

EDITORIAL.

THOUGHT AND CONSTRUCTION OF HISTORIC KNOWLEDGE, A REQUIREMENT TO CONSTRUCT THE
FUTURE.²

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By Hugo Zemelman Merino.¹

ABSTRACT:

A marked trend in Latin America has been the one of constructing knowledge on the premise of the historical development with a more or less precise, emancipatory, and valued direction. But the twentieth century gave us a capricious, uncertain, highly indeterminate, and unsecured history. In this sense, rather than a pessimistic understanding, the history of the twentieth century requires embodying substantive challenges. We face enormous demands in regards to developing our ability to think as Latin Americans; and this relates to the formation of subjects able to see and to think new and viable realities, which is essential to rethink the ways to construct knowledge; understanding that this should be historical in nature rather than theoretical in the face to expand limits as possible, in perspective for the future.

KEY WORDS:

Historical knowledge, historicized subject, memory and future, reality, wholeness, and articulation, utopia and transdisciplinarity, and training of subjects.

The lack of continuity on the social projects in Latin American countries, that constant self-destruction and self-invention, which took the attention of Fernand Braudel, poses a deep question in relation with the social and political experiences in our countries. The plane where the continuity could even be appreciated, is in some ways of cultural creation, like in the literary ones, but not so much in other orders of reality.

Why are the possibilities of building a deeper sense of being in perspective of a project are being constantly interrupted? Why is memory forgotten in this constant re-invention? Is it because there is no interest in building any future?

Behind these questionings, there is something that maybe is difficult for us to assimilate: if the socio-historical reality is not built, there is nothing. If there is no an individual and collective effort, in any value direction that it could be, that is, to build realities, there are no realities. Hence, in the center of those questions, there are some other questions: When and how much do we ask ourselves about Latin America? How do we think about it? From where do we think about it?

What is on the background, is still more challenging: Do we need to build anything? Does it make sense to build anything? Do we need to think about Latin America?

¹Transcripción realizada por Noabi Arbeláez Hernández y editado por Laura García

I would like to make some open-ended questions here. I do not have any answers with me, I think that it would be a mistake. It is necessary to pose some questions because can take many answers, only if we attend to the different national contexts. And that is exactly, among other things, what we need: questions that can open worlds of possibilities; prior to giving them shape in organized speeches, either in the theoretical plane or in the ideological one, taking on these questions as what they are: these are questions which raise up in the value plane of social concrete realities.

We cannot confuse what to know the theory is, to know authors, with *building* theories. The former falls on the limits of information, that is to say, in the verification of such a theory and such authors, in knowing what they say and can apply it. I say so because many times, in Latin America, the construction of theory is understood like the application of theories in other contexts and for other purposes.

This way, different challenges start to profile: What is to build theories in Latin America? Are theories built in Latin America?

By analyzing a theory, we cannot stop thinking that this one is built in accordance with a historical and cultural context, as a manner to an account of choices of constructions posed, from that context. But, can that construction, mechanically, be moved into other contexts, like in the case of Latin American countries, not being aware of the fact that they answer to other necessities of available theoretical constructions, for instance, in Germany or Italy? If the exercise is done mechanically, are the choices of theoretical constructions in Argentina, Uruguay, Chile, or Mexico, equivalent to those, which are had in Germany or Italy? As it has been posed, it would imply to deny history itself. And with this, let me be clear, we do not mean that the theories produced in our countries lack importance, stating this, would be short-sighted and little serious.

What I rather mean is that, it is not the same to acknowledge possibilities of construction of realities from theoretical corpora, which are characteristic of contexts that are not ours than to “explain” our realities from those corpora. When the social scientist applies theories without further ado, without cultural mediation, way down deep, he does not construct theories, what he does is to trap the reality that he aims to comprehend or to explain, based on a set of concepts that cannot have any relevance to that reality.

This problem has a series of implications. When we pose the construction of a theory, where is culture? When we come up with a theory, is our culture a part of that theoretical construction? Or rather, do we expect that our theoretical constructions be made from the requirement of a kind of universalism or cosmopolitanism, as if the culture, the concrete structures, which determine or condition us, and which fix our life spaces would not exist, coming to the absurd of replacing the historical and cultural context by those major theoretical constructs?

