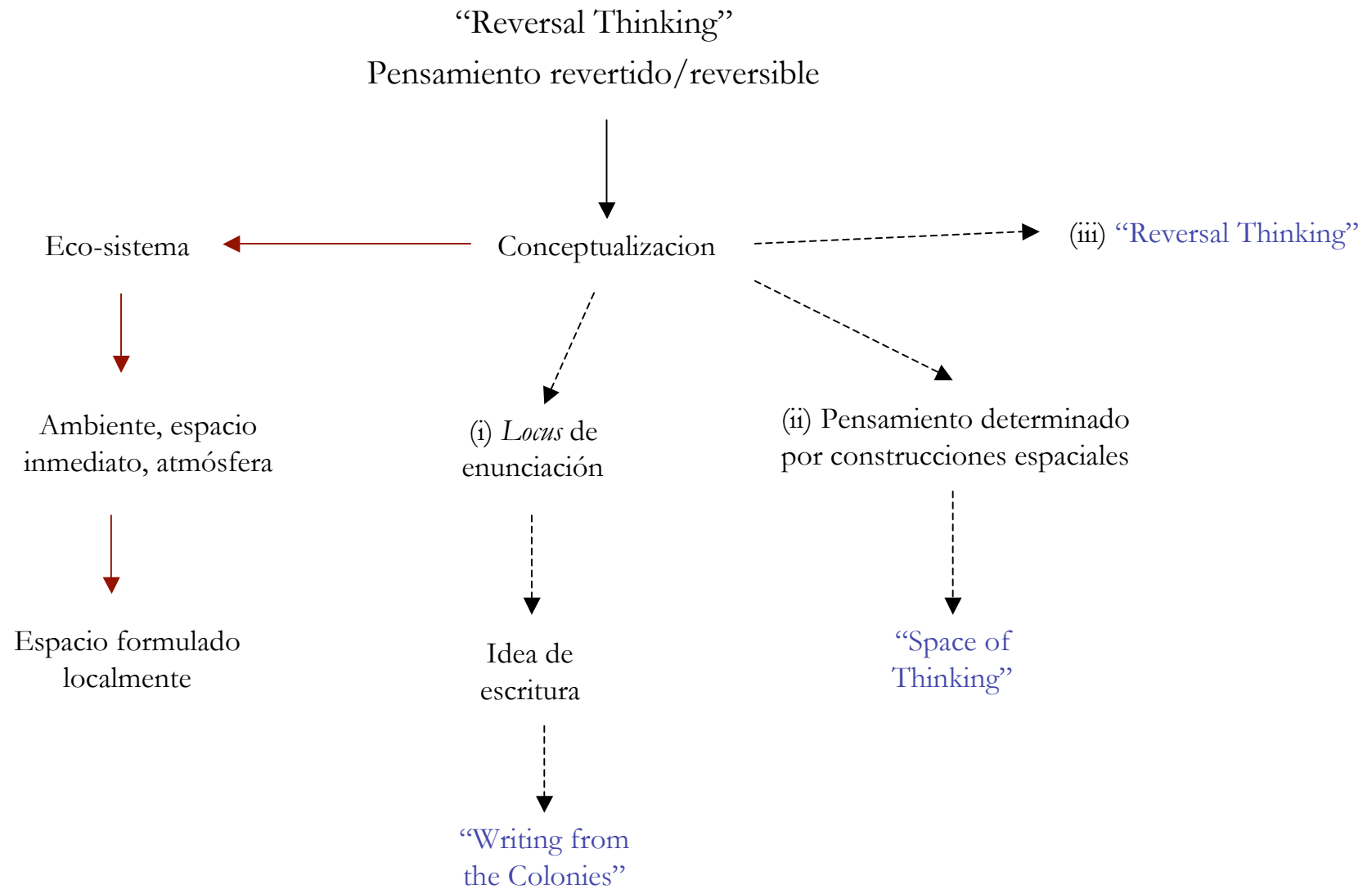


# COMENTARIO INTRODUCTORIO 6

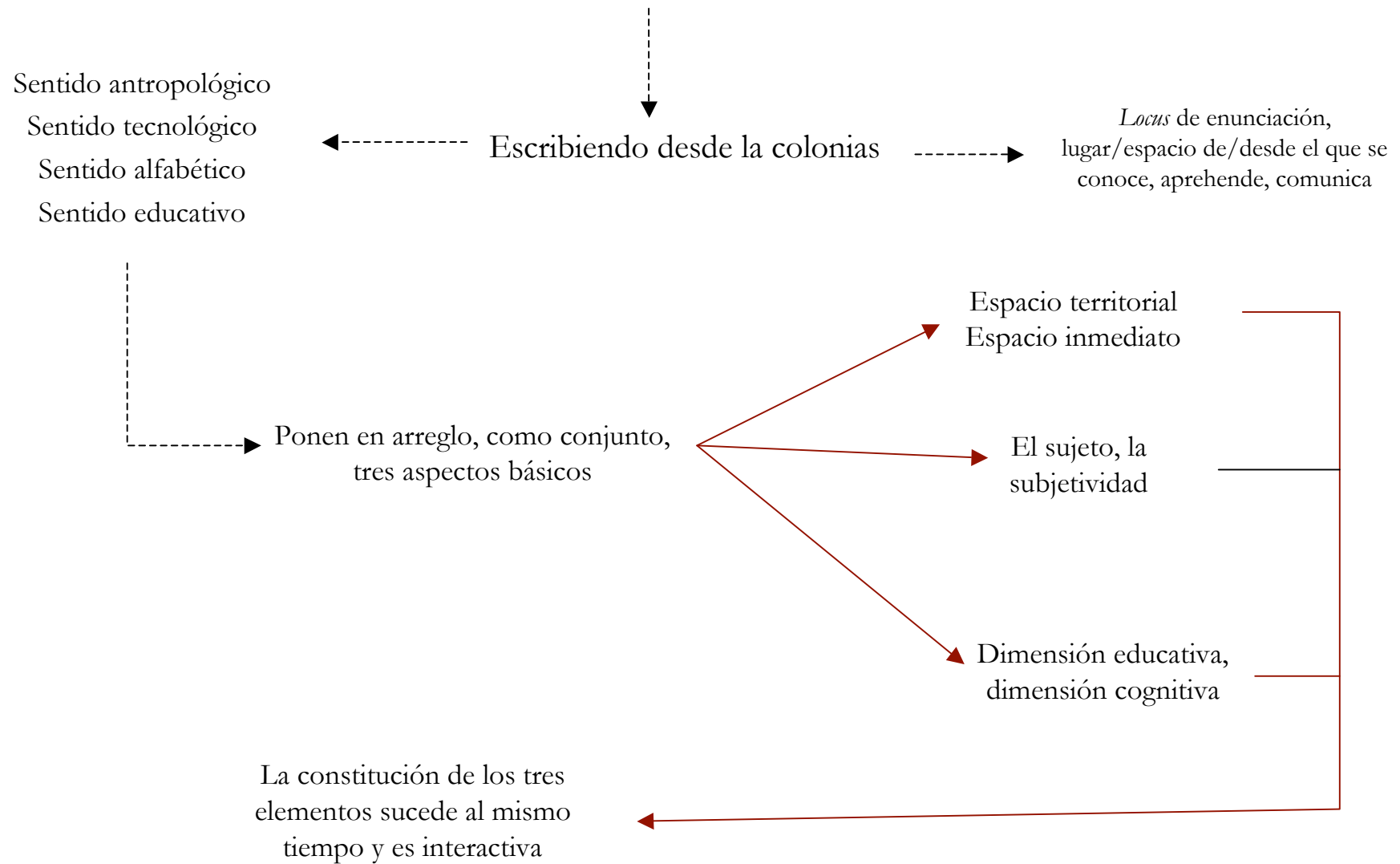
*Geo-Epistemology.*  
*Latin America and the Location of Knowledge (2009)*

Chapter 5: 'Reversal Thinking' (pp. 217-255)

Claudio Canaparo  
Birkbeck College London  
Junio 2011



# (i) "Writing from the Colonies"



### (i) "Writing from the Colonies"

A profound study of the pre-Columbian and pre-Western/European domination of Latin America in terms of ideas and culture is indeed fundamental. The work that has been done already, even when interesting and groundbreaking, is certainly not enough (see for example Brotherston, 1979 and 1992). However, from the local and present point of view, this potential study or studies will have the secondary role of considering the colonial perspective that has dominated the notion of knowledge in Latin America for the past four centuries.

Because it was always considered to an appendix or peripheral part of Europe, 'America' did not enjoy the benefits of the *alterity* ('otredad', otherness) of other colonial regions such as Africa or Asia. Even worse, since the seventeenth century 'Latin America' has also been an appendix of 'North America'. And this *double marginalization* has also become a mark of distinction of all local cultural developments. As we discussed in Chapter 3, in this sense colonialism is less an ideology or a political idea than a way to be located (individuals, objects, institutions) within a particular spatial design or, more precisely, within a particular form of establishing the spatial meaning of what is understood as local.

Therefore, a critical and radical perspective of Latin America's cultural evolution includes a regular consideration of this epistemological situation by which concepts, ideas about knowledge and learning, as well as several definitions of local culture, are determined by formulations about space.

