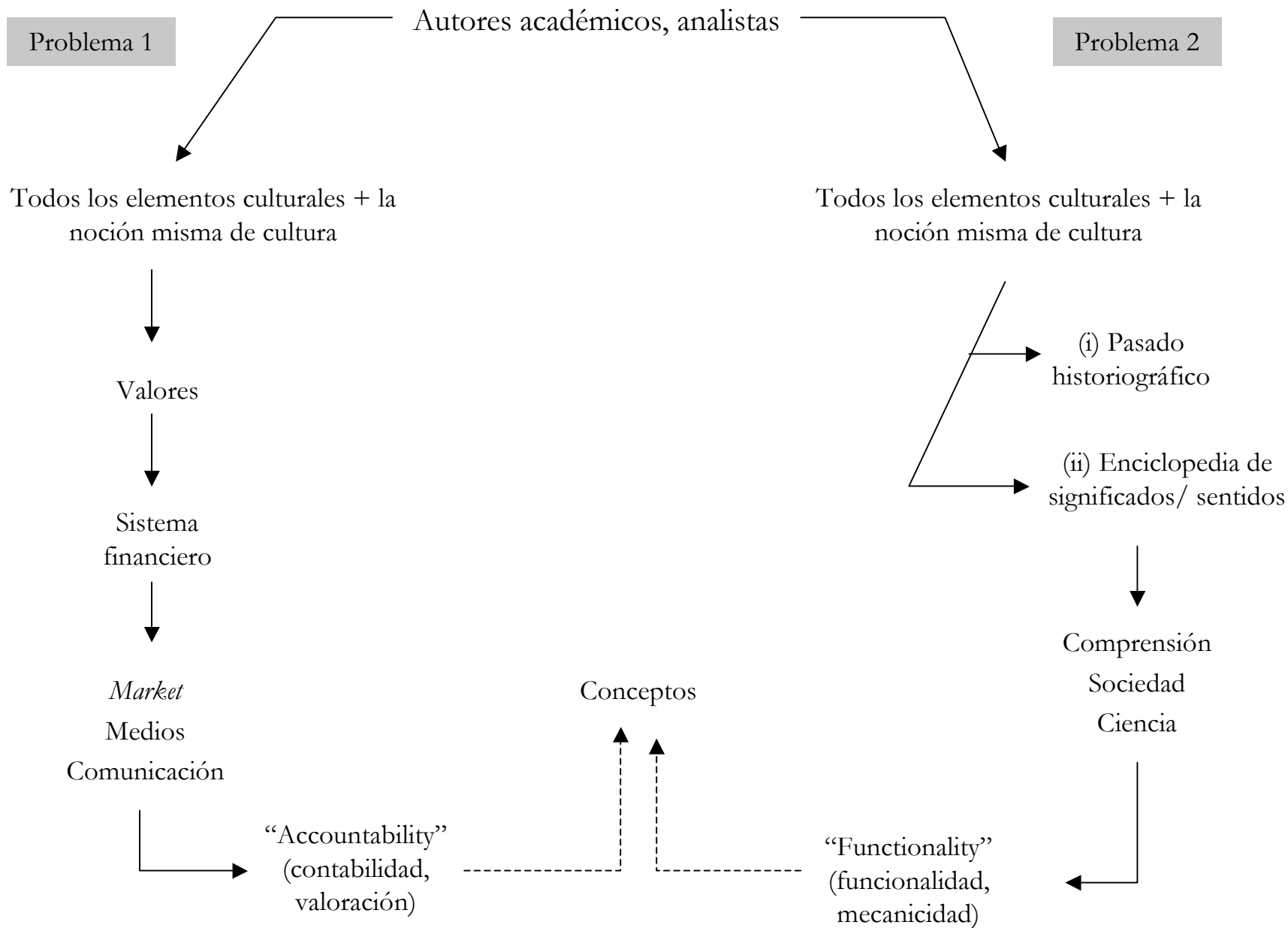


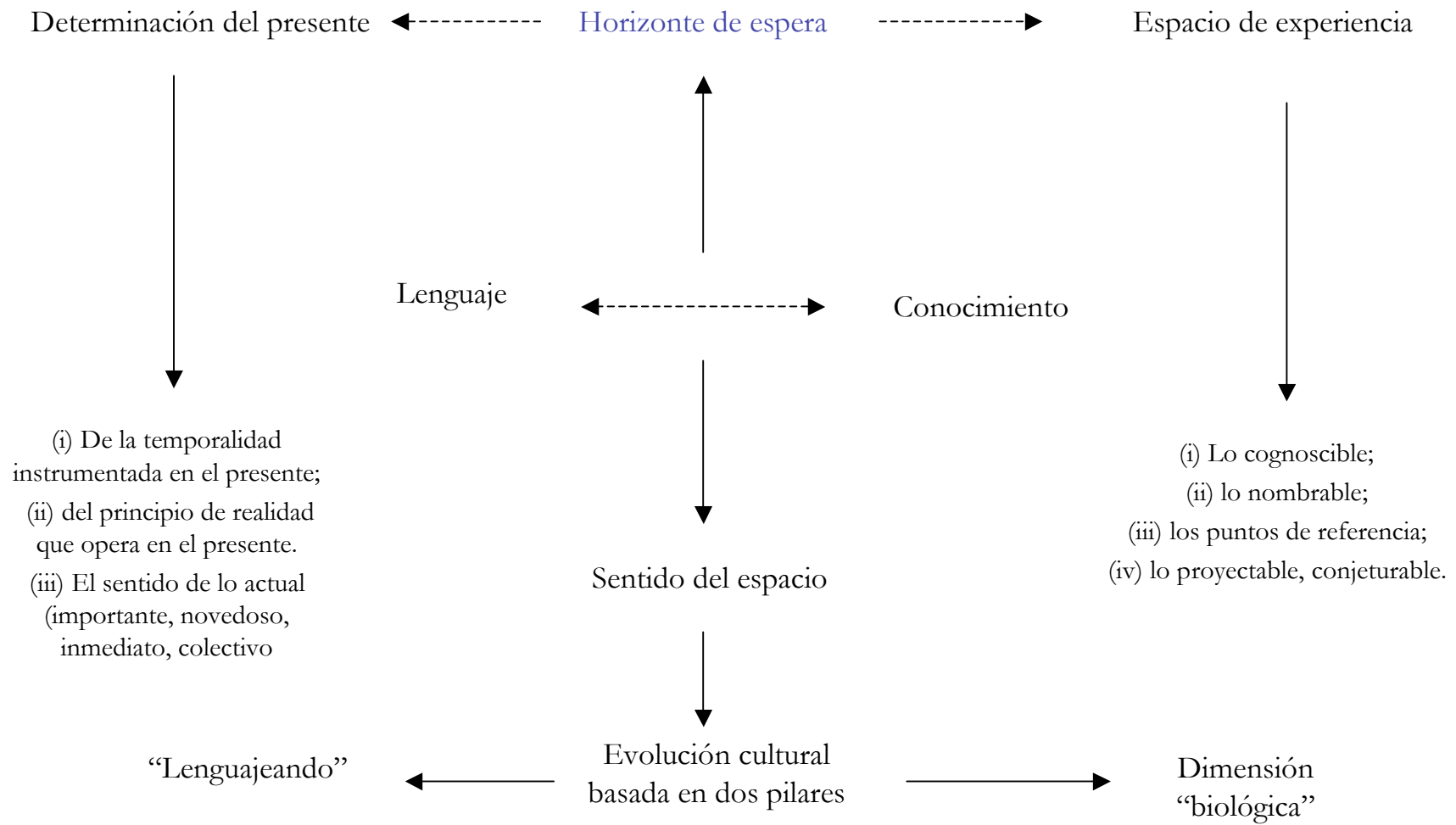
COMENTARIO INTRODUCTORIO 5

*Geo-Epistemology.
Latin America and the Location of Knowledge (2009)*

Chapter 4: 'Language, Knowledge and *horizon d'attente*' (pp. 169-216)

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Lenguaje y conocimiento

However, less important than establishing what is already obvious to the reader, i.e., that the definition of language and knowledge is relevant to determining the meaning of a particular place, is the indication of the fact that language and knowledge have an interactive, mutual self-definition in relation to what we would like to call, in the words of P. Ricoeur (1985: 375–391) and R. Koselleck (1986: 300–322), *horizon d'attente*.² Furthermore, from this perspective, the heuristic of culture – or a principle of understanding the culture in Latin America – should be related less to the origins of European culture itself than to a biological theory about knowledge (see for example Maturana, 1995b).³ The understanding of culture nowadays is more *epistemic* than ever in the sense that the privileges that historical, sociological or political interpretations enjoyed in the past have now disappeared

Primera
aproximación

Segunda
aproximación

“Heurística cultural”

Dimensión
epistémica

(see for example Knorr-Cetina, 1999).⁴ And this is where the real transformation against traditional European colonialism is happening: the *reivindicaciones* (claim, demand) of the pre-Columbian past are less connected to a particular content or subject than to the fact that knowledge is more and more understood in biological and *linguaging* terms,⁵ to use H. Maturana’s well-known expression (see Maturana/Varela, 1980; Maturana, 1995a and 1995b).⁶

Perspectiva acerca
colonialismo

Lenguaje y conocimiento

According to Koselleck, 'L'orizzonte si riferisce a quella linea dietro la quale si chiude, in futuro, un nuovo spazio di esperienza, che peraltro non è ancora visibile'. (Koselleck, 1986: 306). And Ricoeur comments: 'Trois thèmes se détachent des soigneuses analyses sémantiques de Koselleck. D'abord, la croyance que l'époque présente ouvre sur le futur la perspective d'une *nouveauté* sans précédent, puis la croyance que le changement vers le mieux s'accélère, enfin la croyance que les hommes sont de plus en plus capables de *faire* leur histoire. Temps nouveau, accélération du progrès, disponibilité de l'histoire – ces trois thèmes ont contribué au déploiement d'un nouvel horizon d'attente qui, par choc en retour, a transformé l'espace d'expérience dans lequel se sont déposés les acquis du passé.' (Ricoeur, 1985: 379).

