

Dependency Theory and the Aesthetics of Contrast in Fernando Solanas's *La hora de los hornos* and *Memoria del saqueo*

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This paper is a comparative analysis of two key documentaries by Fernando Solanas: *La hora de los hornos* / *The Hour of the Furnaces* (1966–68) and *Memoria del saqueo* / *Social Genocide* (2003). It argues that Solanas produces documentaries when the representative link that ties the political representatives to the represented (the people) is suspended or breaks down, as experienced during the times of the proscription of Peronism (1955–73) and in the more recent crisis of representation in Argentine institutional politics (1989–2001). The comparison follows two axes: political arguments and the aesthetics of contrast. Regarding the first criterion, the paper highlights the current persistence, in Solanas's political argumentation, of externalist-mechanistic versions of dependency theory of the late 1960s and early 1970s. In relation to the aesthetics of contrast, it analyses the stark oppositions in Solanas's documentaries as a visual rhetoric which can be read as an essentialist false-bottom economy that opposes 'appearance' to 'reality'. The article concludes that these political and aesthetic polarizations are essentializing and literalizing discursive strategies that denounce the excesses of political representation from an unmediated and transparent site of full popular presence. Within such strategies, there is no room for the constitutive opacity intrinsic to representation and articulatory politics.

Lines of continuity can be established in the political argumentation and aesthetics of the documentary production of Fernando Solanas, arguably the best-known Argentine filmmaker, from his seminal documentary production *La hora de los hornos* to his recent return to the genre after a break of nearly forty years of fiction film production. *Memoria del saqueo* (2003) is the first of a series of five documentaries that he has been producing on the on-going economic and social crisis in Argentina since the

end of 2001 (Vieira & Olivera, forthcoming).¹ His documentaries thus emerge when the representative bond that ties political representatives to the represented people breaks down in two critical moments for representative democracy in contemporary Argentine history.

The revolutionary politics during the dictatorships that ruled the country intermittently between 1955 and 1973, the proscription of Peronism and Perón's exile (1955–73) provide the historical canvas for *La hora de los hornos*. In fact, the founding scene of popular democracy in Argentina documented was the Day of Peronist Loyalty (17 October 1945) when Perón was liberated from prison by the action of the crowds. This event frames the second part of the film, *Acto de liberación / Liberation Act*, in terms of democratic presence. In a way, it anticipates another founding moment of popular-democratic spontaneity which took place a year after *La hora de los hornos* was released, the *Cordobazo* (29 May 1969). In turn, the betrayal of the representative bond in democratic times, after the long and severe crisis of representation of the 1990s, according to *Memoria del saqueo*, started with Alfonsín in 1983 but became evident during the Menem period (1989–99) and De la Rúa's government (1999–2001). In this second critical moment, Argentina finds its scene of democratic presence in the popular spontaneous rebellions of 19 and 20 December 2001 (also referred to in Solanas's documentary as the *pueblada* or *patriada*). These events frame *Memoria del saqueo*: they constitute the starting point (opening sequence) and the culmination point (final chapter) of the film.

1 The question of representation, populism and political subjects

The 'nation-people' is the key political subject in Solanas's documentaries. Whereas in *La hora*, the *pueblo* is the Peronist proletariat, in *Memoria del saqueo*, there is a more inclusive concept of the people, embracing the middle classes, but it is still named '*pueblo*', '*pueblada*' or '*patriada*' (unemployed workers, pensioners, students, housewives, artists, shopkeepers, women farmers). However, in both versions of *pueblo*, the real substance of democracy is external to (institutional) politics ('the system') and previous to representation (literalization). This relationship of simple, immediate *expression*, without a symbolic, representative mediation, is clear in *La hora de los hornos*. At the beginning of its second part, the voice-over says: '*El pueblo [...] el 17 de octubre hace nacer a Perón. Perón surge como la expresión nacional de un pueblo dispuesto a alcanzar su definitiva independencia*', after which it shows footage of Evita affirming '*Nosotros somos el pueblo. Somos la patria*'. Similarly, Solanas introduces *Memoria del saqueo* showing images of the mobilizations of 19 and 20 December 2001, while commenting: '*Era la patriada espontánea de los nadies que ocupaba la ciudad de las instituciones y los bancos*', and drawing an explicit parallel with the people's unmediated previous presence on 17 October 1945 (the National Day of Peronist Loyalty) and in the *Cordobazo* of May 1969. It is thus

¹ The other four documentaries of the series are: *La dignidad de los nadies / The Dignity of the Nobodies* (2005), *Argentina latente / Latent Argentina* (in production), a fourth one on 'the technological, industrial and scientific reconstruction of Argentina, and a fifth one on the wealth of the land and the disputes over its ownership' (Solanas, cited in Vieira & Olivera, forthcoming).

clear that, for Solanas, Peronism represented the people making their presence transparent, whereas Menemism broke this transparency through an excessive effect on the representative pole: the betrayal of the representative bond.