Primera  
marginalización

Segunda  
marginalización

Como característica  
cultural

Situación espacial = arquitectura,  
medio ambiente, localidad

Dimensión epistémica = consideración  
de conceptos, ideas acerca del  
conocimiento y el aprendizaje

## (i) “Writing from the Colonies”

And if we concentrate on ‘writing’ it is not only because of the central role that writing had (i) in the pre-Columbian period (see for example Brotherston, 1995), (ii) within the conquest and (iii) still has in Latin America, but also because (a) writing has been transformed into a less letter-orientated activity (and therefore into getting closer to a sort of pre-Columbian condition, at least in the historiographical sense), and (b) because the notion of authorship has been developed in the Latin American domain to such an extent that it has become a sort of public paradigm of subjectivity. Or, more specifically, what for Western/Europeans is represented by the notion of the individual in the classic Freudian sense, is in Latin America often established less through an ‘inner perspective’ and more through a public and commercial view of what an individual is, which fits with the local development of the concept of authorship.<sup>1</sup>

Escritura en primera  
dimensión

Escritura en segunda  
dimensión

Construcción de la  
individualidad

Orientada hacia un  
espacio público

### (i) "Writing from the Colonies"

0

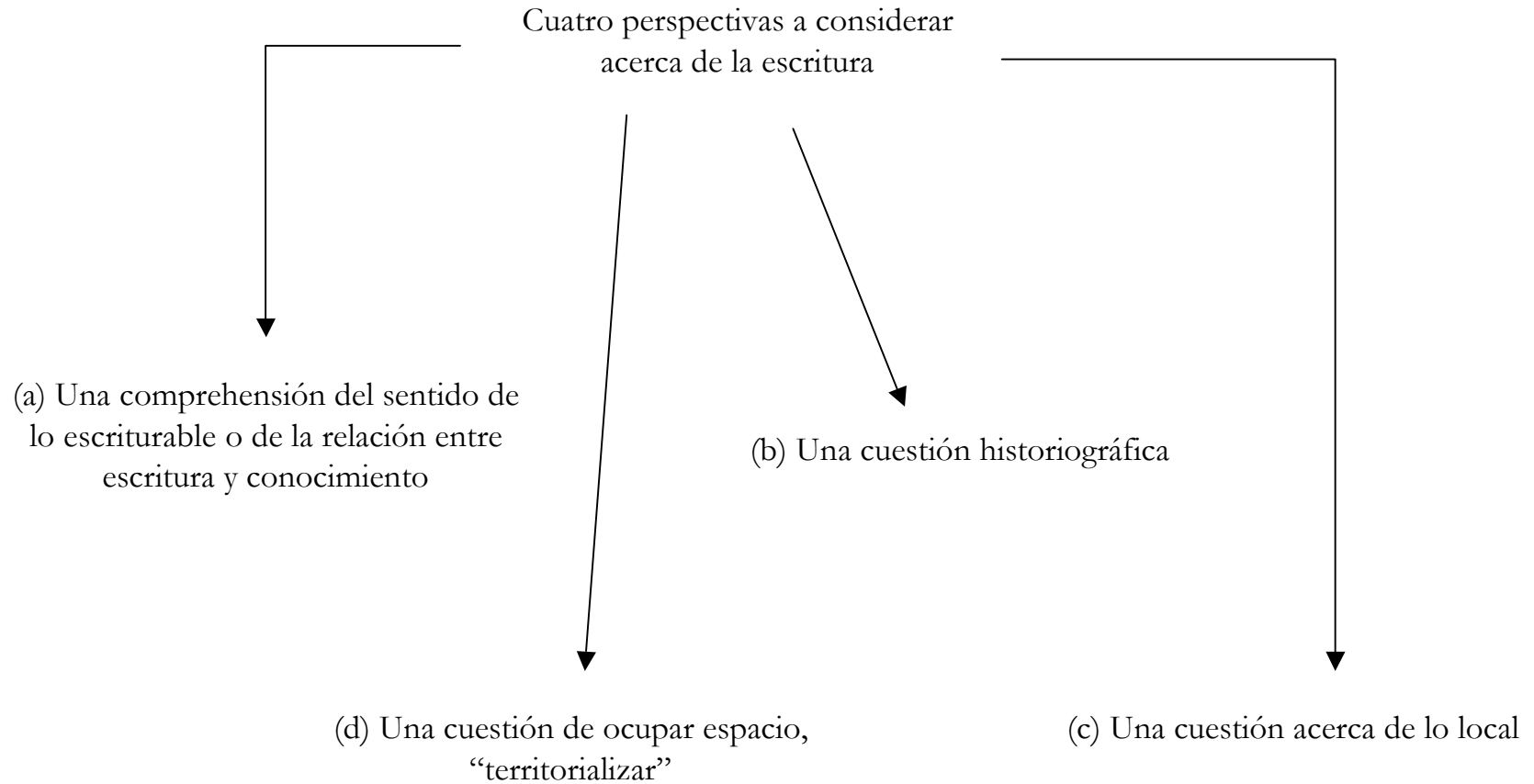
'Writing from the colonies' is not a political stand or an ideological perspective, but a position about knowledge. And less than a position about colonialism itself, it is an attempt to make the 'colonial difference' – as W. Mignolo describes the effect of colonialism within the colonies (see for example Mignolo, 2000a and 2005) – something from which things can be produced, even when criticized. 'Writing from the colonies' is then not a choice but an imposition, like the family relatives we have or the topography of where we were born, something that cannot be erased not only because it is part of what we are as individuals but also because it is there not for today or yesterday, but is a constitutive part of the present notion of culture, time and knowledge. To construct a radical thinking even when we are conscious of this starting point is a crucial part of what we call 'reversal thinking'.

Perspectiva

Significa dos espacios  
significativos, diversos y  
contemporáneos

Conocimiento, imposición  
entendido como aprendizaje, en  
la educación, en la cultura

(i) “Writing from the Colonies”



## (ii) “Space of Thinking”

The space of thinking as understood by us is a domain where *the local* is produced and, no less important, where the local produces objects, artefacts, mechanisms and ideas. Because, whatever colonialism or kind of dominance one might consider, there always exists something that we call *local*. And much of this book was aimed at approaching that sense of *local* and, indeed, all the derivative elements that it generates, such as locality, location, localization, etc. From this perspective the assumption is that the more efficient these objects, artefacts, mechanisms, and ideas are within the immediate environment, the more efficacy (‘eficacidad’) and ‘long life’ (‘larga duración’) they will get outside that immediacy/environment (international, global market). This aspect, as we said before, is made relevant by the fact that, on many occasions, the local efficacy (‘eficacidad’) of some objects, ideas and artefacts is based principally and paradoxically on their circulation outside of what is considered local.