El "horizonte de espera"

'I prefer to think that if comparative processes need an origin, it – like many others – should not be looked for among the Greeks but among some of the features common to living organisms. Discerning differences by identities, and vice versa, also seems to be a feature of human intelligence, and consequently, so are comparative attitudes. Why should comparatism be interpreted as a Greek invention instead of as a human need for (better) adaptation and survival?' (Mignolo, 1995: 19).

Comprensión de
la cultura

'...y hacemos lo que hacemos como seres humanos en el lenguaje y lenguajeando (*languageing*)' (Maturana, 1995a: 39).

"Lenguajeando"

It is in this context that we can understand the lack of any paradigm or, more precisely, the complaint ('queja') of many local authors about the lack of general perspective or paradigm. The impossibility of ascertaining a general view about Latin America, contrary to mainstream understanding (see for example King, 2004), is less related to a multiplicity of conflicts or realities than to an absence of concepts that can refer such totality.

Perspectiva "correctiva"
acerca colonialismo

Lenguaje y conocimiento

Despite the need to deal with the two obstacles already mentioned, cultural evolution should be considered as an issue where biology and *linguaging* get together (see Maturana, 1995b). Traditional institutional or historical explanations cannot confront the condition of the present in Latin America, even when they may help us to understand a particular local aspect:

Evolución cultural

El conocimiento es un fenómeno biológico y sólo puede ser entendido como tal; cualquier discernimiento epistemológico en el dominio del conocimiento requiere de este entendimiento. (Maturana, 1995b: 208)

La condición de lo presente

The fact that the cultural evolution (understood as general epistemic development of concepts and understanding) of what we call 'Latin America' is, in our view, less related nowadays to a particular ideology or a specific idea of language than to a general perception based on biology and finance, is something that indeed radically questions an important number of interpretations made of/about Latin America or any related subject in the present.⁷

La condición del conocer, del
aprehender y del entender

Idea de conocimiento

In Chapter 1 we considered knowledge in terms of 'thinking' to establish a distinction between 'local' and Western/European ('not local') forms of knowledge. We also presented the connection between 'space' and 'thinking' as a way of exploring the hypothesis that in pursuing the 'location of knowledge' there is something different to the traditional historical or scientific pattern. Associations with notions of translation, material culture and *imaginatio* were also made. In Chapter 2, following on from the previous ground, we focused on the ideas of environment, cinematography, language and writing, and their relationship to knowledge and/or thinking. Furthermore, we again explored the notion of 'space' and 'thinking', particularly in relation to the terms/notions of land and territory. Finally, in Chapter 3, the notion of knowledge was explored in relation to science, empire and a dominant 'Enlightenment' paradigm of understanding. The ideas of politics, geography, modernity, reality and colonialism, among others, were explored. To conclude this *tour* we will now try to briefly focus on two or three further aspects to finalize our considerations of the notion of knowledge.

Primera etapa

Segunda etapa

Tercera etapa

Knowledge, like other concepts connected with culture and/or society, has been considered in/for Latin America as a term connected with philosophy or, ultimately, with the history of philosophy. Contrary to this, and from the perspective we are/will be proposing here, knowledge has two dimensions: one is *biological* and the other is about *logistics*.

Hipótesis

Idea de conocimiento

Conocimiento en
términos de pensamiento



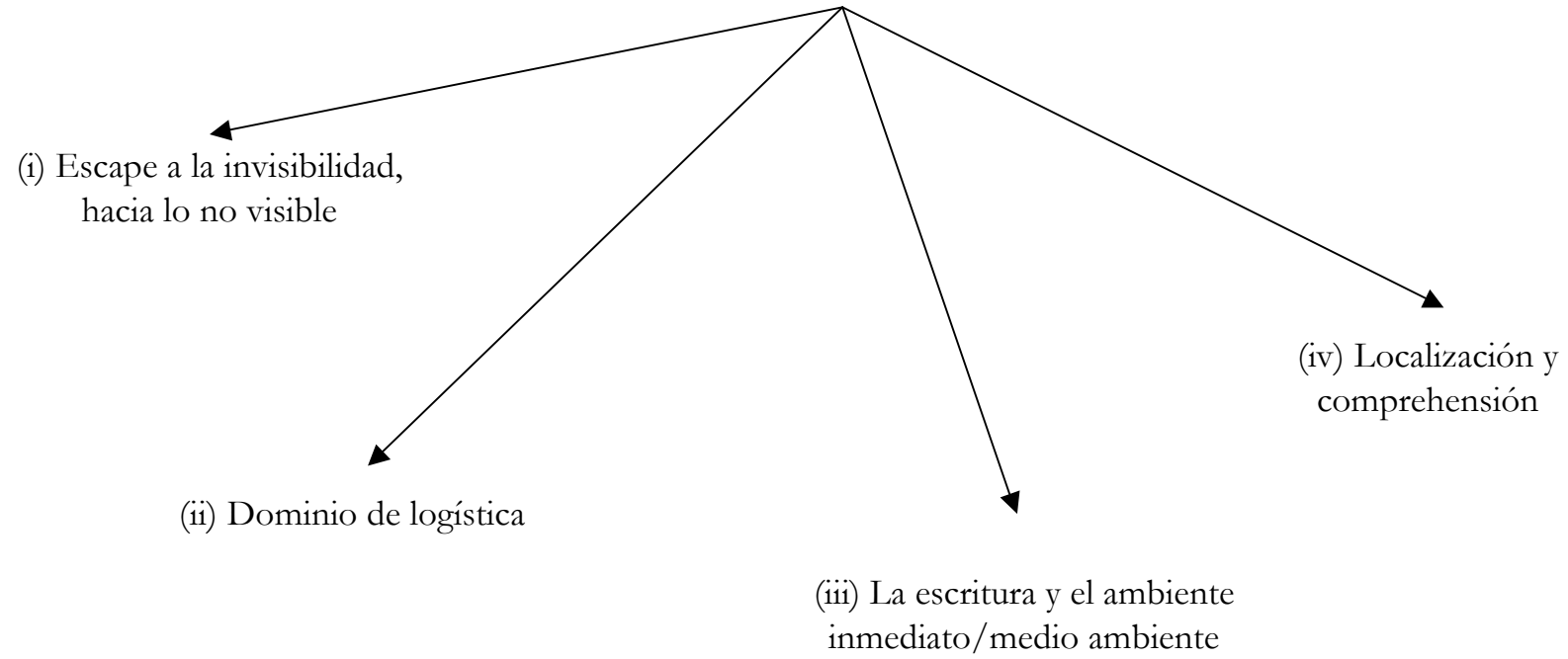
Espacio definido por sus
límites \approx Pensamiento
concebido a partir de sus
condiciones ultimas