In populism, there is always a tension between two poles — the representative and the represented — and none of them can be reduced or completely erased. Neither was it the case that Peronism transparently expressed the presence of the represented people, nor is it the case that Menemism can be reduced to a complete autonomization of the representative pole with no link with the represented. As Laclau points out (2005: 158), there is always a tension in every relation of political representation, a double movement from the representative to the represented and from the represented to the representative:

It is in the nature of representation that the representative is not merely a passive agent, but has to add something to the interest he represents. This addition, in turn, is reflected in the identity of those represented, which changes as a result of the very process of representation. Thus, representation is a two-way process: a movement from represented to representative, and a correlative one from representative to represented. The represented depends on the representative for the constitution of his or her own identity.

Following this line of argumentation about the centrality of the process of political representation in the construction of populism, he concludes:

If representation illuminates something of the inner structure of populism, however, we could say that, conversely, populism throws some light on something that belongs to the essence of representation. [...] Constructing a ‘people’ is not simply the application to a particular case of a general theory of representation; it is, on the contrary, a paradigmatic case, because it is the one which reveals representation for what it is: the primary terrain of constitution of social objectivity. (Laclau 2005: 163)

Given the constitutional gap between representatives and represented, and the loosening of the representative term vis-à-vis the represented one during critical junctures, whenever there is a crisis of political representation, the system makes visible the *constitutive fictionality* on which every relation of political representation is based, and which is intrinsic to politics as such (Laclau & Mouffe 1985: 140). In fact, in every representative function or link there is always an element of fictionality; representation is always a *fictio iuris* insofar as — as Laclau & Mouffe point out — it is a form of presence which operates through metaphoric *transposition* between two elements, the represented and the representative (that which fulfils the function of representing). Political representation is never transparent, as Solanas’s documentaries seem to suggest in relation to the ‘spontaneous presence’ of the people in 1945, 1969, and 2001. Every process of representation takes the form of a *tension* in an ‘unstable field of oscillation’ between two poles: ‘the *literalization of fiction* through the break of all link between representative and represented’, and the *cancellation of all separation* between them by means of the absorption of their respective identities as moments of a single identity (Laclau & Mouffe 1985: 140). Far from being the spontaneous and transparent expression of the people, as Laclau (2005: 163) says, ‘any popular identity has an inner structure which is essentially *representative* [...] for the construction of the “people” would be impossible without the operation of

mechanisms of representation'. The representative term doesn't merely express the represented, it *constitutes* it as an identity. But Solanas denounces the suspension of this representational link as *external* to democratic politics, as a *betrayal* of the representatives (the political class) vis-à-vis a pre-given social-real, as an *excess* of representation over the real, of (institutional) politics over the social. It is in this 'politics of anti-politics' (Panizza 2000: 180) — which corresponds to the first discursive feature of populism (see below) — that Solanas's populist strategy lies.

Solanas seeks to intervene in this very *hiatus* between an *excess* in the pole of representation (the fictional dimension of politics exemplified by betrayal) and the *transparency* of the *full presence* of the *people* as the real substance of democracy.² This is exactly the rhetorical site where *populist discourse* operates. Both *La hora de los hornos* and *Memoria del saqueo* perform two discursive operations (see below) which are characteristic of populist discourse: a) a denunciation of (institutional) politics; b) an affirmation of the unmediated presence of the 'social-real' (the people).

The long-standing tradition of political discourse analysis in Argentina, associated with De Ipola, Laclau, Panizza, Sigal and Verón has identified, with remarkable rigour, the enunciative regularities that mark what is specifically populist about a discourse — starting from corpora mainly consisting of Peronist speeches and texts. Two discursive strategies seem to be the core operations of populist discourse.

