

The second perspective we can adopt downplays the role of Hollywood and focuses rather on the fact that "classical" narration goes well beyond the existence of cinema itself. As described in Chapter 1, the main narrative characteristics that we nowadays consider "classical" can be traced back to Hellenic culture and viewed as one more set of aesthetic values that have been passed and built upon from generation to generation across Western and *Westernized* societies, as Latin America. Evidently, this conserves the "center-to-periphery" assumption of origin that I mentioned previously, yet it takes that claim *away* from something as recent as Hollywood, and stresses the historic and "universal" nature of this narrative style.

In short, what this tells us is that even though an industry such as Hollywood managed to systematize and disseminate "classical" standards through their film production, those principles had long been present as a dominant schema for narrative comprehension and creation in the "Western World". Thus, examples of unconscious application of the model don't necessarily have to be understood as the reflexive effect of *Hollywood's* hegemony in a country or region, but of a far older cultural influence that has been virtually hardwired into our narrative perception.

6.2.3 Perhaps a bit of both…

Naturally, these two approaches are not mutually exclusive. The presence of "classical" narration in Latin American cinema (deliberate *and* casual) can be explained by the combination of both factors: a deeply rooted inclination towards an ancient canonical style; coupled with an intense exposure to audiovisual products from a modern media industry that has traditionally applied its principles. Our filmmakers, being part of the same audience which they address themselves, seem then strongly predisposed to draw upon this more immediate resource.

By this I am referring to a process which I argue occurs at an *overarching*, cultural level; and do not mean to ignore the multitude of other elements that the authors incorporate to their work which make each film *unique* and not just a mechanical repetition of a pattern . As seen even in such a modest sample as the one selected for this research, the use of classical narration may be a considerable tendency but it's certainly not absolute, quantitatively nor qualitatively. The analyses reveal that the films show varying "levels of compliance" with the model, always adjusting its principles to the service of their story, and not vice versa.

Returning to the notion of "free will" with which I opened this section, it may appear as if the discussed positioning of "classical" narration in Western culture doesn't allow much of a choice to filmmakers, who end up applying or referencing the model whether they consciously decide to or not. But if we accept this premise, then I believe it becomes all the more important to continue studying the cases where

film authors' creativity and freedom *are* most manifest: the *deliberate* instances of appropriation and transgression of the model, the specific reasons behind these choices, and the initiatives to move beyond the influence of canonical narrative.

The subconscious usage of a pattern may tell us a lot about its role in the author's context, and about the way in which we perceive and generate narratives; but if there is an intention to overcome its dominance, then I suggest that one must focus on the operations that evidence an *understanding* of the hegemonic situation and a *voluntary reaction* to it. It is through their discussion and analysis that film scholars and filmmakers may jointly contribute to the proposal of alternative models of fiction narration.

6.3 Good Movie, Bad Movie: a brief note on subjectivity.

One slippery ground that this dissertation has systematically tried to avoid is that of film criticism and its pronouncements on "quality". While outside of academia it may even feel unnatural to discuss a movie among friends without a single personal comment about its "positive" or "negative" attributes, to include them in this work would be to contradict the notion of polycentrism that it wishes to advocate.

As explained by Shohat and Stam in "Unthinking Eurocentrism" (1994), a polycentric vision acknowledges the multiple, dynamic and interconnected vantage points from which we can study culture; emphasises fields of power and struggle instead of points of origin; and holds that no single community or part of the world, whatever its economic or political power, should be epistemologically privileged (48).

Most often than not, the unfavourable perception of a film is the result of the viewer contrasting its characteristics to a specific template, which he or she has come to accept as "the norm". This template, of course, is heavily based on the dominant, "classical" model of fiction film narration that I have outlined throughout this study.

One could argue that some films of my sample include narrative traits that could be considered "unusual", "awkward" and even "incorrectly" appropriated, when appraised from the mainstream "vantage point". Yet, a simple switch of perspective (say, from a "Third Cinema gaze") is enough for those very same features to shed their negative labels and become "creative", "innovative" and "counter-hegemonic" transgressions.

