Amateur Citizens: Culture and Democracy in Contemporary Cuba

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ABSTRACT

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My dissertation studies the creative practices of citizens who use cultural resources to engage in political criticism in contemporary Cuba. I argue that, in order to become visible as political subjects in the public sphere, these citizens appeal to cultural forms and narratives of self-representation that elucidate the struggles for recognition faced by emerging social actors. I examine blogs, garage bands, art performances, home art exhibits, digital literary supplements, improvised academies, and informal networks of publication that, as forms of aesthetic experimentation with stories of everyday life, disclose a *social text*. I suggest that their narrative choices emphasize their status as 'regular citizens' in order to distinguish themselves from both traditional voices of political opposition and institutionally accredited cultural producers—professional artists, academics, musicians. This recasts sites of cultural production as models of alternative citizenship where the concept of the political is re-imagined and where the commonplace, pejorative meaning of the term amateur is contested. On the fringes of the republic of letters, adjacent to traditional sites of cultural production, these oblique uses of culture consequently question legitimate forms of public speech. They demand that the way in which the relationship between aesthetics and politics in Cuba has been traditionally studied be reconsidered.

Read in tandem with discourses against and about them from the lettered city—in literature, cultural criticism, film, and visual arts—I also follow the trope of the amateur under revolutionary cultural politics. I suggest that these contemporary voices have a

contradictory genealogy in the cultural practices of the early decades of the Cuban Revolution. I try to show that these cultural practices become politically and socially significant because they try to resist—though not always successfully—cooptation by two forces: the remnant of bureaucratic, state-capitalist tendencies on one hand, and the rapid commercialization of popular culture for a foreign audience on the other. As a result, both the reconfigurations of the cultural field and the contested meanings of democracy in post-Cold War Cuba are re-examined through a reading of informal hubs of cultural production. The functions of culture in late socialism can be then comparatively studied by looking at an institutional framework in transition through the social and political subjectivities that are both expressed in, and constituted by, corresponding aesthetic practices and forms.

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INTRODUCTION

I. Situating the study

The 50th anniversary of the Cuban Revolution, which followed the official transference of power from Fidel to Raúl Castro in 2008 (who had served as unofficial head of state since 2006), was a landmark important enough to elicit in all circles, academic and vernacular alike, a series of debates regarding the futures of Cuban socialism. It was also accompanied by state-of-the-field balances in many areas of study that attempted to make sense of those two decades.[1] In a sense, this was a coda to the process of resignification that had begun in the mid to late 1980s, when the transformation of the socialist bloc and its subsequent disintegration brought on paradigm shifts both symbolic and structural in all sectors of Cuban life, and consequently in all areas of study.

In this context, the exceptionality often appealed to in Cuban analyses sprung from its having followed neither the transition model of Eastern Europe nor the aggressive market 'socialism' of China and Vietnam. In constitutional, socio-economic, and cultural terms, the national destiny was severed from the track of formal democratization and rapid economic privatization that swept the Eastern European countries between 1989 and 1991. The prominent teleological nationalistic narrative that, as Marifeli Pérez-Stable and others have argued, has framed the legitimation of the revolutionary government from its very beginnings facilitated this unlikely course.[2] The "Rectificación de errores" campaign (1987-89), the constitutional changes of 1992, the dollarization of the economy in 1993, the highly controlled participation of Cuba in the global market, the heavy investment on tourism as the main source of national revenue, the beginnings of a modest private enterprise, as well as deep waves of economic crises and mass

emigration, to name a few, were all decisive elements that marked the period officially coined as "Special Period in Times of Peace" in 1990.[3]

The prevalent mood of the 1990s, of which its literary and cultural production with its penchant for realist aesthetics bears witness, was one of desperation and disillusionment, languishing between an agonizing authoritarian order barely able to sustain itself and the frustrated expectations of a coming transition that never crystallized. The later partial economic recovery, in no small measure due to the 1998 presidential win of ally Hugo Chávez in Venezuela, breathed air into the national debate on reform and renewal. Along with new networks of communication made possible by digital media, the maturity of the commercial and cultural ventures begun in the 1990s, and a transformed diasporic demographic with closer physical and emotional ties to the ongoing Cuban reality than previous exiled communities, at the turn of the 21st century the discursive topography of the socio-political and cultural debates began to feature new social dynamics as well as new economic, political, and social actors.

In order to identify the disciplinary contribution and the distinct approach of this dissertation, and as a form of critical ventriloquism, I will first contextualize my own intervention through the discussion of two exemplary and representative works of the general trends in the study of Cuban culture from the 1990s onward: a collection of essays edited by Ariana Hernández-Reguant, *Cuba in the Special Period: Culture and Ideology in the 1990s*, and Rafael Rojas's work in *Tumbas sin sosiego*—a book-length discussion of revolutionary cultural politics that is equal parts intellectual history and literary study—and elsewhere.

Hernández-Reguant's anthology is a pioneering precedent for the theorization of Special Period culture. Though most of the phenomena I will discuss take place during the decade after the Special Period proper—a somewhat arbitrary date would be after 1998—they are

discursively and structurally tied to the same late socialist paradigm as those covered by Hernández-Reguant's volume, while, at the same time, they differ from the Special Period aesthetics. As we have hinted at before, as an epoch it was marked by the proliferation of signs and objects that addressed a host of strange bedfellows, inhabiting as Hernández-Reguant puts it: "the juxtaposition of socialist practices and capitalist landscapes" (12). The essays collected in the volume and the editor's well-framed introduction have the merit of approaching cultural analysis from the same double front—in the tradition of Stuart Hall and Pierre Bourdieu—in which I would situate my own approximation to culture: they pay attention to both the symbolic interpretation of cultural artifacts and aesthetic practices attuned to their sociopolitical functions, and to the effect of material, structural, and social changes on cultural production, circulation, and reception.

For Hernández-Reguant the Cuban culture of late socialism differs from its Eastern counterparts in an important aspect. In contrast with the more substantial artistic ruptures and the protagonic role played by youth popular culture in mobilizing counter-hegemonic forces against state ideology in other socialist countries, Hernández-Reguant argues that "…in the 1990s, most artists chose not to directly collide with revolutionary ideology, strategically insisting instead on the separation of art from politics. It was popular culture, rather, that provided a space for cultural critique" (11). While she recognizes the pressures of youth fringe groups on the state's administration of cultural institutions, and recognizes the daring iconoclasm of the artists of the 1980s, the text goes on to argue that the increased relevance of popular culture as a vehicle of social criticism was the result of its successful commercialization during the economic overhaul of the 1990s: "As the spaces for public expression increased, partly due to the state's weakening

and partly due to new commercial opportunity, so did reflective and critical visions of the social experience" (3).

What Hernández-Reguant, in any case, rightly recognizes, is that generally speaking neither more traditional sites of artistic production nor these new spaces of commercial and popular culture dealt with the political course of the now defunct national project except in roundabout ways: "…Special Period Cuba acquired a distinct aesthetic quality, devoid of the moral judgments that invariably surrounded any reference to the Cuban Revolution. Thus images of ruin and decay and the music sounds of yesteryear were presented as signifiers of authenticity and resilience rather than as of socialism's failure" (13). And while this is an accurate observation, the discursive and structural relation between the field of art and of popular-cum-commercial culture are not clearly outlined. The undue reductionism of cultural production to its greater commercialization in this period leads to a confusion between popular culture and commercial culture throughout, as well as to a muddled picture of the socialist state's own participation both in the commercialization and in the management of the division between 'high' and 'low' culture before and after the Special period.[4]

Further, Hernández-Reguant sustains the particularity of Special Period cultural studies by claiming that "No doubt, Special Period Cuba saw an explosion of forms of popular culture that questioned the canonic divide between 'high' and 'low,' sharply upheld by socialist cultural policies" and that "the boundaries between professional and amateur artists, 'high' culture and low-brow popular culture, neatly and administratively defined under socialism, begun to blur" (2, 12). In the first chapter of the dissertation it will become clear that these boundaries were not "sharply held" nor "neatly and administratively defined" before the 1990s, only that they did not correspond in content and constituency to their counterparts in the culture industry of, say,

western capitalist societies. The management of those categories by the socialist state was irrelevant in the absence of a cultural market as such, since it was not the 'high' or 'low' classification of a cultural product that mattered but rather its rationale within a larger cultural politics program. The critique of such a divide was amply incorporated in cultural polemics throughout the Revolution within official institutions and programs. If, as García Canclini (1990) argues, new cultural markets have challenged the stability of Bourdieu's class-based model as described in *Distinction,* the cultural politics of really existing socialism and its aftermath also require a different account of cultural capital and its appropriations. (García Canclini 37, 41-42) In addition, as Antonio José Ponte and Rafael Rojas have also argued in *La fiesta vigilada* and "Todas las Habanas" respectively, the participation of the state from this point on as both a scripter (of the new relationship between cultural production and official ideology) and a commercial partner (in the commercialization of both popular and high culture in the global market) cannot be overlooked. In fact, by exporting images of a public and cultural sphere that brim with tolerance, indirect social criticism, and non-partisanism, the benefits afforded by these ideological adjustments benefited traditional artists, the new producers of commercial culture, and the state alike, in financial terms as much as in operational flexibility and political clout. The projects I examine here, which come into the spotlight in the decade after the Special Period, explicitly reject the compromises involved in these options even if, eventually, they might fail to survive the logic of ritualized ruptures against which they originally arose.

Published in 2006, on the other hand, Rafael Rojas's *Tumbas sin sosiego* remains the most complete study of the intellectual and literary responses to Cuba's political history in the 20th century, and of the latter's recent trends since the disintegration of the Soviet bloc. The comprehensive reach of these essays, the clear position advanced therein, and the directions they

sketch toward a theory of national culture render the collection another perfect foil for a discussion on the state of the field and the history of the aesthetic and political debates in which the present study attempts to intervene.

The editorial argumentation of the anthology *Cuba in the Special Period* and Rojas's *Tumbas* coincide on two pivotal interpretations of post-Special Period culture. First, the identity crisis produced by the collapse of official ideologies was registered by the cultural production via cosmopolitan dispositions, that is, aesthetic representations sought to overcome the symbolic burden of revolutionary Cuba as a world-historical event, and to seek instead lines of flight toward post-national, diasporic, or global imaginaries.[5] Second, with the transformation of the revolutionary project the homogeneity of a socialist political subjectivity was challenged by the uproar of gender, race, religion, class, and generation based claims to political relevance and epistemic singularity. The insistence on cosmopolitanism also refers to trends that emphasized the national problems as concrete forms of universal struggles, that appropriated cultural signposts which were either geographically unclear or consciously international, and/or that negotiated newfound positions as producers for a global market in which profit and popularity demanded specific narratives of exotic grittiness and heroic survival, as Esther Whitfield's essay (2011) argues very well. Additionally, the greater visibility of situated cultural goods within and beyond an overarching national paradigm incorporated many of the dynamics associated with identity politics elsewhere, as alternative constituencies expressed grievances against a perceived or forcibly imposed norm by negotiating through—and often conflating with—cultural representation, their desire for political participation and social recognition. What varies between the different contributors to the anthology and Rojas's analysis are the causes of these two phenomena. For Hernández-Reguant et al, there is a causal but largely unmediated connection

between those characteristics and the decentralization and commercialization of the Cuban state and its culture; Rojas insists on a conscious move by the ideological and governing apparatus toward a form of managed plurality and selective toleration that builds upon earlier strategies of governance and which are motivated by the ideology of a ruling elite and its survival.[6] The apparent differences between these two positions with regard to multiculturalism are simply the result of a shift in focus: while Hernández-Reguant et al read the commercialization of popular culture from the point of view of the producers, Rojas and others in his position adopt a bird's-eye view by looking at the relationship between state, cultural producers, and intellectuals in diachronic terms.

Rojas, however, interprets these trends of Cuban culture as harbingers of a deep political nihilism insofar as they reflect the deleterious effects of a national identity punished and crippled by decades of symbolic wars. *Tumbas* argues that after 1959, with the eventual consolidation of doctrinal orthodoxy and the establishment of a single-party state, the latter's institutions have selectively shaped the nation's cultural and intellectual heritage based on the ideological needs of the revolutionary order's survival rather than on aesthetic or philosophical merits. After decades of dictating not only cultural policy for all new production but also the availability, significance, and even the public identity of politically insolvent works of the past and the diaspora, these policies have impoverished both the national cultural identity, and therefore the nation's ability to articulate its democratic aspirations for the future. This, argues Rojas, has negatively impacted not only the cultural but also the political literacy of the nation as a whole:

> De manera que la política cubana del olvido se levanta sobre una profunda ausencia de testimonios… Bastaría la simple observación de que Cuba entra al siglo XXI con una sociedad menos cubana y un mundo más extranjero para persuadirnos de que la soledad de la isla es hoy mayor que en vísperas de la Revolución. (42-3)

These operations become all the more dangerous when performed upon intellectual traditions that embody what Rojas understands as a liberal, republican and (therefore) democratic form of nationalism historically rooted in the collective identity of the nation.

We cannot deal at length with two important but arguable points: that the authors Rojas attempts to rescue all belong to that tradition, or that the latter is indeed intrinsically democratic—since the democratic is posited in the text solely as the public and peaceful coexistence of plural intellectual and political traditions that engage with each other and cooperate within a single field of power. For now we can and should interrogate, however, the argument that a democratic politics can *only* be articulated in terms of a national identity inextricably tied to a particular literary corpus:

> Pocos dudan que cualquier salida del laberinto de la soledad cubana implica una comunión con la democracia occidental. En un país republicano como Cuba, dicha comunión parece inconcebible sin la reformulación de un nacionalismo acotado, débil, abierto…o, más bien, sin un patriotismo suave, que no es otra cosa que la expresión cívica del orgullo nacional. (…) Para construir un nuevo modelo cívico, que favorezca la democracia, es preciso nacionalizar el pasado colonial y republicano, reconocer derechos, abrir la nación al exilio, repatriar la diáspora, entretejer Historia y Geografía, tolerar disidencias… Hoy, Cuba es apenas una nación poscomunista. Mañana, podría ser una democracia sin nación, un mercado sin república. (43-4) [7]

Yet even though it undergirds the study as a whole, the assumption that forgetfulness and loneliness, national pride and civic virtue, democracy and (a particular notion of wholesome, organically home grown) culture are natural bedfellows is not explored in itself much further. Why would a democracy without nation—understood in that sense of cultural completeness—be tantamount to a market without a republic? Furthermore, is the nation the only symbolic horizon of cultural self-representation, of communal identity available to a modern democracy? Why would the nation as a concept—and for the author the only cohesive and driving force of historical change in the present conjuncture—be impossible without specific authors and

traditions returned to the public spotlight, specially those Rojas favors above the rest, such as Jorge Mañach, José Lezama Lima, Guillermo Cabrera Infante, to give just three names among others that he takes as respective representatives of "tres de las plataformas simbólicas no comunistas del nacionalismo cubano –la republicana, la católica y la vanguardista– que se disputaron, con el marxismo, la hegemonía intelectual de la isla a mediados del siglo XX" (18)?

Tumbas seems to suggest that a new symbolic horizon be rebuilt from those earlier, exiled traditions, that is, ciphered in the language and symbols of those thinkers whose legitimation as cultural markers of national identity was forged in debates, publications, and political interventions—even when these were tested only within elite literary and intellectual circles:

> En la primera mitad del siglo XX cubano, las élites intelectuales y políticas reaccionaron contra la 'desnudez del emperador' abasteciendo al Estado de ficciones y utopías que, en la segunda mitad de la centuria, terminarían organizándose ideológica e institucionalmente. Sólo una poderosa ansiedad mitológica y una ambivalencia entre valores de 'progreso' y 'retorno', proyectadas en una cultura política nacionalista y autoritaria, pudieron producir el abandono de tradiciones liberales y republicanas que, si bien inmaduras y accidentadas, llevaban medio siglo intentando arraigarse en la vida pública de la isla. (67)

In that sense the bulk of Rojas's investigation, admirable in its scope, is dedicated to debates that reproduce an image of the republic of letters fashioned after a Habermasian scene of public engagement: scenes of dissent and dialogue that gradually deteriorate as ideological orthodoxy grows entrenched, as active forgetting becomes state policy. (126) It must be noted that his essays emphasize the heterogeneity of the debates rather than the superiority or intrinsic value of any particular perspective, though Rojas maintains that the "republican pact" of disagreement and debate, tolerance and mutual recognition, was only possible because nationalism remained a shared concern, a common identity, a unifying context. (103) The project of such a "soft

nationalism" could certainly be then understood as more instrumental than essentialist. The essays would endeavor to show not only the disappearance of even those few spaces of debate and discussion under the Revolution but also, and more seriously, the loss of discourses that constitute conceptual and practical tools with which to recognize and practice—interiorized as one's political identity—a national democratic ethos.

The strength of Rojas's *Tumbas* (and of later works that followed a similar program) lies then in its ability to articulate into a coherent narrative—and with erudite detail—three intertwined histories: the political history of the Cuban Revolution, the various ways in which the revolutionary order has been symbolically represented, and the histories of cultural and intellectual discourses that alternatively preceded, thrived under, parted with, or were silenced by, the Revolution's cultural politics and institutions throughout its different phases. Moreover, Rojas's portrayal of the present quandaries of a cultural and intellectual scene still mediated by a single-party state offer a keen and sophisticated view of an otherwise esoteric landscape of underhanded bureaucratic intrigues, lofty rhetoric, and partial victories. These insights however, are framed within a discourse of diagnosis and adjudication that we ought to dwell on, both because of its argumentative power and for its representativeness of the general tenor that dominates our field. Despite its encyclopedic command of cultural history, its investigative thrust remains couched in the same questions that the revolutionary cultural apparatus asked itself at every turn: "What ought to be read?" "How does a particular construction of an official literary canon advance a desired political end?"

Setting the issue of nationalism aside for now, there are still two possible objections to this approach that ought to be highlighted, and which, as we will see in a moment, are intimately related to questions I will explore in this dissertation. First, that while in Angel Rama's

formulation of the lettered city these intellectual and literary discourses remain but a supplement to political power—and whose own illusions of relative autonomy contribute both to their complicity in political failure as much as to their perceived absolution, and the desire of deliverance, from worldly liabilities—Rama's description of the *ciudad letrada* seems to hover over *Tumbas* as a prescriptive balm. Second, that despite its critical sophistication, *Tumbas* still gravitates toward a historiography caught between "progreso" y "retorno" to use Rojas's own language: at the same time that it distinguishes different phases of the revolutionary order from 1959 on, it tacitly treats the entire process of its development, and in particular the cultural debates, policies, and reforms of its doing as a somewhat parenthetical episode foreign to the momentarily derailed train of republicanism.

The text deals somewhat paradoxically with the consciousness of these objections, especially the first one.[8] The author recognizes that the reconstruction of these intellectual debates might be misleading if the implicit Habermasian principles that render these scenes illustrative of an artificially recreated public sphere in the national past are deployed without further qualification: thus the adjectives "inmaduras" y "accidentadas" used above. Moreover, the dangers of remaining within the artificial walls of this past and its literary afterlives are highlighted explicitly:

> La percepción de la literatura como un sortilegio contra la historia, que protegerá al sujeto de la intemperie, no es precisamente beneficiosa para todas las culturas. En el caso de Cuba, esa reificación de las letras, que va de Heredia a Casal, de Martí a Lezama y de Villaverde a Cabrera Infante, proviene de una herencia nihilista, trabajada a lo largo de dos siglos de frustración política. Hoy, la ridiculez de ciertas poses aristocráticas entre las ruinas de la ciudad es sólo equivalente al cinismo con que muchos intelectuales se adhieren a las peores políticas dentro y fuera de la isla. Antes que gravitar, una vez más, hacia una idea de la literatura como refugio mítico contra la historia, es entonces preferible localizar la redención en la Geografía. (408)

Yet this redemption through the reconstitution of a geographical, rather than an ideological

imaginary takes place mostly in the same literary circles where the unsettled graves of past intellectuals—the eponymous "tumbas sin sosiego"—look for relays. What follows the above citation is a celebration of a heterotopic national literature—that of Pérez-Firmat, of Arenas, of Cabrera Infante—that in providing a hedonistic, subversive language of inconformity conjures up an antithetical force: "En esos lugares literarios la historia aprende a mostrar su perturbadora domesticidad y a secar su fuente de mitos infernales" (408). The conclusion of the essays is furnished by a reflection on the contributions of exiled writers whose works, conditioned by the heterogeneous experiences of the diaspora yet singly marked by their traumatic origin would continue to produce a discourse of place(s). But is not that corpus a result of its own interpretative context, its power plays, its rules of production, its active forgetfulness and its ideological caprices as much as of the state-managed cultural field? Does it so exclusively preserve the language of dialogic plurality, of civic republicanism so dear to Rojas's project? In spite of many subtle parentheses and highlighted exceptions to the cases he profiles, the very formal organization of the last section does not deliver a closure to the question Rojas himself raises. We are left with an innumerable list of names and works, of schools, of groups of writers according to one or another tendency.