De Ipola (1983) and Sigal & Verón (1986) have identified the feature of *distancing vis-à-vis 'politics'* (political society, the State, or power bloc) as characteristic of populist discourse. This corresponds to Laclau's *anti-elitism* (1998a) and to the *anti-institutionalism* which identify the elites with institutionalized politics. This discursive operation entails a symbolic division of the social space into two opposed camps: the underdogs (the people or the civil society) and the top dogs (the people's Other: the political class). This dichotomy also structures the main social antagonism in terms of political society versus civil society, identifying the latter with the *pueblo* (Panizza 2000b: 180). A second core operation of populist discourse relates to a *privileged hermeneutic position vis-à-vis the 'social-real'*, guaranteed by strategies of transparency and by procedures for the production of social 'evidence': the reality of the social is affirmed over the fiction of politics (De Ipola 1983: 125–26). As a discursive strategy, it seeks the symbolic unity of the people through the construction of a 'chain of equivalences' (Laclau & Mouffe 1985: 147–54). The discursive strategies — present both in *La hora de los hornos* and *Memoria del saqueo* — of presenting statistical representations and of showing the human side of sufferings and demands through individual 'cases' — can be considered from this perspective. Both are discursive processes of producing 'the people' as reality, as either objective evidence or crude subjective *pathos*, respectively. Complementing these findings with an analytical study of Argentine TV discourse in the 1990s (Olivera 1997), I have tried to systematize the discursive regularities that define populism as a singular enunciative configuration, able to be articulated in various, and often divergent,

² And more concretely, in two major 'historical hiatuses' in Argentina, that is to say, in the two historical moments mentioned above in which this hiatus became most visible: a) the proscription of Peronism during authoritarian rule and semi-democracy (1955–73); b) Menemism and the crisis of political representation (1989–2001).

concrete discourses. A crucial finding was that this configuration distributes subject positions around the spatial oppositions of interiority-exteriority. With the production of an 'outside of power' or exteriority from politics, populist discourse constructs its specific antagonism to the state, public figures and the power bloc. On the other hand, populist discourse creates a space of full presence which would allow the people's voice — and thus the 'popular-democratic interpellations' (Laclau 1977) — to be heard, without mediations. By means of this spatial configuration, populist discourse aims to produce transparency effects: the populist operation would thus consist of restoring the popular, the spontaneously democratic. In populist discourse, the social body of the people is essentially non-political, and, paradoxically, can only become a political force if it enters an anti-political threshold by expressing its social antagonism against (institutional) politics as a deceitful and corrupt sphere of society.

2 Two comparisons between *La hora de los hornos* and *Memoria del saqueo*

Having discussed representation and identified some populist discursive markers in *La hora* and *Memoria del saqueo*, I will now draw a comparison between the two documentaries in terms of their respective political arguments and their aesthetics of contrast.

2.1 *Political arguments: the persistence of externalist dependency theory*

One recurrent argumentative feature of both films is the explanation of Argentine grievances through a continuous *plundering*, throughout history, from Spanish colonialism and nineteenth-century imperialism, to 1960s neo-colonialism and current globalization. This argument is characteristic of the externalist and mechanistic versions of dependency theory (Blomström & Hettne 1984), notably the model metropolis/satellites put forward by André Gunder Frank (1971, 1972, 1978). There are certainly other models of dependency theory that are more complex and subtle. For example, those dynamic models which emphasize the complex internal configuration of dependency situations: they are structuralist rather than mechanistic, and they highlight a signifying logic in dependency rather than a causal-deterministic one (from the metropolis to the satellites). Key works of important figures such as Dos Santos (1973) and Cardoso & Faletto (1998) are good examples of these dynamic models.³

But externalist and mechanistic dependency theory was the argumentative model that predominated in *La hora de los hornos* and in Argentine Third Cinema in general. Third Cinema, the project put forward by Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino in the late 1960s and early 1970s and disseminated in the crucial manifesto 'Towards a Third Cinema' (1969), was conceived as a politically committed cinema

³ For a general discussion of the different models and approaches in dependency theory (external vs internal, dynamic vs mechanistic), see Blomström & Hettne 1984; for situating Frank and his externalist-mechanistic model within dependency theory and in relation to modernization theory, see Leaver 1977 and Foster-Carter 1976; for a recent updated appraisal of dependency theory, see Dos Santos 2003.

which, for the Third World, was the only alternative to First and Second Cinema (Hollywood and European, auteur cinema, respectively). It was a seminal piece for the emergence of the New Latin American Cinema.⁴ I now wish to argue that *Memoria del saqueo* is an updating of this mechanistic-externalist model of argumentation, globalization being an exacerbated phase of previous imperialism. In *La hora de los hornos*, dependency theory can be summarized under three main arguments, which can also be recognized to some degree in *Memoria del saqueo*:

1. The impossible and contradictory character of the relationship between dependency and development. As stated in section 9 of *La hora* (*La dependencia/Dependency*), Part I (*Neocolonialismo y violencia / Neo-colonialism and Violence*):

En la dependencia no hay ninguna forma posible de desarrollo. El aparente desarrollo de algunas ciudades-puerto traduce sólo la creciente expansión de las grandes potencias en el seno de nuestras economías.