Base de análisis

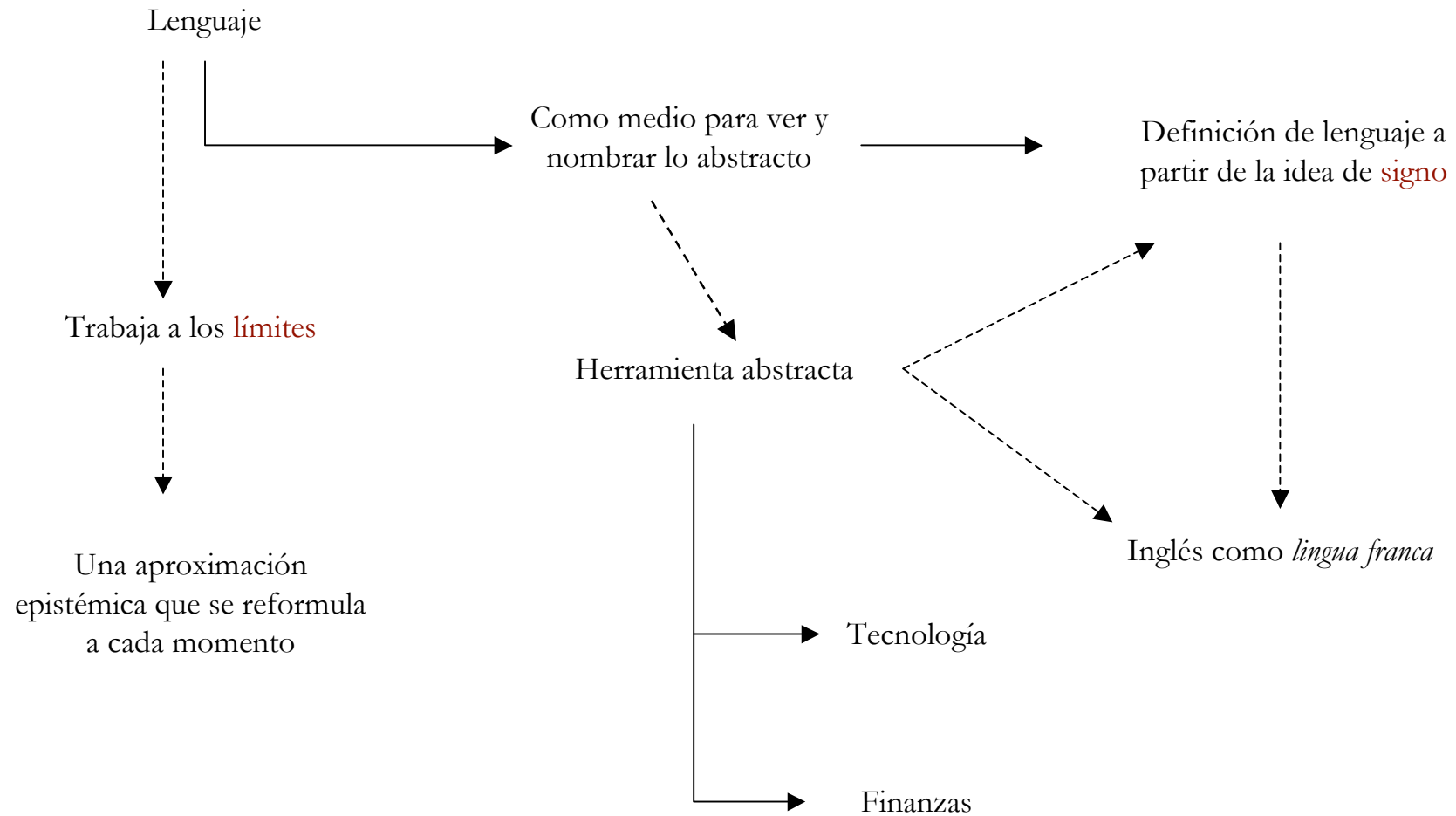
Biología de la
cognición

Knowledge, understood as thinking is defined by its epistemological conditions, by its boundaries. And this is where space and thinking have a natural connection: space defined by its boundaries and peripheral areas matches thinking conceived from its limits and ultimate conditions (see for example Mignolo, 2000: 91–126). Furthermore, this natural connection is rooted in a biological condition as understood by Humberto Maturana: if any study of the transcultural conditions that characterize the local is possible it should be based on ‘biology of cognition’ terms (see Maturana/Varela, 1980: 5 ff.). This is for at least two reasons: (i) because through it ‘reality’ is understood as a result of a community consensus construction, where ‘community’ is understood not only in the sense of Ferdinand Tönnies (1855–1936) (1955) but also in the sense of Imre Lakatos (1922–1974) (1978), and (ii) because any notion of ‘nature’ or objectivism is considered as constructed (see for example Glaserfeld, 1997). Furthermore, the biology of cognition understands knowledge (i) as a *deriva*, (ii) as something constructed locally and for a specific purpose, (iii) as *uniquely* related to an observer, (iv) as an *autopoietic* entity but subject to constant interactions, and (v) as expressed in terms of *language* (see Maturana/Varela: 1980). And all these generic aspects, which basically constitute the foundation of ‘biology of cognition’, also constitute an ideal general approach to the understanding of the local culture.

Idea de conocimiento



Idea de conocimiento



El doble giro, la doble vuelta ("double turn")

According to Foucault, during the sixteenth century words and the objects (or things) started to be separated from one another according to their semantic dimension. Words and things started to be clearly split, even if related, according to their meaning. They started to be classified and their relations developed a taxonomical dimension which in two centuries, according to Foucault, generate (i) the conception of the naturalistic sense of the World, (ii) the mechanical sense of physical organization, and (iii) the evolutionary theory of life and art (see Foucault, 1966: chapter 2). The lack of any distinction between words and objects that was characteristic from the period previous to the Renaissance, according to Foucault, was then transformed by the introduction of an *abstract condition of language*. And if we introduce this argument here it is because we believe peripheral areas like Latin America have started to generate a knowledge that supposes a sort of *second turn of language* by which the abstract condition already discussed by Foucault, which initially only referred to language in the

Foucault hipótesis 1

Foucault hipótesis 2

Foucault hipótesis 3

Reversión de la hipótesis
de Foucault 1

El doble giro, la doble vuelta ("double turn")

form of signs, also started to refer to physical objects, to the material world itself. This radicalization of the connections by which language operated in European terms resulted in the fact that not only the link between language and words is abstract and artificial but also that the physical dimension of objects and things themselves has become an abstraction and an artificial entity.¹⁴

Reversión de la hipótesis
de Foucault 2

The relationship and exchanges between visibility and invisibility which, according to Foucault, are based on what he calls 'similitudes', opened the way to a new notion of language in the sixteenth century and gave it the sense of reality and semantic efficacy.

Reversión de la hipótesis de
Foucault 3

Nowadays we do not have that past functionality and efficacy and a *radical turn to invisibility* has taken place. As ever the reality and legitimacy of language has been founded on a completely invisible set of concepts and ideas of matter. And in these circumstances the collapse of the major part the local political thinking is inevitable, as many of the recent crises of legitimacy in different Latin American governments have proven more than once.

Condición local

El doble giro, la doble vuelta ("double turn")

However what I find most fascinating about this work is not necessarily its diagnosis of European knowledge or the conceptual evolution that it proposes, but the way it implicitly addresses the future as something that will be less connected to any kind of notion of reality or history and more related to an imaginary and argumentative *construction* of the present. The explanation of how the notion of *representation* features at the core of the notion of language within Western Europe during the sixteenth century has a strong and somehow unexpected actuality that not many authors envisaged in 1966 when Foucault's work was first published. And, less than focusing on questioning/criticizing the notion of representation itself – something that has already been done by many authors (see for example Canaparo, 2003: 859 ff.) – what is significant is the *turn* that Foucault's description of the main features of language has, in the sense that the current situation in peripheral areas like Latin America is one where the representative capabilities of language have undergone yet another change on top of the one indicated by Foucault for the European domain. This *double turn* is what is sometimes so difficult to explain to non-European analysts.

Construcción del presente

Noción de
representación

Primer *turn*

Segundo *turn*

Noción local de lenguaje

Language today in the peripheral space of Latin America is not a linguistic entity in the sense described by Foucault ('La prose du monde') but a culture issue in the way discussed here: language is a varied set and collection of signs and objects whose 'materiality' does not have immediate meaning. What is more, language is a varied set and collection of signs and objects that are radically detached from words and from any fixed form or system of meaning. More specifically, language is a set of images whose possible narration does not have any standard or predictable form. This change in the epistemic valuation of alphabetic writing in relation to the location of culture is what has enabled many of the recent post-colonial interpretations of Latin American. And, from this perspective, Western/European tradition is not relevant, for the locals, because of its intellectual qualities or arguments, but because of its strategic value and its historiographical situation. And this also explains why, when considering any Greek or Latin traditions, for example, the reference is less linked to any cultural characteristics or traditions (see for example Canaparo, 2005b: 165–196), as some authors might think, but more to an inevitable historiographic dimension in the sense mentioned before in this chapter (see also Chapter 2).

Noción antropológica,
noción cultural

Versión no lingüística de lenguaje

Conjunto de imágenes

Utilidad funcional

Reversión de la funcionalidad
historiográfica

Lenguaje y estado de cosas

The aforementioned switch in the conception of language – towards a visual domain but also towards an <i>invisible</i> dimension – could also be related to the fact that a strict alphabetic and written form of understanding of language – as was the case in the past – is no longer useful for dealing with an idea of culture or knowledge.	Lenguaje y escritura
And this is when the notion of <i>linguaging</i> ('lenguajeando'), as <i>in principle</i> described by H. Maturana (1995a and 1995b), fits with the language condition of what we have been considering as located ('localizado') in Latin America in terms of knowledge.	"Lenguajeando"
Maturana characterizes language as an operational tool that makes all human activities possible. Furthermore, language always functions in a transitive state, connecting observers, concepts, interpretations and actions (see Maturana, 1995a: 19 ff.).	Condición transitiva y holística
Language here functions in an evolutionary way although not considering evolution as a principle or starting point but as the <i>result</i> of a process (Maturana, 1995a: 152).	Lenguaje como <i>resultado</i>
The human being, understood as a knowledgeable entity, cannot be considered outside language, in which case language works entirely as an <i>epistemological domain</i> that coordinates the physical and non-physical worlds.	Lenguaje como eco-sistema
Therefore, language is also the instrument capable of generating (i) consensus, (ii) cooperation in a communicative sense and (iii) coordination of actions.	Coordinación ecológica

Lenguaje y estado de cosas

Languaging is a 'forma de vida' (way of life) based on regular interactions that operate as coordination and consensus (Maturana, 1995a: 41). *Languaging* is what prevents the material systems from being absolutely mute:

Lo central al fenómeno humano es que se da en el lenguaje. Y lo central del lenguaje es que sólo en él se dan la reflexión y la autoconciencia. El lenguaje es un sentido antropológico es, por lo tanto, el origen de lo humano propiamente tal a la vez que su caída y liberación. El lenguaje saca la biología humana del ámbito de la pura estructura material, e incluye en ella el ámbito de la estructura conceptual al hacer posible un mundo de descripciones en el que el ser humano debe conservar su organización y adaptación. (Maturana, 1995a: 16)

“Lenguajeando”

And this is where the distinction between academic authors and local critics occurs: while authors like W. Mignolo, for example, see the concept of ‘colonialism’ as explaining and representing one ‘estado de cosas’ (state of the question, state of the art) that we can call Latin America, perspectives like Maturana’s regard concepts as constructions that do not represent anything since they are the ‘estado de cosas’ itself. And it is for that reason that Maturana maintains that ‘lo genético no determina lo humano, sólo funda lo humanizable’ (Maturana, 1995a: 15). Latin America is, in this context, a contemporary phenomenon, whose characteristics only acquire the status of knowledge and culture when they can be formulated as a coordination of actions and as a coordination of a particular consensus.

Perspectiva tradicional

Perspectiva alternativa

Lo local como resultado ecológico inmediato

Expectativa - Lengua periférica

And, in this context, it is possible to maintain that the important thing is not only to rescue the aboriginal languages and giving them real social status, not only freeing the Castilian language from its remaining Peninsular academic sickness. Above all it is relevant to determine the legitimacy of the Castilian-Latin American as an intellectually capable language – which, contrary to what some authors might think (see for example Fuentes, 2004), is far from actually what happens. Writing in Castilian within the academic and publishing market is a political and strategic decision that does not prevent authors and intellectuals from learning and expressing themselves publicly in English (or any other vehicular language), as we are doing here. What is at stake here, as Mignolo (2005) has correctly pointed out already, is the fight to impose a ‘paradigm of conviviality’ and this will not happen if we expect it to come from the colonial and imperial use of languages that Anglo-Saxon universities and publishers have introduced in the development of the global culture that determines our sense of contemporaneity nowadays.

Lenguaje
aborígenes

Lenguaje castellano

Condición de
mercado, condición
historiográfica

Negociación,
intercambio, búsqueda
de nuevo paradigma

Pensamiento, acontecimiento y mundo

Following the meaning of thinking discussed before (see Chapter 1) we can now make conjectures about how the sense of environment is built up. If thinking is a way to revert to the philosophical assumptions of Western/European tradition, what was traditionally considered as 'factual' is now, within this peripheral situation, functioning as an ontological perspective and therefore as something that has no epistemological weight in the local environment and its development.