When culture is out of thinking the concrete reality and its multidimensionality, undoubtedly, what prevails is an intellectual deformation in the Latin American intelligence; it is like starting to invent countries, to invent realities in function of some logic of universal character, in circumstances where the role of the intellectual is exactly to capture the phenomena that we have ahead of us, to specify the issues and their particularities, although these particularities do not match any general theory.

The former is seen very clearly in some disciplines, in political science, and even in a certain social anthropology, but especially in the economic speech, which is highly abstract that

can invent countries, which shape them in function of econometric requirements, where the cultural dimensions are completely unknown. From which it can be concluded that, in the measure in that those economic models, although they are quiet correct in terms of the formal or econometric logic, do not take into account what we are calling the *historical and cultural context* are acting in a vacuum.

Although this becomes relative in the fact that, behind those efforts of theorizations where history has no presence, certain social spaces do have, which is part of the debate.

What do I mean by this? On the one hand, that one begins to confirm that culture and a country's memory are out of the efforts of theorizations, on the other hand, that the analysts, their instruments, and models, which are sophisticated many times, lack the specific pertinence for a concrete reality. This does not happen in the so-called "developed" countries, so why do we do it in our countries?

The question leads us to think again in those old theses that some sociologists and anthropologists had posed, especially Mexican, when, during the sixties and seventies in the twentieth century, used to talk about a *mental colonialism*, which is even worse than the economic one. Today, that colonialism, that loss of capacity to face our problems, makes us prone to make up models based on what we cannot understand from reality, and which is even more serious, they impede us to recognize choices of social construction.

Now, why are these choices important? Because it happens that, if there is a legacy is leaving us the twentieth century and that we have to assume in terms of sciences concerning man and society, it is that we do not have any guarantee that history contains by itself, the course of a sense. That is to say, history itself does not assure us that it is developing in a certain direction.

This is a great breakdown of parameters that has occurred in the intellectual world and in the world of ideologies, in the last fifteen or twenty years. Up to some time ago, many people in Latin America built knowledge on the premise that that knowledge made sense insofar it was part of a great metadiscourse that activated the existence of a historical development with a more or less precise direction, and besides it was valued; history was emancipatory, it was part of the development of society in a positive sense, the liberation of men. But the twentieth century has shown that it is not the case.

On the contrary, we have come across with a history, which is capricious and especially uncertain, just like the subjects who shape it; strongly indeterminate, more than it was previously thought during the same twentieth century. We have proven that there is no guarantee, a redemptive challenge; that the possible social, cultural, and psychological salvation of the human species depends on the very efforts of that species, that is to say, from the efforts of each individual and groups in order to build their reality. If they do not build it, there can be no complaint that others impose their own conception.

More than a pessimistic interpretation, the history of the twentieth century, requires to embody a challenge. And in that context, the questions on Latin America and the role played by the social knowledge, have to be found, which gives enormous developments. However, on this occasion we shall confine ourselves to point out problems, except in the theoretical plane than in the effort of reasoning. What I mean is that at this time, we are facing enormous demands in regards to developing our ability to think. It is just this one, which is weakening itself; the ability to view reality is the one which is being deranged.

On some occasion, when addressing the issues of literature and poetry, Octavio Paz stated that there were some problems with regard to the poetic and literary creation, because man was being affected in the grace to hear and in the grace to say. If we take Paz's approach and extrapolate it to the scope of our concerns, we still have a further problem: *we are losing the grace to look at reality* in a sort of negative correlation, because the more we know, while more information we have, while we read more books, less ability to think we have. Why does this occur? Why is the high intelligence of Latin America losing that potential of thinking and we are transforming into *minimum subjects*?

We cannot deceive ourselves; an economic model so exclusive and marginalizing, so impoverishing as the one we face now in all Latin American countries, requires conformist people, the minimum condition of being human. And compliance requires that people do not think so that they do not want, and that they do not want so that they do not demand, and that they do not demand so that they do not exert any pressure. And, therefore, that all can be kept in perfect balance.