Furthermore—and here we move on to the second objection raised above to Rojas—the focus on official state cultural policy with respect to those other cultural imaginaries would seem to imply that the official, ideologically backed cultural policy of the state exhaustively determines the production, reception, and symbolic weight of all cultural and intellectual objects at any given time. By the same token, his own solution would be predicated upon the utopia that a rehabilitation of that canon is not only desirable (if admittedly expired) but could have secured, hypothetically, the future success of a democratic order. But the degree to which the field of

culture generally speaking registers, produces, maintains, and represents the attitudes, aspirations, and values necessary to the exercise of democratic citizenships is surely not exhausted by the top-down management of cultural policy, however strict it may be. Nor is it limited to the disputed canon of the lettered city. Many of these *other* literary works are read openly, if not officially talked about nor printed and sold domestically. In fact, they are received and cherished perhaps with more fruition for their maligned content and their transgressive allure. In Rojas, a reader of Bourdieu, the interpretative community and the non-institutionalized hubs of cultural circulation are however conspicuously absent. In fact, while the conversion is treated throughout implicitly, a discussion of how cultural capital—moreover, a particular kind thereof—is reconvertible to political capital is left unanswered. Finally, though the histories of ideological or aesthetic values in various scenes of canon formation come under scrutiny, the concept of canon itself and the mechanisms by which those practices of signification ripple out toward the political or the social are left ultimately intact.[9]

To be sure, Rojas is hardly alone in approaching issues of national identity almost exclusively through the literary. I have offered here a lengthy discussion of his book precisely because his work is the most sophisticated and insightful representative of that approach. We could find an even less historically attuned recuperation of the diasporic and heterotopic for the reconstruction of a literary national identity in González Echevarría's essay "Contemporary Cuban Literature: A Way Out" (2011). Other contemporary critics have also contributed to a more nuanced understanding of the links between the political, the national, and the literary, but they have also been more focused on specific authors or particular literatures. The works of José Quiroga, Anke Birkenmeier, Esther Whitfield, Jacqueline Loss, Odette Casamayor-Cisneros, and Rachel Price for example, all published in the last decade, have made insightful extrapolations

from the conscientious study of the lettered city, and often go beyond the strictly literary to attend to the audiovisual, the digital, the architectonic, the visual arts, and the musical.[10]

In any case, if Hernández-Reguant and similar approaches to the study of Special Period culture look at (new) capital's effect on the reorganization of the cultural field and on its aesthetic pacts, and Rojas and others attend to the continued domination of a self-serving bureaucratic ideology, I look at possible spaces of autonomy where the democratic failures of both patronages are open to scrutiny. These are sources that would challenge the shared diagnosis of both the pessimism of Rojas and the cautious optimism of culturalists:

> El mapa de los nuevos actores dicta a los discursos culturales la serie de subjetividades que debe ser enunciada. Basta con hojear los últimos números de algunas revisas cubanas, editadas dentro y fuera de la isla…para advertir que las estrategias del discurso crítico son, primordialmente, multiculturales, es decir, enunciativas de un nuevo registro de actores que marcan su alteridad, frente al sujeto nacional, a partir de identidades étnicas, sexuales, genéricas y religiosas. (361)

I was therefore interested in looking for agents that become political actors in the process of a cultural practice, but who do not retreat to arbitrary closures of national identity, or seek refuge in the epistemic predicaments of identity politics. This would force them to bear—if momentarily—the demands of democratic citizenship itself.

II. Gramsci *contra* Gramsci

In the same way that during "La Rectificación de errores" the Cuban government tried to separate the regime's destiny from the falling Soviet bloc by recasting the Revolution's narrative in terms of national teleology, Cuban intellectuals and other academics preemptively invoked Gramsci's formulation of a civil society against possible criticism that Cuba's *sui generis* socialism was opposed to critical currents of Marxism in any way. This appropriation rode on

Gramsci's new prestige and the turn to the concept of hegemony that characterized post Marxist and neo Marxist cultural critique after the disenchantment of the intellectual left with its own historical performance.

The clashes between representative figures of the intellectual establishment and oppositional voices—who also claim to speak in the name of an emergent civil society—that we will analyze here, are all the more relevant if we consider that autonomy is, as Rojas's portrayal of Cuban intellectuals in "Diáspora, intelectuales y futuros de Cuba" indicates, the key problem to think the limited role of the intellectuals as critical figures in the configuration of the contemporary Cuban public sphere. Rojas's exchange with Arturo Arango on the subject, published in *Temas*, relates particularly well their public stance and their tactics for professional survival, to the capitulation of autonomy. As in previous works, however, Rojas is mostly occupied with another excluded party: the cultural production of the diaspora and the mutilation of the literary corpus of a—more broadly understood—national culture. He is concerned in particular with the exclusion from circulation and from public discussion of essays and literary works produced in the diaspora—either actively suppressed or haphazardly vindicated in the last decades by the authorities. What he has called elsewhere "ejercicios de visibilidad y ocultamiento" by the intellectual and political elites he reads here as symptoms of a compromised autonomy: effects of the medullar dependence of the cultural institutions to official ideology. (Rojas: 2009, 198) In his article "Diáspora, intelectuales y futuros de Cuba," part of an ongoing polemic with Arango, Rojas moves to stress, for example, the institutionalized self-censorship that informs the narratives that these intellectuals and writers give about themselves vis-à-vis the political situation. Here Rojas comments on the rhetoric of self-censorship in light of their simultaneous, explicit, and sometimes, vociferous defense of a healthy domestic

criticism:

> El equívoco de Arango reside en presentar como evidencia de la "diversidad" o de la "pluralidad" de las élites y las instituciones políticas, la diversidad y la pluralidad que, a pesar de la univocidad del poder, han poseído, en efecto, los intelectuales cubanos. Dicho equívoco se relaciona con el tabú o la interdicción que constituyen el partido único, la ideología de Estado y otros elementos institucionales del socialismo cubano para los propios socialistas críticos. (*Temas* "Diáspora, intelectuales y futuros de Cuba" 147)

In this rare occasion of Rojas being published in Cuba after his departure, he probes Arango's evidence of that autonomy, since for Arango that plurality of voices goes on to discredit any suspicion of political coercion or of a covering up of general discontent.

Rojas is quick to point out that the open and diverse character of intellectual discourse in Cuba rests entirely on an abstract language of constructive criticism, based on decontextualized readings of contemporary critical theory and lacking any structural self-reflexivity. He also criticizes Arango for relying on Desiderio Navarro's reductionist account of Cuba's political topography, which creates a flawed framework because it defuses potential antagonisms between very different forms of socialist thinking by bracketing the distinguishing features of Cuba's political order: state, party, ideology. "The absence of a public debate, electronic or in print, among Cuban socialist critics about the institutional structure of the Cuba political system leaves room for two possible interpretations: either they agree with it, or they cannot discuss it openly" (147). Here he repeats a point he cogently developed in *El estante vacío* that speaks directly to the positions and the critical role of the work of intellectuals like Navarro and Rafael Hernández who, though in different ways, embody a similar dilemma:

> …hay un punto en que, a juzgar por sus intervenciones más críticas, unos y otros coinciden: en Cuba la cultura es una esfera del Estado, subordinada a la ideología oficial. Esa premisa, con toda la lógica excluyente y el burocratismo autoritario que entraña, debería ser el principal problema de debate en un campo intelectual que presume de su apertura. Sin embargo, la hegemonía política y la autonomía cultural, dos conceptos básicos de la teoría neomarxista, no son temas de

> discusión en la isla. […] **El neomarxismo es una actitud teórica que, al adoptarse en La Habana sin un claro gesto de oposición, termina siendo desvirtuada**. (147)

Rojas recognizes that Navarro's and Hernández's editorial work in publications like *Criterios* and *Temas,* respectively, stands for a socialism that is very different, in tone and content, from that of the Party and its more propagandistic outlets, e.g. *Granma, La Jiribilla*. Yet their inability to define unambiguously their own place of enunciation, Rojas argues, implicates their discourse in the dynamic of what has been described here as the spectacle of tolerance. He goes on to show how their commitment to socialist criticism is at odds with the dysfunctional political experience of "organic intellectuals" throughout the history of the Revolution: they are theoretically distracted by an outdated version of this Gramscian concept to describe themselves, they cherry pick from contemporary Marxist thought, and, argues Rojas, they overlook the implications of ignoring an entire history of Marxist critique from the left—most notably the work of Claude Lefort and Cornelius Castoriadis. ("Diáspora" 148) This suggests that even the work of dissemination and translation of theory carried out by Desiderio Navarro and *Criterios*, though individually admirable, commits an oblique editorial violence: it betrays its proposals and theoretical context by disavowing the political and social reality in which it circulates. In their solitary and decontextualized reading, the problems discussed by the works of contemporary neo and post Marxism showcased by the journal signal a world elsewhere, out in the 'capitalist' world.

The backdrop of these arguments are the competing definitions of the concept of civil society that since the late 1980s have been at the center of national debates regarding the shifting relationship between politics and culture in the post-Soviet Cuba; debates that ricocheted largely from the popularity of the concept in critical studies of the collapse of Eastern European

communisms. The relationship between autonomous cultural groups and the reorganization of a more horizontal, decentralized concept of civil society was discussed in as dissimilar circles as the group Paideia—which proposed a symposium on Gramsci—and the Centro de Estudios sobre América. The polemic bled over to publications like *Temas*, *Criterios*, and *La Gaceta de Cuba,* and was later developed further in Jorge Luis Acanda's *Civil Society and Hegemony* (2002) and Rafael Hernández's *Mirar a Cuba: Ensayos sobre cultura y sociedad civil (*1999). Marín-Dogan's essay "Civil Society: the Cuban Debate" is very thorough in reconstructing these arguments within the context of Rectification, yet she fails to see it as part of a larger program that is less committed to political reform than to the survival of power structures in the face of changing geopolitics:

> Rectification was a policy that set out to change the dynamic of the relationship that had developed between the state and civil society prior to that point and precipitate a fundamental re-composition of the economy, politics, and society, which would lead Cuba back toward an authentic Cuban form of socialism…[The debates] offered a clear encouragement to academics and activists to go beyond orthodoxies in search of new answers to the problems facing the system. (45)

The article is limited, as were the debates, to a group of intellectuals and publications that constitute the very problem of thinking the existence and the critical potential of a Cuban civil society. (61) Michael Chanan's "Cuba and Civil Society, or Why Cuban Intellectuals Are Talking about Gramsci," had proposed a similar reading in 2001, while locating its roots in the first decade of the Revolution:

> …in Cuba's case, most profoundly, what happened in the 1960s was that the triumph of the Revolution completely recast civil society precisely because it radicalized the political domain in a manner that redefined the political subject and the character of citizenship…But what happens when the subject is completely recast in political terms? Does civil society disappear? Not at all, but the transformation gives rise to a problem….As daily life becomes indissolubly linked with the presence of the state, which becomes present in every sphere of life, the difference disappears almost without anyone noticing. (394)

If we recall Navarro’s sophisticated defense of the Cuban intellectual in his seminal essay “In medias res publicas,” originally published in 2001, we can see a similar tension at work.

Navarro’s subtle vindication of the intellectual’s aloofness displaces the attention toward a national history of anti-intellectualism that, though accurate, reduces the current state of the public sphere to the tragic misunderstanding of a besieged intellectuality. Navarro wants to look not at “las medidas administrativas” but to “el discurso que las legitima y, en general, la ideología y las prácticas culturales movilizadas contra la actitud crítica del intelectual, el carácter público de su intervención, y hasta contra la propia figura del intelectual en general” (696). Navarro can then safely criticize that the bureaucrats ask of intellectuals that they concern themselves solely with aesthetic issues while avoiding a discussion of the mechanisms of that request, and the ethical or theoretical implications of their compliance. In the same breadth that censorship as *raison d’état* is harshly criticized for being counter-productive, the true semblance of a state that thrives on overt censorship is entirely avoided: Navarro accepts the myth of the construction of socialism already volunteered by the State to explain the reasons for censorship, while taking distance from the bureaucracy’s methods. (697) He goes so far as to point out that some of those reasons for censorship, such as the inability of the people to process certain information, go against the simultaneous portrayal of those same people’s sovereignty and intellectual capacity by other official channels. But neither *the people* as an empty signifier, nor their purported support for the revolutionary process, are ever called into question. The actual intervention in the public sphere is postponed in order to redefine the role of the intellectual and reconcile it as a class with the ‘party’ and ‘the people’, those safe *subjects* of Cuban official ideology:

> … en sus respectivos momentos de incidencia en la esfera pública, la mayoría de los intelectuales críticos cubanos ha creído más que muchos políticos en la

> capacidad del socialismo para soportar la crítica abierta. Más aún, la han considerado no una amenaza para el socialismo, sino su "oxígeno", su "motor": una necesidad para la supervivencia y salud del proceso revolucionario. (705-6)

Purged by that healthy dose of (socialist) criticism intellectuals reemerge as pursuing the same goals as the State, and thus Navarro, as a true believer, is immediately repositioned as "dentro," the safety zone of Fidel's original cultural guidelines.

However critical of censorship and the reasons of state given by officialdom for its use, the larger framework that institutionalizes constraints on civil rights is never addressed head on. By concentrating on the injustice of censorship itself (for the group of intellectuals), the essay cleverly circumvents, within the boundaries of official ideology, the issue of what topics, concretely, are considered toxic and, most important, why and where this is so. This discourse fails in spite of itself to be "organic" in its socialist criticism because it cannot perform its mediating role in the articulation of consensus between official ideology and the lived experienced of that order. For instance, against what orthodox Marxism defines as bourgeois civil liberties, the state offers in exchange the trifecta of intangible conquests: health, education, and culture—the Revolution's greatest source of legitimacy at home and symbolic leverage abroad. But neither a realistic assessment of the achievements of those missions, nor the actual cost of the needed public investments for their success, nor the enigmatic zero-sum-equation by which public goods require the sacrifice of citizenship and civil rights, are ever made clear.

In order to defend the (rigid) political structure of civil society's (authorized) organizations, Cuban intellectuals of the 1990s turned instead to the defense of a politicization of the civil society against the so-called liberal bourgeois notions of autonomy and civil rights. Borrowing from Gramsci the notion that civil society is not necessarily antagonistic to the state but rather constitutive of the political process through hegemonic struggle, they retained a

nominal alliance to a socialist democracy. Rafael Hernández's move, for example, is to refashion the Cuban model as a successful experiment of the Gramscian conception of civil society, and to dismiss any other interpretation of civil society as ideologically motivated and warped by "autores que estudian a Cuba desde lejos" (54):

> La cuestión de la democracia en Cuba—no en abstracto, según las definiciones puestas de moda en el debate actual, en países donde la gente apenas vota—consiste en la capacidad real de la población para autogobernarse con minúscula y ejercer control sobre el Gobierno con mayúscula. …Concebida como parte de un proceso social en movimiento, y no meramente como una fórmula para que los partidos se turnen en el poder, la sociedad cubana—con todas sus insuficiencias—habría avanzado más por el largo y difícil camino de la democracia que ninguna otra de este hemisferio. (1999: 45)

The misappropriation of Gramsci here is a direct result of the identification of the political order in Cuba as a successful realization of the socialist project, and the misrecognition of a ruling class—one that is not the people as such nor looks after its interests. It responds, as well, to the widespread conflation of an opposition to "really existing socialism" with a neoliberal agenda (following the unfortunate binaries established by the Cold War). This is also a result, as Rojas points out, of that uneasy compromise between political loyalty to the established order and the desperate search for its theoretical redemption in fragments of contemporary Marxist theory. The theoretical deployment of Gramsci's notion of civil society overlooks his emphasis on the dynamic process of the hegemonic consensus, the extreme historical context of many of his concrete political strategies for socialists, and the absolute incongruence of Gramsci's ideas of socialist success with a privileged ruling class and coercive methods of maintaining power.

Joseph Buttigieg's "Gramsci on Civil Society" can be illuminating here, since his objective in the essay is to rescue a political understanding of civil society while evaluating how the left ought to read Gramsci in the wake of the collapse of European communism. Buttigieg reconstructs from the fragments of the *Prison Notebooks* a coherent theory of civil society as it

stands in relation to hegemony by stressing civil society's kinship with political society. His aim is to highlight, following Gramsci, "the fact that civil society is not just a zone of freedom from coercion or sanctioned violence but also, and at the same time, the sphere of hegemony, the terrain of power exercised by one group or grouping over others" (30). The apolitical readings of civil society, and consequently, a naïve view of the hegemonic operations taking place in its terrain, disenfranchise counter-hegemonic projects by stripping civil society of both its political power and the ideological character of its control mechanisms. For Buttigieg, discussing civil society without understanding hegemony overlooks that the main target of Gramsci's criticisms were none other than the democratic masks of the mechanisms of power in capitalist countries, that is, the way in which civil society's institutions were seamlessly involved in the hegemonic processes of political society to further the interests of the dominant group. For Gramsci this did not mean the withdrawal from civil society, or the need to separate it theoretically from political society; instead it informs an active political program within civil society underscored by the concept of "war of position." Buttigieg's acute reading of the *Prison Notebooks* shows indeed that, for Gramsci,

> 1) hegemony in civil society and domination of political society go hand in hand; and that 2) when a group satisfies itself with simply obtaining some measure of corporate autonomy in civil society while remaining subject to the ethico-political and intellectual leadership of those who dominate political society, it dooms itself to subalternity. (29)

But herein lies, as Buttigieg understands it, the negative legacy of associating civil society with the demise of communism: it concedes the victory to a liberal worldview. If we argue, Buttigieg suggests, that communist regimes failed partly due to the fusion of the state with civil society's organizations, resulting in the total control of the latter, then that would seem to support the view that any formulation of a free civil society must begin with a stark contrast between it and the

institutions of the state or dominant group (i.e. political society). He goes on to remind us that, under this formulation, the opposition between state and civil society is ultimately derived from an ideological conflation between freedom of the individual and freedom of the market, and from a liberal view of regulative government as an unnecessary and detrimental intervention. Now is the kinship of these definitions of civil society absolute beyond the historical contingency of its codes of representation? This particular point of Buttigieg's argument follows only in an ahistorical, absolute definition of the terms *state* and *civil society*, while it tacitly invokes a negative and outdated view of individual freedom and rights as bad words, as bourgeois, inherited from certain orthodox Marxisms. Buttigieg laments that the term civil society has been kidnapped by the historical opposition to "really existing socialism," though he later grants that some of those concepts may indeed be "of some use when it comes to explaining the reasons underlying the collapse of the totalitarian regimes in Eastern Europe" (2, 32). To be fair, Buttigieg is only concerned here with showing how Gramsci's formulations must be rekindled so as to resist the political impoverishment of civil society in the culture industry, its weakness to counter the exploitative and undemocratic orders that its neoliberal specters belie. But because Buttigieg does not sufficiently distinguish between the semblances of the state and civil society under really existing socialism as a historical conjuncture on one hand, and the neoliberal cheering these tensions may have induced on the other, it becomes difficult to reconcile Gramsci's (via Buttigieg) prescriptions for a politically relevant civil society with other instances in which the political character of the civil society is expressed, precisely, in its opposition to the state.

The error—and temptation—of discourses like Hernández's would be to ally the project of Buttigieg's left and its Gramscian prescriptions with a view of Cuba's political order as a

realization and continuation of that project. *Pace* Buttigieg's clear understanding of Gramsci, we must historicize then Buttigieg's own reading. Here the state is an instrument of what Gramsci would define as a ruling class and where, therefore, from a strategic and material point of view, civil society must necessarily be construed as opposed to *this* state and *its* politicization of civil society in its efforts to remain hegemonic, without falling necessarily into the trap of neoliberal freedom syllogisms. In effect, many of Gramsci's own descriptions of how and when civil society is corrupted or has lost political solvency seem to align with the opposition's points rather than with the structural organization of "really existing socialism." This caveat of interpretations that persist on left-right dualisms opens them to crucial misappropriations grounded on the historical decontextualization of Gramscian politico-cultural strategies. If the return to Gramscian hegemony articulates other viable, democratic alternatives for the contemporary international left—as is most lucidly and systematically theorized in the work of Mouffe and Laclau—invoking Gramsci in Cuba in such form legitimates (in academic circles at least) a socialism *sui generis,* where democracy is preserved in so far as the relationship between the state and the official, state sponsored institutions of mass organization are the ultimate expression of Cuban society's imagined hegemonic consensus.

If we accept the premise then that the limits of social criticism in the Cuban cultural sphere have been relatively more flexible in the last two decades, but the rules of access to those spaces has not necessarily followed suit, then we are dealing with a public realm marked by the dynamics of a spectacle of tolerance rather than of socialist hegemony.[11] The prevalent modes of cultural and political participation in Cuba today, rather than being subjected to explicit censorship, are managed by regulating membership recognition rather than discursive content. Cultural institutions are involved in a revisionism that attempts to bracket periods of harsher

censorship as exceptions that have long been left behind, and oftentimes individual producers actively contribute to policing the public realm by reenacting set parameters for the exclusion to speech.

