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Between El Dorado and Armageddon: Utopia and Apocalypse in the Films of the Encounter

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Utopianism and apocalypticism are tightly linked to the phenomenon of the "Discovery" of America and its most recent reconceptualizations. The European imagination, both secular and religious, soon considered the New World as an empty space in which the desire for social, political, economic and spiritual transformation could be materialized (Subirats, *El continente* 495). Such transformation frequently appeared associated with a violent break with the reigning order, which entailed an unprecedented proliferation of "fictions of the end." Apocalyptic terror was conceived as a stage prior to the establishment of a millennial realm, or the materialization of the utopias of the Renaissance.

At the close of the second millennium, the Quincentennial celebrations played an important role in rethinking the Discovery and Conquest in light of utopia and apocalypse. Many of the colonialist clichés of previous celebrations were reversed, giving rise to a radically different vision. The term "Discovery" gave way to "Encounter", and "acculturation" yielded to "transculturation" (Olivier 92; Juan-Navarro and Young 11). What was initially conceived as utopia (universal conversion of all the races to Christianity) has been reinterpreted as an ideological cover-up to conceal the plundering of indigenous peoples. In many cases, the millenarian revisionism of recent decades has given rise to an acritical inversion of the prior assumptions or to mere Hollywood-style spectacle. In others, it has translated into a genuine interest in exploring the relationships of power and the conflicts that resulted from the collision of two worlds at the dawn of the Modern Age.

The world of cinema has not escaped from this revisionism. Films such as *Orinoko: Nuevo Mundo* (1984), *América: Terra Incógnita* (1988), *Jericó* (1991), *Cabeza de Vaca* (1991), *Retorno a Aztlán* (1991) and *La otra conquista* (1998), explore the theme of the Encounter between two worlds from an ideological stance that questions the versions inherited from the past. These films react not only against the official history, but also against the neocolonialist discourse of earlier films. The cinema that was produced in Spain under the dictatorship of General Franco, for example, consolidated the providentialist and messianic vision of history that was shaped in the Age of Discovery. As far as the Hollywood productions are concerned, these have reduced the Discovery and the Conquest to simple mass entertainment spectacle. Films such as *Christopher Columbus* and *1492* rewrite certain aspects of the iconography of the Discovery and humanize their protagonists, but go no further than the characteristic clichés of adventure cinema.

The present article will analyze the treatment of the utopia-apocalypse dichotomy in different examples of the cinematographic production dealing with the Old World-New World Encounter. After establishing the interrelation between utopian and apocalyptic thought in the Age of Discovery, I will discuss two groups of films that address this interrelation from disparate ideological positions: the appropriation of the myth of the Discovery by the Spanish reactionary cinema of the Franco regime, and the response to this myth within the context of the historical revisionism of the new Latin American cinema.

Utopia and apocalypse during the period of the discovery

In *The Millennial Kingdom of the Franciscans in the New World*, John L. Phelan examines the importance of millenarianism in the Age of Discovery. Navigators such as Columbus and missionaries such as Jerónimo de Mendieta interpreted the events of geographic exploration and colonization as the achievement of the prophecies of the Apocalypse. Columbus was the first to discern the possibility of converting all the races of the world as part of an apocalyptic and messianic vision, a vision shared by mystics of the time and especially by the Franciscans. For them, nothing would make sense after the universal conversion of the races; any other outcome would have been considered an anticlimax (Phelan 18).

Columbus' mysticism has taken on a more apocalyptic quality with the passage of time. His *Psalms*, significantly given the title of *Book of Prophecies*, and his account of the fourth voyage (1502-1502), belong to this apocalyptic

aspect of the navigator. Columbus was firmly convinced that the world was rapidly heading towards its end. He reached the conclusion that only 155 years remained, a number that he took from Pierre d'Ailly. However, before this could occur, it was necessary that all of the prophecies be realized. Above all, the Gospel should be preached in all languages to all of the peoples and races. In second place, Jerusalem must be liberated from the infidels. In addition to a profitable commercial adventure, Columbus viewed his voyages as the opening of the path to the Western Sea, through which the missionaries could rush to complete the evangelization of all the Gentiles. It is important to emphasize the global theme in the apocalyptic universalism of Columbus, which led him to feel that he was an instrument of Divine Providence.