Construcción
ambiental

La relativización
ontológica

On the contrary, the notion of 'world' that historiographically speaking is connected with the origin of what we understand as Latin America (see for example Mignolo, 2005: x–xx), has been expanded and, as a core concept, now has many formulations that can hardly fit with the univocal meaning of universalism proposed by Western paradigm of enlightenment. In this sense, the world is no longer a fixed framework but a construction and *ad hoc* development. To be more precise, the notion of development in connection with Latin America is always an *ad hoc* phenomenon.¹⁵

La construcción
de mundo

Mundo como construcción
eco-sistémica

Pensamiento, acontecimiento y mundo

The direct connection that linked a universal sense of reality and knowledge with a *unique* conception of reality and the world, is what can no longer be sustained. Latin America as an entity, contrary to what some authors still believe (see for example Galeano, 1986, 1987a and 1987b; and also Fuentes, 1969), is not founded on these Western/European parameters of objectivism and worldness. It is founded rather on more circumstantial and changing aspects that refer on the one hand to a regular and recurrent set of material and on the other hand to imaginary elements.

Construcción colonial
del ambiente

Lo local como
entidad

Deriva material e
imaginaria

Our discussion about speculation, geography and the construction of territories as developed in Chapter 1, fits with this contemporary absence of a universal framework of understanding. Equally, the notions of local, loci of enunciation, reversal thinking, naturalism, and translation acquire their local dimensions precisely because of this *absence*.

Primera hipótesis
acerca del eco-sistema

Segunda hipótesis
acerca del eco-sistema

In Chapter 2, the ideas of space, geometry and ground were developed even further in relation to this lack of universal perspective, both in an imaginary and a physical sense. The notion of 'environment' in its local dimension was also a way to confirm the difficulties or 'real' possibilities of such a universal understanding. Furthermore, on

Lo local como entidad
ambiental y ecológica

Pensamiento, acontecimiento y mundo

exploring the local dimension of the concept of environment we face a sort of discontinuity between understanding – based and conceived locally – and explaining, communicating and writing – where the local is forced to deal with the historiographic, epistemological and commercial Western/European tradition. Conceiving the local by interpreting something – in the hermeneutic sense, for example as Mignolo (2000) does – is not only useful but also possible in relation to a concept of Latin America. However, within that context, producing or generating cultural objects or artefacts that are able to establish a non-asymmetrical relationship with equivalents in the Western/European domain, is something that has proved to be much more difficult and somehow conceptually detached from any interpretation in the hermeneutic sense. And it is this discontinuity between interpreting and acknowledging, between interpreting as understanding and creating an object or theory as explaining, to put it in traditional terms (Wright, 1971), that will concern us in this chapter. In fact, exploring the connection between science and empire, as we did in Chapter 3, was the first general attempt to address this point.