III. The actors

Consequently, this dissertation examines how citizens in 21st century Cuba explore democratic forms of political participation by engaging cultural practices as avenues of access to the public sphere.[12] In blogs, garage bands, art performances, impromptu home exhibits, digital literary supplements, and meeting groups, the stories of everyday life—on the ground, underground—are transformed into experiments in self-determination by pursuing public recognition. They interpellate traditional sites of power by using cultural forms to demand that they be recognized as constituents of the body politic. In this sense, they are provisionally activated as political and cultural actors rather than as spectators and consumers who only sporadically engage in forms of participatory culture.

The fundamental goal of the thesis is to investigate and elucidate the relationship between cultural autonomy and political autonomy.[13] In the concrete cases of cultural production and reception studied here we will see in play the search for a language of demands to wider participation in public affairs. We can map the actors, networks, and poetics involved in such pursuit while reconstructing their contexts from the point of view of intellectual and cultural histories. I argue that, to become visible as political subjects in the public sphere, these citizens appeal to cultural forms and narratives of self-representation that elucidate the struggles for recognition faced by emerging social actors. This responds to the need, in the first place, to legitimize their political claims by grounding them in networks of collaboration and creative

assemblages, and in the second, to secure for themselves both protection and relevance by pursuing greater visibility.[14] Because these subjects inhabit a time of national reckoning whose main narrative is one of thwarted democratic expectations, the examination of these projects will also require that we inspect more closely what democratic may mean in these intersections of the political and the aesthetic.[15] Moreover, since these experiments take the form of cultural initiatives, they invite a reflection on two longstanding problems that frame the history of revolutionary cultural reform in Cuba: democratization *of* culture (cultural communism), and democratization *through* culture (socialist enlightenment).

My investigation attempts to unpack why cultural autonomy remains a politically charged notion in Cuba today, and why, in turn, political autonomy can only be realized through the appropriation of aesthetic discourses and situated cultural productions. As the actions of often-discredited political subjects and non established cultural producers, these operations are wagered in a field doubly hostile to autonomous projects. By doubly hostile I refer to a cultural field where power is disputed between a) structural remnants of ideological orthodoxy and bureaucratic overreach and b) the cultural producers who in partnership with the state entered the global capitalist market after the collapse of the Soviet bloc and the deep economic and social crisis that followed it. I will show that these cultural practices become politically and socially significant incursions into a public sphere because they try to resist—though not always successfully—cooptation by both of these forces: the bureaucratic, state-capitalist tendencies, and the rapid commercialization of popular culture. [16]

With notable exceptions, the historiography of Cuban cultural politics has historically gravitated toward polarizing, mutually exclusive positions adopted by those who dismiss entirely the revolutionary project and those who unconditionally stand by it, since both treat the Cuban

Revolution and its institutions as a parenthetical, homogeneous phenomenon to be wholly defended or indicted. My approach attempts to avoid these pitfalls while resisting the uncritical romanticization of the voices of dissent that usually accompanies the study of democratic projects under authoritarian regimes. I study them instead as ideal laboratories to understand the impact of new technologies and the role of cultural capital in the formation of political subjectivity.

This approximation engages with the puzzle of 'really existing' socialist culture: however inefficient, despotic, intellectually rarified and aesthetically impoverished the cultural institutions of the socialist state have demonstrated to be, only within this framework does cultural production remain politically relevant, publicly effectual. This is not identical to Slavoj Žižek's well-known argument regarding the conceptual bearing of historical communism on the possible reconstitution of a radical left. For Žižek, the formal though catastrophic institutionalization of a communist ideal guaranteed the preservation of a symbolic space where the very failures of that experience kept alive the possibility of a utopian critique, forcing as it did the measurement of the gap between the real and the symbolic. The focus here would be on the structural reconfiguration of the cultural and literary fields as a result of discrete reforms, programs, and polemics that institutionalized the total politicization of culture. Apart from a recuperation of the symbolic capital of the communist experience, these projects offer the opportunity to engage with contemporary responses to a central tenet of revolutionary cultural reform: "the socialization of the intellectual means of production" (Benjamin 93).

While the development of black market economies in late socialism and the impact of privatization and neoliberalism in former communist countries have received more scholarly attention, the shadow social formations and the vibrant underground culture that competed with,

and was rooted in, the logic of an official public sphere has been more difficult to map and, when done, less available to an English readership.[17] An analysis of the space of enunciation occupied and maintained by belonging to those circuits is therefore pivotal to the theorization of late socialism. It would contribute to a greater understanding of the lingering politicization of cultural capital in post-communist societies in all its three forms—the embodied, objectified, and institutionalized. (Bourdieu 1986) As described by the mission statement of "The Post-Communist Condition" Project (2004), under the direction of scholars Boris Groys and Anne von der Heiden:

> The fact that the art market in the western sense did not exist in the east created, in addition, completely differing conditions for the functioning of art. The institutions common in the west, galleries, art societies, museums, private collectors, did not exist in this way in the east and, for this reason, were not part of the corresponding public sphere. The western difference between non-marketable and marketable artifacts did not apply in the east…[C]ultural studies as well as post-colonial studies have largely ignored the situation of the post-communist east-European countries as an object of study. This fact presents cultural studies with the task of formulating a new theoretical discourse which is faithful to the post-communist situation.

Indisputably there are important differences particular to the Cuban experience; among other things, we would have to consider its geopolitical circumstances vis-à-vis Latin America, the U.S.S.R. and the United States, and more important the survival of its basic political structures after the European transitions. The general contours of the relationship between the sphere of culture and the political experience from the late 1980s onward nonetheless retain enough similarities between Cuba and the Eastern European countries to warrant invoking this apt comparison between east-west regarding the function of art, which will allow me to borrow the terms late socialism and post-communism, and to expand this argument to the entire realm of cultural production.

The temporal signifiers 'late' and 'post' in the concepts late socialism, post-socialism or post-communism—used interchangeably—should not be taken as indicative of a fixed internal teleology or of a homogeneous political experience among countries that adopted, to different degrees, the structural and ideological principles associated with the tradition of Soviet communism, implementing its specific solutions within the larger and heterogeneous corpus of Marxist theory.[18] In addition, these terms should not signal either an uncritical adoption of the triumphal transition narrative, which Boris Buden has rightly criticized as the ideology of transition, or *transitology*, of a coming of age of citizens whose political subjectivities before and after the transitions are systematically infantilized by a language that describes a supposed maturation process brought about by the unfolding novelty of western-styled democracy. (18, 21) However, these terms do denote, if clumsily, shared economic, social, and cultural characteristics that were the result of two concrete processes: the institutionalization of the revolutionary moment in a strong, central bureaucratic state apparatus of rigid hierarchies, and the gradual collapse of those bodies leading to their end between 1989 and 1991, which was marked by a rapid privatization of the economic sphere, and a narrative of capitalist and democratic triumph worldwide. In his anthology of postmodernist art in late socialism, Ales Erjavec describes very well their effects:

> Today, these countries share very similar problems, such as rising unemployment, a crisis of values, a loss of identity, commercialization, nationalistic ideas, and a resurgence of sympathy for the former political system, but they also share something else. At the historical point that marks the beginning of their transition to capitalism, these countries also possessed a similar cultural and ideological legacy. From this legacy there emerged similar kinds of artistic endeavors. These were not limited to the officially imposed and often officially sanctioned Socialist Realism, although they were frequently strongly related to it. During the late socialist period, such endeavors emanated spontaneously, and often with no visible connection. (3)

As Erjavec's *Postmodernism and the Postsocialist Condition* (2003) attests, the study of aesthetic practices, especially in the visual arts, has been a fruitful link for comparative studies and has provided provocative material to begin the development of a cultural theory specific to this geopolitical circumstance. The work of Boris Groys in this regard has been consistently insightful, and in the Cuban context, a similar approach has been carried out by art critic and theorist Gerardo Mosquera. Both grapple with the historical and conceptual encounters, overlaps, and ruptures between the afterlives of the artistic avant-gardes and the utopian-collectivist currents of the political vanguard. Exploiting the blurred lines between official and unofficial art, Groys and others in this tradition use that distinction to observe how shifting ideological loyalties, and the periodized reorganization of the socialist cultural field, are involved in aesthetic procedures—both in cultural productions supported by state institutions and in those that are not. Their work and its implications is also the subject of the first chapter of the dissertation, where I trace the trope of the amateur as an important subject of the revolutionary cultural reforms of the 60s and 70s, and where I sketch a theoretical framework for a figure of double-amateurship, cultural and political, that organizes and links conceptually my objects of study. However indebted to these approximations, my interest lies in projects that, unlike those studied by these theorists, do not contend to enter the space of art proper, officially or unofficially. That is, they do not present themselves to the public as the professional work of artists, writers, or critics.

Rather than tokenize the projects I examine here as the newest faces of an old phenomenon—that of political opposition to the Revolution—and instead of looking at cultural practices and artifacts divorced from the power dynamics in which they are produced, I argue that they offer an invitation to rethink the terms that link political participation and aesthetic

discourses in the particular case of Cuba as well as in cultural theory at large. Furthermore, there has been little attention paid to the development of a comprehensive framework that confronts the proliferation of aesthetic practices and social actors in this conjuncture, and almost no interest in critically tracing their emergence to earlier forms of cultural politics. While some contemporary critics have recognized the significance of these irruptions, so far there are little analytical tools to understand the links between these seemingly disparate practices, and to read them beyond their immediate shock value or their ephemeral novelty.[19]

My investigation seeks to develop such a framework. This approach is a risky bargain in more ways than one: to map and propose a narrative for a present moment that is still unfolding, to advance an interpretative hypothesis confronting an absent archive, to imagine zones of contact out of tenuous, often anecdotal nodes of exchange whose material evidence is today not only scarce but rarely collectible, are all potential obstacles that endanger the enterprise from the onset. But through their interactions with other actors of the cultural field, phenomena whose local audience is extremely small, and whose interventions are usually short-lived, become legible in their own right. These exchanges, in turn, can also probe the range of grassroots citizen action and the limitations of institutional reform in Cuba today.

Instead of pursuing an exhaustive catalogue of cultural practices, producers, and objects, I have opted for a more genealogical investigation of these forms of contemporary intervention. Using three representative examples as a point of departure—a private home-gallery, a blog, and a punk band—I examine their tactics of self-representation as well as the discourses around and about them put forth by competing social and cultural actors. The figure of the amateur offers a provisional category that serves as a hinge between officially recognized cultural producers and their publics, and between recognized political subjects and forms of alternative citizenship.

Taking the amateur as a point of departure, in the following four chapters I will be asking, among other things: Are autonomy and institution mutually exclusive terms in Cuban cultural production today? Do these projects sketch new paradigms of political and cultural participation of local or global significance? In which spaces do the adjectives ‘alternative’, ‘autonomous’, and ‘independent’ that often accompany these projects operate, and what is their meaning for participants, theorists, and observers? Are there parallels or discontinuities between traditional practices of samizdat and those facilitated by digital technologies and virtual networks? What patterns of production, exchange, reception, and interpretation have governed what we could call a ‘black market of culture’ in Cuba?

The working hypothesis of the dissertation rests on two basic premises. First, that these figures I examine are successful in gaining visibility insofar as their conditions of possibility can be traced to earlier moments of revolutionary cultural politics (as a result of which they are both possible and significant); second, that these same conditions provide the horizon in which the limitations of such interventions—at least with respect to immediate political effectiveness—are inscribed (they are meaningful within and dependent upon the persistence of the mirror figures against which they rise). We could then simultaneously offer a provisional explanation for their relevance, their singularity, and their exegetical potential without reading them in a vacuum, claiming neither a privileged epistemological standpoint nor a mechanistic translation into concrete politics beyond the tensions in which they already operate.

IV. Amateur Citizens

I propose that the projects and scenes analyzed throughout the dissertation, in contrast with the polemics sketched above, can be read as ideal laboratories to understand the role of

cultural capital in the language of representation—and therefore the public construction—of political subjectivity in post-Special Period Cuba. These kind of counter-hegemonic cultural initiatives may not constitute a civil "society" yet—or ever—but they do make themselves visible by denouncing the dissolution and obsolescence of civil society as has been understood within Cuba's revolutionary framework. In the case of the projects studied here, they respond with a conscious effort to distinguish themselves from both established political voices and institutionally accredited cultural producers with access to spaces of increased tolerance and material resources. This gesture of self-distinction is translated into narratives, sites of production, non-lucrative networks of exchange, and aesthetic choices that emphasize their status as regular citizens.[20]

Can we not recast this conjuncture as a scene evoking the famous passage in Louis Althusser, where the philosopher elaborates an alternative to J.L. Austin's theory of speech acts? In Althusser's "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," the policeman's hailing of a citizen furnishes a paradigmatic example of the interpellation of power as a ritualistic constitution of the subject by Ideology. This is a process of mutual recognition between subject and ideology that is completed the moment the walker turns around to answer the call (and whose temporality as a sequence of events is of course artificial in Althusser's example, their reciprocal reproduction is given already as a matter of one's existing within a necessarily ideological order).[21] It is Judith Butler's take on both Austin's and Althusser's formulations, however, that lengthens the encounter until a scene where discursive agency—the chance of talking back—becomes possible:

> …one would need to offer an account of how the subject constituted through the address of the Other becomes then a subject capable of addressing others. In such a case, the subject is neither a sovereign agent with a purely instrumental relation

> to language, nor a mere effect whose agency is pure complicity with prior operations of power. (Butler 25-6)

Here the focus of Butler's work, in line with her earlier theory on the performativity of gender identity, deals with the specific case of hate speech. We can borrow, however, its wider implications for other instances where the constitution of other types of political subjects is also at stake, since having a chance to answer to the call in more ways than one redresses the subject's impotence by restoring one's ability to participate in one's own politics of representation, at least as a theoretical possibility. Butler takes as her point of departure the assumption that,

> Language sustains the body not by bringing it into being or feeding it in a literal way; rather, it is by being interpellated within the terms of language that a certain social existence of the body first becomes possible. … One comes to "exist" by virtue of this fundamental dependency on the address of the Other. One "exists" not only by virtue of being recognized, but, in a prior sense, by being *recognizable*. …[S]peech does not merely *reflect* a relation of social domination; speech *enacts* domination, becoming the vehicle through which that social structure is reinstated. (Butler 5, 18)

The work of scholars like Bourdieu (in *Language and Symbolic Power* for example), Raymond Williams, and Stuart Hall, implicitly or explicitly invoked in this project, also approaches the politics of subject formation in a similar way, by reading the political function of cultural signifiers and the social dynamics involved in the production and usage of their meaning.

Hall's lucid reflection on the birth of the New Left Review, which is worth quoting at length, is particularly apt to understand the continued relevance of cultural studies understood as an interpretative practice where, as he has put it, there is something "at stake:"

> the New Left launched an assault on the narrow definition of 'politics' and tried to project in its place an 'expanded conception of the political'. If it did not move so far as the feminist principle that 'the personal is political', it certainly opened itself up to the critical dialectic between 'private troubles' and 'public issues', which blew the conventional conception of politics apart. The logic implied by our position was that these 'hidden dimensions' had to be represented within the

> discourses of 'the political' and that ordinary people could and should organize where they were, around issues of immediate experience; begin to articulate their dissatisfactions in an existential language and build an agitation from that point. (This was the source of our much-debated 'socialist humanism'.) The expanded definition of the political also entailed a recognition of the proliferation of potential sites of social conflict and constituencies for change.

Building upon this framework allows us to link the politicization of a cultural amateurism to the idea of a participatory citizenship both in its contemporary form and in its historical origins. Moreover, because of the historical connections between the New Left broadly defined and the first decades of the Cuban revolution, this schema provides a complex landscape in which we can map a negotiable space between—and beyond—two opposite archetypes.

One such commonly held position celebrates somewhat uncritically the cultural policy of the Revolution, weighing on its history as an internally coherent process that denounces the pair cultural autonomy and independent civil society as hypocritical liberal constructs. Nicola Miller's article for the special issue of the *Journal of Latin American Studies* on the 50th anniversary of the Cuban Revolution is a good representative of this approach:

> In sum, the revolutionary government has cumulatively done a significant amount to promote cultural production far beyond the imperatives of propaganda and indoctrination, consistently investing in institutions, organisations and initiatives for both professionals and amateurs. In its pursuit—at times rather relentless—of democratisation of both production and consumption, quality of output sometimes suffered. Some initiatives have been criticised for acquiescing in mediocrity… The enduring strength and appeal of this alternative version of modernity that finds space for an ethical approach to life is one reason, I suggest, why Cuba still has such a substantial and successful community of cultural producers, despite all the material and political difficulties life on the island entails. (691-3)

The second view is lucidly laid out by Rojas, who employs the concept of "ilustración socialista" to point out its shared problems with the naïve pedagogy of classic Enlightenment philosophy, which links political autonomy with a mythical notion of rationality achieved via the utopia of universal education:

> Las mayores limitaciones del proyecto excluyente de la ilustración socialista en Cuba habría que encontrarlas en la ciudadanía constituida, en el último medio siglo, y su subjetividad política. Como observa la socióloga Velia Cecilia Bobes, los ciudadanos del socialismo cubano son sujetos moldeados por una amplia distribución de derechos sociales, pero precariamente educados para ejercer derechos civiles y políticos en condiciones de libertad. El proceso de ilustración, como advertían Adorno y Horkheimer, es, de por sí, paradójico y reversible. Una apertura de la esfera pública en la isla y una exposición de la ciudadanía cubana al pensamiento moderno occidental no necesariamente tendrían que conducir a la democratización política. Pero, por lo pronto, puede concluirse que mientras en las democracias, la ilustración se ve limitada por las mediaciones simbólicas del mercado, en Cuba, la dialéctica ilustrada se ve obstruida por las interferencias ideológicas del Estado….Medio siglo después, el sistema de creencias que sostiene el socialismo cubano se basa en una limitación ideológica de la lectura. (*Estante vacío* 24)

One can see why even Rojas's perceptive diagnosis in *Tumbas* remains an incomplete account of contemporary cultural politics. There seems to be nothing to look for outside of that preordained community (the lettered city) which is the object of those limitations. Once mutilated by the censors, it endangers the political literacy of the whole nation because this community appears, almost exclusively, as the embodiment of Blanchot's wager on the lofty neutrality of a cultural agent who has a role to play in the social process at large: "Desde que se les llama así, los intelectuales no han hecho otra cosa que dejar momentáneamente de ser lo que eran (escritor, científico, artista) para responder a unas exigencias morales, oscuras e imperiosas a la vez, puesto que eran de justicia y libertad" (Blanchot qtd. in *Tumbas* 458-9). But are consecrated artists and writers the only ones to abandon their crafts to higher calls of freedom and justice?

The first chapter of the dissertation will therefore reflect on the import of the double figure of amateurism from historical and from theoretical perspectives. I find the category useful because many of these contemporary actors no longer practice former professions as a result of non-compliance with ideological requisites for job retention. In so far as the primary logic of their cultural production is not the insertion on a lucrative market of cultural commodities either,

they engage in cultural practices as amateurs. It is pivotal that the ambiguous connotations of the term amateur not be taken in its pejorative sense of denoting absence of professional quality, but that it be clear that I use it here precisely to question how these categories are deployed toward selective legitimation in a cultural field until very recently largely devoid of a domestic market for cultural goods. Particularly relevant in this regard is sociologist Robert A. Stebbins identification of a new form of "modern amateurism" in the 20th century, a notion of amateur closer to the etymological origin of the term. It cannot be contrasted to the professional in terms of lack, but instead fulfills a complex function in the circulation of cultural artifacts as "a special member of the public," as a practitioner who may become professionalized, or as one who engages in a practice that does not have parameters or institutions for professionalization yet. (583-7) The worker-aficionado, moreover, was an incarnation of amateurism central to a certain conception of culture that runs through the discourse of the historical avant-gardes and, in particular, through the cultural revolutions of the really existing socialisms of the 20th century.