Hispanicity and apocalyptic eschatology in the propaganda cinema of the Franco years

The messianic and millenarian character of Columbian discourse was appropriated by the dictatorship of General Franco under the concept of *Hispanidad* (Hispanicity). Several films exploited the theme of the Discovery and evangelization from an allegorical and nationalist perspective. *La Nao capitana* (1947), *La Manigua sin Dios* (1949) and *Alba de América* (1951) transport the theme of the Encounter to the political context of Francoist Spain. The millenarian kingdom searched for during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries by mystics, Franciscans, and Jesuits was transformed into the utopia of the *Generalísimo* in the regime that was established after the "necessary" Apocalypse of the Spanish Civil War, notably referred to as a "Crusade" by the dictator.

Although it may appear invariably associated with the genre of historical cinema, *Alba de América* (1951) also constitutes one of the most outstanding examples of the propaganda cinema of Franco's regime. Produced at the request of the highest authorities (one of its promoters was Admiral Carrero Blanco), Juan de Orduña's film about the Discovery concentrates the ideological message of Francoism in a delicate political climate: the beginnings of the fifties, characterized by the movement from an autocracy with fascist leanings towards a corporate regime that was ideologically controlled by the more conservative sectors of the Catholic Church.

After the isolation produced as a result of the defeat of Fascism during the Second World War, Franco's regime had to reconsider its ideological foundations as it searched for an opening in the barriers imposed by the Western democracies. The concept of Hispanicity played a crucial role in these diplomatic strategies and in the unification of the diverse ideological currents of Francoism. Based upon an identification between the concepts of Hispanicity and Catholicism they sought to eradicate the totalitarian image of Franco's government outside of Spain, and to legitimize a regime imposed by force.

Juan de Orduña's film, considered to be one of the most public projects in the history of Spanish cinema (Heredero 175; Fanés 175; Mira Nouselles 123), reflects this historical context in a precise manner. In fact, its exact correlation with the politics of that period permits *Alba de América* to be read as an allegory of the Franco State during the key stage of its consolidation. As is characteristic of the allegorical mode, and as occurs in so many other films of the time, there is a constant play between text (in this case the narrative of the Discovery) and subtext (the conflictive transformations of the regime).

Alba de América reproduces the discourse of imperial Spain, recovering the providentialist, messianic and apocalyptic component of the Discovery and the Conquest. The interest of the State apparatus in this production was based on its potential for legitimization of the period during which it was conceived. The actual phenomenon of the Discovery is ultimately revealed as an excuse, useful only as a function of the ideological parallelisms that permit a connection to the political situation of Spain during the fifties. The Encounter with a new continent not only does not represent the climactic moment of this film, what is more significant, it almost gives the impression of being irrelevant. To the contrary, the focus is placed in the preliminaries and consequences of the Discovery, as well as in its allegorical implications. The struggle of Columbus against adversities, which is the central motive of the film, allows an explanation of the situation in which the ship (Spain) finds itself, in the same manner that Orduña's film serves as explanation and justification of Franco's anticommunist crusade and the affirmation of National Catholicism in the apparatus of the regime.

As in the remainder of the historical films produced by Cifesa and in all of the cultural politics of Francoism an attempt is made to negate more than two centuries of history, especially those moments associated with the origins of modernity in Spain. In what could be defined as a regressive utopianism, Spanish reactionary thought evoked a lost past that it appeared to want to restore: the monarchy of Ferdinand and Isabel as a paradigm for the ideas of unity, order, hierarchy, homeland, religion, and family, that Francoism elevated to the category of absolute values. The Francoist utopia, nevertheless, is born as a degraded utopia, merely an ideological alibi with the goal of a cover-up. In contradiction to utopian thought, which since its origins has aspired to create models of social transformation, the Francoist utopia regards the past as a strategy for reinforcement of the present political order. The "New State," according to Franco's ideologists, was nothing other than the State of the Catholic Monarchs. This can only be considered as a grotesque anachronism, given that no sane person could arrive at the conclusion that at the height of the twentieth century such a jump in time could come to fruition. To take a case in point, the

inherent contradictions in the formulation of an empire concept on the part of the traditionalist ideologists are sufficient proof that Francoism did not seem to assimilate very well how it was possible for Spain to recuperate its universal hegemony within the wretched context of the of the postwar period. Even the idea of cultural imperialism was not viable without a facilitating economic and military climate.