Espacio de pensamiento

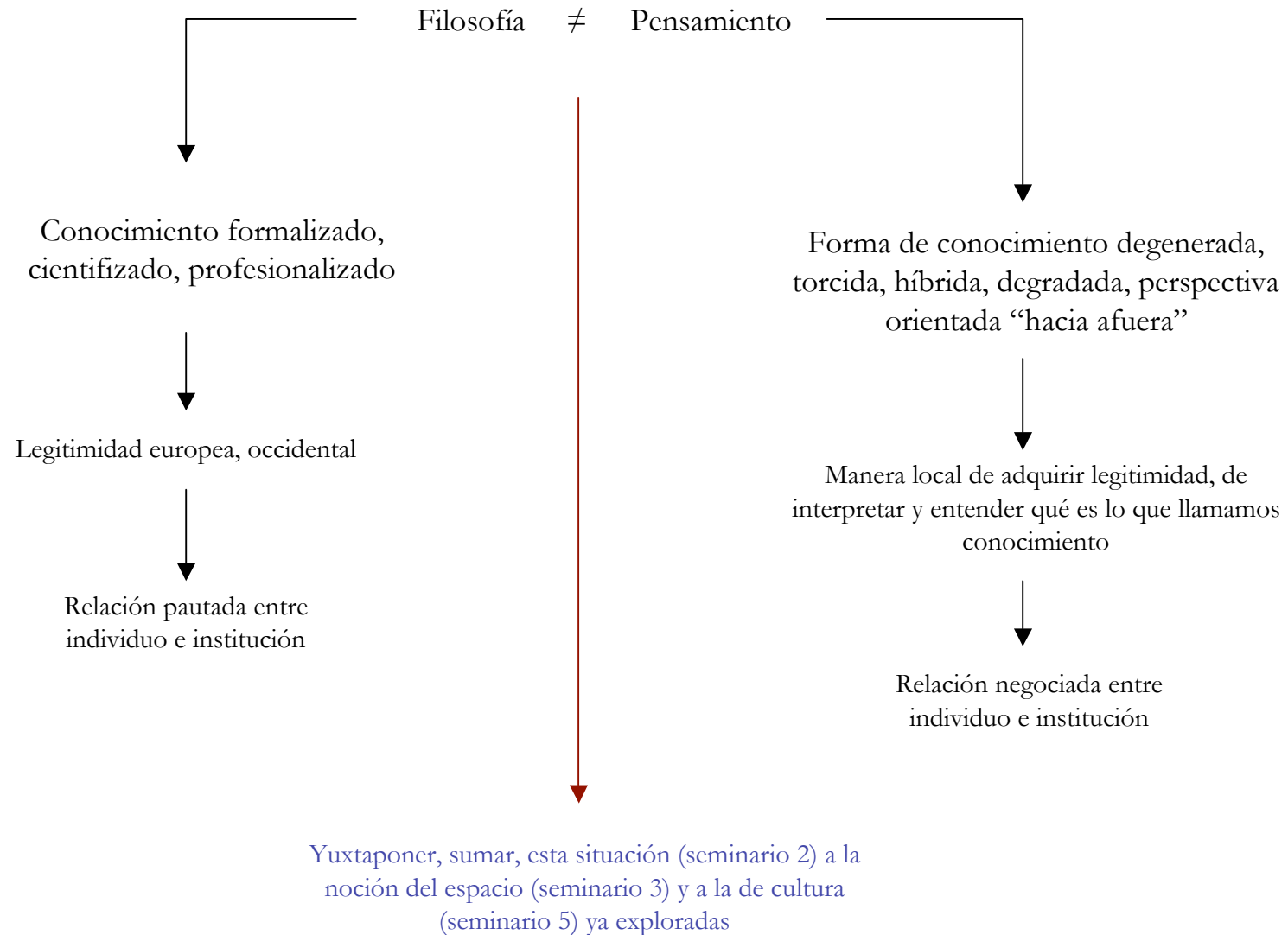
Lo local como constante

Eficacidad de lo inmediato  
en términos espaciales

Eficacia/efectividad a  
partir de la circulación



## (ii) “Space of Thinking”



## (ii) “Space of Thinking”

‘Thinking spatially’ was described as an activity that occupies the space at the same time as it constructs it (see Chapter 1). It was also considered an activity where the borders and limits are constantly being negotiated. Furthermore, the entanglement between a sense of ground and the perspective of thinking spatially is established precisely from the fact that conceiving an environment and defining such an environment are one and the same thing (see Table 1.2). The local transformation/degeneration of philosophy into local thinking is also a crucial epistemic point in the location of knowledge. More precisely, the impossibility of producing ‘philosophy’ within a peripheral context is one of the characteristics of the sense of post-territoriality that permeates the whole local present. Thus, ‘the space of thinking’ is a combination of three elements: (i) a domain regularly established in a borderline environment, (ii) a clear relevance of a visual perspective, and (iii) a construction of an *imaginatio* as a ‘world’ and organization of knowledge (see Table 1.4).

El pensamiento del espacio como método y forma constructivista

El sentido de negociación como constante

Concebir un espacio (en términos de teoría, de percepción) y definirlo es la misma “cosa”

La degeneración de la filosofía tradicional como forma natural (deriva) del pensamiento local –  
Postterritorialidad - Localidad

Los tres aspectos-características del espacio local de pensamiento

## (ii) “Space of Thinking”

### Situación de “doble colonialismo”

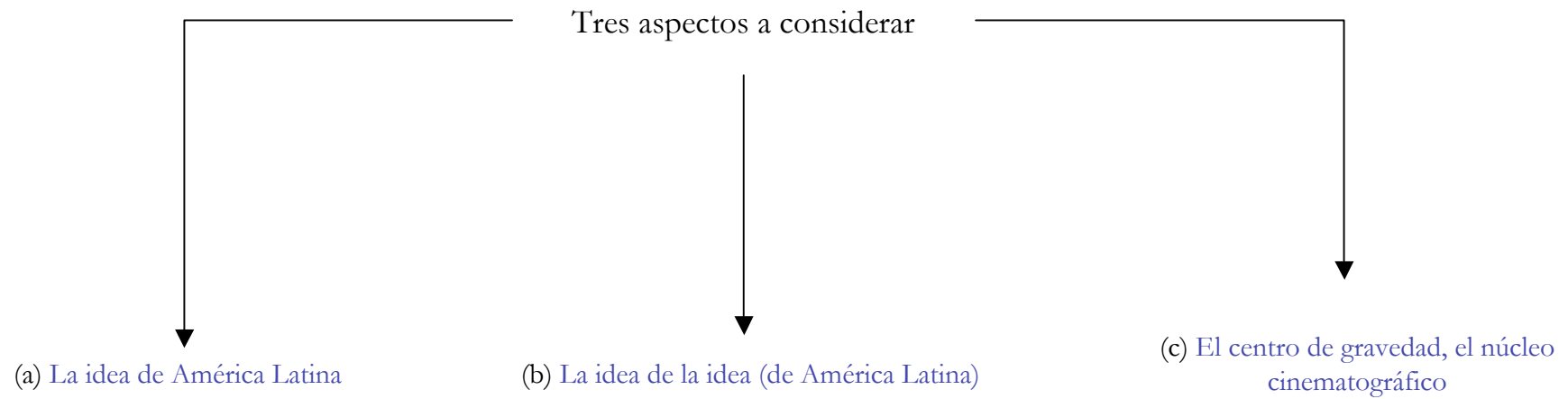
And if the local thinking and the formation of the State are connected it is also because, where an idea of knowledge is concerned it is the situation described above that emerges. The creation of the local State was generated by 2 types of colonialism (‘double colonialism’), one of which came from the Western/European powers and the other one from the local authorities themselves. And so, in this context it is that ‘space of thinking’ or ‘thinking space’ that is considered like the space in its pure manifestation (see Figure 2.5). Authors like Ezequiel Martínez Estrada, who associate culture, knowledge and space, are clear examples of this (see for example Martínez Estrada, 1948 and 1957). And this is how thinking and environment have become naturally associated in local terms.

*Entanglement* entre conocimiento e institución del Estado, en términos de constitución de un espacio del conocer, en un territorio

Dos formas de colonialismo

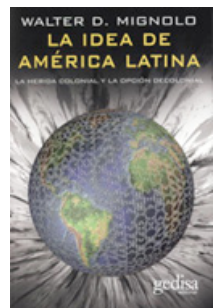
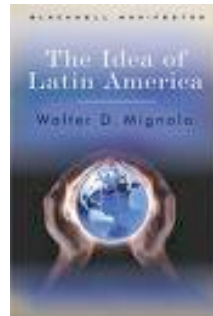
“Pensamiento espacial”  
entendido como equivalente de  
medio ambiente, de atmósfera

## (ii) “Space of Thinking”



## (ii) “Space of Thinking”

### (a) La idea de América Latina



(i) Sentido historiográfico del  
conocer

(ii) Determinación del conocimiento  
en relación al colonialismo

(iii) Determinación de lo local a  
partir del conocimiento

(iv) Evolución conceptual como  
clave epistémica

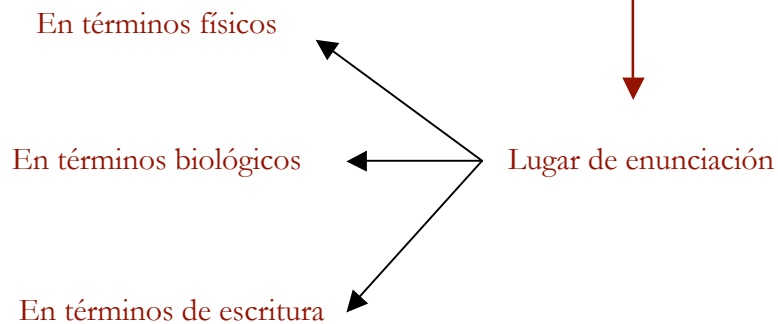
Fuente: Walter D Mignolo. *The Idea of Latin America* (London: Blackwell, 2005); *La idea de América Latina* (México: Gedisa, 2007).

## (ii) “Space of Thinking”

### (a) La idea de América Latina

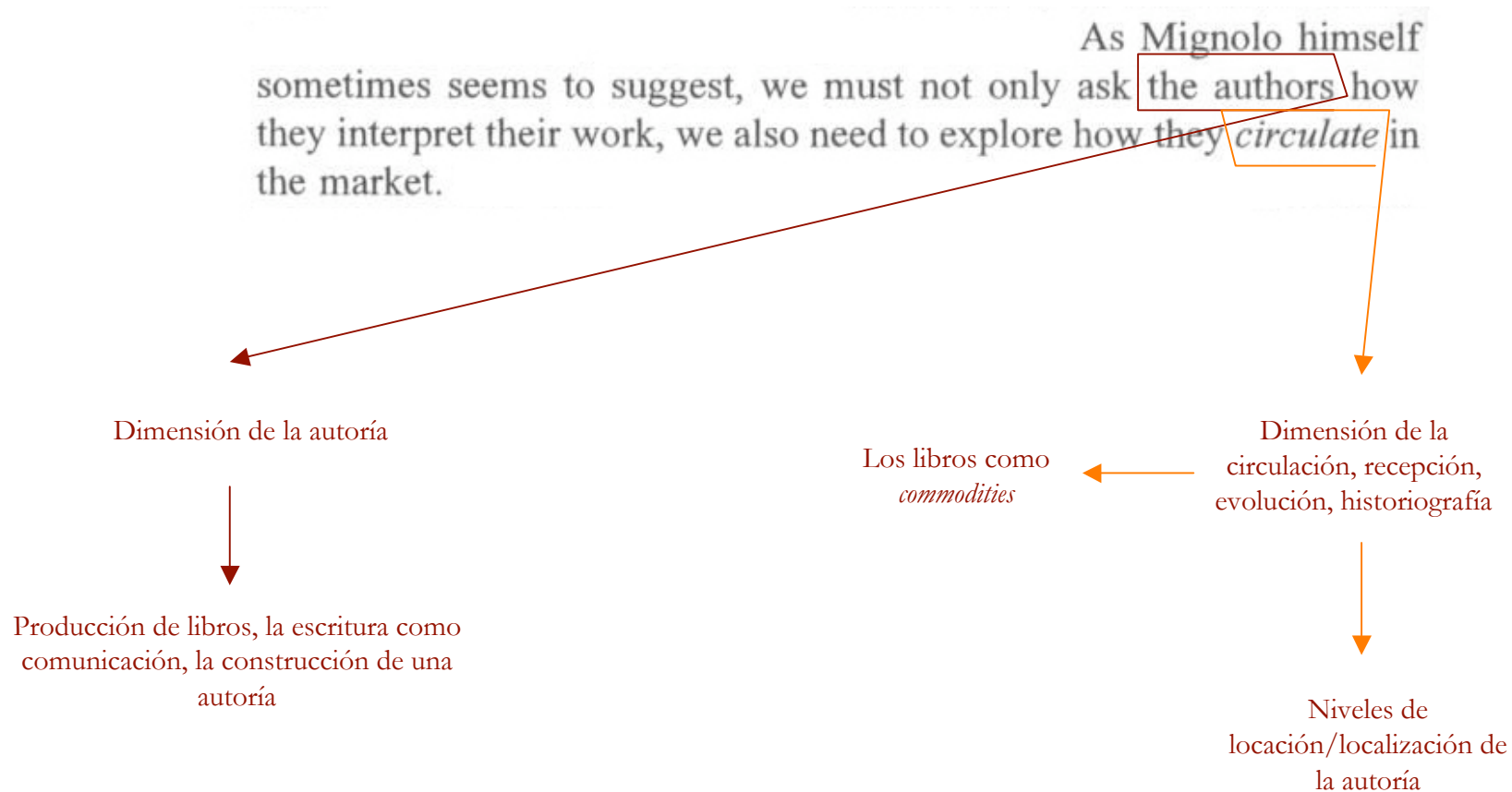
First, the fact that the relevant term of *locus of enunciation* should refer/ be applicable not only historiographically – as is the case in Mignolo’s book (2005) – but also with regard to the present in the sense of ‘culture’ or ‘marché symbolique’, as indicated for example by contemporary Western/European sociologists like Pierre Bourdieu (see for example Bourdieu, 1992).