As I hope the reader has noted, my work in analyzing and commenting the films of the sample has not adhered to one sole view, and thus has not privileged one over the others. Although the figure of the "classical model" is undeniably prominent in this study, I have tried not only to justify its presence (see section 1.4.); but also to examine (as polycentrism calls for) how it relates and interacts with other equally valid cultural modes and circumstances.

I do not believe it was my duty to comment on the "narrative quality" of the films. Naturally, as any regular viewer, I enjoyed some more than others and have personal opinions about all of them. These, however, are of no consequence to this research. As a scholar, I described the films' narrative make-up and presented different perspectives and explanations for it, from narratology and cultural studies, to the actual commentary of their writer/directors. To make a judgement of the films' narrative in "positive" or "negative" terms would imply either the adoption of a single one of these vantage points, or to offer one such "rating" for each of them. Instead, I have opted to simply convey certain frameworks, which the reader may use to form his or her own opinion.

I'm aware that this is a double-edged argument. It may seem that I am suggesting that quality, like beauty, is in the eye of the beholder; or more specifically, that a film's narrative merit depends entirely on the theoretical or ideological framework from which it is reviewed. This may be so, but to complement this position I would add that we should also look into the *intentions* of the film author whenever possible (see previous section, 6.2.) to determine if what we believe to be a "groundbreaking innovation" is in reality a casual choice, or if the apparently "clumsy" usage of

narrative canons is a conscious strategy pursuing certain effects. The more viewpoints available to us from which to "see" and study a single film text, the richer our understanding of it will be, leading us to a clearer and less subjective perception of its "quality".

6.4 On "Hybridity"… a final revision.

Of all the theoretical concepts used in this work, none has undergone such an unexpected change in my perception of it as that of "narrative hybridity". A veritable pillar of my research, this study was based on the premise that filmmakers from the "periphery" actively contest the hegemony of an externally imposed "classical" model of narration by appropriating this resource and transforming it to fit their purposes through its mixture with local narrative materials.

There is no questioning the fact that different models, styles and genres are indeed combined in all of the films of the sample. But is this enough to affirm that they are instances of *hybridization*? As I mentioned before, this particular notion of hybridity rests on the assumption of interplay between two (or more) elements deriving from essentially *different* sources, one "foreign" and the other "autochthonous". To put it in Bakhtinian terms, narrative hibridity is an artistically organized system that allows "languages" from different cultures to come in contact and highlight one another (Holquist (Ed); 1981: 361).

This, however, would not be compatible with the view outlined in the previous section, which holds that "classical" norms have long been the dominant narrative schema across different Western societies. From this standpoint, the model of fiction film narration would not really represent an "external" agent (despite it having been propagated by Hollywood) but simply a variation of a *shared* cultural substrate. With "classical" standards being as much a part of Latin American narrative tradition as any other element perceived as "local", all instances of "mixture" would actually be taking place between elements of the same, extended culture.

Ironically (and testifying to the contradictory nature of Latin America as a continent which at once lives inside *and* outside of modernity (García-Canclini, 1995)), it can be argued that narrative hybridity was more plausibly achieved in those films of the sample that incorporated "alternative" styles of narration. Modes that, according to Stam and Shohat (1994) have their roots in archaic, non-Western cultures; such as our region once was and -in many places and levels- *continues* to be. The carnivalesque subversions of "Asesinato en el Meneo", the vindication of oral tradition in "La Vendedora de Rosas", and the black magic-inspired "Los Niños Invisibles", are perhaps the most salient examples.

Yet, as I said before, those archaic influences are, simultaneously, foreign and local. Thus, the combination of these elements with others like the "classical" model may well constitute a dialogue within the text, but it is one that ultimately unfolds in the same "language". Time and the historic processes of globalization have blurred the boundaries that a study such as this one must look into, between what is "narratively local" and what's not.