What was indeed viable was the invention of an imperial myth aimed at internal consumption that would permit the creation of the deceptive self-perception that Spain was the “chosen” nation, accepting the paradox that Spain was wealthy because Spain was poor. By means of films such as *Alba de América*, the spectators of a ruined country in which food stamps still existed could attend the spectacle of its own greatness. The global project of Hispanicity thus achieved great effectiveness in the internal politics of the country. In addition to promoting a conceited image of Spain, it allowed for a unification of the regime’s political families. Falangists, Carlists, Catholics, and traditionalists could share the values and the projected hegemony that were inherent to this myth. Associated in addition with the ideology of National Catholicism and with the ideals of race, religion, nation, and empire, the myth ended up by converting itself into one of the legitimizing pillars of the dictatorship.

The blatancy of the allegorical plot of the film script might make a contemporary moviegoer smile. The ship (Spain) is led to safe port by a visionary hero (Columbus) under the tutelage of religion (friars of La Rábida) and political power (Isabel and Ferdinand) within visions both providentialist (Spain as an agent of destiny) and apocalyptic (the New State as a reincarnation of the Millennial Kingdom established after the Apocalypse of the Civil War). The spectacular possibilities of the Discovery and its political exploitation, nevertheless, have lasted until current times. We have only to remember the auspicious celebrations of the Quincentennial in order to realize the impact of the myth of Hispanicity upon the collective imagination and its constant manipulation by political power. Forty years after the production of *Alba de América*, this same myth, with even more spectacular features although reformulated from a radically different ideological perspective, maintains its legitimizing power. In the same way that 1492 became a symbol of anti-modernism for Francoism, the public-sector staging centered on the Quincentennial elevated this same date as a paradigm for modernity based upon the acritical celebration of the technical-industrial age (Subirats, *Después* 214). If Orduña’s (and Carrero’s) Columbus searched for a return to the origins of absolutism along the route to the West, new political administrations seem to have made it travel in the opposite direction, in search of a technocratic and post-modern Europe that has turned culture into one of the most politically profitable and economically lucrative commodities.

Historiographic revisionism, anticolonialism and resistance in the new Latin American cinema

In contrast to the apologetic vision of the Discovery consecrated by the official history and carried to its most hyperbolic and grotesque extremes by Francoist propaganda films, the most recent cinema has explored the traumatic encounter between the Old and New World from a revisionist perspective. Critics have studied some of these films in great detail. From Werner Herzog’s *Aguirre* to Nicolás Echeverría’s *Cabeza de Vaca*, studies of the cinema of the Conquest have been appearing on a regular basis. Nevertheless, there are three titles that have passed almost unnoticed, in spite of dealing with some of the most interesting examples of what could be called an alternative Latin American cinema. I refer to the Venezuelan film *Jericó* (1991) and to the Mexican works *Retorno a Aztlán* (1991) and *La otra conquista* (1998).

The premieres of *Jericó* and *Retorno* significantly took place at the same time as that of *Cabeza de Vaca*, the year prior to the five hundredth anniversary of the Discovery. As Nicolás Echeverría’s film, *Jericó* and *Retorno* are works by directors educated in the tradition of documentary cinema. The three films deal with the end of the indigenous world as a consequence of the Conquest. However, while *Cabeza de Vaca* recounts the fantastic journey of a historical figure, the plots of *Jericó* and *Retorno* are fictitious. Certainly allusions are made to events and personages of historical impact, along with innumerable inferences and biblical and mythological parallels, but the focus of these latter two films is centered on apocryphal accounts.

Jericó relates the story of the Dominican friar Santiago, who is sent off (against his will) as chaplain of an expedition to the Amazon region. Friar Santiago, a humanist with bookish leanings is immediately horrified by the brutality of the Conquistadors and by the abuses committed against the aboriginal population, and escapes along with a group of Spaniards who steal the expedition’s gold. All die at the hands of natives, except for Santiago, who is captured alive. At the beginning of his captivity, Santiago attempts to indoctrinate the Amerindians, but suffers all sorts of mockery and humiliations. After his evangelizing fails, Santiago progressively integrates into the indigenous community and eventually completely abandons his European identity. With time, he takes on a wife with whom he has a child, but several years later he is captured and jailed by the Spaniards.