Hence, the structure of dependency necessarily determines development in the metropolitan centres and underdevelopment in the peripheral satellites; as a consequence of this, there is a simple alignment between imperialism/development, on the one hand, and dependency/underdevelopment, on the other hand; this argument makes Solanas's documentaries similar to Frank's classical formulation of dependency: the 'development of underdevelopment':

This colonial and class structure establishes very well defined class interests for the dominant sector of the [Latin American] bourgeoisie. Using government cabinets and other instruments of the State, the bourgeoisie produces a *policy of underdevelopment* in the economic, social and political life of the 'nation' and the people of Latin America. When a change in the forms of dependence modifies the economic and class structure, this in turn generates changes in the *policy of the dominant class* which further strengthen the very same bonds of economic dependence which produced the policy and thus aggravate still further the *development of underdevelopment* in Latin America. (Frank 13; my italics)

2. The heuristic level that explains the evidence of the division between 'development' and 'underdevelopment' is an abstract entity: the System, understood essentially as the world market which defines capitalism in Latin America in the phase of circulation rather than at the level of production (mode of production), as pointed out by Laclau (1971). Consequently, both films produce a two-way correspondence between the System (the imperialist/global market) and development, and the dependency ties are depicted as a simple *saqueo colonial*, which is constant and self-identical throughout history.
3. The internal dynamic configuration of the peripheral countries is reduced to pure political instrumentality as in functional explanatory logic (Hempel 1965; Giddens 1979: 7, 111–13; Tomlinson 1991: 38, 104, 175). This is the thesis of the 'internal factors of power' as mere parasites or appendices of the metropolis

⁴ See Solanas & Getino 1973; for an English translation, see Chanan 1983; for debates about Third Cinema, see Shohat & Stam 1996; for an updating of the Third Cinema project in a globalized world, see Chanan 1997.

in satellite territories.⁵ First imperialism, and later globalization, mechanically determine — from an external site — dependency in Third World countries. For example, in *Memoria del saqueo*, Solanas's voice-over states: 'El presupuesto se aprobaba en Washington antes que en Buenos Aires'. Within this line of argument, the internal dynamics of the domestic ruling classes are reduced to a moral behaviour: betrayal. For instance, in the first section of *La hora de los hornos*, entitled *La historia / History*, the voice-over says: 'La independencia de los países latinoamericanos fue traicionada desde sus orígenes. La traición corrió por cuenta de las élites exportadoras de las ciudades puertos'; similarly, the second chapter of *Memoria del saqueo* is entitled 'Chronicle of the betrayal', and narrates the democratic period after 1983 as a sequence of betrayals of the representative in relation to the represented.

It is also interesting to note the striking argumentative similarity between section 9 of *La hora* (*La dependencia / Dependency*) and section 5 of *Memoria del saqueo* (*Las privatizaciones / The Privatizations*): there are similar images and the same historical account that dates colonial plundering, and dependency on Europe and the US, back to the Spanish Conquest. Thus, section 9 of *La hora* opens with the tolling of a church bell, while there is a drawing of a typical scene of the Spanish Conquest with the following superimposed message: 'Los que en aquella tierra viven dicen: en la tierra adentro hay unas tierras de donde sacan infinitísimo oro. Sebastián Caboto, 1544.' Then, the voice-over is more than eloquent:

Lo que caracteriza a los países latinoamericanos es su dependencia: dependencia económica, dependencia política, dependencia cultural. Primero España, después Inglaterra, hoy Estados Unidos, la historia de nuestros países es la historia de un *interminable saqueo colonial*. Sin independencia económica no hay independencia política. José Martí decía: 'el pueblo que quiera ser libre que lo sea primero en negocios'. En la dependencia no hay ninguna forma posible de desarrollo. El aparente desarrollo de algunas ciudades-puerto traduce sólo la creciente expansión de las grandes potencias en el seno de nuestras economías. Ayer Mitre, Pellegrini, Pinedo. Hoy Prebisch, Frigerio, Alzogaray. Préstamos, inversiones, empréstitos, sirvieron siempre a una misma política de sometimiento. La presunta ayuda imperialista es una ayuda que siempre cuesta más al que la recibe que al que la da. Por cada dólar invertido en América Latina el imperialismo se lleva cuatro. Oro y café, carne y petróleo, trigo y estaño, *el trabajo de un pueblo convertido en mano de obra barata* construyeron las riquezas de las grandes potencias. Es esta explotación la causa del atraso, la miseria, la opresión, la que posibilita el funcionamiento y el alto nivel de vida de las naciones desarrolladas, la que hizo nacer esa oscura palabra inventada por el imperialismo: subdesarrollo. (*La hora de los hornos*, Part I, Section 9: *La dependencia*)