It is not a matter of intellectual delicacy to wonder about what happens in Latin America. What is happening today is a product of distorting and crippling thought. In the old literature, the technological reason or instrumental reason or rationality with attachment at the end was extolled. Today, people have lost the ability to look at reality, to see it. We are unable to comprehensively explain reality, which is exacerbated when we exaggerate the interest by explaining it descriptively and enclose its complexity in a series of conceptual frameworks, where everything appears perfectly orderly and balanced. In this way, we are placed - and many times, we place ourselves - to fallacious orders, because reality does not conform to any framework.

Theoretical approaches are strongly conditioned by the specific situations that they face; or, to say it in rather general terms, by history. Therefore, we have to be able to recover history as the great challenge of knowledge, as the high demand that is always out of any conceptual construction.

This is the great contribution which has left us, among others, the Frankfurt School, not yet sufficiently studied; relegated, banished, despite having perhaps the most prominent figures of the second half of the twentieth century, among them Theodor Adorno. For him, a real challenge of thought is to think that that has not been thought; what is outside the bounds of organized speech. His idea is that reality is beyond any conceptual structure, phenomenological or systemic inspiration, no matter if it be subtle. Man's challenge today is faced with the unprecedented, to look at the unknown. And that is what today is absent in Latin America.

Such is the task we face. If we do not take it, there is no possibility of building something. And if it is not available, then history as a space for the construction of historical subjects, is diluted in the inertia of what the dominant order builds as the only possibility; and, in this sense, we can be in the presence of the end of utopia. But, fortunately, if we can do it; and, in fact, there are many people who are doing it in Latin America.

Of course, what I am pointing out can be worked out in many areas, in the philosophical, epistemological dimension, etc. But there is a domain that cannot be stopped working and this is the plane of training and its implications.

What do we teach? What do we learn? What do we teach for? What do we learn for? From

where do we teach? From where do we learn? These are not easy questions to be answered, because they are beyond the so-called theoretical knowledge and research techniques. Before that, they require something more elemental: *to understand the times we live in*. Today, now, and here.

Let us ask ourselves: do we know what happens today? Do we understand what happens today? Do we know what the current historical moment that Latin America is going through? Personally, I have doubts about it. I think that there is a great variety, a great anticipation of value-ideological character speeches; but these are not considering the central questions, because we are not always willing to assume them: what happens today with the historical moment? What happens in the historical moment in which we are living, from and in which we are building theories and knowledge?

Let us ask ourselves about the grand speeches of today's liberation. Texts and texts and more texts have been written, totaling thousands of pages. The so-called "meta-discourse" of man's liberation in the context of globalization, has been written. But, what is its role? We feel like saying that if we want to free man, let the discourse of liberation be a discourse that reaches the people, which is not for specialists; because sometimes the intellectual deformation leads to that, from which it is clear that only the enlightened will be free, those who are able to understand the speeches of liberation posed by these intellectuals. That would be a huge setback and a poor conception of the enlightenment.

We have to approach the concrete man. And to say a concrete man means, at least, two issues that have to be fully understood.

The first one, is to understand the *specific subject* in concrete spaces where he lives in, works and manages; and from which he is looking for meaning in his own life. Without a doubt, the spaces of everyday life tend to oblivion in the majority of the frameworks carried out in the social sciences.

The second one, implies something that, apparently, is easier, but that is not clearly determined: to begin to establish relationships with the subject in his human faculties. We cannot restrict the training process only to certain dimensions, such as the faculty of understanding and in turn, is reduced to the ability to do.

Both issues imply to review the notion of subject, clearly and explicitly, according to the manner as it is being required to be reformulated at this time, according to the demands of the historical moment. We cannot simply limit ourselves to the notion of *homo sapiens*, nor to the notion of *homo faber*, which is the one today which is being extolled. There are other dimensions, such as those which were stated, for the first time, about 40 years ago, with very few followers, as the dimension of *homo ludens*, described in a not very recent, but current text [*Homo ludens*, Johan Huizinga, 1938, who posed a series of challenges.