The first decade of the Cuban Revolution, and the contemporaneous rise of New Left and the fuel that "Third World Marxisms" and anti-colonial, anti-imperialist struggles of the 1950s and 1960s provided to the configuration of new subjectivities in the global geopolitics of the second half of the 20th century complicates even further the balance of the Revolution's domestic performance with its intellectual legacy within a larger field of heavy symbolic wagers. When many Latin American countries were threatened and plagued by right-wing and bloody military dictatorships, caught between predatory economic overhauls on one hand, hawkish global politics, and Cuba's image of a beleaguered socialist utopia on the other, Cuba could boast of large-scale participatory mobilizations and unprecedented popular support. This tremendous initial backing, of course, would be vastly misspent by the revolutionary governing

body and, indeed, waned steadily with the bankruptcy of the latter's promises and its heavy-handed misadministration, mimicking the ills of really existing socialisms identified by Raya Dunayevskaya, Tony Cliff, and Cornelius Castoriadis two decades earlier, and against the expectations of rupture with orthodoxies put forth by other figures of the Left like C. Wright Mills, Hans Magnus Enzensberger, C.L.R. James, José Revueltas, Roque Dalton, Sartre, and Ernesto "Che" Guevara himself regarding the Cuban revolutionary process.[22]

The cultural agents of 21st century Havana profiled here question the access to, and the relevance of, the intellectual and cultural production of a tutelary and politically ciphered communal order, and they so with demands that they be recognized as constituents of the body politic by deploying aesthetic discourses—through writing, music, photography, art performances, editing, and curating. In the first chapter (Genealogies of the Amateur), theorization of the links between culture, politics, and media invites a critical engagement with the echoes and the political ambitions of the historical avant-garde, and allows us to identify latent tropes of political amateurism in radical democratic theories. This approximation bridges the localized readings of the dissertation with broader dialogues in the work of contemporary thinkers that build on the figure of the spectator as a compelling metaphor for the aesthetic dimension inherent in the constitutive processes of political subjectivity.

The second chapter examines some alternative uses of private homes in Cuba's capital city, Havana, in the last two decades. Through a reading of the spaces—virtual or physical—that host informal hubs of culture (home galleries and private libraries, informal salons, and portable networks of literary and cultural circulation), I locate tensions in the post-Special Period landscape, when public space becomes increasingly privatized and private homes are openly turned into public meeting places. Drawing from classic theorists of space and from

contemporary approaches to spatial cultural politics, I examine how new social actors deploy, politically, the aesthetic potential of the private home, and how, consequentially, political subjects are constituted by operations which resemanticize urban space and the private sphere. In addition to a critical genealogy of these practices, at the end I summarize current approaches to the study of Havana and identify ways in which my argument differs from them.

The third chapter links the alternative blogosphere to a strategic position where citizenship can be articulated from a new place of enunciation, one that challenges institutionalized forms of cultural and political criticism and the rules of civic participation of the public sphere. If the image and assessment of these bloggers (and, in general, of Internet and social media penetration in Cuba) is usually distorted by the way onlookers relate to their stories—through the amplified effect of international media coverage, through the virtual portals in which their writing often becomes divorced from what happens off-line, and through the negative media campaign of the Cuban government against them—in this chapter I propose to study these phenomena by looking at moments of interaction between bloggers and prominent figures of the political and cultural establishment, as well as to see blogging in the context of other, mainly cultural activities in which the bloggers were involved off-line. We will see what happens both when they are unplugged by the authorities, and when they are 'unplugged' from the Internet. In doing so this chapter seeks to avoid two commonplaces of blog theory: the technological determinism involved in overly optimistic celebrations of virtual platforms on one hand, and the skeptical dismissal of these particular actors, and of the impact of new technologies in general, in the shaping of the public sphere on the other.

The fourth chapter examines lyrical vulgarity and punk aesthetics as a politically consequential form of social protest in the context of post-Special Period Cuba. The band Porno

para Ricardo's music and image, which rely on political profanities as much as linguistic ones, provide an opportunity to explore the ideological, formal, and performative affinities between the song chorus and the political slogan as simultaneously disciplinary and convertible vehicles of social meaning. Drawing from the writings of Žižek and Bourdieu on ideology, language, and insult the chapter reflects on issues of aesthetic representation by close reading the lyrics of the band in the context of the history of the song in revolutionary Cuba, and by situating in a wider sociological context Porno para Ricardo's belated recuperation of punk—a style that is historically and intrinsically amateur as both a genre and a subculture.

The category of amateur, and its various manifestations in these contemporary projects, would serve to grapple then with different but related phenomena of late socialist culture: they can be called upon in order to examine how the very first impulse of democratizing access to culture as a central goal of the revolutionary process begets both the fetishistic status of culture, and the insubordination of the public against the artificial scarcity produced by the censor's interference. As bearers of "illegitimate knowledges," to borrow Bordieu's terminology (1986), amateurs enact a rupture with the tutelary logic of both political and cultural programs. This is sustained in a kind of *anti-intellectual intellectualism* (deploying, somewhat out of context, Horacio Tarcus's term), which is the double effect of the total politicization of culture by the revolutionary process, on one hand, and the citizens' rejection of its ideological paternalism, on the other. Both processes harbored intense fetishes around cultural goods and information that continue to operate today. In turn, this dynamic has been channeled toward alternative networks for their circulation and off-grid hubs for their clandestine traffic. This is why the first chapter of the dissertation addresses, if cursorily, the history of cultural politics told from the point of view of the ideal subject of cultural reforms rather than from the polemics of socialist realism or

vanguard aesthetics, or as the history of the underhanded politics of a bureaucratic apparatus, as it is usually done. Instead, I trace the emergence of the trope of the amateur, the aficionado, and the autodidact, under the new cultural policies after 1959. This suggests that the contemporary voices I profile in later chapters, at the same time that they contribute to the mapping of the post-Special Period cultural field, also share paradoxical roots with the early cultural practices of the Cuban Revolution. Such a lineage would at once renew and problematize, as I argue in the conclusion, the utopian promises of cultural communism and socialist enlightenment.

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[1] See for example, the "Cuba: 50 Years of Revolution" special issue of the *Journal of Latin American Studies* (2008); "Cuba en la nueva geopolítica", a special issue of *Encuentro de la cultura cubana* (2009); Antoni Kapcia's (2012) "Celebrating 50 Years – But of What Exactly and Why is Latin America Celebrating It?"; Rafael Rojas's (2008) "Souvernirs de un Caribe post-Soviético"; Julia Sweig's *Cuba (*2009); Carmelo Mesa-Lago's (2012) *Cuba en la era de Raúl Castro*; Gray and Kapcia's (2008) *The Changing Dynamic of Cuban Civil Society;* and the volume *Cuba y el día después: doce ensayistas nacidos con la Revolución imaginan el futuro,* published in 2001 but participating in the same zeitgeist.

[2] See for example Marifeli Pérez-Stable's *The Cuban Revolution: Origins, Course, and Legacy*, Rafael Rojas's *Tumbas sin sosiego*, and Fernando Martínez Heredia's *Desafíos del socialismo cubano.*

[3] For an in-depth historical analysis of these processes see the 1995 edition of Louis A. Pérez's *Cuba: Between Reform and Revolution*. For the primary source, the important speech by Fidel Castro on January 28th, 1990 is one of the earliest formulations of this course: "Sin embargo, pueden venir otras variantes para las cuales tenemos que prepararnos. Nosotros llamamos a ese período de bloqueo total, período especial en tiempo de guerra; pero ahora tenemos que prepararnos por todos estos problemas, e incluso hacer planes para período especial en tiempo de paz. ¿Qué significa período especial en tiempo de paz? Que los problemas fueran tan serios en el orden económico por las relaciones con los países de Europa oriental, o pudieran, por determinados factores o procesos en la Unión Soviética, ser tan graves, que nuestro país tuviera que afrontar una situación de abastecimiento sumamente difícil.[…]Debemos prever cuál es la peor situación a que puede verse sometido el país a un período especial en tiempo de paz y qué debemos hacer en ese caso. Bajo esas premisas se está trabajando intensamente".

[4] As for the theoretical distinction between the popular and the commercial, both the well-known critique of García Canclini in "Ni folklórico ni masivo" and Stuart Hall's description in "Deconstructing the Popular" must be taken into account here: "Yet 'transformations' are at the

heart of the study of popular culture. I mean the active work on existing traditions and activities, their active reworking, so that they come out a different way: they appear to 'persist' - yet, from one period to another, they come to stand in a different relation to the ways working people live and the ways they define their relations to each other, to 'the others' and to their conditions of life. Popular culture is neither, in a 'pure' sense, the popular traditions of resistance to these processes; nor is it the forms which are superimposed on and over them. It is the ground on which the transformations are worked" (Hall 443). With regard to the Cuban case, Antonio José Ponte's *La fiesta vigilada* (2007) and *Villa Marista en Plata* (2010), as well as many of his articles in first in *Encuentro de la cultura cubana* and later in *Diario de Cuba*, have been dedicated to studying the changing relationship between the institutions and rhetoric of the state and the cultural and artistic production of this period as well. The merit of Ponte's more historically attuned observations and the connections he makes between popular and commercial culture on one hand, and the discourse of official art and the state cultural apparatus on the other, supplement the type of cultural studies that focus solely on the foreign commercialization of culture and its domestic effects, which often square with mildly romanticized assumptions about newfound individual agency and expressive popular outlets in contrast to the grey stark past of bureaucratic absolutism. Of works that avoid facile dichotomies, a mandatory mention is the meticulous work of Jacqueline Loss, which elucidates the ambiguous quasi-colonial situation of Cuba with respect to the U.S.S.R. Other works of the last decade worth consulting are Sujatha Fernandes' *Cuba Represent!* (2006) and Robin Moore's *Music and Revolution* (2006), and Esther Whitfield's *Cuban Currency* (2008), all of which will be discussed in more detail in chapters 4 (music) and 3 (blogs) respectively.

[5] If the state cultural policy, especially from the 1990s on, worked under the assumption that a national identity was only culturally, morally, and politically acceptable within the horizon of formal revolutionary adhesion regardless of its content, and its transformed narrative of national teleology was to be severed from the rest of the socialist bloc, the paradox is that, as both Rojas and Hernández-Reguant have observed, such tactic nationalism was sustained on identities that flaunted their cultural cosmopolitanism: "In the island, being Cuban no longer meant, necessarily, being revolutionary—in the sense of being committed to a nationalist political project. It meant, more than ever, being cosmopolitan" (Hernández-Reguant 10).

[6] As do Ponte, mentioned above, and José Quiroga, who in *Cuban Palimpsests* refers to the new governing logic as disciplinary rather than repressive. For additional information on the aesthetic and structural transformations in the literary field during this period see also the special issue of the *Revista de Estudios Hispánicos,* "Cuban Literature of the 1990s."

[7] While in passages such as this one Rojas seems to favor the liberal republican tradition as the key to modern democratic nationalism, this preference can also be read as a counterbalancing act. The author would be recovering thus through his own essays a fuller profile of those targets of selective vindication, outright suppression and unmerited indifference. In that sense Rojas is also invested in finding, through the scholarly and painstaking work of a detailed cultural history, a resolution in a political as much as symbolic war that "se proyecta sobre la memoria y los herederos de uno y otro bando entablan una discordia en torno a la reconstrucción del panteón nacional" (14).

[8] Surely it need not translate into a failure of the argument as whole, for we could object that the debates he revisits were not constitutive of a democratic public sphere themselves and still rescue their worth as pedagogic and practical tools in the formation of political subjects.
[9] I'm borrowing this distinction from John Guillory's work in *Cultural Capital*.

[10] Anke Birkenmeier's and Rachel Price's brief essays for that same volume and which appeared together with González Echevarría's in the special issue of *Review 82* "Cuba: Inside and Out", engage more provocatively the same questions by examining critically the use of a post-Cuban identity in contemporary literary works. The provocation is carried even further in a piece by Orlando Luis Pardo Lazo, in "Has There Been Any Cuban Literature Since the Revolution?": "…grinding poverty and a populist justice…We were naked to the elements, museum-ready mummies for sexual or intellectual tourism (or both), exquisite corpses in the rubbish bin of utopias…But Cuban Literature didn't dare to take vicious advantage of this opportunity…It lacked playfulness and cynicism and had far too great a sense of solemnity" (128), adjudicates the writer referring to the boom of 1990s Cuban literature. The question of nation and literature "is all about an academic inquiry related less to Literature and Revolution than to a certain kind of Cultural Archaeology fabricated in the First World….Nobody in Cuba would believe such a line of inquiry, unless it was imposed by the political police…" (126) Thus mourns the author, also known as OLPL, the latest *enfante terrible* of the literary scene, and who traffics in the reluctant acquiescence to the absurd, the neurotic pessimism, and the overabundance of cheeky neologisms inherited from a triple legacy of *écrivains maudits*: Virgilio Piñera, Guillermo Rosales, and above all Guillermo Cabrera Infante respectively. Though apophatically, Birkenmeir, Price and to a lesser degree OLPL place similar weigh on the rejection of a national essence (that is, on a negative nationality) than other critics do on the pursuit of the positive content thereof. In this critical corpus, the nation continues to be a category situated beyond the artificial, administrative borders of a geographical accident, searching for relevance in the afterlives of Renan's formulation and building upon studies of collective memory and identity. Sure enough OLPL, as Price discusses very cogently in her contribution to that volume, must be understood within a wider trend of digital literature that purposefully projects its generational difference by insisting in a staunch cosmopolitism. However, the circumstantial limitations of this poetics are only outmatched by a vehemence that often betrays its own precariousness, its concealing contrivances, its haunting sense of involuntary provincialism.

[11] There are at least two standard traditions in the theorization of tolerance in this sense. First, there is the critique of bourgeois tolerance, whose constitutive split between the public and the private preempts the irruptions of radical change while concentrated capital secures the mediatic hegemony of an illusory public consensus. This notion of tolerance finds a seminal exposition in Herbert Marcuse's "Repressive Tolerance." The second one is that of Vaclav Havel's essay in *The Power of the Powerless*, who addresses the complicit system of double morality where a similar split between private dissent and public compliance produces a particular form of tolerance in the historical socialist formation: first, the citizen 'tolerates' the ideological propaganda to avoid punishment by the political police. In the late socialist society, as we see in both Hernández-Reguant and Rojas, the State in turn 'tolerates' certain forms of criticism in order to administer the forces of dissent. Žižek again provides updates on these problematics and reviews the work of other post-Marxist thinkers who address both of these traditions to

complicate their premises. See the already mentioned *Did Somebody say Totalitarianism?* and his 2007 article "Tolerance as an Ideological Category."

[12] For now, public sphere should be understood in general, not in the technical Habermasian sense of *publizität*: as the combination of media and spaces of socialization where certain practices and networks guarantee the circulation of political, social and cultural imaginaries within a community, making the material or symbolic goods bearing them accessible to its members; that is, wherever and however a *public* is summoned.

[13] The language of autonomy should not be understood as an attempt at adjudication in the classic debate about the 'bourgeois' freedoms of the artist against socialist realism—or any such demand of art to be subsumed to a political tendency or social goal. Autonomy here refers more to a structural rather than to an aesthetic dimension: it means that the realm of cultural institutions of the public sphere and its constitutive processes—production, exchange, reception—aspires to be independent, at least, from blunt attempts to regulate and monopolize it by self-interested elites or an openly repressive apparatus. In due time we will address the critique that cultural autonomy, understood as part of a theory of civil society independent of political society, is but a liberal construct. The language of autonomy in politics, in turn, finds its classic articulation in the modern philosophical distinction between rational subjects capable of regulating themselves and an external transcendental authority whose commands must be fathomed and interiorized—even though they would be autonomous, as in the Kantian update to the Cartesian subject, only when participating in a rational universality. Either in the context of politics or the context of culture, of course, autonomy is not a fully articulated state that must then be achieved; in the post-Enlightenment era it ought to be understood rather as a ongoing practice, as an activity.

[14] I mean visibility here in a concrete, situational context where the highly centralized structure of the public sphere has allowed for a long history of governmental intervention and censorship. To speak of political subjects and visibility should not necessarily reference Rancière's more elusive formulation of visibility in terms of the aesthetic dimension of politics, or "the distribution of the sensible." While there are some terms in Rancière's work that could be usefully deployed in the critique of the politics of representation, the general system in which they are discussed evacuates their potential at least for the present study. Therefore my examination of this moment only participates in that framework insofar as both Rancière as a "post-Althusserian" and Cultural Studies are concerned with struggles for recognition, as Žižek observes in the afterword to *The Politics of Aesthetics.* (75) (Žižek means the comparison as a criticism of both traditions for downgrading the primacy of the economic sphere.) Rancière's distinction between the police and the political would seem fitting at first because it could describe very well why moments of great upheaval are perceived as crisis of political subjectivation, meaning the suspension, reshuffling, or subversion of the social categories or identifiable political subjects of a particular ordered configuration, that is, the recognizable parts of what he calls, after Plato's *Republic*, "the order of the city" (*Disagreement* 29). But the political for Rancière is the realm of action that remains open as long as it has the potential to disrupt the realm of policing—the manifest order of unequal distribution—by wielding universal claims to equality: "Politics occurs when the egalitarian contingency disrupts the natural pecking

order as the 'freedom' of the people, when this disruption produces a specific mechanism: the dividing of society into parts that are not 'true' parts; the setting-up of one part as equal to the whole in the name of a 'property' that is not its own…" (18) Its value as a gesture in emptying essentialism out of political subjects and teleology out of politics is not to be dismissed, but it fails to address what goes on before, around, and after the type of *extraordinary* event that counts, under Rancière's definition, as the practice of politics proper (and therefore of democracy by definition); opposed to the practice of politics as policing: the *ordinary*, ongoing negotiations and disputes within existing institutional and discursive frameworks. (29) The language supporting that distinction, that of "distribution of parts" and of the "demos" retreats from discrimination between different kinds of underdogs. The radical equality that allows the irruption of the demos as moments of insurgency is predicated upon the anonymity of the constitutive parts of the people. The model therefore remits practically all negotiations of the parts that *are* distributed to the category of the para-political. What then is the relation between politics as democracy and politics as police in this account? Historically, it is never clear; it remains too abstract because there is no effort to historicize the concept of "part", so that it either works in all kinds of situations or in none at all. (30) The temporalities, and therefore the realms of policing and politics never coincide: policing seems to refer to a long duration—a period of relative stability—and politics to short-lived crisis. Is this not a problematic view of history as a series of crises that are not structurally related to each other except through a single paradigm of unequal distribution? Would it not benefit from a clearer elaboration of how the realms of policing and politics coexist and inform each other constantly? Theoretically, the relation between policing and politics is also one of political disagreement, where what is at stake more than disagreements about concepts or entitlements is the very conditions of speech, who counts as a speaker, and what counts as speech: "The structures proper to disagreement are those in which discussion of an argument comes down to a dispute over the object of the discussion and over the capacity of those who are making an object out of it." (xii) This formulation is a felicitous one, pregnant with potential. There is an excellent discussion of the rationality of disagreement and its political avatars, for example. (50-51) But Rancière moves the discussion to explore the problem as a disciplinary one: the disagreement is ultimately one between political philosophy—which began with Aristotle's *Politics*—and the philosophy of the political—a Platonic miscarriage that Rancière now will bring to full term. (xii) In *Disagreement* in particular, Rancière opts to go squarely against the Marxian paradigm of world-transforming philosophy, developing a philosophy against political philosophy understood as either the philosophy of politics (mechanistic or institutional in focus) or the politics of philosophy as an institution itself.

[15] What I mean by democratic political subjects here is of an ordinary pedigree: the bearers of the rights involved in and required for popular sovereignty *and* individual self-determination. First fully formulated in ancient Athens—sophisticated philosophical analyses of both the *demos* and the citizen are already found in Plato's *Republic* and Aristotle's *Politics*—it does not find the terms of its current articulations until the 18th century. It is from this point on that modern democratic citizenship generates a particular polemic regarding the balance between the equality of the *demos* and the freedom(s) of the individual, and whose claim to universality will be the very crucible where its non-universal realities will then be contested. This should not signal a theoretical capitulation to deliberative democracy within the Enlightenment paradigm

(Habermas' "rational consensus") or representative democracy as it is practiced in much of the world today, the fallacies of which have been discussed more astutely at length by, for example, Nancy Fraser and Chantal Mouffe. But falling short to appeal to and engage with the elegant philosophical elaborations of Cornelius Castoriadis, Ètienne Balibar or Claude Lefort on the subject, this rustic definition of the democratic should suffice for now.

[16] Both the neoliberal marketplace and the party controlled bureaucracy are undemocratic (a distinction that in itself is increasingly irrelevant: either the state retreats as corporations usurp or abrogate its functions, or it withers de facto as *res publica* when it merges with them or falls under the influence of transnational corporations). The example of the role of culture in this sense is particularly revealing: while in many "really existing democracies", to use Nancy Fraser's terms, political relevance is traded for relative or nominal freedom in a supposedly decentralized market of unequal competition, in "really existing socialisms" the rigidly centralized structure of the public sphere the equation is inverted.

[17] The degree to which they were, in fact, communists, or the question of what kind of communism they implemented, has been of course the subject of a century of debate. Excellent analyses of the relationship between Marxism, totalitarianism and Soviet communism from different perspectives are Claude Lefort's *Complications: Communism and the Dilemmas of Democracy* (2007) and Žižek's *Did somebody say totalitarianism?* (2001). It is worth revisiting the positions of Raya Dunayevskaya and Cornelius Castoriadis from the late forties to the mid-60s, who disavowed—much before the wave of de-Stalinization caught Europe between Sartre, Mao, and Althusser—the theoretical legitimacy and the Marxist content of those historical political formations. The classic documents in this tradition are "State Capitalism and World Revolution" (1950), "Sur le régime et contre la défense de l'URSS" (1946), and Dunayevskaya's "A New Revision of Marxian Economics" (1944). The Johnson-Forest tendency, with CLR James and R. Dunayevskaya, claimed that despite their superficial differences both East and West were ultimately state-capitalisms, whereas Castoriadis group Socialisme ou Barbarie saw the U.S.S.R. as a new form of political and social organization whose main pillars were a single ideology party and a massively inefficient bureaucracy. CLR James and Dunayevskaya would continue to develop independently forms of Hegelian Marxisms and Castoriadis and Lefort would abandon Marxism proper and would gravitate toward psychoanalysis and radical democracy respectively.