An almost identical contrapuntal audiovisual opening in section 5 of *Memoria del saqueo* (*Las privatizaciones / The Privatizations*) precedes and frames a very similar political argument about the continuity of self-identical dependency ties. Here again,

⁵ According to Blomström & Hettne (1984: 72), 'the concept of "satellite" suggests a total lack of a dynamics of its own'.

a church bell tolls, while a drawing shows Spanish *conquistadores* arriving in Latin American lands and meeting some Indians. To which Solanas's voice-over adds:

Más allá de los siglos y los métodos, las concesiones de los bienes del Estado serán continuidad de las viejas explotaciones coloniales. Antes fue el oro y la plata de Potosí. Hoy, las ganancias del petróleo, el agua y las comunicaciones. Las compañías extranjeras hicieron en nuestro país lo que no les hubieran permitido hacer en los suyos. (Memoria del saqueo, Chapter 5)

In short, we can say that in the externalist-mechanistic version of dependency offered by *La hora* and *Memoria del saqueo*, there is a predominance of the causal and systemic moment over the signifying and historical one: by attributing the explanatory principle totally and deterministically to the external causes (imperialism/globalization as the *explanandum*), the historical singularity of the internal dynamics as an articulatory moment between the internal and the external is lost. Ultimately, this operation of attribution reduces and dissolves the internal dynamics into a purely instrumental factor (it sees the local elites as 'internal factors of power', merely parasitical on the economy and culture of the metropolis). It is precisely this predominance that explains that, in this version of dependency theory, the discursive moment of reversal is privileged over that of displacement.⁶ Thus, in these films, imperialism, neo-colonialism and globalization are systems that mechanically determine, from an external site, dependency or the Third World situation understood as a set of positions and functions (metropolis/satellites; centre/periphery): this is what I call the *functionalism* or the functional explanatory logic (Hempel 1965, Giddens 1979: 7, 111–13, Tomlinson 1991: 38, 104, 175) implicit in externalist-mechanistic dependency theory.

What is at stake here is a reversal of dominant discourses of modernization (neo-colonialism, neo-liberalism), through a mere substitution of *explananda*, while keeping the same functionalist explanatory logic. This substitution of *explananda* results from a shift in the operation of attribution from endogenous causes of underdevelopment (traditional cultural traits, backwardness, inefficiency, etc., typical of modernization theory) to exogenous causes (imperialism, globalization, and the world market; typical of externalist dependency theory). In short, there is a predominance of the discursive moment of *reversal* — with its dominant components: antagonism and equivalence — over the operations of displacement.

Solanas's documentaries are certainly very effective in overturning the polarity of the dominant dichotomies and in reversing the hierarchal oppositions which underlie the various colonizing discourses, hegemonic in Argentina and Latin America throughout history, by unequivocally uncovering 'the conflictual and subordinating structure' (Derrida 1981: 41) of these dualisms (their privileged and marginal terms) and by exposing their inherent violence as not only dominant, but also highly oppressive systems of values. So, for example, the hierarchical opposition between development and underdevelopment is recast in terms of centre and periphery, resulting in a reversal of the privilege and values assigned to their respective terms. However, these films do not seem to be able to move beyond this antagonistic overturning of the

⁶ I follow Derrida's (1981) conceptualizations of 'reversal' ('inversion' or 'overturning') and 'displacement' as the two necessary moments of deconstructing a text or a discourse.