El presente como simbólico,  
como cultura, como  
dimensión historiográfica



## (ii) “Space of Thinking”

### (a) La idea de América Latina



## (ii) “Space of Thinking”

### (a) La idea de América Latina

it seems evident that we cannot criticize Western/European authors for being Western/European-orientated in their approaches and ideas. We can criticize them, when considering a foreign subject, for not been conscious of the epistemic limitations of their approach. But we cannot assume that their ‘philosophical thinking’ (in Western/European terms) should be social-orientated: philosophers are not religiously committed people and, more precisely, are certainly not ethical individuals by default.

(i) Lo extranjero como relevante

(ii) Perspectiva de distancia, la distancia como categoría

(iii) Lo social como construcción derivada de la percepción/elaboración del espacio y no al revés



## (ii) “Space of Thinking”

### (a) La idea de América Latina

The ‘contenido indígena’ of the arguments deployed by Kusch and others are at no stage generated from a new idea or notion of writing and knowledge as Mignolo claims or, to be more precise, as he is certainly and paradoxically doing on his work. Kusch and others are still discussing historical perspectives and, antagonistically, Western/European conceptual systems (see for example Kusch, 1977). There is an *epistemic gap* between Mignolo’s proposal about knowledge and the rather argumentative dimension of the works of *teoría de la liberación* (‘liberation theory’) – perhaps with the isolated exception of some of Dussel’s writings (see Dussel, 1985) – and those of other authors who have been trying to establish a local autonomous cultural and theoretical point of view (see for example Kaufman, 2007). The fact that Mignolo somehow tries to place/inscribe his work within this tradition of ‘local thinkers’ makes the situation even more evident (see Mignolo, 2000a).

La condición del  
“indigenismo”

La condición del historicismo

La discontinuidad entre las  
perspectivas tradicionales y la  
propuesta con rasgos epistémicos

## (ii) “Space of Thinking”

### (a) La idea de América Latina

The meaning of a concept does not come from the authors that devised/exposed it, even when the author’s biographical account could add many connotations to it. The historiographic entity of some authors should not be confused with the viability of some concepts (see for example Bourdieu, 1984).

La condición conceptual 1

And, just as importantly, as we have already stated (see Chapter 4), a concept should always include its own

La condición conceptual 2

history, situation and evolution if we want to have an accurate culture location and epistemic approach (see Canaparo, 2005: 165 ff.).<sup>9</sup>

The fact that what we call ‘Latin America’ is increasingly something manufactured *outside* the traditional topographical boundaries of what makes the land of Latin America itself is not new and, as Mignolo quite rightly indicates (see Mignolo, 1995 and 2000) and as we have discussed already (see Chapter 1 and Chapter 2), it cannot be dissociated from the way in which Latin America was ‘discovered’ by Western/European people and settled as a colony.

América Latina como concepto  
evolutivo

Is not by discussing/exploring the evolution and development of the idea of Latin America that we will obtain some creativity and freedom from the epistemic and conceptual point of view. It is necessary to go beyond and, in first instance, see how *the idea of the idea* of Latin America works. And this is also what explains the previous discussions about ‘constructivism’ (see Chapter 4) and, in a minor way, the perspective of cybernetics (see Chapters 1 and 2).

Historicismo

Perspectiva epistémica

## (ii) “Space of Thinking”

### (b) La idea de la idea (de América Latina)

What does ‘the idea of the idea of Latin America’ mean? It indicates that what is relevant in relation to the use of ‘Latin America’ is, above all, a conceptual employment. The important aspect of study is not so much a historical account of the idea of Latin America but rather how Latin America became *an idea*. The idea of the idea refers also to a form of analysis where the epistemic aspects are considered as more relevant than other folkloric-orientated elements. And, as part of this approach, the ‘lugar de enunciación’ (locus of enunciation) of the author-analysis becomes part of the analysis itself.

Perspectiva epistémica

El ambiente, al atmósfera inmediata, el lugar de enunciación como condición epistémica de análisis

This in part is the natural realm of Mignolo’s writings and in that sense his work on Dussel and others is very interesting and useful, as since it attempts to construct an intellectual evolution towards this idea of Latin America, which is the first one, at least in cultural terms, since the works of Martínez Estrada and Angel Rama (see Mignolo, 1995, 2000 and 2005).

Puntos de referencia

## (ii) “Space of Thinking”

(b) La idea de la idea (de América Latina)

And this is also why we maintain that the idea of Latin America, more than ever before, is actually connected to academies and corporations such as the universities. Therefore we are no longer dealing with some anthropological sense of culture that produces a meaning of what the idea of Latin America is, but, quite the contrary, that Latin America has become a manufactured perspective that varies and undergoes modifications according to its relation with the media and the production of universities. Thus, in a similar way to what used to happen to some cultural-State orientated Western/European institutions during the nineteenth century, the shift made in North American universities, from colonialism to imperialism, especially within the second half of the twentieth century, has become the new instrument of the cultural and historiographical domination of peripheral areas like Latin America.

Sentido epistémico de lo real, del principio de realidad

Constitución de valores como *commodities*

Reformulación del colonialismo

## (ii) “Space of Thinking”

### (b) La idea de la idea (de América Latina)

For this reason we can only regard suspiciously the views of some academic authors – based mainly in North American universities and institutions – who are trying to transform issues like the so-called ‘latino’ subject/movement into a driving element of the whole idea of Latin America and of what is understood as Latin American space (see for example Grosfoguel/Maldonado-Torres/Saldívar, 2005). Is this academic attempt another form of colonialism/imperialism concerning Latin America? Is this ‘latino’ dimension the future of Latin America as an idea? It is perhaps too early to tell but what is clear for now is that, outside the US academic environment and outside the US territory, the ‘latino’ issue is not as interesting and relevant as some authors would like us to believe (see as before Mignolo, 2005: 95–148). The commercial success of some films, music clips and general literary books inscribed/registered with the ‘rótulo latino’ (latino label) is not enough to confirm this ‘new internal colonialism’ or promising future. The strong media phenomenon that the ‘latino’ issue has become inside/outside the US environment, is still not enough to replace the sense of culture upon which the idea of Latin America has been built in the last 400 years in conflict with Western/European traditions. And this is true, even when some academic and commercial spheres, like literature and music, have been completely over-written by the activities and views of the US market, universities and academics.

Lo “latino” como ejemplo de transcultura en el sentido desarrollado por Ángel Rama

Como se afronta el desarrollo de los valores en términos de *commodities*

Operación historiográfica



## (ii) “Space of Thinking”

### (c) El centro de gravedad, el núcleo cinematográfico

The consideration of cinematography as a natural and current form of reflecting (thinking) about our present, environment and historiographies does not result in a de-legitimization of the activities of writing as discussed here. In fact, quite the opposite, cinematography supposes such activity as a *realm*. And this is where we take stock of the many works done on this subject as our understanding is that the classical perspective of writing (‘la ciudad letrada’, ‘las letras’: Sarmiento, Bello) is not actually hostile or opposed to the graphic, visual and cinematographic views we are presenting, but quite the contrary, they work together and it is difficult to think – at least within the Latin American context – of one without referring to the other. However, what is radically different is the fact that, as already mentioned, this writing/written perspective is interpreted from a social and cultural context that is visually orientated.