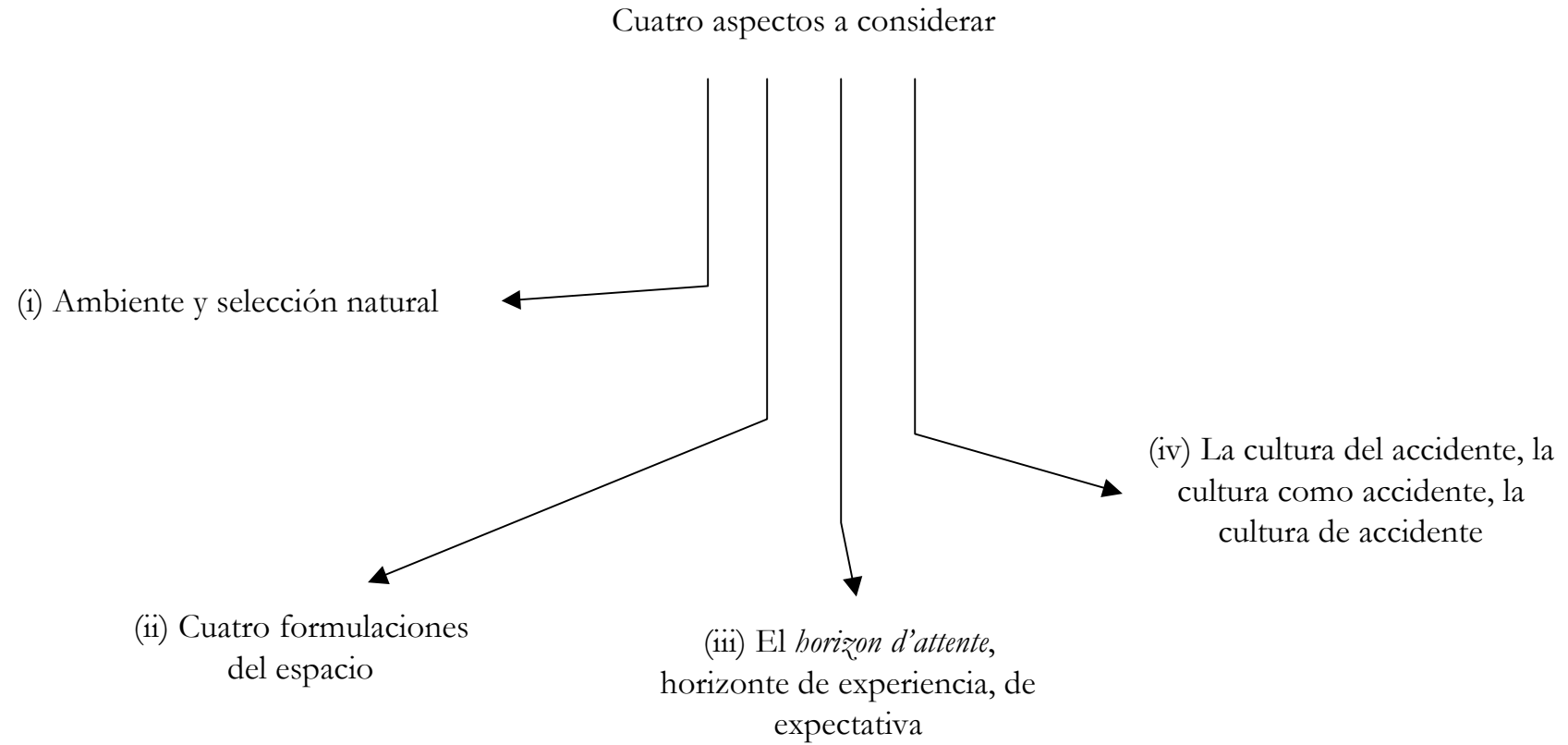
La discontinuidad del presente

La perspectiva hermenéutica

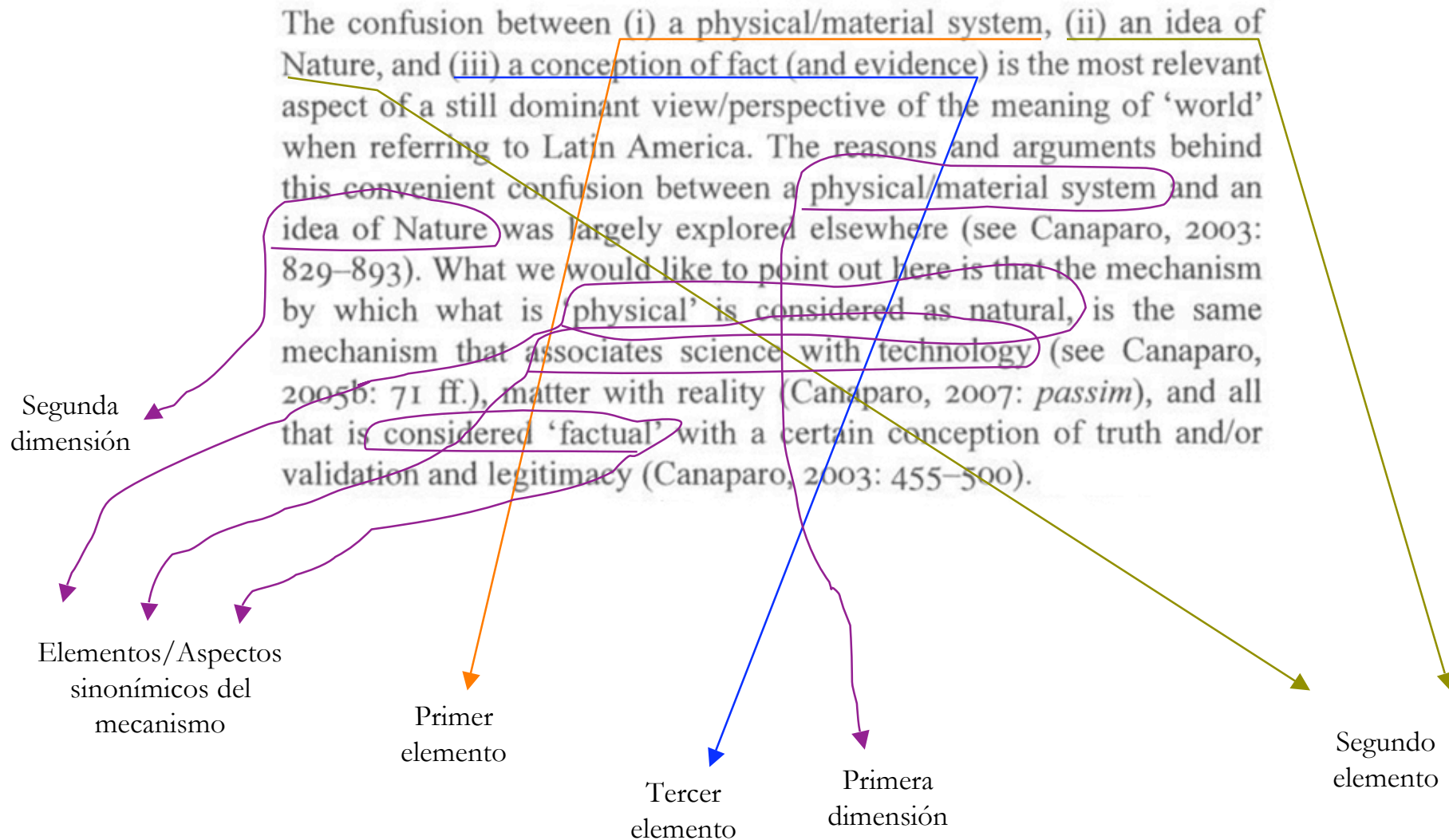
Revisión de la perspectiva hermenéutica

La discontinuidad del presente en perspectiva

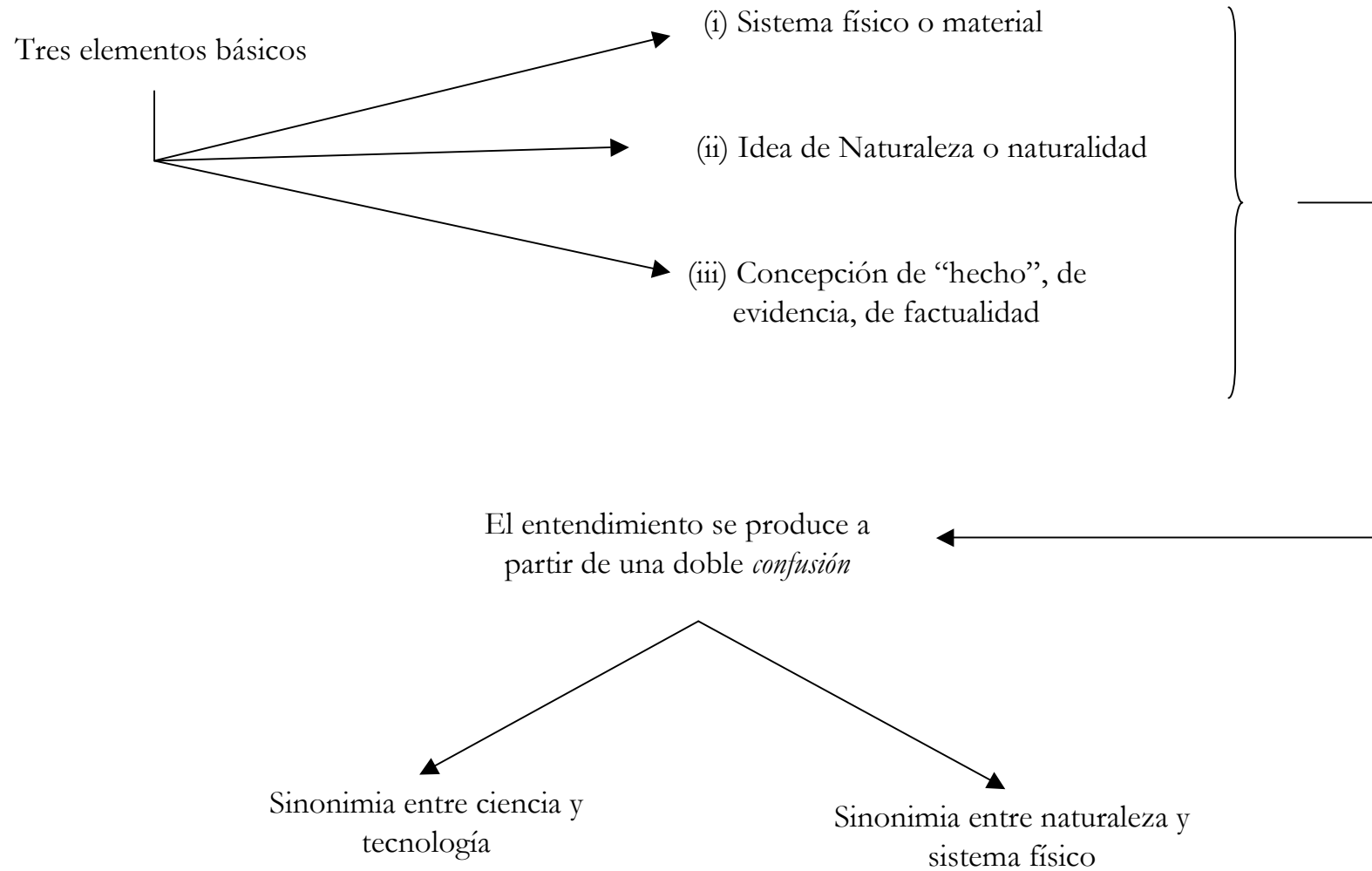
Pensamiento, acontecimiento y mundo



(i) Ambiente y selección natural



(i) Ambiente y selección natural



(i) Ambiente y selección natural

What is relevant in the peripheral condition of Latin America, insofar as it is described here, is that all these conceptual associations and mechanisms get *corrupted*. They are not directly questioned on their argumentative status, which would be impossible from the conventional, commercial or intellectual point of view, they simply get twisted, and become implemented in an unexpected way. In this sense 'Latin America' is a place where, contrary to what some authors might think (see for example Larraín, 2005), the *implementation* of Western/European models and projects does happen, but in a *degenerative* way. The main paradoxical effect of Latin America, conceived as an environment and as described here, is that it produces a *de-naturalization* of Western/European ideas and perspectives. And this is exactly the limitation of Western/European colonialism: of course it exists, but not in a predictable way; it certainly has catastrophic and brutal consequences, but not in predictable way. Latin America is not a sociological laboratory of Western/European dominance, as it might appear after reading some local and non-local analysts. Of course, this is not because of any kind of 'resistance' prevailing locally, but quite the contrary. It does not happen for 'good' or positive reasons: it is because of the *destructive and degraded nature of its environment and development*. And this explains why the most successful forms of colonialism and/or imperialism are those that use political concepts to hide a systematic scheme of violence, corruption and State terrorism. Far from being a privilege of military governments or military regimes, this situation is present in many of today's formal democracies.

La corrupción como
proceso natural

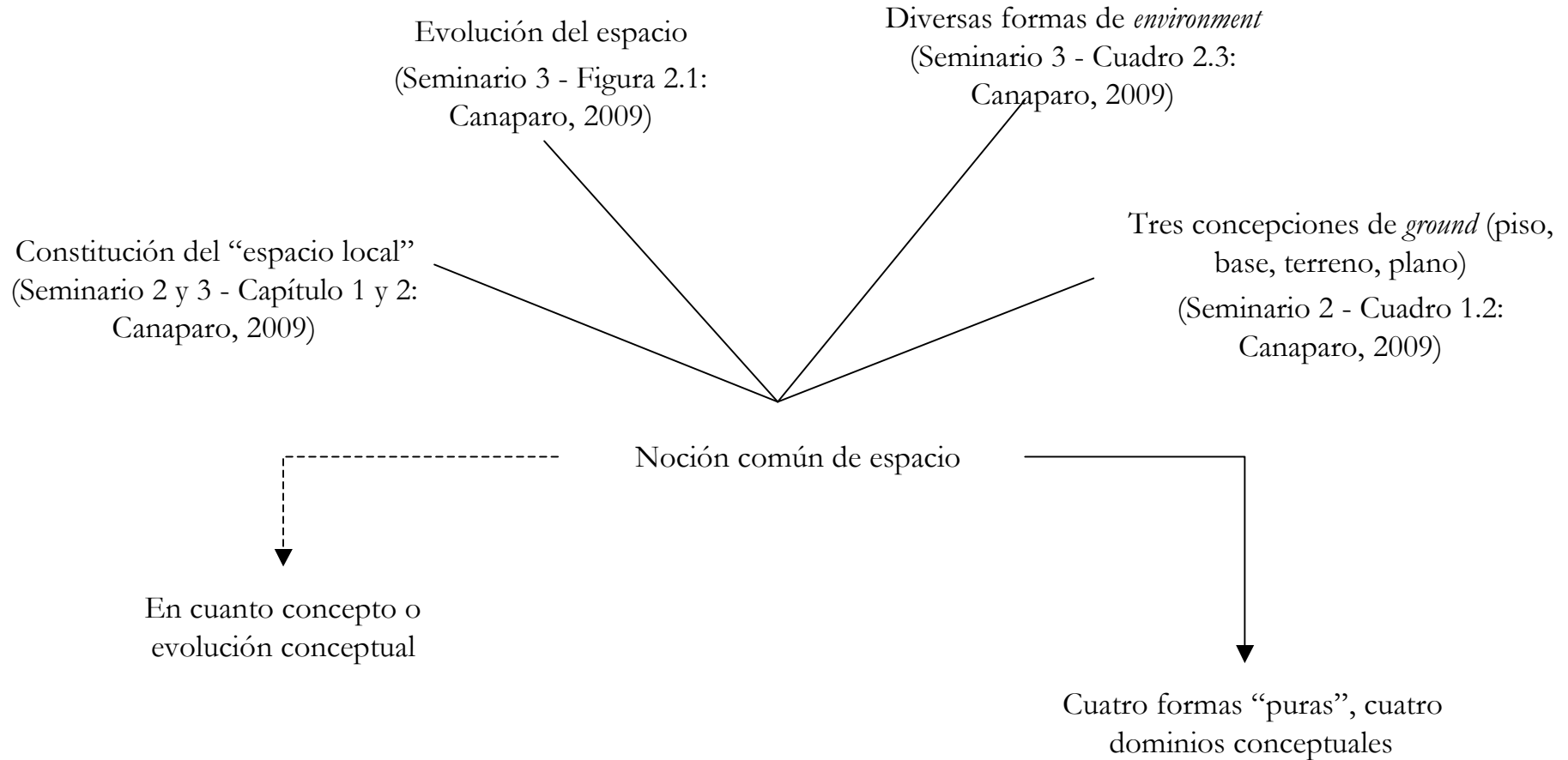
La degradación/ degeneración
como deriva natural

Des-naturalización
de lo no local

Resistencia por degradación

Violencia ínsita

(ii) Las cuatro formas del espacio



(ii) Las cuatro formas del espacio

Ground stricto sensu	Place	'Lugar'	Definition 1	Question of location
	Place-world	'Ubicación'		
Cultural ground	Site	'Localidad' 'Sitio'	Definition 2	Question of comprehension
	'Milieu'	Surroundings 'Periferia inmediata' Community	Definition 3	
Epistemological ground	Environment	Atmosphere Weather Forecast	Definition 4	

TABLE 4.1. The four definitions of space that inform our comments on the conceptual construction of Latin America from the point of view of space. A comparison with the notions of *ground* (Table 1.2) and evolution (Figure 2.1).

(ii) Las cuatro formas del espacio

Definition 1. Space is considered as *place*, that is, as establishing one *lugar*. More than determining by reference points, this space is defined by the characteristics of a particular and limited domain. And this space can be considered as a *place-world* when it is determined by, or in relation to, a position – in which case it is the context, the placement in a context that is relevant.