[18] The bibliography on this history is prolific, and in addition to Marxist theorists like Alan Badiou, Slavoj Žižek, Claude Lefort, and Cornelius Castoriadis, who have addressed head on the legacy of the communist experience, I will limit myself to citing three distinctly illustrative approaches from other disciplinary traditions: the symbolic and elegant reading of Susan Buck-Morss regarding the ideological affinities of the opposing Cold War poles in *Dreamworld and Catastrophe* (2000); Naomi Klein's polemic but poignant report on the predatory aftermaths of rampant neoliberalism in *The Shock Doctrine* (2007); and Stephen Kotkin's incisive and sobering account of the collapse of communist governments in Europe in *Uncivil Society* (2009).

[19] In the next section I discuss some of these approaches, their contributions and their drawbacks.

[20] The strategic label "regular citizen" refers to the claim to represent a larger constituency dispossessed of sinecures usually attached to ideological loyalty or the simulation thereof. Conversely, it refers to someone who cannot or does not pursue professionalization as part of a cultural market. The (re)creation of elites by some of these initiatives—distinguished by information access, technological savvy, cultural capital, urban settings—is not to be disregarded. In addition, the sensationalist practices of the international media and the commercial and political lobbying exercised by the large communities of Cuban emigrants both domestically and in their respective countries of residence cannot be ignored when it comes to analyzing the international representation of some of these phenomena. Though enjoying a comparatively modest mediatic presence, the highly politicized perspective that makes them headlines caters to the polarized positions of the interested parties (the Cuban government, Cuban artists and intellectuals, the heterogeneous groups of the Cuban diaspora, academics, politicians and militants of a heterogeneous international Left). At the same time, that relationship has been privileged in other studies and so we are displacing it, though not ignoring it, from the main focus of our investigation.

[21] Because of the charged connotation of the term 'ideology' in the context of historical communism it should be noted that I am not using it here in a pejorative sense. In his writing Althusser will often go back and forth between two definitions: on one hand, there are ideologies in the plural and narrow sense of the word (sets of beliefs articulated within a single, self-contained symbolic framework) and on the other, Ideology as an absolute category (the structural configuration of power intrinsic to social formations and prior to the very idea of a political subject. This in turn is a structuralist interpretation of an Aristotelian notion, namely that even if the individual exists chronologically prior to or independently of the city, the polis *is* prior to the citizen, that is, only within the polis does the idea of a citizen make sense, only within it can the citizenship be practiced as such and, in Aristotle, can an individual fully exercise his practical wisdom in the pursuit of the happy life).

[22] It may be opportune to recall here the parody of both 'bureaucratism' and 'academicism' accomplished by Viénet's iconic *détournement* "Can Dialectics Break Bricks?" for it engages both the renewed utopian moment that contributed to the repositioned impact of the Cuban Revolution in the global political imaginary of the 1960s, and the patterns of authoritarianism and orthodoxy that it came to repeat. In a scene where a pompous government functionary addresses a horde of discontent workers, in keeping with the absurd and mocking tone of the entire film, Viénet bares the dangerous contradictions of orthodox vanguardism and theoretical misappropriation: "That's how you exercise your dialectical materialism […] Work must be your only role. Work. Family. Fatherland. Work! Family! Fatherland! Just stick to that. I don't want to hear any more about class struggle. If not I'll send in my sociologists! And if necessary my psychiatrists! My urban planners! My architects! My Foucaults! My Lacans! And if that's not enough, I'll even send my structuralists."

CHAPTER ONE:
Genealogies Of The Amateur

> Now I know *how* to set about this work, I never knew how, I always began too soon, I thought, like an amateur. All our lives we run away from amateurishness and it always catches up with us, I thought, we want nothing with greater passion than to escape our lifelong amateurishness and it always catches up with us.
>
> Thomas Bernhard, *The Loser*

I. Definitions

The amateur has no history, except as part of the histories of the professionalization of other trades, crafts, and arts. Or so it would seem at first sight. Meditations on the term amateur almost invariably begin with an etymological gesture or a disciplinary demarcation; so they are either too broad or too narrow. These are symptoms of the challenge posed by the manifold definitions of the term, of its variable meaning with respect to historically specific conditions and to the other actors with which it has been entangled semiotically: autodidact, dilettante, aficionado, bricoleur, professional, expert, connoisseur. But regardless of the occasion, almost every definition of the amateur reaches a consensus around the practice of an activity that is not one's principal means of livelihood. More generally, amateurism can be understood as the absence of, or non participation in, a legitimate framework of public recognition, remuneration, and/or accreditation for engaging voluntarily, regularly, leisurely—and sometimes passionately—in an activity.

When the amateur intimates the idea of actors participating in a specialized pursuit without engaging in it as a primary means of sustenance, systematically if to different degrees, true to its Latin etymology amateurism connotes a rigorous dedication to a practice as well as the knowledge of the specialist; this is the case of amateur sports, amateur gardening, or amateur radio enthusiasts. The term may also denote a group of practices that lack, for different reasons, an equivalent profession against which it is defined—such is the status of some types of

hobbyists like collectors (of coins or stamps), and that was the case in different moments of history with early photographers, doctors, scientists, and inventors. Many of these cases can encompass marginal material gains, but maintain a kinship to the amateur because they lack recognition of as specialized professional knowledges in a given sociohistorical formation.[1] Since at least the second half of the 19th century, the term amateur has been increasingly used in contrast to the professional.[2] In everyday language, therefore, the amateur has been invoked more and more in its pejorative sense, that is, in contrast to any highly skilled and accomplished figure. As a result, it is frequently heard as an adjective signaling inexperience, low quality, lack of professional training and/or accreditation.

As we will examine, the amateur and its related figures often emerge, for these very reasons, in critical discourses that call into question concepts such as recognition, authenticity, and authority in cultural theory. Throughout the 20th century explicitly conjured or spectrally invoked, the amateur has stood as a figure of contrast with respect to the market-driven standardization of aesthetic codes, as counterpart to the professionalization of creativity, as signifier of the democratization of taste and creative labor, and as a site of resistance—as thought-experiment or imagined alter-ego—to the division of labor, the commodification of leisure time, and the alienation of labor specific to the capitalist mode of production. As of late, a certain discourse of the amateur has also been inextricable from modern theories of technology and media; discussions about forms of cultural amateurism were central to both the historical avant-garde and to revolutionary culture, and these debates are being rekindled in the digital age in optimistic and pessimistic tenors in equal parts.

The possible permutations of the amateur trope have also insinuated themselves in political philosophy, where it has been used both as a metaphor and a model for political

participation: either against the professionalization of politics, or as a cautionary buffer to the advantage of the incumbent. A certain understanding of the amateur as a concept associated to democratic discourse, in fact, dates back to at least Plato's *Republic:* arguably, amateurism is already implicitly invoked, if pejoratively, in the one-person-one-craft argument, where engaging in anything other than one's own trade (and above all in the governing of the city) becomes an undesirable human expenditure that threatens the order of the city—and/or of the soul—since it hampers the singularly focused commitment that excellence requires and that a strict division of labor enforces. The amateur as social actor, as ideal, or as trope, is therefore etched as a double inscription in cultural and political theories: as a peculiar agent of cultural production and dissemination on one hand, and as a special figuration of the *demos* on the other.

This chapter will begin with a general discussion of the philosophical origins of, and the interpretative possibilities opened by, the amateur as a theoretical concept. In the last section, I will discuss the amateur as a historical trope in Cuba's revolutionary cultural politics, which ties the brief intellectual history of the first two parts to the thesis proposed in the introduction, namely, that the amateur figure can be a useful framework to read the reconfiguration of the cultural field in Cuba during and after the Special Period.

II. Cultural amateurs

In the cultural context, the amateur has a checkered presence, combining or alternating between at least three distinct senses of the term: as an agent (the actually existing amateur), as a thematic subject (as a trope), and as discourse (as place of enunciation or as an identity often appropriated or referenced strategically to by the artist, the professional, the critic or the philosopher). For a quick glance at its transformation from the 19th century to the present we

could enter the history of cultural amateurism in *medias res* via Adorno's "Four Hands, Once Again." A miniature autobiographical essay of 1933, the text recalls his musical upbringing and the role of four-hands piano arrangements played in the circulation of classical music, as well as in facilitating an active, participatory form of listening up until the turn-of-the-century:

> In the age of strict division of labor, the bourgeoisie defended its last music in the fortress of the piano, which they vigorously maintained; inconsiderate, indifferent to how it sounded in the ears of the others, the alienated ones. Even their mistakes, which were unavoidable, preserved an active relation to the works that those who in an intoxicated state listened to perfect concert performances had long ceased to posses. For this, certainly, the four-handed player had to pay the price of entering into action archaically domestic, dilettantishly unschooled. Their dilettantism, however, is nothing other than the reverberation of the true musical tradition and the product of its decline. The question remains, for whom will the last artist meaningfully play when the last dilettante, who lives by the dream of being an artist, has died?[3] (3)

The four-hands arrangement was but a subset of the flourishing genre of music written for the piano and friendly to the non professional home—often female—pianist throughout the nineteenth century.[4] Before the gramophone, the player piano, the radio, the jukebox and subsequent technologies of mass reproducibility established new standard forms of listening and performing, amateurs were arguably some of the most significant agents of cultural dissemination and appreciation, and not just in music. Buck-Morss points out in her commentary of the essay that

> …if domestic familiarity robbed music of one kind of aura, if for Adorno "serious" music was never untouchable and its "greatness" elicited no authoritarian reverence, it maintained an aura of another sort, the kind Walter Benjamin would claim was threatened with extinction in the modern age of art's mechanical reproducibility. Unlike radio and phonograph recordings, this music was recreated with each reproduction. It was brought to life, actively produced rather than passively consumed.[5] (1)

Moreover, even before the 19th century, amateurism—in music, painting, literature—was not merely relegated to a form of private consumption in the family home; it was above all a

socialized form of active aesthetic enjoyment in salon cultures providing a circuit for the dissemination, discussion, and promotion not just of the works themselves but of aesthetic theory and criticism more generally.[6] The development of 19th century amateurism will follow the same general pattern of that which, following Adam Smith's notion of non productive time, Thornstein Veblen will coin as 'conspicuous leisure.' Amateurism, in this sense, was part and parcel of the bourgeois appropriation of those activities previously belonging exclusively to 'the leisure class,' as leisure itself was redefined to allow for the bourgeois appropriation of the cultural capital of the declining aristocracy, and for the rise of a mass culture later.[7]

In "The amateur retort" art theorist and critic John Roberts offers a historical account of the significance of amateurism in the development of modern art and art theory at the end of the 19th and the early 20th centuries, beginning with Manet's flirtation with incorrect or improper—as in amateurish—aesthetic guidelines as a challenge to academic conventions of pictorial representation.[8] Roberts sustains that in the context of the visual arts of the 19th-century (much like we saw above in the case of music), the modern figure of the (really existing) amateur sat somewhere "between petit-bourgeois aspiration and aristocratic entitlement" (*Amateurs* 16), while, as appropriated discourse or alter ego in the hands of the professional artists, it fulfilled a variety of other functions with respect to the institution of art and its immanent polemics about representation techniques. He contends, further, that much of our present notions about the amateur, as well as its variegated appearances in 20th century art and cultural discourse,

> are derived from two related sources…: the incorporation into art, from the 1920s, of the "underprofessionalized" technologies of photography and film, and the transformation (after the Russian Revolution) of the amateur into the "nonartist artist"—the amateur as nonprofessional *coparticipant* with the professional. In this light, we might say that the amateur-as-producer or "nonartist artist"—as ego ideal and fantasy figure—is one of the determining and recurring forces in art after the avant-garde irruptions of the 1920s and 1930s. With the dispersal, retardation, and, later, reinscription of the original avant-gardes in European and

> American art, the amateur became sometimes an implicit and sometimes an explicit point of identification with the postrevolutionary moment of the amateur-as-producer's democratic incorporation into culture. (18)

Here too we get a history of technological and economic modernization where 19th century amateurs bifurcate during the 20th century along different paths: either the amateur disappeared as a significant agent, that is, he/she became cannibalized by the culture industry and by the autonomous, professionalized system of cultural production under capitalism, or, in revolutionary and avant-garde cultural theory and their mass programs of cultural democratization, the amateur was redefined as producer-author and enlightened worker.

In the late 1970s, sociologist Robert Stebbins made a case for the amateur as an indispensable cultural agent of modernity who lubricates the mechanisms of distribution and reception of the cultural markets in the 20th century. Looking at the circulation of culture from economic and broadly sociological perspectives, Stebbins identifies in the amateur an embodied link connecting and mediating between the worlds of the professional and the spectator. Amateurs would be, as Adorno suggests above, not only the most dedicated and appreciative members of the public—in addition to guaranteed attentive audiences and reliable consumers of the professionals' work—but also a source demographic of professionals-in-the making and of original contributions to their respective fields, and more so in emerging practices. In Stebbins's account, which builds on earlier scholarship on play and on empirical observations of the flows of money, personnel, and ideas between the professional and amateur worlds of music and sports, modern amateurism would have survived and even sustained the professionalization of activities previously considered past times and hobbies. While the emergence of mass communication amplified the exposure of professionals and with it developed higher standards of excellence, in Stebbins's model this also dovetailed with the expansion of cultural spaces and

new subjects along them who continued to engage as amateurs in the sense of knowledgeable, if "nonprofessional participants" (583). Surely, as an individual, the really existing amateur had to confront the immanent pressures of the activity in which s/he is engaged either by pursuing professionalization "away form play toward necessity, obligation, seriousness, and commitment as expressed in regimentation…and systematization", or by remaining satisfied with his/her role as amateur. (583) Beyond the description of the individual pressures burdening the really existing amateur, it is to Stebbins's credit that he goes on to identify what he terms the system "professional-amateur-public" or "P-A-P" which allows him to challenge the idea of amateurs as necessarily less skilled or knowledgeable than their professional counterparts, to describe instead the relationship between those worlds as not only symbiotic but also highly dynamic: "both groups are clearly more advanced than their publics in these ways….In other words, amateurs serve publics, as professionals do, and at times the same ones….The amateur [is] a special member of the public…" (586-7).[9]

However, though Stebbins's amateurs comfortably insert themselves in these seemingly unproblematic networks of circulation and consumption, his work does not provide a material analysis of the amateur attitudes about leisure he otherwise describes so well ("seriousness at leisure"), that is, there is no concern for the technological, gender or class based determinants of distribution and perception of leisure practices. It is equally incontrovertible that reproduction technologies and the eventual professionalization of many disciplines (including photography and film) eventually threatened the concept of the cultural amateur as a figure whose productive capabilities could actualize a potential disruption of revolutionary dimensions—even if such subversion was mostly an imagined fantasy appropriated by artists and critics. For instance, in the case of music discussed above, player pianos first, and phonographs later, eliminated the

need for the leisured learning required to be good enough to play socially. Even though in their early years such technologies were still luxury commodities, by the post-war period it was the technologies of reproducibility that were coveted: the leisured learning of the amateur constituted neither a status symbol nor a circuit for cultural goods in the private sphere. (figs.1-3)

A tragicomic reenactment of how the player piano not only reorganized the modes of attention and reception cultivated around amateur playing in aristocratic and haute bourgeois circles, but also stood as an allegory of the arrival of the mass as public and aesthetic subject along with technologies of reproducibility, happens around minute 42 of Nikita Mikhalkov's classic *Unfinished Piece for the Player Piano* (1977)—a MOSFILM blockbuster based on a Chekov short story (also screened in Cuba in the late 70s or early 80s). When the player piano arrives at the dacha, as a practical joke, the servant is ordered by the party host to sit and pretend he is playing Liszt's "Hungarian Rhapsody No. 2." The choice of music is important, because Rhapsody n. 2 is a notoriously difficult piece of the late Romantic repertoire for the pianoforte, was immortalized by Tom and Jerry ("The Cat Concerto" 1947), Bugs Bunny ("Rhapsody Rabbit" 1946) and the Marx brothers ("A Night in Casablanca" 1946), and is one of the classical pieces that have become so popularized that they have lost their symbolic capital as 'high art' in order to become kitschy.[10] The unsuspecting observers look in disbelief at the instantly acquired virtuosity of the vulgar Zakhar, who swings his arms awkwardly in front of the keyboard while looking up at the balcony with an idiotic smile. (The composition of the scene is exquisitely synecdochic, for family and guests are gathered in the second floor terrace, looking down at the servant playing the mechanical piano that has just arrived in the yard). The camera then zooms in on the flustered faces of the witnesses of such marvel when Zakhar gets up and the spectrally

autonomous piano continues to play the Liszt hit, causing one of the ladies to faint and stirring general bewilderment.

Technologies of reproduction did not merely gnaw at the aura of the work by displacing the rituals of its performance and reception, they profoundly eroded the specific cultural capital of the amateur agent as well. In turn (and this is one of the arguments running through the dissertation), digital or portable technologies that reintroduce capabilities of production by the nonspecialist in the second half of the 20th century—in addition to more horizontal forms of reproducibility and dissemination—have revitalized and transformed the amateur as a cultural agent in our own times, forcing us therefore to reexamine similarities and differences with the 'active production' element that Buck-Morss, after Adorno and Benjamin, describes above. In any case, the origins of those processes lie in the practice of 19th century amateurism which here affords us both a genealogy of these practices and a historical context for the debates on authorship, cultural democratization, and the formation of new publics that scaffolded and shaped aesthetic and critical theory throughout the 20th century.

A key text for any such discussion is Benjamin's "The Author as Producer." Here Benjamin tethers an initial examination of quality and political tendency to an analysis of the function of authors in the production of social goods, so as to arrive at the moment when the goal of the revolutionary activity of the author-as-producer is to usher in a society of producers-as-authors. This last image is of particular interest to us, since for Benjamin it constitutes both a theoretical conclusion and a historical—however flawed—observation of what he sees happening in the Soviet Union. Benjamin is clearly building upon a critique of specialization heavily inspired by the Lukàcs of *History and Class Consciousness,* who argues that overspecialization and the reification of disciplinary boundaries are core features of the

experience of the capitalist organization of knowledge, where knowledge of the totality is made impossible under the alienating fragmentation of the different spheres of human activity. (Lukàcs 103-4) How can authors confront that, and how do they do so differently in the East than in the West, asks Benjamin?

Quoting a passage from another of his own essays of the period, "The Newspaper," Benjamin finds in the press "the forms of expression that channel the literary energies of the present," since the newspaper provides a "scene of literary confusion" that blurs the boundaries between specialized human activities, disciplines, and genres. (82) That editorial indiscipline inherent to the logic of the newspaper (where you get disparate content, images, and texts juxtaposed on a single page) may cater to the readers' impatience and therefore occasionally pander to the lowest common denominator of the now eroded public sphere, but it also produces the second transformation in the relations of production and consumption that, under certain material conditions, leads him not to the pessimist critics of the press—he is thinking about his contemporary Karl Kraus and Kierkegaard—but to the possibility of a radical transformation of power relations. The passage is worth quoting here in its entirety for it shows Benjamin's dialectical thinking at its best:

> Here, however, a dialectical moment lies concealed: the decline of writing in the bourgeois press proves to be the formula for its revival in the press of Soviet Russia. For as writing gains in breadth what it loses in depth, the conventional distinction between author and public, which is upheld by the bourgeois press, begins in the Soviet press to disappear. For there the reader is at all times ready to become a writer—that is, a describer, or even a prescriber. As an expert—not perhaps in a discipline but perhaps in a post that he holds—he gains access to authorship. Work itself has its turn to speak. And its representation in words becomes a part of the ability that is needed for its exercise. Literary competence is no longer founded on specialized training but is now based on polytechnical education, and thus becomes public property. It is, in a word, the literarization of the conditions of living that masters the otherwise insoluble antinomies. And it is at the scene of the limitless debasement of the word—the newspaper, in short—

> that its salvation is being prepared. (qtd in "The Author as Producer" 83) (We will return to this essay, "The Newspaper" in the following section).