Cinematografía como forma de pensamiento. La reformulación de la escritura

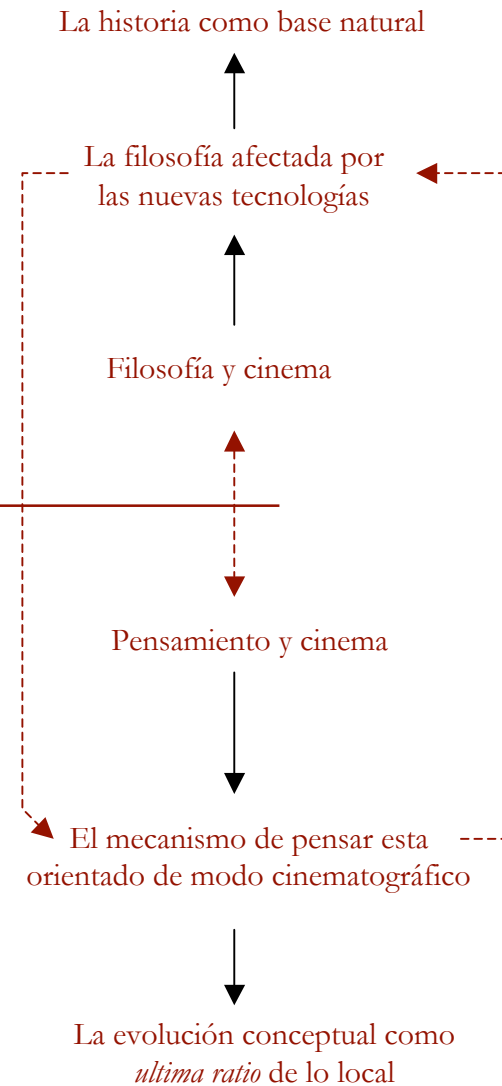
La re-formulación de lo alfabético como principio de lo escriturable

Perspectiva social determinada por lo visual (no por lo histórico, temporal o político-institucional)

## (ii) “Space of Thinking”

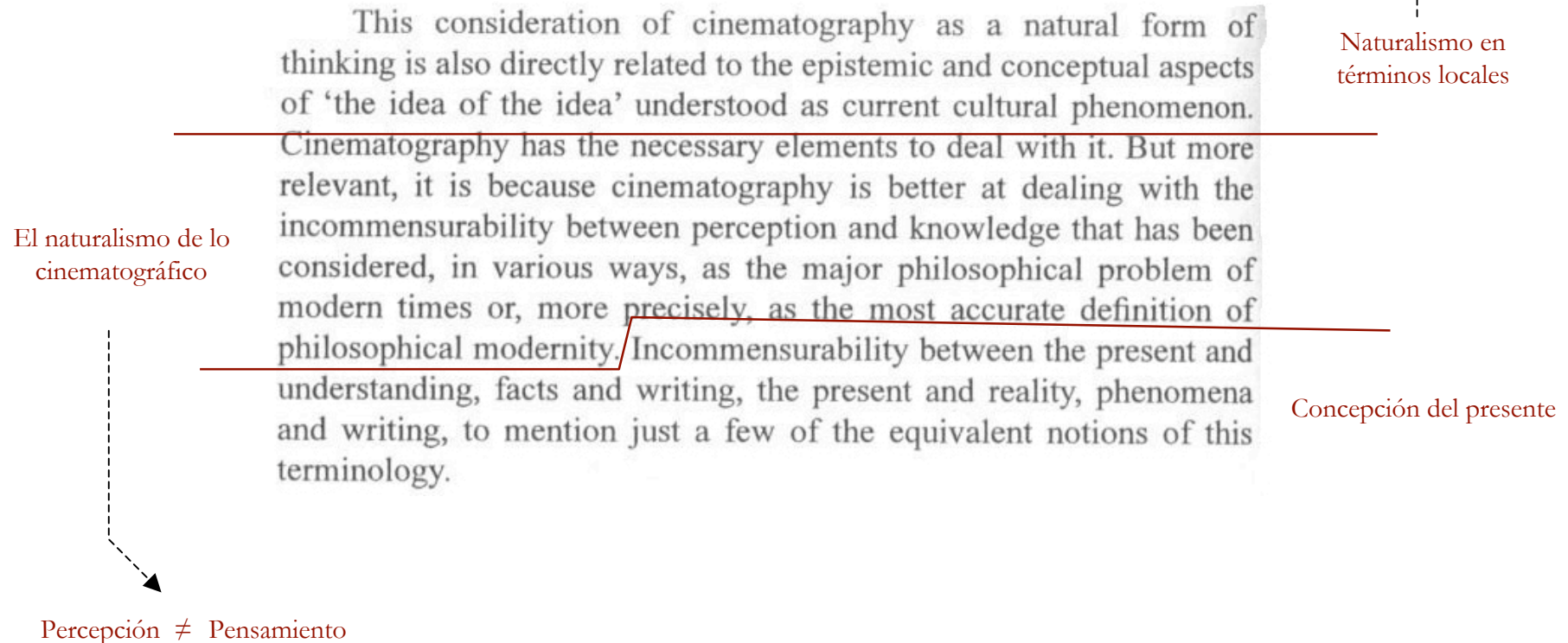
(c) El centro de gravedad, el núcleo cinematográfico

Henri Bergson was probably the first Western/European philosopher to consider the speculative consequences of the development of cinema – at least that is the clear proposal in the classic cinematographic works of Gilles Deleuze (see for example Deleuze, 1983 and 1985). Peripheral areas like Latin America (see Chapters 1 and 2) cannot avoid this general situation, but even more relevant in this regard, the cinematographic mechanism is at the core of the constitution of the modern State and communities in Latin America (see Canaparo, forthcoming: Chapters 7 and 8).



## (ii) “Space of Thinking”

(c) El centro de gravedad, el núcleo cinematográfico





## (ii) “Space of Thinking”

Primer orden

(c) El centro de gravedad, el núcleo cinematográfico

Segundo orden

Cinematography forces the exhibition of objects, people and narrations in such a way that its *second order* dimension is always there in the form of meaning (see for example Foerster 1974 and 2003). The fact, for example, that the simple evolution of an idea (‘Latin America’) cannot simply be considered from the point of view of its content (‘first order’) but must also be considered with regard to how that idea became an idea (‘second order’) is something that the semiotic condition of the cinematography’s visuality covers all the time.

La condición semiótica  
“revertida” como método

And this semiotic condition basically refers to the location of three semantic aspects: (i) a meaning situated at the level of the *content* of the image, (ii) a meaning situated at the level of the *form and collective* elements of that image, and finally, (iii) a meaning located at the axis of the previous meanings with a sense of (a) present, (b) continuity and (c) reality. We call this condition *the cinematographic core* of local knowledge.

Aspecto del  
contenido

Aspecto del  
significado ya  
establecido

Aspecto de la  
forma, del  
conjunto

(a) Presente

(b) Continuidad

(c) Principio de  
realidad, lo real

Fuente: *Geo-Epistemology. Latin America and the Location of Knowledge* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2009), p. 234.

## (ii) “Space of Thinking”

### (c) El centro de gravedad, el núcleo cinematográfico

The cinematographic then, understood as a domain in the circumstances described here, is the finest expression of this space of thinking. And indeed it is the most radical form of questioning of the Western/European culture that has been dominant since the sixteenth century.

Cinematografía como espacio de interrogación crítica (como espacio de pensamiento)

This questioning did not necessarily go entirely as it was planned, but, on the contrary, appeared mainly as a natural and local evolution, modification, and transformation of the Western/European tradition by twisting, distorting and de-naturalizing this tradition itself.

De-generación local (consecuencias en términos de educación y conocimiento)

In this sense cinematography implies that *we do not understand once but many times*. Cinematography as methodology is a constant re-acting process, a scheme that is continually undergoing revision and change. And this is why there is a connection between the thinking (‘pensamiento’) understood as a cinematographic stand and the notion of ‘reversal perspective’ proposed in this book. The sense of *ground* in term of knowledge cannot be sustained, in peripheral areas like Latin America, from an enlightened point of view. Therefore the pretension of a paradigmatic stance is an illusion that goes in line with the ‘internal colonialism’ that was predominant among the ‘founding fathers’ who pursued the local political independence from the Western/European powers. This explains the useless analysis of a Latin America understood in terms of modernity or modernization.

Comprensión como un proceso de muchas etapas, y donde hay conflictos en muchos casos

La ineficacia del iluminismo

La “ilusión interior”

## (ii) “Space of Thinking”

### (c) El centro de gravedad, el núcleo cinematográfico

The cinematographic core, on the other hand, is not a system or a scheme that can be set/placed in a series of theoretical axioms or precepts. As we have discussed previously (see Chapter 4), following Humberto Maturana’s epistemic propositions, we understand the cinematographic core as a *condition of possibility* – which is the reason why we have also discussed the relevance of the notion of *horizon d’attente* (see Chapter 4). Nor is the cinematographic core a reproduction of some recent Western/European philosophical perspectives (see for example Frampton, 2006), for the simple reason that such ‘reproduction’ cannot be achieved due to the financial and economic conditions of peripheral areas. But also because cinematography today is less an intellectual outcome of Western/European colonialism, but rather a product related to technology, market conditions and media situations, that is, a reality – or a sense of reality, to be more precise – present in any corner of the planet that can be assumed or understood as an existing space. And this is the profound root of cinematography in our present every day life: space can only be defined – and thereby *exist*, as we have argued in these pages – in relation to the cinematographic principles as explored here.

Cinematografía como condición de posibilidad. El *horizonte de espera* como categoría básica

Imposibilidad de reproducción de lo ajeno, de lo distante, en términos de realidad o veracidad

Dimensión tecnológica

Espacio, ambiente, atmósfera definidos a partir del principio cinematográfico

### (iii) “Reversal Thinking” (“Reversal Perspective”)

One of the main problematic issues of recent local theories about Latin America, especially during the twentieth century, has been the fact that the majority of them based their *legitimacy* on (i) a political promise, (ii) a counterpoint to what is understood as Western/European culture/tradition, or (iii) the ideal and isolated condition of cultural production. The ‘reversal perspective’ tries to avoid these conditions of existence right from the beginning and, even more, it attempts to go in the opposite direction by embracing all the existing meanings and interpretations of the past without questioning their legitimacy but looking closely at their epistemic stand. The ‘reversal perspective’ is interested in the production of ‘becoming’ (understood as present), in the status and content of the *horizon d’attente*, but not in the polemics regarding the historiography’s legitimacy or in the delimitation of the academic or editorial communities.