Perhaps this is why it might be wiser to dispense with the allegory of the "hybrid" altogether when speaking about the combination of narrative elements in a text. Even if Martín-Barbero's notion of "*mestizaje*" hits closer to the mark (as the coexistence of different times, traditions, cultural forms and meanings that define Latin American reality), I now think that another one of his concepts may be a more suitable analogy. He compares the complexities of our identity with "the fragile texture of a palimpsest: that text from which an effaced past emerges tenaciously, if illegibly, between the lines being written by the present" (1996:1). I believe this figure serves as a simplified yet insightful illustration of the way in which narrative creation by Latin American filmmakers display the synchronous but often casual or vague presence of different influences.

Janet Staiger (in Grant (Ed); 2003) is another scholar who questions the accuracy of the "hybridization" concept when she analyzes the claim that such a process occurs between different narrative genres within Hollywood. Despite the differences with my

own topic, I think that both this argument and her response to it are congruous with the discussion presented in this section:

> I have to ask, are the breedings of genres occurring in Fordian and post-Fordian Hollywood truly cross-cultural? Truly one language speaking to another? I seriously doubt that the strands of patterns that intermix in Hollywood filmmaking are from different species. Rather, they are in the same language family of Western culture. The breeding occurring is not cross-cultural, but perhaps, and with a full sense of the derogatory implications involved, even a case of inbreeding. (197)

As I arrive to the end of this study, I am compelled to agree with Staiger. My analyses have shown that the "classical" model of fiction film narration does not remain intact, but that it is transformed, subverted and combined with a vast range of other storytelling influences and devices. However, realizing that "classical" standards have long ceased to be truly "foreign", I now feel that labelling those creative operations in Latin American fiction cinema as examples of "hybridity" is to dangerously indulge in the "cosmopolitanism" I have tried to avoid.

Supporting this shift in my position are not just scholarly views like Staiger's, but also the knowledge gathered from the film analyses and the interviews with their authors. The generalized perception of the "classical" model among these writer/directors is that it constitutes a "public domain", which no single party can claim propriety over. Similarly, the examples of unaware use of the model suggest that its narrative norms are not something that must be consciously accessed as an external source, but that have become a part of the authors' psyche.

6.5 Viva la Revolución!

Until now, I have only briefly mentioned the issue of *hegemony*, and focused on arguing why, from a strictly *narrative* standpoint, my cases of study should not be categorized as "hybrids". But what about the notion of cultural hybridity as an act of *resistance of power*, whereby -as I hypothesized- the usage or rejection of the

"classical" model represents the contesting of Hollywood's hegemony in the region by local filmmakers?

That question, of course, has been partially answered so far. By stripping Hollywood of any real "authorship" of the model, the idea of "narrative domination" looses significant force. Yet the influence of Hollywood's overwhelming presence in our region's media cannot be written off that simply. Hegemony *is* present, and the best proof of it lies in that very presumption of the model's origin and ownership that this study had to address.

The element of "resistance" was indeed present in some of the films of my sample, most notably in Ciro Guerra's "La Sombra del Caminante", Victor Gaviria's "La Venderora de Rosas", and Jorge Alí Triana's "Bolivar soy yo!" These are the three cases in which the authors openly admitted their creative agenda to propose narratives that went *against* (or differed from) the traditional narrative pattern that, in their view, has been particularly exploited by Hollywood.

Therefore, the key element to determine whether a film constitutes an example of "resisting hegemony" is the *acknowledgement* of its main author as such. This position echoes the one described by Friedman on hybridity (Chapter 1), which holds that this process is a *conscious choice* by a cultural agent to identify himself or his actions as "hybrid". Consequently, unilateral categorization by an outside observer is, essentially, a theoretical imposition.

Indeed, the reader can go back to Figure 21 and notice that the distinction between the *aware* and *unaware* use of "classical" narration that arose from my analyses is of little use in this topic. "Asesinato en el Meneo", for example, is in the same group of conscious rejection or transgression of the model as are "La Sombra…" and "La Vendedora…". However, director Oscar Castillo (who is no stranger to oppositional cinema, as accounted in Chapter 3) did not envision the film's parodical subversions as a "statement of resistance", but merely as a comedic tool to appeal to his audience. Conversely; "Bolivar soy Yo!" was -in principle- meant by its author to reject the

traditional style of narration, though its analysis shows that the film ended up subconsciously displaying much of the model's guidelines.