dominant binary oppositions towards a new conceptual system or a different rhetorical space. Solanas's discourse seems to remain trapped within the binary logic at stake in the reversal operation it performs: there is simply no effective displacement or indeed conceptual resituating of this binary logic in another argumentative or tropological level. This is because, when exclusively operating antagonistic over-turnings without a differential displacement into another rhetorical space, the logic of equivalence dominates so much over the logic of difference, that the resulting critical discourse merely reproduces the rhetorical operations and argumentative logic of the dominant discourse, albeit changing its axiology.⁷ This is to say that, as discussed above, the argumentative texture of these documentaries follows the very same functional explanatory pattern as those used by those discourses which they are attempting to denounce and contest (the theory of modernization and subsequent neo-liberal discourses). Through its use of this functional explanatory logic and its maintenance of binary oppositions such as centre/periphery (or representatives/represented), Solanas's documentary discourse, far from challenging dominant discourses and producing new conceptual, argumentative and political strategies against global capitalism, represents a regression to the rhetorical operations characteristic of externalist-mechanistic dependency theory. Thus, any possibility of resituating the dominant binaries in a more complex and differential articulation of terms and elements — attentive to heterogeneity and singularity — in a more dynamic, decentred (and perhaps hybrid) conceptual and tropological space becomes discursively impossible within the restrictive limits of Solanas's antagonistic reversals: his 'politics of rhetoric' (Laclau 1998b).

In short, the exclusive emphasis on the antagonistic movement of reversal reintroduces the equivalent dominant causal-mechanistic logic, thus aborting any possible displacement into a new conceptual system. The only elements of displacement that Solanas's documentaries recognize in neo-colonial ideology and in the dependency situation are those of the mask, the disguise and later betrayal, but not as operations or configurations — as in Bhabha (1986) for example — but as simple instruments of ideological inversion in the service of the neo-colonial illusions and lies. So, for example, the dependency discourse of *La hora* is elaborated as a reversal of the by then dominant modernization discourse, a reversal which, avoiding any displacing operation of the neo-colonial antagonism, simply literalizes it. Summarizing, we can say that the denouncement of neo-colonialism and globalization by these documentaries literalizes Third World antagonisms.

2.2 *The aesthetics of contrast: visual rhetoric as moral criticism*

The fundamental discursive strategies of Solanas's documentaries express the national-popular antagonism — because it is not always apparent as real opposition

⁷ That is to say, the critical discourse is the reversed image of the discourse criticized, and in that sense it is equivalent to it: it is more similar than dissimilar. An overriding antagonistic reversal of this type tends to split the social field in two paratactical camps (centre/periphery) resulting in a stark polarization between two opposed chains of equivalences (the world market or the 'System' vs the nation-people), leaving no room for the politicization of *difference*, that is to say, for other *differential* articulations and positions within this oversimplified political field. For a discussion of the logics of equivalence and the logics of difference as the two main discursive logics at stake in relation to the construction of social antagonisms, see Laclau & Mouffe 1985, and Norvall 2000: 217–22.

— in terms of filmic logical contradictions: stark, extreme visual and contrapuntal contrasts, morally organized in false-bottom economies. This rhetoric of the image consists of spatial and aesthetic oppositions. Montages juxtapose contrasting images or angles to show antagonisms as the system's logical contradictions. Certain recurring oppositions which inhabit the aesthetics of both films are:

1. faces of deprived children / skyscrapers and tall city buildings;
2. faces of deprived children / empty government offices and institutional buildings;
3. poor / rich;
4. high angle / low angle;
5. countryside / city [Buenos Aires]
6. contrapuntal sound: contrast sound/images with ironic, parodic, or sarcastic effects.

These contrasts and contradictions respond to what I call a 'false-bottom economy' ('economía de doble fondo') centred on the structuring opposition appearance/reality or appearance/essence. In *La hora de los hornos* this false-bottom economy appears within a rhetoric that denounces disguises and masks: the phrase 'La monstruosidad se viste de belleza' eloquently synthesizes this revealing, unmasking discursive operation in Section 12 (*La guerra ideológica*), in Part I of the film. In *Memoria del saqueo*, the false-bottom economy can be read in the iconic juxtaposition of 'la ciudad de las instituciones y de los bancos' and 'los nadies' in the Introduction to the documentary. It can also be recognized in the contrapuntal montage shown in Chapter 4 (*El modelo económico*), which juxtaposes, on the one hand, the words of Neustadt — the official journalist of Menemism — describing in his TV programme the benefits of the economic model for the country and denying the impoverishing effects of the neo-liberal model ('Es mentira que este modelo produce pobres'), and, on the other hand, the heartbreaking images of paupers living in a flooded area. There is a strong moral content derived from the very form of these oppositions — their very false-bottom structure — which are used to denounce *deception* through *mask* and *disguises* [*La hora* . . .] or through *betrayals* and *lies* [*Memoria del saqueo*].