Tradición  
teórica local

Ignora la cuestión de  
la legitimidad

El presente como forma de la  
espera/expectativa, una construcción  
en torno a un espacio de experiencia



### (iii) “Reversal Thinking” (“Reversal Perspective”)

‘Reversal thinking’ then, as proposed here, is a way not to avoid the consequences of Western/European dominance but, on the contrary, to assume them and to start what we will like to call its open manipulation. And by manipulation we understand not only the fact that we *use* Western/European authors and/or ideas but also that we attach to them a different legitimacy or functionality to the one generated in their original context. This is the great *epistemic difference* that very few authors have been capable of recognizing or paying the attention that it deserves.<sup>10</sup> The question or problem is not whether we consider a Western/European heritage or not, because the possibility implied in such a question is denied right from the start since we cannot ignore that foundational/basic tradition and start from zero. A more pertinent question would be to question/modify the relationship that such a tradition has with its own context of production. And obviously another pertinent question would be to see how it works in relation to local space. We also call this the ‘reversal perspective’.

La manipulación  
“comprometida”

Tergiversar teorías y  
orientaciones

La diferencia  
epistémica

Lo utópico como ontología clásica

Modificar la concepción del presente  
o en relación con el presente

### (iii) “Reversal Thinking” (“Reversal Perspective”)

The long cultural and intellectual ‘inferiority complex’ – one of the consequences of colonialism – that the local communities suffer is more related to their inability to do something with the cultural heritage of colonialism, than to finding some kind of miraculous *zero degree* of local culture and politics.

The location of knowledge is then, from this viewpoint, less a proof of potential analytical and informational capabilities and more a simple and immediate way of defining ‘what is there’ (question of localization), ‘what its meaning is’ (question of understanding) and ‘what we are going to do with it’ (question of knowledge). Thus ‘reversal thinking’ should be fully understood as a present form: it is not an attempt to go back in time or in cultural evolution but a pragmatic assumption of *what is there* (culture, historiography, tradition, foreignness) *and here* (territory, language, market, locality). We believe that the proposed ‘culture of the accident’ is not only an interpretation tool but also something that fits with the conditions of the pragmatic requirements of ‘reversal thinking’.

La noción local  
de empiria

Localización del  
conocimiento compuesta  
por tres elementos

Cultura del  
accidente

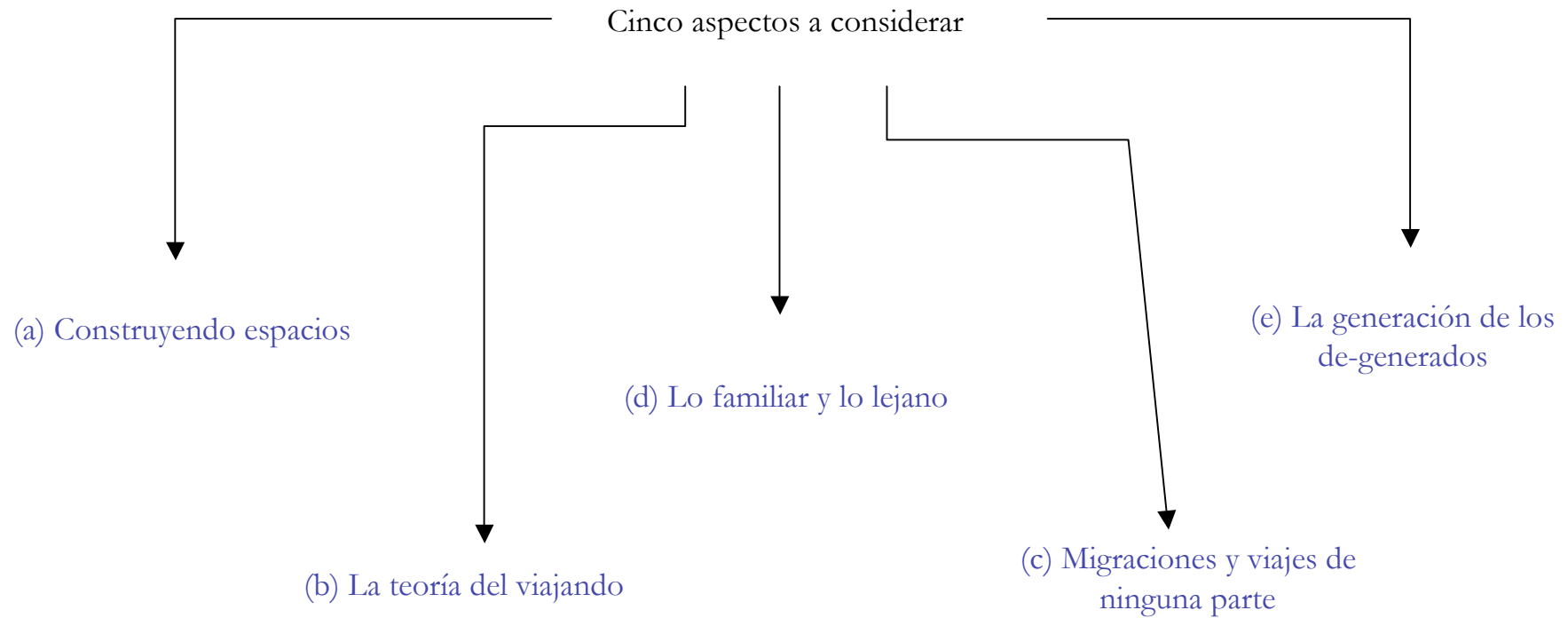
Primer  
elemento

Tercer  
elemento

Segundo  
elemento

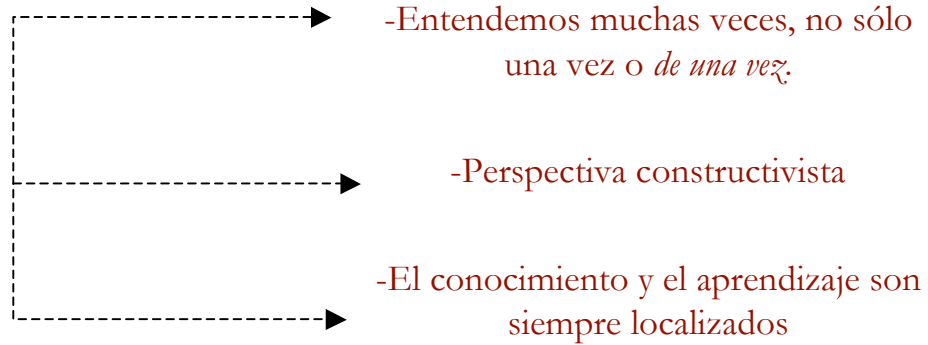
### (iii) “Reversal Thinking” (“Reversal Perspective”)

La perspectiva reversible,  
pensamiento revertido/reversible



(iii) “Reversal Thinking” (“Reversal Perspective”)