Ubicación
Lugar
“Lugar en el mundo”
(Place-world)

Definition 2. Space is determined by the *localidad*, that is, by a certain number of elements that make the nearby areas – the neighbourhood – clear and relevant. That is also why it is understood as *sitio* in some cases, i.e., as a particular and well-focused location.

Localidad
Sitio

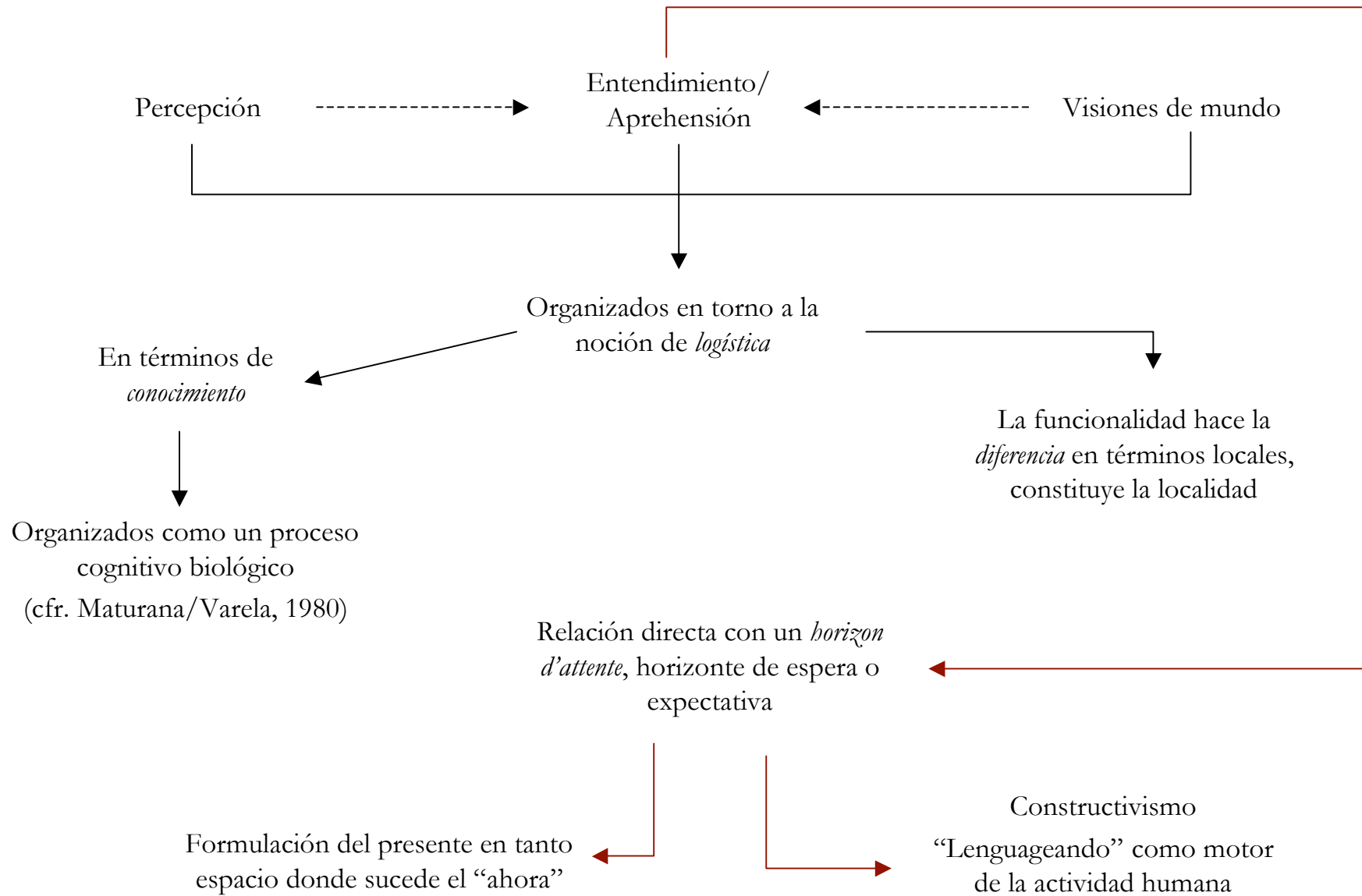
Definition 3. The ‘milieu’ is a complex form of space that is produced by the interaction between a particular form of surrounding – or ‘*periferia inmediata*’ – and the sense of group obtained from its constitution by people or applied to objects (‘community’).

Medio
Periferia inmediata
Comunidad

Definition 4. The environment understood as space works here as an equivalent of *atmosphere*: space is conceived as a total set, that is, not only as space but also as all the elements included in it and, no less significantly, all the possibilities (‘pronósticos’, forecasts) that they can generate. This space has a close relation to the three forms outlined in Table 2.3, that is, with the ideas of ‘ambiente’, ‘escenario’ and ‘amueblamiento’.

Atmósfera

(iii) El *horizon d'attente*



(iii) El *horizon d'attente*

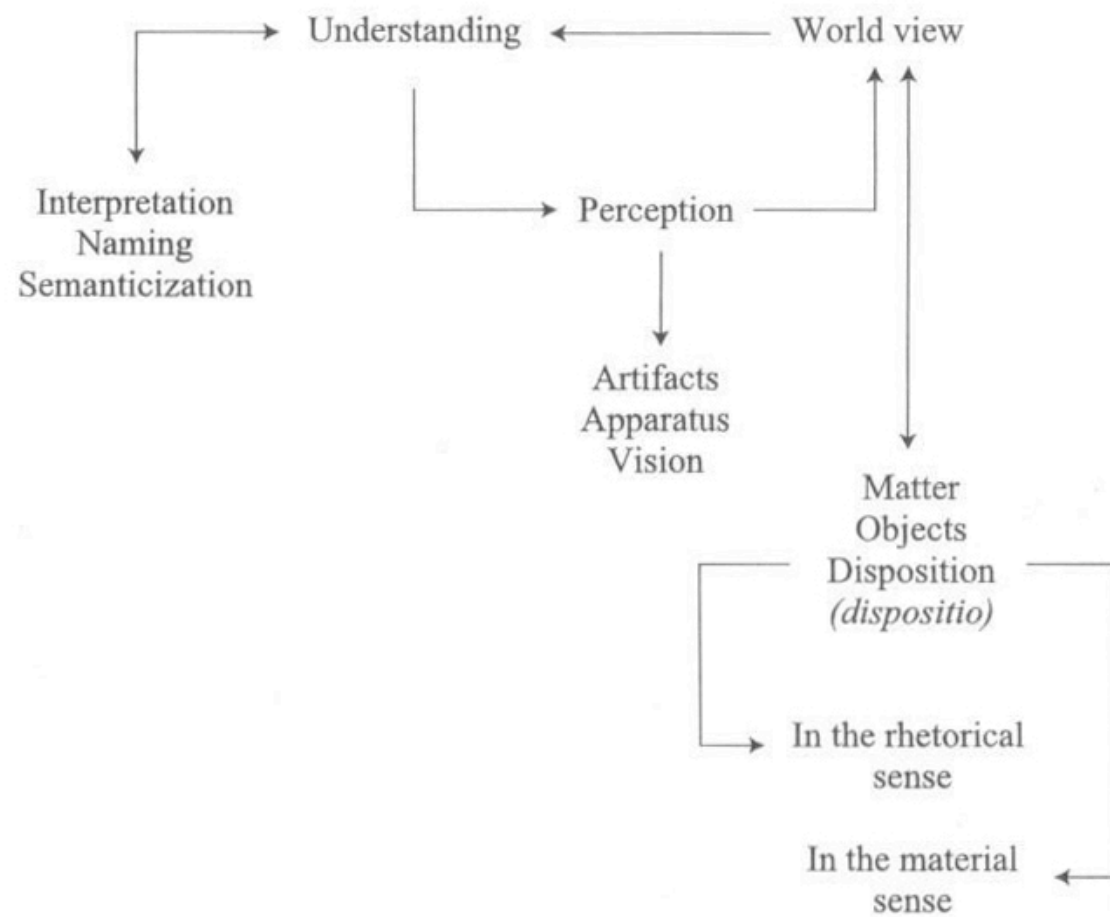


FIGURE 4.1 General outline of the mechanism of *horizon d'attente* in relation to the concept of Latin America defined by a spatial perspective.

(iii) El *horizon d'attente*

Perception, understanding and the 'visiones de mundo' (world-view) are organized, according to the hypothesis proposed here, around the notion of *logistics*. As a set or ensemble, understood as 'knowledge', they are organized in *biological* terms (see for example Maturana, 1995a and 1995b). Of course, we say 'biological', not because the ultimate explanation about knowledge should *per forza* be reduced to biological descriptions, which is an ontological question/issue, but on the contrary, because biology understood as a cognitive process (see Maturana/Varela, 1980: 5–6) provides an accurate and holistic explanation of knowledge in terms of 'peripheral thinking' as we are discussing here.

Perspectiva logística

Dimensión biológica

It is when European authors such as P. Virilio, for example, try to consider of the limits of culture, society and understanding, that is when the relation with peripheral areas becomes more evident (see for example Canaparo, 2005b: 71–84 and 205–220). The 'logistics of perception', as Virilio himself referred to it, is an attempt to describe how far human perception is from the traditional European history of the definition of philosophy and how *artificial* it has become. The connection between war and cinematography is a privileged scenario that, according to Virilio, allows us to deconstruct this general artificial and non-reversible sense of our environment. This condition is pretty much applicable to the borders and peripheral areas of the Western/European domain. But this does not, as some simplistic extrapolation might suggest, account for the whole situation. And it can be understood by looking at the 'Europeism' that Virilio at no time tries to hide (see for example Virilio, 1996). The local use of apparatus, technological devices, the idea of reality, the concept of physical objects, *language*, the domain of things (physical and imaginary), are totally different from Western/European patterns. They function in a different way, their *functionality* is different, even when they work in a similar framework to the Western/European domain ('global market', 'scientific paradigm', 'culture pattern'). And it is this *functionality* – what Maturana, describing the epistemic dimension of a cognitive process based on biological parameters, calls 'deriva' (Maturana, 1995a: 109 ff.) – that makes the difference.