All of these events are explained through the narration of his diary. At the beginning of the film, we are warned by a voice over: “This is a diary written in reverse. So I can keep lifting myself up from my memories of horror.” In truth, Santiago writes a diary that inverts the typical flow of sixteenth-century chronicles. Instead of demonstrating the

conversion of the natives at the hands of the Spanish missionaries, he shows the conversion of a Spanish missionary at the hands of the natives. Rather than identifying the aboriginal culture with barbarism and the Spanish empire with civilization, he takes pleasure in underscoring the savagery of the Conquistadors and the humanism of the Amerindians.

However, the allegorical framework that is woven around the spiritual odyssey of Friar Santiago presents the most interesting aspect of this film. Through the narration of his diary we receive numerous biblical references. On several occasions mention is made that "Jericho has not fallen. Jericho is in the soul". Both in the biblical intertext and in Lamata's allegorical remaking, Jericho acquires a highly metaphorical dimension, although its ideological significance in the two texts might be diametrically opposed. In both cases the legendary city works as a metaphor for the entry into the Promised Land. Yet while in the biblical text it is interpreted as an obstacle that must be destroyed in order to gain entry into the Judeo-Christian utopia embodied by Canaan, in the film it is presented as an object that must be reconstructed in order to escape from the dystopia of the Conquest and the genocide of the indigenous peoples.

In accordance with the biblical tradition Jericho was strategically important for the Israelites since it represented the threshold for entrance into Canaan, the Promised Land that they sought to conquer and occupy. Mammoth walls fortifying Jericho made it impenetrable. Nevertheless, its defeat was a necessary step for the eventual conquest of Canaan. The destruction of the city was therefore a spiritual and military necessity.

In Lamata's film, Jericho is metaphorically associated with the New World. Friar Santiago, sent to evangelize the heathens, is one of the agents initially employed for its destruction. Even so, the Dominican friar fails in his attempts to convert the natives and ends up adopting their customs. His conversion takes place in the midst of an emotional ceremony in which his vestments are symbolically thrown off and he joins in the ritual dance of his adoptive community.

Friar Santiago, who seemed to be meant to repeat the destiny of Joshua and to serve as an instrument of divine wrath in the destruction of Jericho, tackles the labor of its reconstruction. The end that awaits him again corresponds with an allegorical scheme of biblical inspiration. In agreement with the Scriptures, whomever attempts to rebuild Jericho would see his firstborn die. In the film, Friar Santiago not only loses his mixed race son, but also is dispossessed of his Spanish family (his sister) and his native wife, condemned to pass the rest of his days shut away—for insanity or for heresy, although it is not conveyed to the viewer.

The finale of the film is disconcerting. When Friar Santiago has the opportunity to escape from his imprisonment not only does he not do it, but instead he histrionically mocks his jailer and closes the prison door upon himself. The demented (or lucid) burst of laughter by the protagonist puts a final touch to his long journey in search for a utopia that is repeatedly denied to him and which in the end he must search for within himself. The words of his diary that are repeated at various times during the narration ("Jericho has not fallen. Jericho is in the soul") finally make full sense at the end. Deprived of contact with the human community, Friar Santiago seems to discover the paradoxical meaning of the word "utopia:" *u-topos*, the non-place, the space that one can enter only through the imagination or spiritual conquest.

Like *Jericó, Retorno a Aztlán* is characterized by a reworking of utopian-apocalyptic intertexts, although in the case of *Retorno* its referents are not found within the Judeo-Christian tradition but rather in pre-Hispanic mythology. Written and directed by Juan Mora Cattlet, the film is an attempt to explore the origins of the Mexican cultural identity from an indigenous perspective. It represents the first Mexican film completely set in the pre-Columbian period and the only one with dialogs exclusively in Nahuatl. The film takes place in fifteenth century Mexico, some seventy years before the Conquest of Mexico by Hernán Cortés in 1520. The plot centers on two magical journeys: that of the messengers of Montezuma the Elder (grandfather of the emperor who met Cortés), and that of the Aztec peasant Ollín. The two groups travel a mythical route towards the place known as Aztlán, the legendary city of origin. The purpose of the trip is to beg assistance from the goddess Coatlicue in order to end a four-year drought that threatens to destroy the stability of the empire.

In *Retorno* Mora Cattlet deploys a documentary style with great plastic beauty. Filmed at Mexican archeological sites and set to pre-Columbian music, this film aspires to transport the contemporary spectator to beginning times, to a state prior to the introduction of European culture to American soil. With a polished sound track at the hands of musician and anthropologist Antonio Zeneda, *Retorno* was the result of a long period of research that its writer and director carried out with the sponsorship of the Guggenheim Foundation. The film, produced in collaboration with the Fondo de Fomento a la Calidad Cinematográfica and the National Autonomous University of Mexico, had its premiere in Mexico City in January of 1991.

