

**EL NORTE *TAMPOCO* EXISTE: FIRST-AND-THIRD-WORLD AS SHOW  
(ESSAYS ON THE EPISTEMOLOGY OF THE SPECTACLE FROM GUY DEBORD,  
SANTIAGO ÁLVAREZ, GREGORY NAVA AND ARTHUR TUOTO, 1965-2016)**

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**ABSTRACT**

The history of United States – Latin America relations has been dominated by discourses of development since the earliest stages of independent nationhood. In the twentieth century, these discourses found an epistemological anchoring in the geopolitical concepts of First World and Third World well past the Cold War Era, as well as in the related notions of Empire and Neo-Colony in more recent postcolonial studies. As cultural concepts, these binary categories exceed the economic substrate to which they claim reference. This dissertation examines this excess as a function of spectacular media and focuses on the degree to which these categories (which regulate crucial aspects of the mutual U.S. – Latin American imagination) may constitute compromised epistemological dogmas firmly governed by the very capitalist status quo that they attempt to counter.

In order to develop a theorization of the textual forces at work in the formation of these cultural concepts of First and Third World, this dissertation examines the work of Cuban revolutionary filmmaker Santiago Álvarez in dialogue with an update of Guy Debord's theories on the spectacle, the *dérive*, and psychogeography. Together with critical considerations of theories of space-time, modernity and postmodernity, as well as of the

nation-state epistemological order, it formulates a critique of the development discourses, called here “demarcational critique.” This model is also put into conversation with a key theoretical work on the topic (John P. Leary’s *A Cultural History of Underdevelopment*), a fictional text (Gregory Nava’s *El Norte*), and an experimental film of crucial meta-reflective value (Arthur Tuoto’s *Não Me Fale Sobre Recomeços*).

Through an exploration that seeks to blur the line between theoretical and fictional texts, this dissertation concludes that the development discourse, and its main subsidiary notions of First and Third World, generally studied as purely economic categories, possess a spectacular dimension, and that the analysis of this dimension must involve cultural studies. It further highlights the problematic nature of those notions in relation to a postcolonial project by examining their Eurocentric, moralizing, and racialized nature. Finally, this dissertation proposes and demonstrates an alternative, non-national model for postcolonial discourse.