Periferia: "Logística de al percepción"

Ambiente de guerra: construcción artificial de eventos

Elementos básicos

Funcionalidad alternativa, periferia

(iii) El *horizon d'attente*

Understanding then is the central element in what refers to the *horizon d'attente* situation. If we follow the classic Western/European philosophical taxonomical distinction that Georg Henrik von Wright (1916–2003) made between ‘explanation’ and ‘understanding’ (Wright, 1971), we end up with two intellectual traditions expressed in many ways: description and theory, prediction and explanation, Aristotle (384 BC–322 BC) and Galileo (1564–1642), causal methodology and teleological methodology, natural science and human science (see Wright, 1971: Chapter I).

Clásica aproximación
a “entendimiento”

However the ‘understanding’ postulated here is far from the one associated with this Western/European interpretation of the history of philosophy. It is more closely related to the constructivist approach described by E. von Glasersfeld and J. Piaget (see for example Glasersfeld, 2005: 53–75; and Piaget, 1970a and 1970b) as a concept on its own and as the best connection with a perspective that situates language (*linguaging*, construction of reality, construction of knowledge) at the heart of human activity. In this context, understanding is a comprehensive notion of four different situations: (i) ‘we are someone’, (ii) ‘something is already there’ (dictionary, encyclopaedia, physical world), (iii) ‘we are looking at something’ (‘devenir’, ‘deriva’), and (iv) ‘we need to take a stand, we need a particular direction’.

Aproximación alternativa a la
noción de “entendimiento”

Aspectos del
“entendimiento”

Understanding then, acting at the centre of the *horizon d'attente* attitude, works in three different directions: (i) from the *linguaging* point of view exploring uncharted areas, (ii) from the knowledge point of view dealing with the perception understood as logistics and as vision, and (iii) from the physical point of view dealing with objects and matters (‘materiales’). Directions (ii) and (iii) also deal with the construction/modification of a ‘world-view’.

Entendimiento como
horizonte de espera

(iii) El *horizon d'attente*

This is the relevant point here: the *horizon d'attente* is relevant because, as we have already stated, it explains the construction of a particular form of *present*. It is relevant also because it determines the notion of 'knowledge' itself or, more precisely, because if our environment – including ourselves – is *a result* that cannot be approached in a retrospective way (Maturana, 1995a: 105 ff.), then the analysis is translated to the expectation of what the natural 'deriva' will make possible. In this sense, any concept that refers to Latin America, as analyzed here, is a device that works towards what is not yet here – and this working in a void or within what is not there, becomes one of the main characteristics of Latin America itself.

Como factor determinante
del presente

Como factor determinante del
“conocimiento” en tanto
construcción de un ambiente, de una
deriva

Concepto como
instrumentos/aparatos que
negocian con lo ausente

(iii) El *horizon d'attente*

In Figure 4.1 we were trying to establish the basic conditions under which the *horizon d'attente* – understood as a main element of the present – operates. And if understanding is at the heart of this constructive process of knowledge/acknowledge it is because *linguaging* – as described before – is the driving element of our experience:

La construcción del ambiente, del medio ambiente, a partir del encuentro entre un *horizon d'attente*, un presente y un lenguaje

La experiencia humana está libre de contenido. En nuestra experiencia no nos encontramos con cosas, objetos, o naturaleza como entidades independientes como podría parecernos en la ingenuidad de la vida diaria; vivimos en la experiencia, en la práctica de vivir de seres humanos en el flujo de ser sistemas vivientes en el lenguaje como algo que nos sucede en nuestro interior y a nosotros mismos mientras lo lenguajeamos. (Maturana, 1995a: 95).

Noción de experiencia

Furthermore:

Los seres humanos existimos en el lenguaje, y nuestra experiencia como seres humanos se lleva a cabo en el lenguaje en un flujo de coordinaciones consensuales de coordinaciones consensuales de acciones que ponemos de manifiesto en el lenguaje. Los objetos, la consciencia, la autorreflexión, el ser, la naturaleza, la realidad, etc.; todo lo que los seres humanos hacemos y somos se lleva a cabo en el lenguaje porque usamos el lenguaje para generarlo, pero no como una abstracción o mero discurso, sino igual de concreto como cualquier operación en el flujo de las coordinaciones consensuales de acciones en las que surgimos y existimos. El hecho que existimos en el lenguaje, y constitutivamente no podemos existir fuera de éste porque estamos constituidos dentro de él, y el hecho que al ser en el lenguaje sólo generamos experiencias en el lenguaje, no nos limita, sino que al contrario, es la condición que hace posible que la ciencia sea un dominio explicativo en el que cualquier cosa que pongamos de manifiesto en él se convierte en parte de nuestra existencia como seres humanos. De hecho, el hecho que al existir en el lenguaje nuestro dominio de experiencia

Noción de
“lenguajeando”

deba ser un dominio cerrado del cual no salimos, ni podemos salir, parece ser una limitación sólo si pensamos que deberíamos de poder referirnos a una realidad independiente. (Maturana, 1995a: 96)

(iii) El *horizon d'attente*

What is tragic about colonialism and, specifically, about the Western/European intellectual and cultural heritage in relation to Latin America is the fact that people – indians, natives, ‘criollos’ and migrants in general – constructed themselves around it. It therefore cannot be avoided, merely re-formulated in the best possible cases. Furthermore, this construction is strongest when it is aimed at the future, that is, towards what has not yet happened but which might happen. And it is in this future that, as we indicated before, the present itself is defined. It is this post-industrial mechanism of the formation of communities and individuals (Jeudy, 1990), well established in Latin America, that constitutes the real challenge to the Western/European tradition.

Primera constatación
de colonialismo

Segunda constatación

Tercera constatación

Cuarta constatación

(iv) La cultura del accidente

Συμβαίνω in Greek has various meanings: (i) to have the feet (or boots) ‘attached’ (ensemble), (ii) get together with someone, (iii) come to terms with someone, (iv) agree on, and also has many meanings referring specifically to things like, for example, ‘to let things drop’ (‘dejar caer’). The contemporary meaning of accident, more related to the Latin notion of *accidens/accidentis* – and in particular to *accido/is* – also has several significations: (i) fall, fall near to or fall over (‘cadere presso, cadere sopra, cadere’), (ii) jump over (‘piombare addosso’), (iii) ‘come up to the ears’ (‘giungere all’orecchio’), (iv) becoming (‘accadere, avvenire’), (v) manage to, obtain a result (‘riuscire, avere un risultato’), (vi) cut (‘tagliare’), (vii) to weaken (‘indebolire, annientare’), (viii) to consume, to finish (‘consumare’). All these different meanings are in the background every time we use the word accident just as they are when the notion of accident that we propose here is situated in a particular context. So accident, like other concepts, can be generally considered as a ‘word’ and at the same time as a ‘notion’, and it is the combination of these two contexts that produces the concept/s of accident.

Primera aproximación

Segunda aproximación

Palabra + noción



[definición de concepto]

(iv) La cultura del accidente

As mentioned previously, if we understand culture as the most epistemically relevant set of characteristics, elements, bodies and objects of a particular space (see for example Knorr-Cetina, 1999), then the evolution of such a set, according to our perspective, can be understood

La interpretación de lo cultural como objeto básico

only by *accident* and/or *accidentally*. And that is why the idea of change, understood as *accident*, is a concept that inevitably emerges when we refer to any form or aspect of knowledge. The concepts of evolution and modification that obtain nowadays on a conceptual, social and cultural level are closer to a notion of accident than to a traditional meaning of change:

Cambio y evolución como básico de todo conocimiento

1. Accidents happen randomly and can hardly ever be predicted.
2. Accidents represent a radical variation for the elements involved in them.
3. Accidents also cannot be predicted by their own internal development. Accidents work by 'ensayo y error' (trial and error).
4. Accidents are non-compatible with memory, or, to put it better, accidents scarcely have memory. However, there is a *know-how* of accidents and that is where the majority of the analyses concentrate.
5. Accidents are qualities or states that in principle are not part of the original structure, system, object, etc., that they affect or modify.
6. Accidents happen in language, in bodies, in things as in objects, and in individual people's mind.
7. Accidents cannot be defined by themselves but by what they produce or generate.
8. Accidents happen very quickly: an increasing speed is one of the regular aspects of accidents.

Características del accidente entendido como motor del conocimiento y la evolución

(iv) La cultura del accidente

These characteristics of accident never appear clear or in sharp individual form. They appear more as an *evolution*, as H. Maturana described in his 'biology of cognition' (see Maturana, 1995a). The idea that evolution is an element that cannot be avoided when we are referring to knowledge is something that appeared very clearly in Maturana's theory (see for example Maturana, 1995a: 105 ff.). Furthermore, in Maturana's theory, the idea that evolution cannot be avoided is connected to the fact that things are not determined by any 'objective' condition:

Accidente como evolución

Accidente como componente inevitable del conocer

Desde un punto de vista biológico, los seres vivos son sistemas determinados estructuralmente. Por tanto, todo lo que les ocurre en cada instante les ocurre como parte de su dinámica estructural en ese instante, y determinado en ella. Ello implica que los cambios estructurales que un ser vivo sufre como consecuencia de sus interacciones con el medio en el que se realiza, no son determinados por los agentes externos que un observador ve incidir sobre él, ni dependen de la naturaleza de ellos, sino que quedan determinados por la propia dinámica estructural del ser vivo (Maturana, 1995a: 108)

Sinonimia entre evolución y accidente

Moreover, according to Maturana

el ser vivo no puede distinguir en su operar el origen interno o externo de sus cambios. En otras palabras, la dinámica estructural de un ser vivo ocurre ajena a lo que un observador pueda distinguir como interno o externo a él. La distinción entre lo interno y lo externo, en un ser vivo o en cualquier otro sistema determinado en su estructura, es una distinción que hace el observador, y por esto no participa en el operar de tal clase de sistemas. De esto se sigue que los fenómenos propios de la dinámica estructural de un ser vivo y los fenómenos propios de su relación e interacción con el entorno en el que se realiza, son fenómenos de distinta clase y no pueden ser reducidos unos u otros. (Maturana, 1995a: 108–109)