Another striking similarity in this rhetoric of contrast, characteristic of both films, is that between the beginning of Chapter 4 (*La ciudad puerto*), in Part I of *La hora*, and the opening images of *Memoria del saqueo*. The passage from Chapter 3 to Chapter 4 in *La hora* is achieved by means of a montage. A filmic quotation of Fernando Birri's famous scene in his seminal documentary *Tire dié! Throw us a dime* (1956) — in which street children are begging money from the passengers of a passing train in the province of Santa Fe (Argentina) — alternates with high angle shots and low angle shots of city buildings in Buenos Aires. At the end of this contrasting sequence, Solanas edits Birri's image of the last child looking up at the train from a high angle with a low angle shot of a tall Buenos Aires building, suggesting an identification of his own gaze with that of the subjective camera. This is a paradigmatic montage of internal colonialism within neo-colonialism/imperialism and highlights the system's contradiction between deprived begging children and metropolitan wealth in terms of camera angles (high/low) with their respective diminishing and magnifying visual effects. Exactly the same visual rhetoric occurs in the opening

sequence of *Memoria del saqueo*; its very first image is a superimposition of two shots: a low angle shot of tall and wealthy city buildings and a close-up shot of a deprived child's face. This suggests that globalization renders the imperialist contradictions simultaneous, timeless: the two sides of the same coin (signifier/signified; representative/represented). This opening superimposition is a synthetic image of globalization and highly symbolic of the overall message of the film. The same rhetoric of contrast between low angle shots of tall city buildings and high angle shots of deprived children scavenging garbage becomes a syntagmatic montage — this time by means of juxtaposition rather than superimposition — throughout the Introduction to *Memoria*.

How can we make sense of these extreme aesthetic contrasts? To what extent do they constitute a politically meaningful visual rhetoric? How can we read them politically? According to Laclau & Mouffe (1985) and Laclau (1988), social antagonisms can only be shown, but never said, because they are located at the limits of language. They can only manifest themselves as metaphors according to the totalizing logic of condensations and symbols.⁸ The fundamental and structuring antagonism displayed by Solanas's documentaries is that of 'the nation-people' vs 'the System'. Following Laclau's ideas, the unity and integrity of the national-popular identity is neither essential nor literal, but symbolic and metaphorical, and its meaning is fundamentally negative: anti-imperialist (Third World), antibourgeois/ antioligarchic (popular) and anti-European (Latin American).

But how does *La hora* construct its antagonistic enemy, the System? First, it gives it a proper name: 'neo-colonialism'. Neo-colonialism is a displaced continuation of its predecessor: colonialism. This displacement does not express the antagonism of the colonial tie as a real opposition between two forces (as the different modes of coercion which are characteristic of colonial domination would do: sacking, serfdom, genocides and wars), but disguises such antagonism. The specific form that antagonism takes in neo-colonial domination is precisely that of the mask and that of the disguise. In *Memoria*, this displaced antagonism takes another moral form: betrayal. (Betrayal is one of the key explanatory categories used throughout the film, and its Chapter 2 is eloquently entitled *Crónica de la traición*.) Therefore, the fundamental discursive strategy of Solanas's documentaries is to express this antagonism, which is not apparent as real opposition, in terms of logical contradiction. This discursive procedure follows the previously mentioned false-bottom structure that opposes surface to depth, according to what I would like to call two regimes:

- 1) a set of superficial metaphorical operations that construct an identity out of the condensation of symbols put together in a false mask: 'Universality' and 'Man' are neo-colonial masks that hide the ethnocentrism and neo-racism of a dominant particularity: the European/North American white man (see *La hora*, Part I, Chapter 11: *Los modelos / The Models*);⁹

⁸ Drawing on the Wittgensteinian distinction between 'saying' and 'showing', Laclau states that social antagonism 'can only exist as a disruption of language, as metaphor. Antagonism is the limit of the social, the witness of the ultimate impossibility of society, the moment in which the sense of precariousness reaches its highest level' (Laclau 1988: 256).

⁹ 'Se impondrá el modelo de *hombre universal, valor universal, cultura universal*, es decir, la *desintegración de los valores, de la cultura y del hombre*' (*La hora*, Part I, Chapter 11: *Los modelos / The Models*).

- 2) at a deeper, 'real', level, a metonymic regime which operates by penetration and contagion (corruption), and expresses the real hegemonic displacement of neo-colonialism and globalization: winning adept consciousnesses through its victory in the 'ideological and cultural war'.