In very general terms, Benjamin's argument in "The Author as Producer" is organized around four main proposals: a) the creative activity of authors must be analyzed as another form of economic activity, that is, as embedded in the relations of productions of the socioeconomic formation in which they take place, b) technologies of mass communication qualitatively transform the relationship between authors and publics, c) how do (revolutionary) authors contribute—and can they? should they?—through aesthetic techniques to the progressive/revolutionary transformation of relations of production, while taking into account the two factors above? "Rather than asking" says Benjamin, "'What is the attitude of a work *to* the relations of production of its time?' I would like to ask, 'What is its position *in* them?' This question directly concerns the function the work has within the literary relations of production of its time. It is concerned, in other words, directly with the literary *technique* of works" (81). This statement must be pondered further because it is the pivot displacing the dualistic understanding of form and content, which Benjamin does by situating the author within the relations of productions rather than as a disinterested observer in an autonomous realm of thought and creativity. The answers he offers to his own questions will then rest on two things: on one hand on his understanding of *technique* (whose archetypical practitioner is Brecht) and on the other, on the different status that aesthetic production has as economic production in the Soviet Union and the West—according to Benjamin's own problematic reading (he is writing in 1934).

Aesthetic production and reception are thereby reframed as economic production and consumption, and, like many other theorists of the period, Benjamin assumes that there is a causal link between aesthetic discourse and politico-economic emancipation. However, Benjamin's approach is, as he himself outlines at the beginning of the essay, far from the

position that authors merely ought to produce revolutionary content as handmaids of a political credo (e.g. demagogic or propagandistic works). Instead, he concentrates on a dialectical understanding of formal solutions, which is where the concern with the new technologies of communication comes in. Literary authors, Benjamin argues, should not compete with "the new instruments" but engage their techniques instead, put new media at their disposal, including technological reorganization of disciplines and reception modes:

> …technical progress is for the author as producer the foundation of his political progress. In other words, only by transcending the specialization in the process of intellectual production—a specialization that, in the bourgeois view, constitutes its order—can one make this production politically useful; and the barriers imposed by specialization must be breached jointly by the productive forces that they were set up to divide. (87)

In the formal construction of his/her texts, in aesthetic strategies attuned to the modes of attention of his/her surroundings, in short, in literary *technique*, the author, as producer, has two options: to reproduce the order of things (the ideological function of bourgeois art), or to produce them anew:

> And this attitude the writer can demonstrate only in his particular activity—that is, in writing…*An author who teaches writers nothing teaches no one*. What matters, therefore, is the exemplary character of production, which is able, first, to induce other producers to produce, and, second, to put an improved apparatus at their disposal. And this apparatus is better, the more consumers it is able to turn into producers—that is, readers or spectators into collaborators. (89, italics in the original)

In any case, concludes Benjamin, whether the change in economic relations comes before formal aesthetic revolutions—as in the Soviet Union—or whether such responsibility falls upon committed authors still working within a capitalist social formation, the goal toward which all (left) authors-as-producers ought to work is ultimately "the socialization of the intellectual means of production." (93)

Here we come full stop to a contradiction that will often resurface in these debates: on one hand, the intellectual *means of production* must be freely available to all if its *products* (cultural goods) and desired *effects* (to elevate, educate, form citizens, dealienate, emancipate) are to be socially universal; herein lies the socialist critique that radicalizes the classic Enlightenment project. On the other hand, however, a certain level of specialization of intellectual and aesthetic work—of the authors and artists as a guild—must be retained if artistic creation is to have its own function in the new society: will liberating the literary means of production from the whip of capital involve the elimination of the writer, that is, if the goal is to convert the authors-as-producers into producers-as-authors? Benjamin only quips with a classic misreading of Plato who, against all the vilifying that still goes on about that specific point of the *Republic*, did *not* banish the poets but, precisely, did the very same Benjamin is advocating here, that is, assigned him/her a specific task within the perfect order of *kallipolis,* a task that is legitimized by its contribution to the common good rather than by the individual glory harvested by the poet's nefarious false images: "The Soviet state will not, it is true, banish the poet, as Plato did; but it will—and this is why I evoked Plato's republic at the outset—assign him tasks that do not permit him to display in new masterpieces the long-since-counterfeit wealth of creative personality" (89). The fundamental conflict that underlies Benjamin's somewhat muddled articulation is the problem of the ambivalent character of culture itself: as specialized discourse of aesthetic production, that is, as a system of experts, as a desirable experience that must be universalizable, and as an *ordinary* praxis.

The case of the worker correspondents in the Soviet Union, for example, is a great staging of the contradictions at the heart of Benjamin's intervention, and something about which he surprisingly says very little. (I also bring it up here because, in the chapter on blogs, the figure

of the non-author citizen whose writing straddles the literary and journalistic discourse and who reports from street-level in contemporary Cuba will hark back to some of these problems.) Jeremy Hicks's "Worker Correspondents: Between Journalism and Literature," for example, gives a fascinating account of how the incongruent expectations and conceptions of the various cultural agents involved in the reorganization of cultural production in the early Soviet Union concluded with the clash informed by the different senses outlined above in which the amateur as a trope, as discourse, and as agent participated in theories and programs of cultural democratization. "For the artistic revolutionaries of the *Lef*"[11] Hicks tells us, "the attraction of worker correspondents was the very novelty, naiveté, and lack of literary awareness that the proletarians wanted to overcome. Far from simply symbolizing the new, for *Lef* the worker correspondents were journalist-writers unspoilt by the literary traditions of the intelligentsia; they were pure products of the new culture" (574). Eventually, however, debates regarding both notions of quality and of revolutionary politics would clash, not the least because the more conservative views of artistic culture—exemplified in Trotsky's *Literature and Revolution*—entered the debates, and according to this position the cultural accomplishments of the old aristocratic and bourgeois orders were to be emulated and improved in revolutionary culture, not discarded as mere molt. Cultural producers would have their own role to play in the overall productivity of social reality, but aesthetic experience and cultural literacy were not to reorganize perception along with economic reality via formalist experimentation, as the avant-gardes had dreamt; they were to supplement the construction of socialism as education tools for the exercise of citizenship and self-government by continuing the realist aesthetic tradition whose central concern is the emancipation of man.[12] For his part, Hicks also highlights how internal disagreements in the movement also betrayed discordant perceptions of participating actors,

including the self-image of the worker correspondents whose aspirations to become literature writers in the conventional sense responded to expectations of upward mobility and cultural prestige rather than to radical theories of cultural production:

> If the proletarians tended to see the worker correspondents as future writers, and *Lef* valued them more in their own right as journalists, in the movement itself a similar tension was expressed as two competing tendencies. On the one hand, we see the desire to fulfill the journalistic task of informing by means of the colloquial language that came most naturally to the correspondents. On the other hand there is growing concern to improve the literary style of the correspondents' contributions. (575-6)

Despite the theoretical contradictions and occasional inconsistencies undergirding these polemics, in conceptual as much as in historical terms—one need only to think about the programs designed to bring about the democratization of culture in the early Soviet Union and in self-labeled socialist states elsewhere—a certain figuration of the amateur thus became the crucial site of articulation for the socialist radicalization of the Enlightenment project. (Perhaps the most archetypal of these proposals can be found in the Proletkult movement.)

In the context of Latin American cultural studies, for example, Nestor García Canclini identifies continuities between the Enlightenment and its socialist critiques by looking at how their political dreams were sustained in programs for the democratization of culture. Building on the assumptions of European salon culture and the public sphere of the 18th century, according to which being literate translated into having access to otherwise restricted spheres of deliberation—even if that was a necessary though not sufficient requirement—Canclini sees an explanation to "why leftist parties and social movements that represented the excluded practiced a Guttenbergian political culture rooted in books, magazines, and pamphlets" (22). For Canclini, of course, those assumptions are something to be overcome rather that revisited, for he merely hints at those kinships so as to identify fruitlessly utopian vestiges of socialist enlightenment in

the foundational corpus of contemporary cultural studies.[13] But this is not merely an issue that should be dismissed, as Canclini argues, because of its "facile idealizations of political and communicational populism" (22-23), for the cultural politics of socialist enlightenment are not reducible to the clashing dreamworlds of the workers' upwardly mobility aspirations on one hand, and the utopian fabulations of the artists and intellectual of the avant-garde on the other.

The civilizing function of culture—which the Enlightenment in turn recovered from its Hellenic sources—was, in its socialist radicalization, concerned with the political, but above all with the socio-economic intervention in the production of culture in particular, and the reproduction of social life more generally. In this view what was at stake in universal cultural literacy was not simply a matter of inclusion in deliberative and electoral politics. In its loftier and most radical theorizations, cultural literacy was merely the first step in a total process of reorganization that conceived of cultural activity as an essential language in the production and reproduction of the total social reality of the future utopian community. The aesthetic and cognitive sensibilities inherent to a certain conception of culture and creativity were not thought of as merely palliatives for human alienation but as potential models for the emancipation from alienated labor itself; they anticipated wondrous signs bespeaking that the *social* division of labor and the distinction between manual and intellectual work had finally been overcome.[14] One need only return to two famous passages in Marx (also go-to passages for the socialist humanists of the 1960s) that theorize the overcoming of alienation in terms of both the universalization of creative, intellectual activity among men and the end of stultification by overspecialized mechanical work (which also preoccupied greatly Adam Smith). The first is from *Capital* where he only hints at the implications, the second from *The German Ideology,* written with Engels:

> It is not the place, here, to go on to show how division of labour seizes upon, not only the economic, but every other sphere of society, and everywhere lays the

> foundation of that all engrossing system of specialising and sorting men, that development in a man of one single faculty at the expense of all other faculties… (394)
>
> And finally, the division of labor offers us the first example of how, as long as man remains in natural society, that is, as long as cleavage exists between the particular and the common interest, as long, therefore, as activity is not voluntarily, but naturally, divided, man's own deed becomes an alien power opposed to him, which enslaves him instead of being controlled by him. For as soon as the distribution of labour comes into being, each man has a particular, exclusive sphere of activity, which is forced upon him and from which he cannot escape. He is a hunter, a fisherman, a shepherd, or a critical critic, and must remain so if he does not want to lose his means of livelihood; while in communist society, where nobody has one exclusive sphere of activity but each can become accomplished in any branch he wishes, society regulates the general production and thus makes it possible for me to do one thing today and another tomorrow, to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticise after dinner, just as I have in mind, without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, shepherd or critic. This fixation of social activity, this consolidation of what we ourselves produce into an objective power above us, growing out of our control, thwarting our expectations, bringing into naught our calculations, is one of the chief factors in historical development up till now. (160)

Following similar clues in later Marxist thinkers such as Benjamin, Lukàcs, Lefebvre, and the Russian avant-garde, John Roberts's work in *Philosophizing the Everyday* argues for the significance of the history and theoretical deployments of the concept of the everyday as praxis in cultural theory. The work is only tangentially concerned with the amateur figure as such, since it is meant primarily as a disciplinary intervention on the everyday as a category. Nonetheless, a few of Roberts's remarks here are worth dwelling on because the birth of the interpretative category of "the everyday" as Roberts nicely explicates it—mainly following Henri Lefebvre—is couched in the debates about cultural democratization of the early Soviet avant-gardes for which the amateur is a constitutive figure.

The central argument of *Philosophizing the Everyday* is that contemporary cultural studies, since the second half of the 20th century and as a result of various theoretical influences—some forms of structuralist semiotics but Michel de Certeau's above all—have

overinvested in ‘the everyday’ as a theory of consumption, rereading it as active, redeemable locus of reception. We can see this concretely in, for instance, Canclini’s otherwise shrewd accounts of the way globalization and the cultural economies of its urban hubs have displaced questions of citizenship previously contained within a narrower understanding of politics, cited above. Canclini’s essays in *Consumer and Citizens* and elsewhere might be good examples—if carefully and empirically researched rather than semiotically based ones—where the loci of consumption have all but foreclosed other approaches to cultural analysis. For if Canclini proposes to look at “…how changes in modes of consumption have altered the possibilities and forms of citizenship” (15), Roberts would argue that it is possible to simultaneously maintain a purposeful political concern with how, in post-industrial capitalism, changes in modes of *production* and *circulation* alter citizenship inasmuch as modes of consumption of commodities and cultural goods do, and that the only way to do this responsibly is to revisit the theoretical assumptions that frame the questions we pose to the everyday.

While Roberts’s intention is not to upend entirely the validity of the active consumer as an interpretative approximation, his claim “to reinstate the philosophical and political partnership of the concept [of the everyday]” is leveraged against the perceived toothlessness of which contemporary cultural studies is often accused. According to him such an approach may additionally restore greater analytical power to the category of the everyday beyond its current, more limited jurisdiction: “In an eagerness to borrow from what is most amenable to postmodern theories of the productive consumer, contemporary debates on the everyday have severed the concept’s connections to prewar debates on social agency, the cultural form of art, and cultural democratization” (2). Against De Certeau’s “reorientation of the debate away from a general

theory of cultural production to the productive consumer," Roberts exhorts us to a broader and more historically attuned notion of the everyday, that is,

> to think the concept of the everyday as the very antithesis of contemporary cultural studies in this respect, insofar as it stands squarely against the discipline's disaggregation of cultural production and consumption; and—moreover, and more pertinently—for their democratic reintegration. To defend the concept today is to defend the continuing possibilities of cultural theory as a revolutionary critique of the social totality. …To critique the assimilation of the political into the cultural in theorization of the everyday, after de Certeau, then, is not to reify the political as authentically separate from the cultural or the cultural as a lesser form of politics. The *enculturalization* of politics is the great and abiding social transformation that the revolutionary critique and theorization of the everyday puts in place from 1917 to 1975. (5, 11)

Though we might say that Roberts's focus in the text is more generally on the abandoned intellectual history of the category of the everyday, the implications of his argument for my project are twofold, and are significant not only in an abstract disciplinary sense. First, by reintroducing the link between cultural production and social agency to the analysis of the everyday, I can locate along those axis some of the practices I profile here in relation to both the political and cultural fields in which they operate, that is, if the everyday can be conceptualized as an active canvas of potentiality, as the site par excellence of the amateurs' activity, as the quintessential sphere of circulation of their discourse, and as the primary source of their raw material. Otherwise, some of the actors I will discuss risk being overlooked as cultural agents in their own right, and continue to be cursorily read only as politically relevant but aesthetically uninteresting. Second, the way he frames the *theoretical* utility of revisiting alternatives 'everydays' by looking at the specific socio-historical landscape in which they first became thinkable and valuable can be helpful as a model to my own, albeit more modest attempt, in tracing some of the contemporary polemics regarding culture and politics in post-Special Period

Cuba back to less emphasized aspects of an earlier revolutionary reorganization of culture, especially in the late 60s and throughout the 70s.

Roberts, for example, is careful to distinguish the critical history of the concept of the everyday as it unfolded differently in the Soviet and in the Western European contexts of the early 20th century. With the benefit of hindsight, Roberts rightly reminds us of something that Benjamin's "Author as Producer" already intuits: that the concerns of Western Marxism, and therefore its theories of the everyday, could not be responses to objective transformations of the everyday but were confronted instead with sketching possibilities of revolutionary consciousness under capitalist modes of production. Meanwhile, however catastrophic the political and cultural records of the Soviet Revolution ultimately was, and even if both East and West mass utopias of industrialization were symbiotic Janus faces of the same process as Buck-Morss has eloquently discussed,

> …for the first time in human history the Bolshevik seizure of power is able to break the link between the collective experience of the dominated and religious and cultural fatalism, thereby allying social transformation with cultural transformation 'from below'….This is why one should not underestimate the utopian content of the Russian embrace of the everyday as a cultural and social category; from 1917 the 'everyday' (byt) in Soviet culture is subject to an extraordinary theoretical elaboration and scrutiny that largely shapes the content of the concept through the twentieth century, pulling other uses of the 'everyday' towards it. (19, 20)

Roberts therefore finds that the Russian Revolution provided the conditions of possibility for the emergence of, and experimentation with, certain revolutionary conceptualizations of culture. He is careful, at the same time, to differentiate between *the kind* of discursive transformations and collective expectations that allows for their appearance—not to be confused with the 'authentic' political and economic socialist revolution that they advertised themselves as—and to recognize

how actual reorganizations in the fabric of cultural production and circulation were carried out, implemented, or rejected:

> Limited to the avant-gardist margins, the revolutionary cultural transformation of the everyday is confined, at Party level, to the demand to increase the cultural level of workers and peasants. In a society of mass illiteracy this basic requirement was an obvious priority; and Lenin and Trotsky rightly attacked those idealists elements on the left that thought this illiteracy could be transcended at will. But at the same time the encouragement of cultural uplift introduced a pervasive dualism into the political rhetoric of cultural change, in an echo of prewar cultural debates. Rationalization and discipline of labour came first, cultural transformation came second. The result was a revolution in the name of the transmutation of all values, but without any sense of this transmutation as the possible liberation of sensuous form from labour. (25-6)

One of our tasks in the next section will be to sketch echoes of these processes in the early decades of the Cuban Revolution, while working to pinpoint not only the immanent similarities and differences between these revolutionary cultures but also to identify the historically specific conditions of the global 1960s that set Cuba on its own path, even in a condition of ideological and economic dependence with respect to the Soviet Union of the 1970s and 1980s.

In addition to these transformations in the aesthetic register already mapped by Roberts, which resulted from the machino-technical imaginary of early revolutionary culture in the Soviet Union, the figure of the artist within relations of production was also affected by the structural reorganization of the cultural field in really existing socialisms. In the Soviet Union, as in Cuba before the 1990s, the Union of artists and writers and the various agencies within the Ministry of Culture were the ones that conferred privileges and titles, and established influences and hierarchies in the domestic cultural field, and in the international circuits of exchange among the former socialist countries. The absence of cultural markets redefined what it meant to be a professional artist, writer, or musician in terms of state-centered institutions and according to the gatekeepers who organized the exchange and production of cultural goods. Obviously neither

production, not circulation, nor reception were ever wholly under absolute control of state authority, but that only means that in a context where culture became a terrain of potential "automatic conflict," as Petr Uhl aptly describes it in his discussion of the Czech cultural underground vis-à-vis its Western homologues, the risky gradations of what was considered official and unofficial, if not always clear cut and historically dynamic, were always politically charged. (193)

Along these lines, in *History Becomes Form,* Boris Groys argues that in contrast to the Western art world of the 20th century —dominated by the question "What is the artwork?"— Soviet art discourse was therefore more concerned with asking "Who is the artist?" (11) As a consequence, for the production of art in the Soviet Union (and we could argue for all other countries, including Cuba, which emulated its cultural framework), and even more so for the eventual emergence of the unofficial art world, this meant that "the unofficial Soviet artists were nonprofessional hobbyists, like many people in the West making art for themselves or their family and friends, for the goal of self-therapy or just to relax after working or on a Sunday." (12) The flip side of that situation is that, as Groys points out official artists could not really be considered professionals in the ways their homologues in the modern art world are, not only in the ways in which they earned a living, but also in the ways in which conflicts and competing poetics played out in the public sphere:

> The function of Soviet art is reminiscent more of the medieval artistic guilds than of the modern art system. To struggle against the Union of Soviet Artists would be simply to engage in the quarrels among artists. … Thus, one can say that the place in which Russian unofficial artists situated themselves as artists was neither in the Western art market (because they had no access to it) nor the Soviet official art system (which they despised). (13)

Groys then confronts the question of the nonprofessional artist where contemporary cultural production in the post-Socialist paradigm is concerned. As I do here, he also considers that even

when the East-West distinction is no longer operative, this legacy of intellectual and aesthetic explorations around the question “Who is the artist?” can still offer clues to read the proliferation of nonprofessional cultural production that intersects with technologies and circuits uprooting the traditional understanding of aesthetic producibility:

> the artistic activities of millions and millions of people…can be described neither as contemporary art, nor as non-art, nor as kitsch. But in fact, they are not so different from what professional artists are doing. Joseph Beuys was completely right when he claimed that everybody should be an artist—or, rather, that everybody must be understood as being an artist. This requirement is not part of a utopian vision, as was often assumed. Rather, it is a correct description of the facts as they already are. The status of the artist as a result becomes unclear and uncertain everywhere—even if this situation is not analyzed to the extent to which it should be. (14)

What Groys may be overlooking, and what I will discuss in more detail in the chapter on space, is the way the ideological commonplaces of post-industrial capitalism often inhabit the mantras of crowdsourced creative power to the detriment of public support for, and investment in, cultural production and education. In any case, for the specific context of this project, these general concerns must be qualified still in relation to the specific legacies of the revolutionary cultural policies; we remain with the question of whether the distinction between official and unofficial culture still matter in a post-Socialist but not a post-Castro Cuba, and, ‘if,’ ‘where,’ and ‘what for’ these lines can be drawn at all.

