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The City in US Latino and Latin American Film

Italo Calvino, through the narrative voice in Imagined Cities, addresses the dynamic nature of an urban space: “The city consists of its relationships between the measurements of its spaces and the events of its past”(10). Thus, a depiction of a city as a palimpsest must include its past and present. Accordingly, fiction writers and film directors often portray the city as a synchronic story occurring within a diachronic space. Scholars in the field of urban studies explore the relationships between time and space, while critics study the city as a space where people live. They explore how the author or director perceives the city and how the inhabitants interact with each other and their shared space. Postmodernist critics have greatly advanced the field, and have studied the politics of place and space, the role of gender, class and race, and the city as a postmodern space.

My study surveys the work of these cultural studies’ critics and applies the theory of the study of the city to films produced by U.S. Latino and Latin American directors in the last fifteen years. I analyze *The City* (David Riker, United States, 1998) and contemplate the nature of the fragmented New York City presented in this film. The director uses the focalizations of illegal immigrants to deliver the city to the audience from a distance. The characters hope to realize their dreams and instead find a soulless city. In *Rodrigo D: no futuro* (V́ctor Gaviria, Colombia,

1990) the protagonists live on the outskirts of Medellín, Colombia and see the city from far away. The director switches from long- to medium-range shots to emphasize the sharp contrasts between the two spaces: 1) the affluent city hidden behind the foggy pollution looming far away, and 2) the poor shanty town that assaults the audience with its abrasive violence. Finally, I study Eliseo Subiela's end of millennium production, *Pequeños milagros* (1997) to analyze the presentation of Buenos Aires as a magical space. I focus on the mise en scène and photography to explain how Subiela uses them to deliver a message of hope by means of city that contrasts sharply with the jungles of New York City and Medellín.

The City: In Search of a Theoretical Model

For decades, social scientists have studied the city as spaces of community interaction. At the same time, scholars in the humanities have studied the city as places of human interaction and specifically, as spaces artists portray through their special filters to present a city that welcomes, scares, overwhelms, traps, protects and serves as the setting for narratives, poems, plays and films. Contemporary literary critics, based greatly in the postulates of postmodernism, have devised new models that have allowed scholars to study the city from new perspectives and within additional frameworks. This broad range of studies includes the exploration of cities as spaces that stand not merely as a backdrop for human interaction, but as the main protagonists of the works themselves. Some of them are positive, while others offer opposing views.

Postmodern critics add to the cultural conversation about "Imaginary Cities" by often providing contrasting, rather than complementary views or positions. For instance, Frederic Jameson defines the city as inclusive of postmodern spaces which are disorienting and disabling (114). D. Harvey approaches the city with a more positive mind set and portrays the city as a

space which offers an ‘emporium of styles’ (Rabat’s phrase) from which the individual might

In summary, Riker and Gaviria deliver postmodern cities full of dwellers that must struggle everyday to make it. Both directors succeed in showing poverty and decay spreading like an urban cancer under the distant ignoring watch of the affluent areas. The audience very rarely sees beyond the poor areas that the director shows them. The skyline full of architecturally beautiful and functional buildings hides behind a foggy filter that hides them. Film’s spectators gaze at the jungle-like environment depicted behind the medium, long and close-up shots that Riker and Gaviria use to emphasize the disparity between both worlds. They show the world how people really live in the city. They both hope to educate the world and promote change. The camera continues carrying out its role first received with the emergence of the New Latin American Cinema back of serving as a weapon of passing along social commentaries.

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