This is Solanas's diagnosis of neo-colonial, and later global, domination. Its strategy of counter-hegemonic resistance consists of counter-metaphorical — and as such, literalizing — operations that reverse these dominant metaphoric operations, denouncing them as false. Thus, for example, *La hora* makes visible the contingency of the dominant neo-colonial metaphoric totalizations ('Man' in capital letters is actually 'the European white man'; Chapter 11, Part I), and then proposes its own totalizations around the identity of the 'nation-people'. However, these are not presented as contingent, but as essential and literal identities: authentic identity spaces of full humanity — paradigmatically expressed in close-ups of deprived children's faces both in *La hora* and in *Memoria* — external to the neo-colonial and global System. The 'nation-people' in these documentaries is, therefore, a literalization. That is why it can only propose either war and militarization (*La hora*) or spontaneous popular mobilization (*Memoria*) as the necessary forms of struggle against neo-colonialism, globalization and 'Mafia power', producing a literalization of the national-popular antagonism, that is, its direct translation into a specific objective relation: the real opposition between popular and repressive forces. This, in *Memoria*, is directly translated into a moral opposition: the dignity of the represented vs the betrayal of the representative.

3 Final remarks: the strategy of denouncing representation as excess

Solanas's denunciation and reversal of these false-bottom economies is his strategy of resistance to the neo-colonial (in 1968) and neo-liberal (in 2003) totalizations of the world market, to which he opposes his own counter-hegemonic totalizations in the identity of the 'nation-people'. But the contingent link between the nation-people and the universal values it represents (total liberation in *La hora*, human dignity in *Memoria del saqueo*, and so on) appears, in the documentaries considered, as a necessary and transparent one (as 'natural' attributes of the nation-people), because their discursive operations tend to erase the traces of the contingency of the articulation between this specific historical agent and its more universal political and moral tasks. It is through these naturalizing and literalizing operations that the rhetoric of Solanas's documentaries loses political efficacy in the struggle for hegemony. Because, as Laclau says (1998b: 11–13), 'if there is going to be hegemony, the traces of the contingency of the articulation cannot be entirely effaced. [...] It is only on the traces of (contingent) contiguity contaminating all analogy that a hegemonic relation can emerge'. The *pueblo-nación* of these documentaries is a literality, the transparent and unmediated revelation of a full presence that can only produce 'concealing effects'.

Denouncing the excesses of deceitful representation, Solanas opts for the transparency of an unmediated full presence: the people shouting in indignity, at the end of *Memoria del saqueo* (Chapter 10), 'Que se vayan todos'. He thus shows, at the same

time, the fullness of the social and the complete vacuum of representative politics. Memoria del saqueo ends with the empty corridors and stairwells of the Casa Rosada, the presidential building in Buenos Aires, overlooking an over-crowded Plaza de Mayo, the symbolic centre of Argentine democracy, where most of the popular demonstrations and protests take place. Meanwhile, the voices of the people affirm their presence, in a contrapuntal soundtrack, singing 'El pueblo no se va' (Memoria del saqueo, Chapter 10). Between the presence of the social and the excesses of representation, between full transparency and empty mirages, in these documentaries there is no room for the opacity of representation and articulatory politics.¹⁰

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Este artículo es un análisis comparativo de dos documentales clave de Fernando Solanas: *La hora de los hornos* (1966–68) y *Memoria del saqueo* (2003). El trabajo argumenta que Solanas produce documentales cuando el lazo representativo que vincula los representantes políticos con los representados (el pueblo) se suspende o se rompe, como ocurrió durante la época de la proscripción del peronismo (1955–73) y en la más reciente crisis de representación de las instituciones políticas argentinas (1989–2001). La comparación se basa en dos criterios: argumentos políticos y estética de contrastes. Con respecto al primer criterio, el artículo subraya la persistencia actual, en la argumentación política de Solanas, de las versiones externalistas y mecanicistas de la teoría de la dependencia de finales de los años sesenta y principios de los setenta. En relación con la estética de contrastes, se analizan las rígidas oposiciones de los documentales de Solanas como una retórica visual que puede ser leída como una economía de doble fondo que opone 'apariencia' a 'realidad'. El artículo concluye que estas polarizaciones estéticas y políticas son estrategias discursivas esencializantes y literalizantes que denuncian los excesos de la representación política desde un lugar transparente y no mediado de presencia popular plena. Dentro de una estrategia semejante, no hay espacio alguno para la opacidad constitutiva de la representación y la articulación políticas.