III. Amateur politics

To begin unpacking the mercurial avatars of the amateur in political discourse with a classic, the fourth installment of Edward Said’s Reith lectures, *Representations of the Intellectual*, is felicitously titled “Professionals and Amateurs.” Said’s main interlocutor in this section is Russell Jacoby, whose well-known diagnosis and indictment of the decline of the non-

academic intellectual rehearses a historical and sociological explanation to substantiate the stereotypical representations of the intellectual in the postwar cultural imaginary: ivy-towered, navel-gazing abstruse writers who abscond from worldly risks and shun political speculation. Where Jacoby identifies threats to the ideal of the fiercely and necessarily autonomous intellectual—the academy, the suburbs, a certain nihilism behind the worldly withdrawal of post-Beat generations—Said responds with concrete examples of how academia has, in fact, nurtured the work of scholars with notable impact beyond their guilds, how the concerns of intellectuals have diversified, and how in large part, the more modest approach of academics and contemporary intellectuals comes precisely in the wake of a conscientious critique of those earlier models of heroic, larger than life intellectuality whose apparent loss Jacoby, like Julien Benda before him, mourns rather uncritically. Nonetheless, Said insists, however imprecise Jacoby's other findings might be, there remains a foreboding pith that runs through that characterization:

> The particular threat to the intellectual today, whether in the West or the non-Western world, is not the academy, nor the suburbs, nor the appalling commercialism of journalism and publishing houses, but rather an attitude that I will call professionalism. By professionalism I mean thinking of your work as an intellectual as something you do for a living, between the hours of nine and five with one eye on the clock, and another cocked at what is considered to be proper, professional behavior—not rocking the boat, not straying outside the accepted paradigms or limits, making yourself marketable and above all presentable, hence uncontroversial and unpolitical and 'objective.' (73-4)

For Said, the conditions of that attitude—specialization, the cult of the certified expert, professional (and therefore economic) conscription by power—when taken to the extreme, erode the general sense of historical, political and social forces needed to exercise the capacity for critical thinking at large, ultimately breeding a sense of complacency and yes-saying, and, worst

still, inhibiting the internal growth of those very professions and disciplines beyond accepted commonplaces and categories of the thinkable, the sayable, the researchable.

To keep one eye in one's work, and one eye in "a different set of values and prerogatives" is the answer Said offers and gathers under the term *amateurism* (82), which becomes a strategic approach to offset the requirements of modern professionalism and a way to exercise what Said believes is still at the core of the intellectual understood as a figure who fulfills a specific social function:

> The intellectual today ought to be an amateur, someone who considers that to be a thinking and concerned member of a society one is entitled to raise moral issues at the heart of even the most technical and professionalized activity as it involves one's country, its power, its mode of interacting with its citizens as well as with other societies.[15] In addition, the intellectual's spirit as an amateur can enter and transform the merely professional routine most of us go through into something much more lively and radical; instead of doing what one is supposed to do one can ask why one does it, who benefits from it…there is no getting around authority and power, and no getting around the intellectual's relationship to them. How does the intellectual address authority: as a professional supplicant or as its unrewarded, amateurish conscience? (82-3)

The word intellectual is used throughout Said's essay in two senses: to designate those who by the nature of the profession and therefore their specific skills and knowledge are already (at least potentially) intellectuals, and to describe the form of worldly engagement and critique that they ought to engage in, and that has come to redefine—largely a result of the turbulent 1960s and not without relation to his own postcolonial place of enunciation—the profile of independent agent provocateur on which the idea of a public or committed intellectual hinges.

In a 1960 letter to none other than Sartre (a recurrent figure in Said's text as well), Blanchot will offer a similar argument regarding the relationship between an intellectual's profession and his/her political praxis:

> Intellectuals, I mean many of them, writers, artists, scientists, who until now seemed to have no concerns other than their own activities, recognized the

> demanding character of this activity and recognized that this demand must, today, lead them to political affirmation of a radical character. … The intellectuals thus became aware of the novelty of the power that they represent and, although in a confused manner, of the originality of this power (a power without power). (2010: 36)

That idea is later belabored in "Intellectuals under Scrutiny," a 1984 text dealing exclusively with the subject. There, in fact, Blanchot moves further away from the profession of the intellectual as a point of departure for his/her social function, and concentrates on a definition similar to Said's spirit of *amateurism: "*It would seem that you aren't one [an intellectual] all the time any more than you can be one entirely. The intellectual is a portion of ourselves which not only distracts us momentarily from our task, but returns us to what is going on in the world, in order to judge and appreciate what is going on there" (1995: 207). (Perhaps a sign of its later composition, however, Blanchot's text goes on to rework intellectual action in terms of a form of tactical withdrawal: "a proximity at a distance" that opens a provisional space of epistemological privilege and that seems to be slightly at odds with the initial "political affirmation of radical character" of the letter to Sartre, but not that different from what Said has in mind.) The idea running through both Blanchot and Said that certain professionals are more conducive—by vocation, by social position, and/or by training—to participate in wider circles as intellectuals insofar as a *communicative* function or an aesthetic dimension is involved is not entirely unreasonable. But it should be clear that not only can proto-intellectual professionals fulfill a critical socio-political function by recurring to the amateur spirit, but also that other social actors who engage as amateurs in worldly affairs could be said to fulfill—even if provisionally or strategically—an equivalent intellectual function.[16] Of course, it would be unfair to reproach Blanchot and Said for their narrow social focus, since they only set out to theorize their own place of enunciation and they are thinkers of their time (from the *soixante-huitards* onwards),

when the self-critical pose of the messianic intellectual was *de rigueur.* In any case, I am more interested here in retracing the philosophical sources of their appeal to the amateur rather than in returning to the vintage formulation of 'the problem of that intellectual,' a critique that though still relevant has a privileged bibliography and therefore is less interesting to reenact.

These philosophical origins must be sought in relation to autonomy, another recurring concept under scrutiny in Said's text, since the source of both autonomy's bearing on this topic and of Said's and Blanchot's characterization of amateurism as a form of political engagement with the world is Enlightenment philosophy, finding its classic formulation in Kant's "An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment:"[17]

> The *public* use of one's reason must always be free, and it alone can bring about enlightenment among human beings; the *private use* of one's reason may, however, often be very narrowly restricted without this particularly hindering the progress of enlightenment. But by the public use of one's own reason I understand that use which someone makes of it *as a scholar* before the entire public of the *world of readers.* What I call the private use of reason is that which one may make of it in a certain civil post or office with which he is entrusted. (n.pag.)

The term scholar is used in Kant in the same sense in which much contemporary discourse, including Said's text, uses the word intellectual.[18] Public use of one's reason is something one does for the benefit of the public beyond and above the purview of one's own professional duties. However, in Kant's text the degree to which one has authority to speak about certain matters—military service, doctrine or tax decrees—seems to stem too from the knowledge accrued in one's station of said subject, so to go as far as saying that Kant is invoking a form of amateurism as such would be a gross extrapolation. It is Said, recuperating a Kantian concept of public use of reason, who sees a kinship between the spirit of amateurism and the social need to overcome alienating professional boundaries in the circulation of knowledge within a community.

It should not surprise us then that the political dimension of a certain notion of amateurism has its roots in philosophical tradition not only in Enlightenment thinkers but in fact, dates back to Ancient Greece, precisely because the political amateur shares a history with democratic theories dear to the tradition of Western political philosophy. In not entirely dissimilar terms, Aristotle, who is writing about the Greek polis in the wake of its impending demise,[19] anchors his examination of the practice and mechanisms of citizenship around deliberation, precisely by focusing on participatory and governing skills—and the required education to develop them—as it pertains the citizen as a politico-ethical subject. In fact, while Aristotle's political and moral works often address the specialized knowledge of the statesmen and law-givers specifically—much of it refers to the expert knowledge needed to craft 'the right constitution' for the city—there is a running theme that applies to all citizens of the polis (though citizenship then was obviously a much more narrowly restricted category): that the individual good or individual happiness (*eudaimonia*) cannot be achieved except through active life in the political community, since the role of the state is not to limit the individual good so as to realize a common good (or to collapse them as reducible to each other as some readings of Plato would have it). Instead, the function of the polis is (ideally) to provide the vehicle for *eudaimonia*, which then yields the good of the community as a whole: "A city-state is excellent, however, because the citizens who participate in the constitution are excellent; and in our city-state all the citizens participate in the constitution. The matter…is how a man becomes excellent. … Everything thereafter is a task for education" (213-4).[20]

Centuries of exegetical commentary deal with what, exactly, Aristotle meant by "Man is by nature a political being," "Man is born for citizenship," "The polis is prior to the individual." The only thing that is patently clear is that as a function of Aristotelian teleology, the virtuous

life in the polis cannot possibly be achieved unless those virtues of the citizen that characterize the good life are developed through and expressed in his political participation. Withdrawal from political life would mean the voluntary subjection to the will of another—giving up the exercise of one's position as free and equal—and therefore would result in the following of another's practical wisdom instead of one's own—a capital impediment to a virtuous, happy life.[21] In any case, Aristotle's text offers a critical response to the absolute link between theoretical knowledge and political knowledge gleaned from Plato's (historically and philosophically specific) anti-democratic position. Though far removed from the idea of rule by the indiscriminating mob or the simple majority, Aristotle nonetheless goes through great lengths to complicate the idea of 'professional' politicians in the sense in which Plato's philosopher-kings (though 'professional' here is an anachronistic term) are derived from his one person, one craft argument. The one person, one craft argument makes its appearance various times early in *The Republic*: "Will a single individual do better exercising a number of skills, or will each do best concentrating on one?… That is because the task in hand will not wait for the person doing it to have a spare moment. **So it is essential that whoever is doing it should concentrate on it, and not regard it as a hobby**" (370b-c, my emphasis).[22] Political participation as envisioned in the Aristotelian texts discussed here may not be expressed via metaphors of amateurism as such, but they do bring to bear arguments against the idea of political participation (not legislation and the actual crafting of the laws) as a specialized craft for a previously vetted group within the community. Instead, a concept of excellent citizenship is drawn from individual engagement and an individual's all-around education that is the purview, argues Aristotle, of the public interest and therefore the concern of the entire polis.

This is not a ruse on my part to wax romantic about Athenian democracy either, since even in Aristotle the concepts of citizenship and democracy are highly problematic—based on socioeconomic and political exclusions, slave labor, structural inequality—and mean something altogether different to what they might mean in modern democratic theory. However, many contemporary philosophers and political scientists return to these texts for the same reason that we do here: later political philosophies are always in dialogue with these texts, with the questions and definitions they set forth, and the foundational problems they grappled with. Ancient Greek democracy continues to be a referent—one may even say an *idée fixe*—for many contemporary theorists; take Jacques Rancière in the *Philosopher and his Poor* and elsewhere. Discussing the drawing of lots in Athenian democracy, for example, in "Who is the subject of the rights of man" Rancière ties in his own formulation of the part of those who have no part—the quintessential space of democratic subjectivity—to a figure of radicalized amateurism that is inherent to the procedural logic of Ancient Greek democracy. In Rancière's model that figure is however pitted against the discussion that we have mapped so far regarding skills and qualifications for governing as defining features of democratic citizenship:

> …the power gained by drawing lots, the name of which is democracy. **Democracy is the power of those who have no specific qualification for ruling, except the fact of having no qualification**. As I interpret it, the demos—the political subject as such—has to be identified with the totality made by those who have "no qualification." I called it the count of the uncounted—or the part of those who have no part. It does not mean the population of the poor; it means a supplementary part, and empty part that separates the political community from the count of the parts of the population. (305)

Similar to other critiques we saw in the previous section, and as a reaction against both traditions, Rancière's criticism highlights the links between Enlightenment rationality—inherited from Greek ideals of political virtue—and the intellectual Left's subsequent response to it in the following century. In the *Philosopher and his Poor* Rancière will build upon these and other

Platonic distinctions (seeing/knowing, active/passive, appearance/reality) to develop his critique of the philosophical and Marxist traditions up to Pierre Bourdieu's sociology, and where he identifies the persistence of the Platonic prejudice in different guise:

> Sociological demystification then produces this result: it recasts the arbitrary as necessity. Where Plato reduced the serious reasons of needs and functions to the arbitrariness of the decree excluding artisans from the leisure of thought, sociology will read the philosophical illusion of universal freedom and will refute it by disclosing the difference of *ethos* that makes the artisan incapable of ever acquiring a taste for the philosopher's goods—and even of understanding the language in which their enjoyment is expounded. (204)

While I do not agree with the conclusions Rancière derives from that reading (see note 24), it is worth noting that the foundational entanglement of leisure, thought, division of labor, and social agency that informs this polemic was a foundational act—in this Rancière is right—where the distribution of political competence was linked to the distribution of labor and the prohibition of leisure. In any case, affiliations and continuities between Ancient Greek, Enlightenment, and Marxist approaches to culture and politics are points of departure and rupture in Rancière's philosophical project—and of his railing against the emancipatory power of culture as causally linked to the idea of emancipation in politics. Our discussion of them here, however, seeks only to demonstrate a continued and widespread concern in contemporary cultural and philosophical theories with the affinities and dialogues between different historical models of participatory politics, and with how issues of literacy and cultural competence are implicated in them. In this sense, Bordieu's approach to figures of illegitimate knowledge might a better model for us—and certainly more intelligible than Rancière's—since Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital does not fall back into the kind of aesthetic existentialism gleaned from Rancière's other works on the politics of aesthetics.[23]

So far I have tried to identify in this far from comprehensive set of texts, various moments in which the amateur as a figure is invoked in political philosophy, and, just as we saw in the section on cultural amateurs before, to see how it has been deployed to challenge or support certain understandings of participation in politics. A final exposition will elucidate, I hope, the way that the concept of amateurism has lent itself to arguments about the democratic ethos in the specific context of the post-socialist condition, so that a broader reflection on its relevance for political theory can find legitimacy for the concept as an interpretative category in the historical moment with which we will be occupied for the remainder of the project.

The pejorative sense of the political amateur—as synonym of the dilettante or the inexperienced beginner—acquires a very specific and significant role in both the early socialist and the post-socialist contexts.[24] Commenting on the Eastern European landscape, philosopher Boris Buden points out that the prevailing language of the postcommunist transitions is supported by,

> a paradox that points at what is probably the greatest scandal of recent history: those who proved their political maturity in the so-called 'democratic revolutions' of 1989-90 have become thereafter, overnight, children! Only yesterday, they succeeded in toppling totalitarian regimes in whose persistency and steadfastness the whole so-called 'free' and 'democratic' world had firmly believed, until the very last moment, and whose power it had feared as an other-worldly monster. (18)

Looking at the intellectual history of the concept of democratic transitions from a global comparative perspective, Buden traces the concept of transition to the 1960s and 70s in reference to both Southern Europe and South America, transitions that were always from authoritarian rule to something else, but at least then, argues the philosopher, the outcome was not predetermined by the analytic framework, and so an understanding of the complexity of regime changes staved off the kind of ideological oversimplification that he observes in the "transitology" (the ideology

of transition) of postcommunist analyses. In more recent years, describes Buden, both scholarly and vernacular understandings of political transitions have undergone comprehensive streamlining: "Its goal is always already known—incorporation into the global capitalist system of western liberal democracy" (19). The results are the impoverishment of political discourse and of subtleties in both concrete situations and in broader historiographical terms:

> Political science finds no reason to understand this transition in terms of a specific historical epoch. It lacks basic identity features: a specific postcommunist political subject or system, for instance, and a specific postcommunist mode of production, or form of property. In fact, political science does not need the concept of postcommunism at all. It prefers instead the aforementioned concept of 'transition to democracy'… (18)

Buden's critique of these analytic scenarios would be predicated on a vision of the post-communist transitions that is not without problems. While Buden does not rely explicitly on an appeal to civil society—the term most commonly associated with the post-Cold War political landscape of the transitions—it is not clear if the argument he is making is a conceptual argument (i.e. man is always already either politically mature or everywhere equally incompetent), or a historical one (it was 'the people' who brought about the end of really existing socialism thereby proving their democratic credibility).

In this sense it may be worth bringing in Stephen Kotkin's criticism of transitional historiographies of Eastern Europe. Kotkin's narrative of the last days of Eastern European communism calls for "a different understanding of social process from the usual invocation of something called 'civil society.' The latter slogan has proved to be catnip to scholars, pundits, and foreign aid donors" (7). Kotkin, who focuses on how the strain of bankruptcy was what ultimately forced the hand of the "uncivil society" to capitulate, that is, how the nomenclature was forced into a transition, convincingly argues against the retroactive romanticization of the political effect of the opposition, which mostly came to light in the wake of 1989. Without

subtracting from their merits, Kotkin questions their actual impact in the collapse of communist regimes, arguing that even in the cases where there were mass demonstrations of popular discontent, these took place where the opposition was the least organized. (xv) Furthermore, he makes a distinction that in our case will prove crucial, that is, the difference between a fully functioning civil society and a discourse that presents itself as such:

> Most analysts continue to focus disproportionately, even exclusively, on the 'opposition,' which they fantasize as a 'civil society.' […] But just as "the bourgeoisie" were mostly an outcome of 1789, so "civil society" was more a consequence than a primary cause of 1989. Thanks to the repudiation of the single-party monopoly and its corollary, the state-owned and state-run economy, the 1989 revolutions would make civil society possible. That said, highlighting the opposition is understandable for Poland since, as we shall see, Poland *had* and opposition, which *imagined itself* as civil society. (xiv, emphasis in the original xiv)

This does not mean, however, that they were not effective, but rather that our parameters for measuring the success of political action in this case must shift toward a more long-term perspective. Where I would disagree with Kotkin is in dismissing the opposition as having only a moral value in retrospect: "The mostly small groups of dissidents, however important morally, could not have constituted any kind of society" (7). Instead, I would insist in their performative dimension, that is, in ways in which their discourse nonetheless opened spaces of participation that provided future models of citizenship. They were successful insofar as they managed to shift the conversation, to become visible in that public sphere as subjects. In turn, as in the case of their counterpoints in Cuba, they served to spearhead democratic debates, creating expectations of behaviors related to other political orders that had not been experienced by a people as such. The comparison is warranted not only because they once belonged to the same geopolitical bloc, but also because the echo of the dissident movements—of Czechoslovakia and Poland especially—arrived in Havana as well. Texts, rumors, images circulated however unevenly, and

some of the Eastern European dissidents' discourses and modes of organization were also emulated (in a much smaller scale).

The case of post-Cold War Cuba nonetheless introduces problems that set it apart from its former Eastern European homologues, because the *de facto* transition has been much less comprehensive in terms of socio-economic structures, and because politically speaking the constitutional framework remains that of a single-party state. This is further compounded by the persistence of a rhetoric of war with the U.S., and the dynamic of mass emigration which at the level of individual aspiration usually replaces, or is more expedient than, the collective dreams of democratization.

For Velia Cecilia Bobes, the political maturity of Cuban citizens has been put in question further by the absence of a transition seen as a product of decades of symbolic and institutional reeducation by the ruling class. In her two studies of the relationship between the state, the nation, and the formation of a collective political morality in Cuba, Bobes gives a historically accurate, well-researched description of how the official civil society works in practice. In *La nación inconclusa* for instance, Bobes specifically addresses how the concept of citizenship in Cuba has been negatively influenced by the collapse of "represented" and "representant" in "the identification of the socialist state order with the nation and the motherland" (114). Through an in-depth reading of the Constitution of 1976 and its amendments, the Penal Code, and the political rhetoric of the Revolution, Bobes effectively reconstructs the genealogy of a political culture ciphered in increasingly antidemocratic praxis, the legitimation of violence in defense of the Revolution, and the promotion of intolerance (163,174)—where civil society becomes synonymous with normative patterns of participation when "la movilización popular sustituye a la participación ciudadana" (119). This, argues Bobes, produces a public sphere characterized by

lack of diversity and plurality, as well as a concept of civil society whose mechanics are deeply deceptive:

> en lo institucional se caracteriza por la existencia de muchas organizaciones orientadas y referidas por el Estado, no autónomas, y cuyos autores, desde la perspectiva simbólica, tienden a actuar a partir de un código de pertenencia, donde la diversidad y la autonomía son vistas como amenazas a la estabilidad y la convivencia y, más aún, a la soberanía y la independencia de la patria. (115)

A look at the contemporary landscape will demonstrate that even amidst post-Cold War expectations of transition and opening, these patterns of exclusion described by Bobes have not disappeared entirely. The importance of a recent surge of initiatives that explicitly work outside the institutional spaces to emergent democratic discourses, regardless of their precarious conditions of possibility and success, is then better understood if we consider with Bobes that "más de la mitad de la población cubana de hoy nació después de 1959, lo que significa que han sido socializados toda su vida en un horizonte simbólico que no provee ni alternativas para desarrollar proyectos políticos autónomos ni habilidades o destrezas para participar en la política democrática" (174). In later chapters, I will speak about 'amateur citizens' to underscore the lack of an institutionalized discourse of autonomous democratic participation. Unlike the sociologist, however, I work to identify "really existing" modes of attention and speech that explore, however precariously, the possibility of representing and articulating alternatives even in the context of an incomplete or frustrated political transition, and that do so by appealing to cultural forms. These modes of participation are not often registered by interpretative approaches that work with more established categories of cultural and political analysis, but they offer avenues out of the perception of Cuban political reality as nothing other than a wasteland of abjection and indifference whose cultural production exclusively addresses a consuming public elsewhere.