Retorno examines the pre-Hispanic world in a critical fashion, avoiding a facile idealization of the Amerindian

civilizations. In fact, Mora Cattlet's film concentrates on the pre-Columbian origins of two elements that the revisionist discourse of the past few decades has invariably attributed to the Conquistadors: the oppression of Amerindians by a regime supported by terror, and the suppression of historical memory. The protagonist, Ollín, is given the task of begging urgent help from the Aztec gods. He obeys and marches to Aztlán, which is identified with an Eden-like space and time, a lost utopia towards which the characters of the film direct themselves with the purpose of avoiding the Apocalypse represented by the death of the Fifth Sun. In Aztlán Ollín meets the mother goddess Cuatlícue who pronounces that "the great warrior shall be defeated and humiliated" in a clear premonition of the Conquest which would take place only a few decades later. Upon his return he finds that his family has disappeared and the village in which he lived has been devastated. In order to avoid the spread of the news of his journey, Ollín is captured and executed by royal order.

One of the final episodes of the film coincides with a recurring element of the new Latin American novel and film: the suppression of historical memory and the capacity of the arts and literature to recuperate it. In *Retorno*, the truth about the journey of Ollín to Aztlán and the prophecy of the end of the Aztec world is erased from the historical register. Fearing that the message that Ollín receives from the goddess Coatlicue could spread, and that such a message could be harmful to imperial interests, Tlacaoel, the councilor of Montezuma the Elder, decides to burn the codices that relate these events. This gesture, which could be considered as a forewarning of the burning of Nahuatl manuscripts later carried out by the Spanish missionaries, turns out to be useless to prevent the looming disaster for the pre-Cortesian civilizations.

The scene which frames the film as a sort of prologue and epilogue consists of a liberal reconstruction of the Legend of the birth of the Fifth Sun, a myth tightly related to the apocalyptic thought of the Aztecs, who understood history to be a succession of creative and destructive cycles. According to this myth, the gods, gathered together about a bonfire in Teotihuacán, decided the creation of the Fifth Sun. One of them would have to throw himself upon the flames in order to give birth to a new era. None dared to do it, except for Nanahuatzin, who by his immolation allowed the birth of the sun that would illuminate the ancient civilizations of the Americas.

In *Retorno* the mythical weave is presented through a dream of Montezuma the Elder, who appears as one of the gods who reject the sacrifice. It is Ollín, on the other hand, anachronically taking the form of Nanahuatzin, who actually does it. In this manner, Mora Cattlet creates a worldly version of the myth. In contrast to Montezuma's fear is the bravery of the people embodied in the peasant figure Ollín. The expression of the film is in keeping with the characteristic strategies of Latin American historical revisionism: the recreation of myths from the past that permit an explanation of the present and legitimizes plans for change with a view to the future (Juan Navarro 259).

As in *Retorno*, *La otra conquista* focuses on the search for the origins of Mexican identity. While the former does this by means of an exploration of pre-Hispanic mythology from a perspective prior to the Conquest, the latter is focused on the process of transculturation that was unleashed after the sixteenth century and which gave rise to the creation of Mexican *mestizo* culture. Directed by the young Salvador Carrasco, *La otra conquista* relates the story of the conversion of Topiltzin, Montezuma's illegitimate son, after having been punished for persisting in his beliefs. Confined to a Franciscan monastery under the guardianship of Friar Diego de la Coruña, Topiltzin begins the process of Christianization which will lead him to "conquer" the image of the Virgin Mary.

La otra conquista depicts a tradition characteristic of the religious interaction between the Old and New World: the association of the mother goddess Tonantzin with the Virgin Mary as a supreme manifestation of the syncretic nature of Mexican religious beliefs. As Carlos Fuentes and Octavio Paz have frequently pointed out, veneration of the indigenous myths behind the figures of the patron saints is a common practice dating back to the Conquest (Fuentes 146; Paz, 96-97).

Carrasco's film focuses on the war of images that has taken place in Mexico since the time of the Encounter. To the friar, the image of Tonantzin constitutes an idol, a diabolical fetish that must be destroyed in order to implant his ideas in the new conquered territories. As in numerous episodes recounted in the chronicles of the Conquest, the film begins with the destruction of pre-Cortesian images and codices, a ritual act that is carried out simultaneously with the consecration of a temple to the Virgin Mary. In the remainder of the film, we witness the resurgence of pre-Columbian symbols within the Christian iconography and its appropriation by Topiltzin.