One of these challenges is to recover the teaching of what it means to combine this set of dimensions in the process of intellectual growth, both at the volitional-emotional plane and the intellectual one. Without a subject who is able to harmonize the set of his faculties, the capacity to see reality cannot be developed; if this capacity to see reality cannot be developed, we cannot act upon it; choices cannot be recognized nor anything can be built because it lacks the capacity to recognize senses.

In this type of arguments, we can even be recovering contributions that come from the Greeks, it could be fatal if we forget them, as many people have pointed it out. For example,

to revive this combination, which until Plato's days was relatively harmonious, between two types of rationalities that coexist in the human being: the inert reason, which is the reason for analytical thinking, which began to be oversized since the Renaissance, especially with the mechanical philosophy of the seventeenth century, and that another *rationality*, which was scattered, separated, dissociated, which, right or wrong, seek to recover some more speeches engaged with the historical subject and that the Greeks called *erotic reason*, which has to do with the world of the intuitive, emotional, volitional, and which today, have a minimum development.

A manifestation of why this another reason is not developed has to do with the thorough absence, systematic and on the rise, in training programs - for example, in the social sciences - such elementary matters as literature. Literature does not have any presence in the training of social scientists today, in basic training. The reduction began with its absence, but it was followed with others - philosophy and history—in order to leave an excessive space only to techniques. What we have called the glorification of instrumental reason, in the terminology of this dichotomy, it would be somehow *inert reason*; the rest is not taken into consideration, not even the private or everyday life, with what we are mutilating more and more the subject.

This problem has been analyzed for some time and produces grief that, despite this, we still do not have reactive capacity in this regard. Herbert Marcuse's texts at the beginning of the 1960s, among others, raise the idea of "one-dimensional man", who is today fully consolidated. What is more serious is that this condition is not only supported by the economic and technological logic, which is demanding it, but by the social dynamics as a whole. In this sense, it is worrying that, what we consider the rescue of the subject, is not affecting any subject, but it rather seeks to compensate pieces of a subject, rags of a subject... poor subjects who are not subjects; they are, rather, obedient consumers and conformists; who have lost the capacity to look at reality, to see it in what it has of new, because what is new is characteristic of the human condition.

The meaning of what we say is that the human being is always incomplete, who has the need of his deploying himself in order for him to truly enrich and not to be trapped; that is why, he should always be breaking parameters. However, today we want to mummify him; we are reducing him, just as some theorists want, by transforming him as a subject into a function.

Where do the human remains remain?, one could ask oneself.

Does perhaps the set of roles make a human being or is a human being capable of being deployed in many roles? How are we going to tackle the problem? If I pose it in one sense or another, the consequences, the theoretical and the practical ones, are enormous. If we see the human being in the set of roles, for example, we are left without any remnants of his capacity to create different things from those patterns of roles, which are making him up. That which is unsurpassable of being a human is being surpassed. That what in the field of education has been called the technologization of subjectivity consists of becoming good spokespeople of the context, without even building it. We are men of the circumstances, but we are not men against the circumstances. We are determined by them and, in that sense, shaped by them; we are expressions of circumstances created by other subjects; we limit ourselves to be their exponents with a minimal or no capacity to create circumstances or to place us against them, in front of the contexts; to see them from a different perspective. The challenge is how we can solve what we propose. To address the excessive dominance of theories, concepts, and systems that go there and here; that we even translate without mediation of any kind from chemistry or physics, from wherever it is, we have to start from

our historical consciousness. Humans are beings determined historically; however, we do not know what history is; this implies that we cannot place ourselves against the world, we cannot place ourselves before society.

Until the seventeenth century, man used to do it in a more or less systematic way; even in the nineteenth century, it was difficult to find a scientific author, who would not raise his construct from frameworks that were those of his vision of reality.

For example, Descartes builds a perspective that lasts still until the nineteenth century, which has permeated the Cartesian intellectual inheritance until the present day. On the other hand, in the twentieth century, which is the century where knowledge has reached rapid developments, those visions of reality have been lost, the vision of the world has been lost. This is what Edmund Husserl refers to in his criticism of European science in a classic text [*The crisis of the European Sciences*, 1936], where he indicates that everything has been reduced to a pure intellectual technology, losing, therefore, thought. This is what has happened in the last 60 years.

