I will discuss here North American art historian David Craven’s notion of ‘alternative modernism’.\(^1\) Let’s start from a decisive critical element of Craven’s elaboration. That is, from its inception, modernism is a conflictual realm, far from any unity or uniformity of principles.\(^2\)

It is in the face of this tense and heterogeneous order that Craven will outline the trend of ‘alternative modernism’, whose trademark consists of the critical and poetic elaboration of the late processes of modernisation of peripheral countries.

Given its date of origin in the mid-1990s, it could appear as just another variation on a postmodern multiculturalist or postcolonial theme. In no way is it this. In truth, for Craven it is about establishing a reflexive system of modernism in general – inclusive of the central countries. And yet this is observed critically and dialectically from a peripheral viewpoint. That is, without the traces of optimism one finds in Marshall Berman’s texts or the condemnation of the avant-garde consistent with the reflection theory of György Lukács.

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2 ‘[A] plurality of related but also notably divergent and even fractious tendencies’ (Craven 1996, p. 30, n. 4).
stood as capitalist modernisation – is also claimed by Craven, who chooses as the founder of ‘alternative modernism’ the Nicaraguan poet and thinker Ruben Dario and his notion of ‘modernism’. Dario elaborated it in the 1880s and later disseminated it in Barcelona, where he was also active.\(^3\)

Let me insist on this point. ‘Alternative modernism’ does not seek to elaborate a local history. This is a crucial difference in view of localist perspectives surrounded by phantasms of authenticity or originality recurrent in multiculturalisms and postcolonialisms.

In sum, the perspective of ‘alternative modernism’ is dialectically linked, in negative terms, to a notion of a global system of production of goods and services. Similarly, it rests on the encompassing critical notion of imperialism understood as a stage of capitalism linked to monopolies, which, in addition to containing the colonial and semi-colonial subsystems, includes intra-imperialist oppositions and specifically a certain historical cycle dialectically correlated to modernism.

It is therefore a project with an all-encompassing systemic ambition and in which the notions of imperialism and modernism are intertwined. How so? What other elements combine with Dario’s ideas in the first matrix of the system?

**Third World and Modern Art**

The critical praxis of Craven nurtures itself as much from artistic forms as from struggles and political forms existing in the Third World – a term which Craven understood as linked to the French revolutionary notion of Third State.\(^4\)

Besides resting on Baudelaire’s and Dario’s ideas, the internationalist perspective of ‘alternative modernism’ adds to these ideas forms of modern art of peripheral countries and also some so-called ‘primitive’ or pre-capitalist practices. As such, the essay published in *Third Text* chooses as an example Catalan modernism, which includes works of a young Picasso, permeated with ingredients of anarchism;\(^5\) as well as the architecture of Gaudí, based on ideas

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4. For Craven, it was possibly a matter of rescuing and renewing the term in the face of the criticism of Immanuel Wallerstein, which dismisses, as we know, the local and specific implications of the general notion of Third World, to emphasise the unified character of the global economic system.