In its representation of the relationships between Spaniards and natives, Carrasco's film avoids, nevertheless, Manichaeism and the traditional depiction of the native as the noble savage. Instead of limiting itself to a statement of the physical and ideological violence imposed upon Topiltzin, *La otra conquista* also reveals Friar Diego's "conversion" process. From the first moments in which he appears blinded by religious fanaticism until his death scene, in which we discover that he had preserved a fragment of the codices between the pages of his Bible, we witness a process of religious, political, and cultural negotiation with the indigenous Other. The mastery that Carrasco demonstrates in the treatment of this theme lies in a synthesis of the conflictive forces during the period

of the Conquest and colonization, without resorting to personality types. On the contrary, Friar Diego and Topiltzin reveal complex psychologies charged with paradoxes and contradictions, from whose meeting will emerge the modern Mexican identity.

At the beginning, Friar Diego is the inquisitorial figure obsessed with the destruction of the identity marks of the indigenous world as a step prior to the institution of Christianity, but he ends up by adopting the role of those Franciscans, such as Friar Bernardino de Sahagún, who contributed to the survival of the indigenous memory after the initial holocaust. Topiltzin, at the beginning, is the native who disdainfully rejects the ideas that Friar Diego is attempting to impose upon him, but he ends up by embodying the process of syncretism and appropriation of Christian symbols by the Amerindians.

In one of his febrile hallucinations, Topiltzin imagines himself on the verge of a sacrifice to the Virgin Mary, when she is transformed into Tonantzin. The film demonstrates the process of domestication of the Christian image at the hands of the protagonist. The evangelization of the conquered lands, that many have interpreted (and continue to interpret) a simple acculturation of the vanquished, undergoes a critical reexamination in *La otra conquista*. We no longer deal with the resigned acceptance of ideas imposed by the colonization of the New World, but rather with the appropriation of the cultural iconography of the colonizers which permitted the defeated people to preserve many of their symbols of identity.

This act of appropriation is represented via the “conquest” of the image of the Virgin. Topiltzin steals the image from the sacristy, where Friar Diego keeps it “locked up” and with it he throws himself into the void. His self-immolation refers us to both Nahua and Christian messianism. In the same manner as the sacrifice of the Christian Messiah, that of Nanahuatzin in the myth of the Fifth Sun permits the birth of a new era; in this case, the birth of the Mexican mixed blood race. As in *Retorno a Aztlán*, Carrasco’s film ends with the solar image, a representation of divinity and the announcement of a new day, of a new beginning.

Carrasco demonstrates the response of the Amerindian civilizations to their feeling of identity loss after the collapse of their world as a result of the new colonial order. As Salvador Velazco has suggested, “*La otra conquista*, much more than a historical drama, is a parable for the religious syncretism that has characterized the Mexican nation since the sixteenth century” (Velazco 146). A religious syncretism is revealed, which appears tightly related to the conflicting political and military forces and which opens for us a new possibility for interpreting the phenomenon apart from the clichés of traditional historical cinema and of the ethnocentrism of Western thought.

Jericó, *Retorno a Aztlán*, and *La otra conquista* strive to create an alternative version of the Old World-New World Encounter characterized by a systematic revision of the dichotomies associated with the discourse related to the Discovery and the Conquest: civilization / barbarism, discoverer / discovered, conqueror / conquered, utopia / apocalypse. The three films resort to an apocryphal form of history that permits a condensation of numerous historical events within mythical frameworks. Rather than focusing on great historical figures, they do this by means of apocryphal personalities that embody an opposing perspectives. In contrast to the traditional allegories in which the personages become character types, *Jericó* and *La otra conquista* demonstrate complex psychologies immersed in a process of ideological and cultural negotiation.

The millennial realm represented by the imperial and authoritarian State and extolled by films such as *Alba de América*, here change into an Apocalypse, after which a reconstruction of the identity symbols of the colonized peoples is required. The symbolic reconstruction of Jericho, the journey to the origins of Aztlán and the appropriation of the cultural symbols of the great city are thus put forward as alternatives to the hegemonic discourse of the Quincentennial celebrations and its commercial ramifications.

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