El lugar del observador como una teoría para un desarrollo cognitivo

(iv) La cultura del accidente

Therefore, the link between one phenomenological domain ('sistema autopoietico', 'deriva') and the other ('ser humano', 'linguaging', 'observador') is necessary and indispensable but also *accidental*: the environment of the 'ser vivo' ('living creature') cannot be detached from the specific 'ser vivo' that constitutes it, yet the determination of the environment itself is done by *accident*, by 'deriva', that is, by an exchange where structures and changes are established and made understandable by the change itself:

...en un sentido estricto no hay ni puede haber determinación genética de ningún carácter o rasgo de la conducta de un organismo, pues éstos surgen de una manera sistemática durante la deriva ontogénica de éste. (Maturana, 1995a: 120)

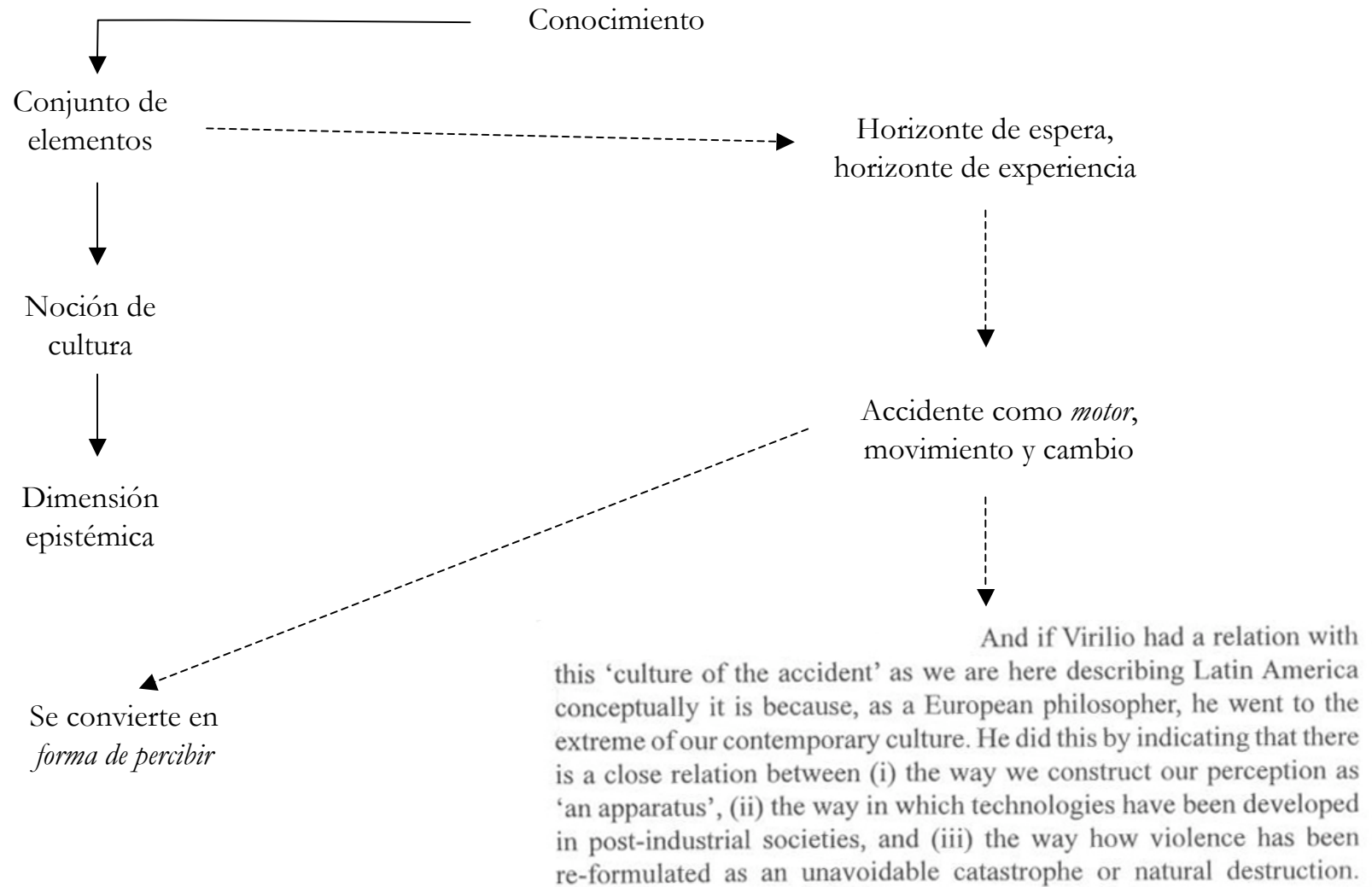
The *accident* not only characterizes change in relation to its contents (first phenomenical/ phenomenological domain), it also refers to the way in which this change happens (second phenomenical/ phenomenological domain). The accident is related both to the *internal* and to the *external* dimensions of evolution, even when both domains according to Maturana are not directly related (see Maturana, 1995a: 118 ff.).

Las relaciones conceptuales, los sistemas de entendimiento, son accidentales

El ambiente y sus habitantes son parte de una misma situación indisociable que se genera a partir de una deriva, de una sucesión *accidental*

Dimensiones del accidente

(iv) La cultura del accidente



(iv) La cultura del accidente

However, contrary to what Virilio maintained, we do not believe it is possible to make a distinction between 'natural' and 'man-made' accidents (see Virilio, 2002a: 23): all accidents are as natural as man-made. The comprehension of 'natural' accidents requires an equal amount of technical devices as the comprehension of 'man-made' ones.

Primera característica

It is the unavoidable technological dimension of our environment that makes any concept both artificial and natural at the time: 'artificial', because it is generated and/or understood by devices and apparatus, 'natural', because (as before) it forms our immediate environment, what Maturana calls *nicho* (niche) (Maturana, 1995a: 111). The irreversible industrial and technological condition of our environment is what makes accidents the most natural form of change (see for example Virilio, 2002a: 23–24). Today we are in the absolute opposite situation, as described by the French humanist André Malraux (1901–1976) sixty years ago:

Segunda característica

Culture is what makes man something other than an accident of the Universe. (see Virilio, 2002a: 27) ²⁰

Tercera característica

We are at the exact antipodes of Malraux's *dictum*. Malraux's conceptual man no longer exists, except as an anthropological event of the past. We are living in an environment built up around the culture of accident. Such a 'culture' is not anthropomorphical anymore, but is a 'culture' that is an *unknown quantity* of aspects, concepts, things, objects, all of them related to a present – or, more precisely, to a set of actual contemporary events – by *accident*. And in this context, what is the meaning/concept of language, historiography and established physical systems, is less related to the definition of 'culture' than to how they – as a part or a totality – are connected to that notion of present.

Cuarta característica

Quinta característica

(iv) La cultura del accidente

The understanding of culture in terms of accident reinforces the *meteorological* dimension of it, the fact that culture behaves also in terms of weather: regular forecast, instabilities, predictions, sense of the local and the global, sense of short term and long term. In the words of Virilio:

Just as there are spells of bad weather in nature, there are also periods of bad weather in culture and we would need a positive 'meteorology' of invention to attempt to avoid *the storms of the artifice of the Progress of knowledge*. (Virilio, 2002a: 86)

El pensamiento como
actividad meteorológica

As we have already discussed in Chapter I, the fact that we are continually forced to think – and define knowledge – in terms of atmosphere, gives this meteorological perspective an everyday quality. Not only are we looking every morning for the traditional indicators of temperature, raining, etc., we also look at the indicators of pollution, CO₂, decibels, etc., and we dress and carry devices accordingly. More relevantly: we cannot understand our physical surroundings other than through this atmospheric perspective. And this is why Maturana's

notion of the biology of cognition is so useful: because it allows us to think about this atmospheric condition as our *natural environment*.

La experiencia como percepción
ambiental. Lo meteorológico como
condición natural del espacio: lo
natural como construcción

(iv) La cultura del accidente

However, what is relevant for us is the fact that, as stated, the culture of accident functions (i) as a *result* or (ii) as a condition of knowledge. And in these circumstances the culture of accident has three major effects on the construction of our immediate environment and knowledge:

La condición de la
“cultura del
accidente”

Tres efectos mayores respecto de la
construcción del ambiente inmediato

- I. The construction of the local. It functions by creating and developing a landscape perspective as a regular and ordinary tool for understanding our surroundings and ‘vital space’. In this sense ‘the culture of accident’ leads to the generalization of a *manufactured landscape* as part of the immediacy and starting point of the local environment. The notorious documentary *Manufactured Landscapes*, by the Canadian filmmaker Jennifer Baichwal (1960–) (2006) is a wonderful illustration of this point.

Primer efecto

(iv) La cultura del accidente

2. Learning/acting in a war environment. The war environment is the nature of ourselves, of our bodies, and of our knowledge. Evolution understood in H. Maturana's terms has this cultural/collective consequence and is regarded as irreversible. And this means not only that we have conceived 'life as war' – to use the expression from Godfrey Reggio's (1940–) film *Naqoyqatsi* (2002) – but also, and principally, that we understand and develop our environment as in/within war conditions. This is a crucial distinction between Western/European tradition and the Latin American perspective.

Tercer efecto

3. The making of knowledge. In this sense 'the culture of accident' leads to a *tiranía* (dictatorship) of the numerical aspects of capitalism and post-industrial societies (and the consequent development of concepts like 'quantity' or/and quantification). According to the statistical perspective that dominates our sense of *measure* in collective/societal terms, we die in advance nowadays: we are always part of a group of people that will die for something that is or has become *common*. As Norbet Elias (1897–1990) has already stated, the abstract aspect of our 'dying condition' is the worst psychological enemy of our intellectual and emotional integrity (see Elias, 1985).

Cuarto efecto

Less because it was founded on folkloric independence, the concept of Latin America became effective because it offered a combination of (i) different forms of space (see Figure 4.1), (ii) a *natural* perspective based on a *horizon d'attente*, and (iii) a series of *accidental* aspects that determine our notions of environment and knowledge.

El concepto de
América Latina