What this tells us is that patterns of narrative combination found in films from the "periphery" (and which may be prematurely labelled as narrative "hybridizations") can in fact be quite independent from the "contesting of hegemony"-value that is often assigned to "cultural hybrids". We can link this to the main argument of the previous section and say that, in the same way that the mixing of different narrative influences doesn't necessarily make a film a "hybrid", neither does the presence of a dominant model within that mixture automatically make it a case of resistance.

For Janet Staiger, the most valuable critical contribution that scholars can make through their interest in studying and categorizing films is to "analyze the social, cultural, and political implications of pattern mixing" (Ibid: 197). In this sense, I believe that the argument presented above is important because it may advice future researchers interested in the subject to tackle questions of narrative resistance *without* necessarily having to pass through the theoretical filter of "hybridity".

6.6 "Pure" Intentions in an "Impure" Field

I am aware that this research has merely scratched the surface of the ideal objective formulated by Staiger, as the discussion of the personal and social circumstances of creation were not given as much priority as the task of taking apart and studying the characteristics of the narrative texts. Nevertheless, I believe that the element of "context" was never neglected and that, in fact, it yielded the more interesting (and hopefully useful) points of this initiative.

The main goal of this project was to learn more about the way in which Latin American fiction films were making use of an influential model of narration in the region. I believe that this task was successfully carried out through my analyses; but this effort would have ultimately been sterile without the conversations with the

authors to help me contrast the gathered knowledge, revise my presumptions and arrive at the conclusions that I have outlined in this chapter.

For Narratology scholar Mieke Bal, this discipline should not be considered as a mere "tool" for analysis, but rather as a perspective on the cultural act that is narration. As such, it shouldn't just aim at deconstructing and classifying the narrative object, but at understanding how cultures take things, people and themselves apart in the process of creation. In her own words, Narratology ought to be a theory "which defines and describes narrativity, not narrative; not a genre or object but a cultural mode of expression". (1997: 222).

I wholly agree with this position, but I believe it refers to the collective, *compounded* obligation the researchers who delve in this field, and does not imply that every individual research project should try to fulfil this highly complex and ambitious theoretical task. Personally, I find it comforting that an equally respected author like Janet Staiger points to the academic merit of more "piece-meal" objectives such as "distinguishing between inbreeding and hybridity" (Ibid: 197), as this study has done.

As I said at the beginning of this chapter, I would like my research to be a "jumping point", not just for me, but for others that may find the work included here useful to their purposes, creative or academic. Perhaps the more obvious path to take from this point is to shift the focus of analysis from the *texts* themselves to the *process of creation* of those texts; essentially engaging in the study of "narrativity as a cultural mode of expression" that Mieke Bal suggests.

What I am suggesting are close collaborations between the scholar and the practitioner, or better yet, the commitment of the ever increasing numbers of *scholar/practitioners*. From new technology resources such as *blogs*, *video-diaries*,

and "*making of*" videos[105], to something as simple as a paper journal, I would encourage film authors to keep a regular and intimate log of the evolution of their narrative, from its earliest possible point, through the writing stage.

Whether these exercises are unmediated or guided by the scholar to focus on particular research questions, I believe they would be invaluable in his/her subsequent analysis of the interacting factors involved in the creative process. Furthermore, the accumulation and study of these individual cases is what can take us closer to the grand objective of understanding how a culture perceives and makes use of narration.

Janet Staiger makes a statement about Hollywood which I think can be safely extrapolated to fiction cinema in general: there is nothing "fixed" or "pure" in it for scholars to analyze and categorize… not genres, not models, not sources of narrative materials. The only thing "pure", she says, has been the sincere attempts to find order among variety (Ibid: 185). I view the present study as one of such attempts; and I hope that it serves to engross our knowledge of some of the creative processes and circumstances that are at work in Latin American fiction cinema.

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[105] Products which are of value to the practitioner, as they can be tied-in to marketing strategies in the future, such as DVD extra features, TV promotion, podcasts, etc.

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