With very few exceptions, this period has occurred in an overwhelming predominance of this intellectual technology, which today aims to be carried to the plane of the particular subject. It is no longer to form subjects who think, but technologists in the perspective of the logic of human resources. Although it is not known what for you have to be efficient technologists as being efficient. What for? From where? It does not matter; that is a problem that does not concern me.

However, it is not about transforming reality into a large object that we must understand once and for all, as it was the aim of the nineteenth-century philosophy. We can agree with the criticism today is formulated about those visions of the totality of reality -which is what man seeks for good-, but this is very different to give up the effort of conceiving reality as a dynamic articulation, although that articulation will never become the content of a formulation. In essence, what is sought is not the articulation of the world, as complex and sometimes indomitable, but, rather, the recovery of the thinking subject.

This is a subject capable of thinking, from the fragmentary, from the partial, that that can include the fragmentary and the partial. That requires a thinking subject with a set of his faculties and not only with understanding. The scientific world has not posed this challenge sufficiently, and if it has been posed, it has not been solved. One of the indicators of what we say is that, when it comes to ethical issues in relation to scientific knowledge, most of the texts come from the natural sciences more than the social sciences.

What is wrong with ethics? This question is perhaps a way to be aware of the fact that we are not aware, that there is something that does not work. No wonder, then, that the relationship between knowledge and ethics has precisely emerged as one of the most developed branches of sciences, which is physics and, probably, from biology, by the tremendous biogenetical experiments that are being carried out.

However, we have not solved the problem of rational posture, which is supposed to correct, to recover the capacity to look at the world. That which was previously solved in a closed philosophical system, today it is not achieved in the same way; but a thinking capacity can be developed, which is not necessarily a theoretical one, but which it meets the role of placing us in history.

Reality is always beyond any theory and any conceptual boundary; man's capacity consists of transgressing those boundaries, not only at the plane of the great theoretical construct, but especially in the everyday personal life of each one of us.

These problems are not only present in the academy, but in the subjects that make reality every day. If from the everyday life of each one of us, we are not able to see beyond the boundaries, which constitute it, beyond the parameters, which define it and trap it, then we are not thinking; we are simply being subjects-reflections of circumstances, but not subjects who are able to be placed against the circumstances, in terms of other logic, showing different horizons of life.

Choice: here there is a key concept in the history of mankind. If this were not the case, we would still be in the Middle Ages, in the patristic philosophy or with Giordano Bruno. But is not the case. We are much more here, because it has been possible, and that is a central point. That is why this discussion has to do with the formative process, with man's capacity to think against his own reason, what distinguishes him from any other animal species. That is to say, the capacity of thinking against his truths, his certainties, as Imre Lakatos used to state.

What we say leads us to a mention with which I would like to end this exposition. The great subject of today's human sciences, which is to solve the relationship between the disciplinary discourses and the question of their boundaries.

More than a paradigm crisis, we are dealing with a crisis of disciplinary boundaries; because the social and historical reality is demanding us to think beyond these limits. As Morin used to say some time ago, there is more reality between two disciplines than two isolated disciplines.

How to fix the mind, in the case of specialists, to think beyond the qualifier system of the sciences that we inherited in the nineteenth century and that we have not changed? There is a challenge that is not exclusively methodological or epistemic of the specialists in the construction of social knowledge. It is a training problem.

The other big problem in classical thinking at the end of the nineteenth century and at the beginning of the twentieth century, which is not either solved despite the attempts that have been made, it is like solving the relationship between the *disciplinary or transdisciplinary discourse*. And along with the problem of boundaries, with an issue that has a number of connotations that we have not finished experimenting, it is here where the problem of utopia emerges.

Today, science and utopia are discussed separately. The problem lies in the fact that with this separation, we will not solve the problem neither of utopia nor of science; the solution lies in the relationship of the two. The question is how utopia is incorporated in the construction of a rigorous disciplinary discourse that has its own requirements in analytical terms, brought together with demands that can be linked with the concept of utopia. In other words, as utopia is present in the different disciplinary discourses.

I would say that we live an era in which as never before, a speech is being built from utopia, but with a difference: today, utopia is silent.