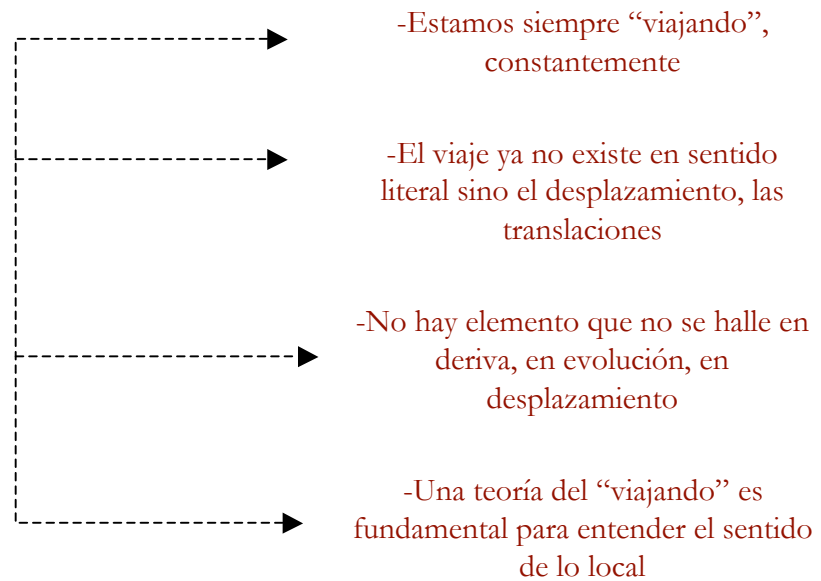
(a) Construyendo espacios





### (iii) “Reversal Thinking” (“Reversal Perspective”)

(b) La teoría del viajando



### (iii) “Reversal Thinking” (“Reversal Perspective”)

#### (b) La teoría del viajando

Las cuatro regiones  
de América Latina

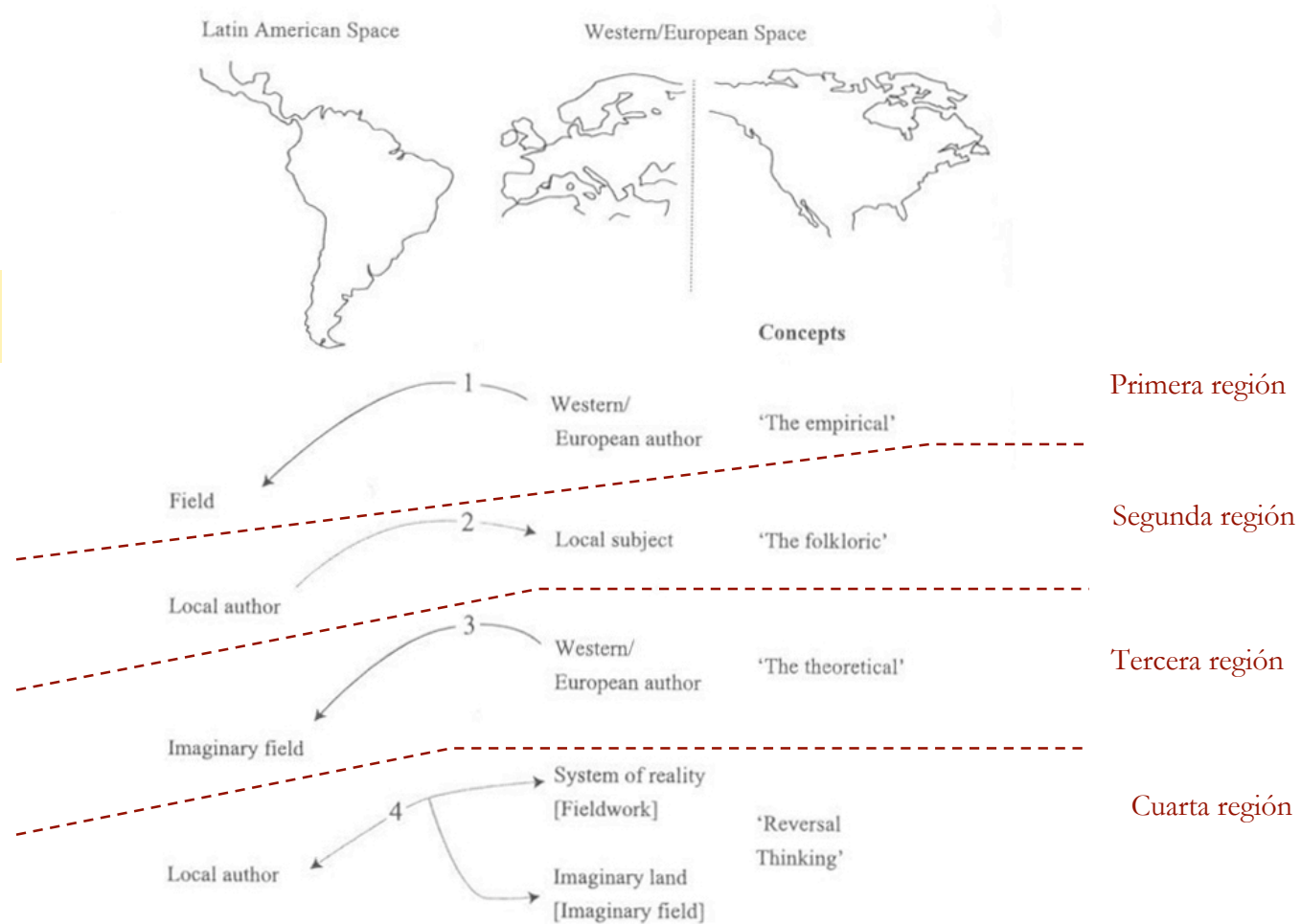


FIGURE 5.1. The 'reversal perspective' in terms of space and authorship.

### (iii) “Reversal Perspective”

#### (b) La teoría del viajando

Considering the forms of space discussed in Chapter 4 (see Table 4.1) and then following the evolution outlined in Figure 5.1, we can establish four different definitions of Latin America as a space

Cuatro definiciones  
básicas de América Latina

*First definition.* Latin America appears as a ‘field’, as a place of research for Western/European authors. This is the first trip/journey where the ideas of world, newness, taxonomy, and exploration prevail – it is a trip/journey to an empirical domain. The form of space that prevails here is that of *place* (‘lugar’), a basic form of ground.

Definición  
como lugar

*Second definition.* Latin America appears as ‘local subject’ – considered and used also by local authors – but established for Western/European authors and parameters. This is the second trip/journey where Latin America is constructed as a unity and obtains the status of reality. For the same reason this is where the folkloric dimension emerges as the purest expression of what is considered as local. As a complement of the previous definition, the space that prevails here is that of a *place-world* (‘ubicación’), which initially also acts as a basic form of ground.

Definición como  
lugar-mundo, lugar-  
en-el-mundo, lugar-  
de-mundo

### (iii) “Reversal Perspective”

#### (b) La teoría del viajando

*Third definition.* Latin America became an imaginary field for Western/European authors at the same time as the idea of ‘autonomy’ from Western/European traditions appeared locally. And this ‘autonomy’ from the traditional powers was first expressed in a theoretical form (political ideas, literary ideas, artistic ideas). The idea of *site* (‘localidad’, ‘sitio’) is the form of space that corresponds to this understanding of Latin America, which normally operates as a cultural ground.

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Definición como  
localidad, sitio

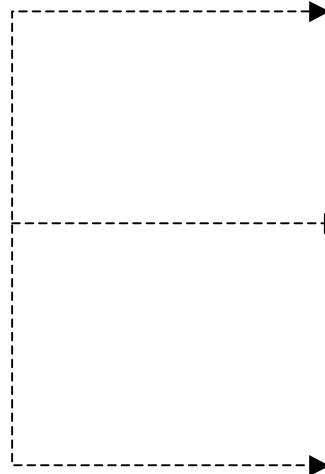
*Fourth definition.* Local authors have not exhibited or postulated any notion of Latin America but have started to exercise/use a particular analytical perspective that implied the existence of Latin America as a concept and *épistème*. Thus Western/European space becomes a ‘field’ for these local authors and later an imaginary field too. This is when the reversal trips/journeys start: Latin America is a trip/journey to Europe and also, no less significantly, a return trip/journey back. These movements can be repeated many times. Authors and situations have started to work under this ‘reversal’ mechanism: the ‘reversal thinking’ becomes a local methodology. In terms of space, this version of Latin America has two forms: one being ‘*milieu*’ (surroundings, ‘periferia inmediata’, community) and the other being *environment* (atmosphere, weather, forecast), which can be situated respectively as cultural ground or epistemological ground.

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Definición como (i) medio,  
periferia inmediata, y como (ii)  
atmósfera, “tiempo”,  
“pronóstico”

### (iii) “Reversal Thinking” (“Reversal Perspective”)

(c) Migraciones y viajes de  
ninguna parte



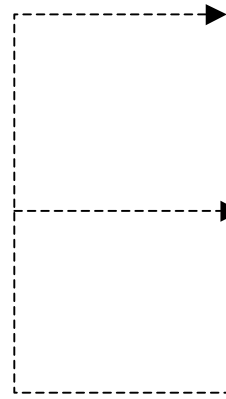
-Estamos siempre entre lo  
considerado como apropiado y  
aquello que entendemos como  
extraño, extranjero, no nuestro

-El presente es una forma de  
“ahora” desdoblada, esquizofrénica

-Estamos forzados a  
constantemente tener presente una  
negociación de significados con un  
*grado cero* de nuestro medio  
ambiente

(iii) “Reversal Thinking” (“Reversal Perspective”)

(d) Lo familiar y lo lejano



-El ser (la subjetividad adjetivada) es siempre estar en alguna otra parte

-El presente es una forma de “ahora” desdoblada, esquizofrénica

-El ambiente, en cuanto atmósfera, es constituido por ambos aspectos, el familiar y el lejano

### (iii) “Reversal Perspective”

#### (d) Lo familiar y lo lejano

And together with this notion of travelling and migratory condition, there is another constant and regular presence in the formation of an idea of Latin America: the question of what is considered as ‘close’ (familiar) and what is ‘far away’ (non-familiar). Strictly speaking we should talk about ‘familiaridad y lejanía’, that is, a sort of mechanism that both defines our space and its elements, defines what is strange, alien and distant from our space. However, this distinction is not exclusive as one aspect is connected to the other, as shown in Figure 5.2. And it is this *dependence* on the familiar and what is far away – and vice versa – that we call ‘environment’.