The utopia is silent because the speech built from utopia currently has the excessive claim to identify itself with reality. We are living a moment in which many speeches that

man manages, among them, the economic one, aim to apply ontological principles, that is to say, to identify intimately itself with reality, insofar as the speech appears to be real. Consequently, It is perceived as not utopian, which is the point that needs to be addressed, because utopia is not the application of ontological principles of the future time, but the version of many future times.

Thus, a country has had many past stories; it also has, as the Annales School, has said, many possible futures. That has always been this way in history. Today, we are living a moment in which multiple possible futures are silent and are crushed by a speech that aims to have caught the reality once and for all and that, therefore, has resolved with its own construction, the issue of utopia. This blockade situation leaves us unarmed, absolutely bewildered before the end of utopia; it means that there is no more future time, that mankind has just arrived, in the Hegelian sense of the word, to its last stage. It is intended that we live in a perpetual present, which reproduces itself eternally.

However today, we reiterate a situation again, not one of religious inspiration, but an economic one: the future time cannot be caught by anyone, only it can be trapped by the very upsetting of the conditions of reproduction of mankind. If it is not possible to continue holding the multiple possible futures, the problem lies in knowing how to recognize choices, and this is one of the biggest challenges. It is in this interpretation of choices where utopia plays a role, because we cannot interpret the circumstances that are determining us if we do not do it from a future requirement.

Therefore, utopia is in all areas of the subject, not only in the large spaces of history; also in the small spaces in which each of us develops and defines their life choices; in the constructions of life that everyone can recognize as possible at some point, there, there is also utopia, and that means to rescue the subject.

These challenges are not epistemological, methodological, or technical; they are challenges, which give rise to a need to see the historical moment, but they require to be translated into training processes.

We must choose between being a subject who is the builder of their own reality or being an inert subject- illustrated, but inert-, subject to the limitations of the circumstances, in a sort of mechanical determinism. In this case, we cannot be more than a minimum subject, a form of subordination, fueled in many countries by the training processes, which omit the thinking subjects.

Our thinking can lead in many directions; however, here we have picked up, without excluding others, the sense of recovery of the historical consciousness, which is the ability to look at reality and to transform it into the premise from which you can build knowledge. It supposes a capacity of reasoning that must be cultivated, hence this problem has necessarily to be translated into a fruitful connection between science and pedagogy, in a broad and creative sense; thus if it is not translated into training processes, it is not but a mere discourse among specialists who say all these things simply to reassure the own consciousness and then, happy, go back to daily consumption. Beware of these schizophrenias, which are a form of accommodation against the tensions; a release of all the bitterness and the sorrows, which are transferred to another so that they continue being happy. You have to assume the problem in terms of trades, professions of everyone, either to construct knowledge, to teach, or to work the connection between teaching and building knowledge.

We are always faced with essential questions: what am I doing? How do I face the future? What do I recognize as choices? How do I link memory, both collective and personal, with the construction of the future? What need do I for the future? How do I translate that need into construction actions from everyday life? This is a comprehensive question, which has to do with the role of intellectuals, as we are not outside to what has happened in our countries.

It is very easy to transfer the responsibilities. However, the problem is to be aware of what happened with thought. Do we really think about our countries? We think of them as a reality with all its limitations or do we invent them? Latin America is a continent plagued with speeches without a subject and many subjects that still do not find their speech. It is the point of departure and arrival of this reflection.

Nota:

² Hugo H. Zemelman Merino. Falleció en Pázcuarro, México el 3 Octubre del 2013. Maestro en Sociología. Fundador, Presidente y Director del Instituto Pensamiento y Cultura en América Latina, IPECAL. Profesor e investigador del Colegio de México y de varias instituciones tanto mexicanas como latinoamericanas. Mayor información sobre su obra y legado en Ipecal sede México, Cerro de la Carbonera, no. 24, Delegación Coyoacán, México D.F. Tel. (55) 53 36 42 87, secretaria_general@ipecal.edu.mx. El presente artículo es una transcripción de una conferencia dada en Chile durante el año 2000. Esta transcripción fue realizada por Noabi Arbeláez Hernández y su edición por Laura García García de Bogotá, Colombia