Antropología de lo fenoménico,  
de la eventualidad

“Ambiente”/ “Medio  
ambiente”

The difficulties that many Latin American communities have with regard to the status of what is far away (‘lejano’, ‘distancia’, ‘extranjero’), as we mentioned already (see Chapter 1 and Chapter 2), cannot be detached from this *constitutive element* of the local. The inability to define the meaning of strange (‘extraño’) or foreign (‘extranjero’) in a particular moment, as Alejandro Kaufman (1955–) (2007) has already pointed out, reinforces the relevance of the mechanism of a *horizon d’attente* (see Chapter 4) as the main domain in determining what is considered as *legitimate* local knowledge.<sup>13</sup>

La constitución de  
lo local

El *horizonte de espera*  
como categoría

(iii) “Reversal Thinking” (“Reversal Perspective”)

(d) Lo familiar y lo lejano

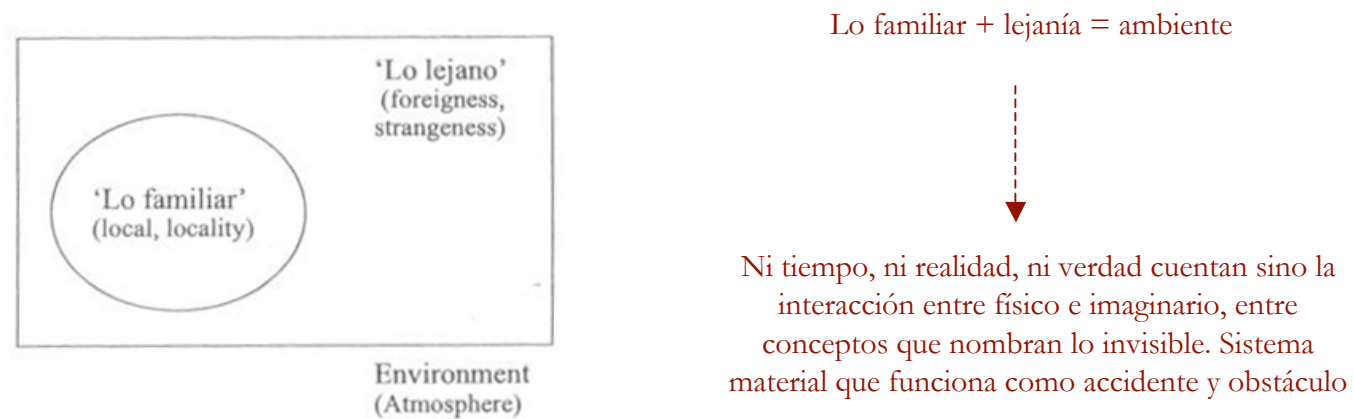


FIGURE 5.2. The idea of Latin America expressed as environment.



(iii) “Reversal Thinking” (“Reversal Perspective”)

(d) Lo familiar y lo lejano

As we stated in Chapter 4, environment was conceived/envisaged as a form of space, or more precisely, as the space where the epistemic ground is set (see Table 4.1). Environment in this sense can be understood as *atmosphere*, which is expressed/conceived as local (familiar) and/or foreign (distant, far away). The notions of ‘ambiente’, ‘escenario’ and ‘amueblamiento’ (see Table 2.3) – along with all the expressions connected to them – are also related to this sense of environment as defined by the familiar and the distant.

Medio ambiente como combinación de lo cercano y lo lejano = *ground* epistémico

Ambiente como atmósfera, como espacio totalizante con elementos variables acerca de los cuales se puede especular

Ambiente, es escenario y amueblamiento, como los tres aspectos básicos del espacio inmediato

### (iii) “Reversal Thinking” (“Reversal Perspective”)

#### (e) La generación de los de-generados

Latin America as a space, as a concept and domain, does not generate changes by means of revolutions but by *degradation*. The present questioning of the Western/European tradition, contrary to what many specialists affirm (see for example Hardt/Negri, 2000; and Wallerstein, 2004), is not a result of any particular political, ideological or intellectual operation or strategy. It is a simple and natural local evolution – in the Maturana sense of the term (see Maturana, 1995b) – that degrades and degenerates the colonial paradigm imposed by Western/European tradition. Although colonialism can be explained in historiographical terms by using notions of civilization, power and capitalism, those explanations are only a remotely connected with the construction of the actual present. And, paradoxically, the actual questioning of these adverse colonial conditions, has less to do with some critical ideology or historical understanding, and much more to do with a local system that is degraded and has degenerated to the point of not return.

El cambio como *degradación*

Evolución en términos locales

Construcción del presente como *deriva* constante del colonialismo

(iii) “Reversal Thinking” (“Reversal Perspective”)

(e) La generación de los de-generados

And this degradation is what, in other terms and following Maturana’s work, can also be called ‘deriva’ – the ‘deriva’ being as *natural* as any cultural and intellectual element can be, that is, irreversible and evolutionary (Maturana, 1995a and 1995b). This ‘evolutionism’ – culturally, economically, physically – should be considered not by its virtues but by the determinations/results that it produces/generates; and the irreversible aspect should be understood as one of the main elements that compose and determine our actual sense of present. As indicated before, the concepts exist and act independently of the individual will.

La deriva como degeneración/  
degradación

Evolucionismo que afecta  
a todo el espacio local

### (iii) “Reversal Thinking” (“Reversal Perspective”)

#### (e) La generación de los de-generados

We should be concerned more about the understanding of this degradation than about any other ideology, power or army. This condition of *natural degradation* is where one finds the possibilities for ‘reversal thinking’. As A. Kaufman, for example, states:

La nuestra es una cultura desde hace mucho tiempo que no puede pensar la idea de anomalía, accidente, excepción, interferencia; esas nociones no son compartibles con nuestra realidad. En cualquier caso hay una catástrofe, absoluta, apocalíptica, ‘todo está mal’. [...] El conocimiento, todo el conocimiento, filosófico, literario, universitario, en la vida moderna está ligado a la guerra. Eso no lo podemos pensar en Argentina. Entonces no podemos hacer la guerra. (Kaufman, 2007: 110 and 117)

Exploración de la degradación como  
forma de reflexión básica

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‘Reversal thinking’ tries to overcome these limits of understanding and thereby offer new perspectives on the definition of knowledge. The proposal for the understanding of the local idea of literature, for example, that Julio Ortega made in *Transatlantic Translations* (2006), agrees implicitly with Kaufman’s diagnosis and contributes to the direction that we are proposing to take with ‘reversal thinking’.

El conocimiento es una  
comprensión de los límites

### (iii) “Reversal Thinking” (“Reversal Perspective”)

#### (e) La generación de los de-generados

Elemento cotidiano

Furthermore, in this general context it is also possible to refer to a sort of *damaged language* to explain the way in which the elements involved in Latin America as space/as a form of space are produced. Therefore the ‘reversal perspective’ is not trying to do a ‘better’ analysis than Western/European authors or to ‘perform’ in relation to a particular subject or matter. This is the crucial point: the ‘reversal perspective’ assumed a *jump* in the dimension of language, that is, the refusal to implicitly assume the notion of universal language or a universal conceptual system (‘science’, ‘Spanish’, etc.). And of course this rejection should work in two ways: (i) in the same way that any universal language is rejected in relation to Western/European traditions, (ii) equally any attempt to establish universal ideas about Latin America, as some authors still do (see for example Galeano, 1997 and 2001), should be avoided for exactly the same reason: epistemic simplification. This is why it is sometimes quite difficult to discuss Latin America as a concept, because there is a long tradition where universalism, in philosophical and linguistic terms, was confused with the defence of some sort of local identity. As already mentioned (Chapter 3), that was another *turn* in the Western/European colonialism implemented at a local level.

El fin de los universales

La ausencia de todo espacio genérico

Establecer lo conceptual sin universalismos. El *giro cognitivo* a nivel local



(iii) “Reversal Thinking” (“Reversal Perspective”)

(e) La generación de los de-generados

The universal assumptions, within the Western/European tradition, are no longer operational. The Western/European framework (enlightenment, modernity, etc.) has not disappeared but its *heuristic power* has another status. Instead of operating as a contemporary sociological condition and/or conceptual category it has become a sort of historical phenomenon or, even worse, a kind of historicism that affects all intellectual activity. This is also why the ‘reversal perspective’ is not simply about interpretations or finding hermeneutic holes in European-generated theories, but it is about thinking spatially, as we have already stated in Chapter I. And this is also why, instead of focusing on ‘being’ (‘ser y tiempo’, ‘temporalidad’), we should focus on that which does not include ‘time’ as a relevant and constitutive characteristic or category of understanding, such as, the notion of *cosa* that we presented

El conocer como  
herramienta de eficacia

El historicismo como  
enfermedad colonial

El pensamiento del espacio  
como alternativa

Como categoría, como evento  
especulativo *ab initio*



### (iii) “Reversal Thinking” (“Reversal Perspective”)

#### (e) La generación de los de-generados

Finally, why should the reader turn his/her attention to a hypothetical idea of ‘reversal thinking’ when other more tested critical ideas already have their own historiography in relation to the concept of Latin America? The point is not to abandon those useful sets of ideas, like the ‘theology of liberation’ or the perspective of ‘border thinking’, but to examine them under the light of two conditions: first, to look at them *from the other side* or create another side for them *another side* (see Figure 5.1, and its respective comments); second, to interpret them from a perspective where the boundaries of what is considered as social

Primera aproximación empírica

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no longer exist.<sup>14</sup> If these two perspectives are implemented, we can improve a set of ideas like the ‘theology of liberation’. With the first action those sets of ideas will become more connected to the present and/or to the construction of what we understand as present, while with the second action the sets of ideas will be able to face the increasingly sophisticated and non-visible dimension of colonialism in a much more efficient way.

Segunda aproximación empírica

### (iii) “Reversal Thinking” (“Reversal Perspective”)

#### (e) La generación de los de-generados

We are not so much degenerated by choice as degraded/corrupted by circumstances that are outside of our control and, in some cases, outside our immediate understanding. [Reversal thinking] is a perspective that acknowledges this condition and is used as a base and starting point. Conspiracy theories about history and social victimization have ruined many opportunities for effective knowledge within Latin America. Moreover, they have prevented the construction of a credible and efficient sense of locality. It would no doubt be cool and trendy to consider ourselves in a libertarian position regarding Western/European colonialism, but this statement of reference – or any other – will be useless if it does not go together with a conceptual ground that not only endeavours to name what is considered as ‘familiar’ but also, and in many cases even more importantly, to establish/determine what is understood as ‘non-familiar’.

La determinación de lo heredado

“Reversal Thinking” como  
herramienta hacia lo heredado

Necesidad de un *piso* (nivel cero)  
conceptual