IV. Cultural Communism and Socialist Enlightenment in Revolutionary Cuba (1959-1980)

This last section traces the subject of the next chapter—the development of a parallel, informal network of cultural production, circulation, and information, and a subculture of autodidacts, and Do-It-Yourself logic, in short, various incarnations of amateurism—to the "enculturalization of politics" (Roberts) that characterized the consolidation of revolutionary cultural institutions during the first two decades of the Revolution. During these years the multiplication of the spaces *of* and *for* culture was accompanied by the expanded and experimental definition of culture itself. This process was not necessarily carried out through the critique of the high and low cultural divides (for traditional cultural producers and bureaucrats alike despised, rather uncritically, the so-called vulgar commodities of the culture industry), but via the recuperation of a nationalist discourse predicated upon the rediscovery of popular and folkloric themes, the appropriation of universal culture and its massification (from the famous 1961 Alphabetization Campaign, to the system of National Arts Schools and Houses of Culture, to the "fusilados" books), and the resemantization of revolutionary subjectivity along intangible values associated to culture, civic ethics, sports, and education. To further investigate why the cultural capital of social agents becomes a politicized category and ammunition for social antagonism, this section revisits the interplay between the democratization *of* culture, and the democratization *through* culture in revolutionary Cuba, in order to recast the figure of the amateur as an interpretive trope that links past and present forms of cultural and political participation.

There are three distinct paradigms at work in the history of cultural organization after the Cuban Revolution. One is derived from a current within Marxist tradition that made of culture an instrument of hegemony subordinated to the political project of the construction of socialism. Put

in crude terms, if the economic reforms of socialism would accelerate the extinction of the bourgeois subject, the cultural reforms would supplement the reeducation taking place in the economic realm with befitting, reflective representations of underlying material (and therefore historical) transformations taking place in the new society. The second paradigm is related to the interplay between aesthetic form and historical temporality. Inherited from the polemics of the historical avant-gardes and their various political tendencies, this approach to cultural production was predicated upon a philosophy of history according to which material and technical progress was to be matched by aesthetic forms, but where the relationship of form to their respective material and social context was not mechanistically reflective and/or purely instrumental as in the first case, but autonomous and causally empowered instead. The third one built upon the older tradition of humanist enlightenment, recreating the aspirations that the expansion of culture and education to the public at large would finally deliver a universal subject embodying the rational, autonomous beings only dreamt by the 18th century (and articulated as the nonalienated human by their revised critique in the early Marx and the variegated socialist humanisms that flourished in the 1960s). In practice, of course, these currents often co-existed or were combined into hybrid positions.

These combinations can also be organized around the two distinctions we discussed in the introduction: the democratization *of* culture, which we can understand as either the move toward cultural communism (universal access through socialization of cultural goods and means of cultural production), or the move toward the democratization of taste (which revolved around nationalist and folkloric themes, recuperation of 19th century figures of nationalism in culture, concern with origins, the rediscovery of the countryside, resistance against imported forms associated to the mass culture industry). These conceptualization of culture saw itself as a fight

against the cultural experience of alienation and the symbolic colonialism associated to imported productions from the cultural centers of the Western world, whether they be London, New York, Los Angeles or Paris; and the democratization *through* culture, that is, a socialist radicalization of the project of Enlightenment whereby political emancipation and awakening was both reflected in and aided by cultural participation, i.e. the civic function of culture recuperated from the Greek ideals discussed above. There are two background conditions to this process: the global context in which these reforms take place (the affinities between Third World Marxism and socialist humanisms, the concern with the specificity of the contradictions in underdeveloped and peripheral regions), and the concrete dynamics of the domestic economic (the internal mismanagement and the international isolation plaguing Cuba's feeble economy, whose *coups de grâce* were the debacles of the Cordón de la Habana in 1967 and the Ten-Million Sugar Harvest in 1970). These factors steered the language of revolutionary cultural transformations toward a virtue ethics whose central themes had been rehearsed by Guevara's famous "Man and Socialism in Cuba," but were sustained in the national imaginary by a programmatic interpretation of José Martí's humanism, which prioritized spiritual and cultural development over industrialization and rapid economic modernization.

In fact, it was because 'culture' was considered not only as another terrain of ideological struggle but arguably as the most valuable asset in the image that the Revolution had of itself, and wanted to project internationally, that it has always been a sphere of charged polarizations. Some of the polemics of those years—the most representatives of which are collected in Graziela Pogolotti's volume *Polémicas culturales de los 60*—were born, precisely, out of different definitions of what a 'cultural revolution' was. One of these paradigmatic dissensions is dramatized exceptionally well in a passage of Jesús Díaz's *Las iniciales de la tierra* (a novel

whose publication in the 1970s, according to various accounts, was delayed until 1987) when the protagonist's fellow workers decide to collect a fund to buy one of the newly published books by the Imprenta Nacional and are trying to decide which one to buy. His comrades choose *Don Quijote* but Carlos, the protagonist, is expecting them to choose ten of Mao's pamphlets for the same price, since he is a hardliner at the time of the events. (The Revolution's *bildungsroman* par excellence, the novel is told as a series of flashbacks that map significant episodes in the intersections of his personal and his political trajectories.) Once *Don Quijote* arrives, Carlos is curious to read it, and submits Cervantes's text to the most rustic and meticulously dogmatic materialist analysis:

> Cuando todos estuvieron dormidos abandonó los libros de texto y tomó el Quijote. …El héroe resultaba ser un tipo feo, flaco, ridículo, que unas veces daba risa y otras lástima porque siempre estaba equivocado…luchaba por la justicia sin conocer las leyes de la historia, ni tomar en cuenta a las masas, ni las condiciones objetivas y subjetivas, ni la correlación de fuerzas entre explotados y explotadores…no podía comprender la inevitabilidad de los períodos de acumulación de fuerzas, era incapaz de convertir los cambios cuantitativos en cualitativos, producir el salto y ejercer la negación de la negación sobre el proceso histórico para propiciar el desarrollo en espiral; era, en fin de cuentas, un pequeño-burgués…Todo ello se debía (según confesaba el propio autor) a que una montaña de lecturas mal asimiladas lo habían enloquecido…¿No podía también *El Quijote* hacer un daño incalculable a las nuevas generaciones? Pero entonces, ¿por qué se habían editado aquí más de cien mil ejemplares? Había solo una respuesta, las editoriales estaban minadas de viejos (o de gentes con viejos criterios, daba lo mismo), incapaces de entender que la tarea de la revolución consistía en arrasar con el pasado… (255-6)

A related view of how what Cuba's cultural revolution aspired to can be gleaned from a statement attributed to Ambrosio Fornet by Andrew Halkey during the Cultural Congress of Havana in 1968, although the dissension Fornet is speaking from is the brewing storm between Cuban revolutionaries and foreign intellectuals that would unravel in the following three years: "People do not expect to find abstract and 'pop' art paintings in our galleries, editions of Proust, Joyce and Robbe-Grillet in out bookshops, Antonioni's and Bergman's films in our cinemas.

…Perhaps they did not expect to hear the serial music of our young composers and those passionate discussions about aesthetics at the art seminars and coffee tables" (141).

Pamela Smorkaloff's now classic *Literatura y edición de libros: La cultura literaria y el proceso social en Cuba* (1987) reads in the concrete strategies for mass publication of textbooks and literature the embodied examples of more abstract debates about the function of literature and culture in revolutionary societies. In this sense Smorkaloff's volume provides a useful—if excessively triumphalist—account of how literary publishing was reorganized to match the changing social functions of books, readers, and writers after 1959, and discusses how the publishing apparatus adjusted to the demands of what was widely perceived to be a cultural revolution highlighting the relative inexperience—and therefore the rejuvenating boldness—of the new editorial and publishing personnel of the Consejo Nacional de Cultura first and the Instituto Cubano del Libro later. (114) For Smorkaloff, after the nationalization of the Imprenta Nacional, the defining moment crystallizes during the years when Ediciones Revolucionarias began the practice of photocopying textbooks for higher education obtained abroad, in order to republish them in large scale and provide them free of charge (1965-67). This practice of *libros fusilados* [pinched books], as they came to be known, would spark in turn the kind of massive publications of the late 60s, 70s, and early 80s that became the trademark of the Instituto Cubano del Libro, created in 1967. Two notable examples are the collections Ediciones Huracán, which published paperback classics of the world literary canon for adults—from Balzac and Daniel Defoe to Hemingway and José María Arguedas—and Gente Nueva, its equivalent for young adults, which included in its roster authors Emilio Salgari, Mark Twain, and Horacio Quiroga.[25] Smorkaloff's assessment of that process is a rereading of the Benjaminian proposals cited above with regard to the cultural agents, though unlike Benjamin's text it operates with a much more

traditional definition of culture that takes into account not *technique* or experimentation but, rather, universal competence and literacy in an already defined corpus:

> Formar lectores, desarrollarlos, es también formar escritores; todo escritor se inició como lector, y todo lector es un escritor en 'potencia'. Una sociedad en la cual *todos los sectores* de la población practican y cultivan la lectura, podría cosechar escritores en cada uno de esos sectores. La nueva librería cubana tiene en sus estantes una variedad de títulos de literatura cubana y universal, contemporánea y clásica; herramientas esenciales para que un pueblo lea activamente, y ninguno, sin excepción, pertenece a la 'subliteratura' enajenante. Es importante subrayar esto, porque además de ser un pueblo que lee activamente, lo leído *hace pensar,* conduce a la reflexión…, reflexión capaz de desembocar en la escritura….Al paso que va, no es inconcebible que para el año 2000 todo cubano alcance el nivel universitario. (127, italics in the original)

Under the ideal confluence of all these approaches, to elevate the quality—in the technical, ideological, and aesthetic senses—of cultural goods vis-à-vis those of the capitalist culture industry, and to universalize cultural enjoyment and participation, were to exert long lasting, qualitative transformations of taste and perception (and therefore of the subjectivity) in the spectator-citizen (as opposed to the spectator-consumer). As a special case or ultimate realization of the spectator-citizen, the worker-aficionado—the incarnation of the amateur that we are interested in—makes several appearances in official documents, cultural histories, as a thematic subject, and as an addressee of workshops, night classes, prizes, and competitions.

It is certainly impossible and beyond the scope of this project to repeat here the entire history of the reorganization of culture from 1959 onward in Cuba. Still, a few remarks are in order, because however privileged it has been as an academic subject of study, one of my arguments is that the cultural historiography of the revolution has, with some exceptions, favored periodization around *causes célèbres* and their tribulations with power (e.g., the cases of *P.M.*, *Lunes de Revolución*, el Ediciones Puente, Heberto Padilla, Guillermo Cabrera Infante, José Lezama Lima, *Pensamiento Crítico*, el "Quinquenio Gris," etc.), rather than being concerned

with issues of reception theory and other interpretative categories of cultural theory (such as the category of the everyday touched upon above). The study of cultural politics in the first decades of the Cuban Revolution, that is, the period of inauguration of its cultural institutions, has thus traditionally focused on the polemics of aesthetic representation vis-à-vis revolutionary politics and on the selective censorship of an unevenly repressive bureaucratic apparatus.

This is due to various factors, not the least that the 1960s set the tone and pace for the dominant cultural historiography. This was a decade dominated by very traditional figures of the literary establishment in the sense that, though literature and the writer acquired a prominent and unprecedented role in the political and public spheres as an intellectual (Claudia Gilman), the literary star system in some form or another, and various nationalist essentialisms, have towered over all other approaches to cultural analysis in histories of Cuban culture since. With few exceptions, the theoretical and historical circles lacked a critical dialogue with other traditions of Western Marxism and with the experiences of the Russian Revolution, and even with the foundational corpus of Marxism itself, probably as a result of the *post hoc* interpretation of the Cuban Revolution as a socialist uprising.[26] This created a theoretical vacuum even after officially embracing the principles of Marxism-Leninism and despite sustained contacts with international figures belonging to heterogeneous Marxist traditions: Sartre, Hans Magnus Enzensberger, Ernst Mandel, and José Revueltas, among many others. This is not to dismiss the importance that the debates regarding the role that writers and intellectuals would have in the Revolution had for cultural policy and the reorganization of culture, or to deny the relative accuracy with which the country's general climate of toleration, censorship, and cultural innovation has been registered by the relationship between traditional intellectuals and the *nomenklatura*.[27] But there are limits to the narrative framing of a history that revolves around alliances, controversies, and breaks

between the same familiar characters of any other national cultural history: the artists and intellectuals on one hand, and the State and the political elites on the other. I would argue instead that a comprehensive account of the theoretical and historical encounters between aesthetics and politics in the cultural experiments of the early decades of the Cuban Revolution cannot exclude the point of view of the ideal subject of cultural reform: the amateur or the aficionado as a special member of the public, of 'the people.'

To pursue this line perhaps a shift of focus to the long decade of the 1970s would yield unexpected results from what has *only* been read as a 'grey' or 'black' period in Cuba's cultural history—which it undoubtedly was, and which explains why it is still a taboo subject for both defenders and critics of the Revolution. For defenders it is a chapter rather not revisited; for critics it is uninteresting (aesthetically) and merely a testament to the often-cruel persecution suffered by many artists and intellectuals under the revolutionary government. As it became evident, however, in the recent 'guerrita de los emilios' (when intellectuals living in Cuba and abroad discussed the reappearance of figures associated with that era on TV) and in the published essays of the "Ciclo: La política cultural del período revolucionario: Memoria y reflexión" organized by the Centro Criterios, to bracket this era as an exceptional and never repeated omission conceals other moments and strategies of censorship and disciplining still ongoing; similarly, to portray the most perverse patterns of this period as the paradigmatic example of a one-dimensional process spanning the entire Revolution obfuscates the complexity and heterogeneity of any social process' cultural record.[28]

Another aspect of the decade is that, though the 1961 Alphabetization Campaign continues to be the first great task of the new government, and though many of its iconic cultural organizations were created in the 1960s (ICAIC, UNEAC, Casa de las Américas, Consejo

Nacional de Cultura, Imprenta Nacional, EGREM, the national art schools, the National Ballet, etc.) the formalization of the cultural structure—including the Ministry of Culture and the neighborhood Casas de Cultura—was not fully realized until the 70s. Surely its most immediate, well-known, and controversial identity as a historical period was one of much stricter censorship and oversight. That was no doubt a response to the echoes discontent blowing westward from Eastern Europe at the end of the 1960s, which compounded by the growing influence exerted by Soviet Union and Cuba's entrance into CMEA in 1972, the period also coincided with the internal maturation of the power structures, which sought to fill the vacuum left by the adventurous improvisation and the popular support of the first decade with sober and far-reaching disciplinary instruments of organization and control.

Rather than carry out a historiographical intervention—which would require a burden of archival research beyond the scope of this chapter—I would like to sketch instead a few questions for a reading that does not upend but simply aspires to enrich existing ones: In very broad strokes, we could argue that if the 60s were concerned with aesthetic representation and individual artists and writers in the face of official ideology and the new power elite, the 70s turned to the structural organization of the cultural field per se. Consider for instance the tone of the documents from the 1970s we will examine shortly (the two UNESCO reports of 1971 and 1979 on Cuban culture, and the proceedings of the First Congress of Culture and Education of 1971), in comparison with the following passage from *Havana Journal*, which details Andrew Halkey's chronicles of his participation in the Cultural Congress of Havana in 1968 where that transition is already under negotiation:

> [Frederico] Alvárez (sic) suggested that we must own up to Julio Cortázar's dictum: '*Every* intellectual belongs to the Third World!' In reply, C.L.R. [James] objected to one of Alvárez's statements which included the fact that Albert Schweitzer had contributed to the emancipation and development of the Third

> World. **C.L.R. also proposed that all intellectuals, those from the developed world and those from the underdeveloped world, should be firmly discouraged, and in fact abolished as a force. Salón dead still. Consternation. Bewildered, silent delegates everywhere.** Alvárez disagreed vehemently.… Julio Cortázar of Argentina explained, succinctly, that the ivory tower intellectual is dead….Great consolation for all of us to see how fighting fit C.L.R. looks. He promised a bomb for Roberto Retamar during the resumption of the Commission, with his paper aimed against the intellectual. (110, 113-4; my emphasis)

The next congress celebrated in Havana, the First Congress of Culture and Education of 1971, would abandon substantively these discussions, even though it took place during the same week of the final unfolding of the Padilla affair with the poet's famous public self-accusatory letter read in the UNEAC's headquarters. (The congress convened from April 23rd to April 30th in Havana.)

As a document of foundational cultural policy, the congress of 1971 tends to be passed over in favor of Fidel's "Words to the Intellectuals" (1961).[29] (The same relative anonymity has befallen later texts like those around the founding of the Ministry or the "Tesis sobre arte y literatura" of the First Congress of the Communist party in 1975.) When it is mentioned it is usually done only because of the interest on the intellectual and political climate that surrounded it, rather than because of its own significance as a signal of shifting cultural politics. It may occasionally be showcased as a locally modified zdhanovist graft, or subsumed within the most publicized and polarizing censorship case in the Revolution: the Padilla *cause célèbre.*[30] However, while both the text and its context certainly belong in the black book of bureaucratic overreach, a careful reading of the Congress proceedings betray an amalgam of competing schools of thought within the socialist and the national traditions regarding the political function of culture. Couched in an undeniably authoritarian and orthodox worldview, the declarations also attempted to articulate, if clumsily, a new role for mass culture and media within a revolutionary framework. The Cuban political and cultural institutions of the 1970s were therefore confronting

the problem of establishing institutions and organizations to guarantee and expand revolutionary hegemony understood as cultural democratization, even if the implementation of these directives was at best tutelary and anachronistic, and at worse self-serving and heavy-handed. The critical lens that historical distance affords us may complicate the standard reading of the text—and of the entire decade—as nothing more than the final nail in the coffin of the aesthetic freedom of Cuban artists and writers under the Revolution.

The opening lines of the section on "Cultural activity" of the *Declarations of the Congress* read "El desarrollo de las actividades artísticas y literarias de nuestro país debe fundarse en la consolidación e impulso del movimiento de aficionados, con un criterio de amplio desarrollo cultural en las masas, contrario a las tendencias de *élite*." (Casal 106; italics in the original) And the document continues in the same exalted tone:

> La cultura de una sociedad colectivista es una actividad de las masas, no el monopolio de una *élite*, el adorno de unos pocos escogidos o la patente de corso de los desarraigados. En el seno de las masas se halla el verdadero genio y no en los cenáculos o en individuos aislados. El usufructo clasista de la cultura ha determinado que hasta el momento sólo algunos individuos excepcionales descuellen. Pero es sólo síntoma de la prehistoria de la sociedad, no el rasgo definitivo de la cultura. (110-11)

These tenets are echoed in Lisandro Otero's 1971 report on Cuban culture to the UNESCO, though Otero's tone is less monumental and closer to the traditional language of socialist humanism of the 1960s. Otero's text is also more grounded in concrete examples of programs carried out on both urban and rural areas, and on statistical figures about movie-goers, film screenings in rural areas, numbers of library users, and so on, and which were part of what was called Plan Cultura-Mined, "basado en el criterio…de que la educación ha de ser la conjunción del estudio, el trabajo, el deporte, el arte, y la recreación, para propiciar la formación de un hombre nuevo, integral…" (21). Whether these statistics are inflated matters little to our

purposes, for what these documents show is, above all, the image the cultural apparatus had of itself and of what it wanted to project (and also why I have insisted this is not a historical but a conceptual argument). It shares with the *Declaration of the Congress of Culture and Education* a concern for mass media—radio and television—and for their use in schools (e.g. the weekly 30-minute programs of classical and national music appreciation), as well as for the work of cultural educators in the classroom and the involvement of the students in neighborhood-based cultural programs. The figure of the aficionado and a description of the logic behind throwing state support for amateur movements are also prominent, as is the unique phenomenon of the cultural educator ("instructor de arte"):

> La personalidad integral del hombre futuro no debe limitarse al papel pasivo de simple espectador. Para su equilibrio físico y mental el ser humano necesita el conocimiento y la práctica de alguna de las artes. A través del movimiento de aficionados, se logra una participación que engendra una apreciación mayor y un despertar de sensibilidades y vocaciones que canalizadas por vías académicas pueden desembocar en obra mayor. Pero ello no basta. Para lograr una personalidad balanceada el trabajo debe comenzarse desde las más tempranas etapas de la educación. (15)
>
> La búsqueda de fórmulas que permitieran acelerar la sensibilización de las grandes masas populares para su participación tanto creadora como espectadora en los quehaceres artísticos, tan distantes hasta el triunfo de la Revolución de sus posibilidades, nos llevó a la creación de este nuevo factor de la cultura que es el instructor de arte del que no existía antecedente alguno en los años de la República. El instructor no es formado para ser artista, sino para detectar, orientar, sensibilizar y estimular la actividad artística en diversos sectores de la población. (19-20)[31]

These texts attest to the contradictory persistence of currents of socialist enlightenment and cultural democratization within the predominant image, evoked by the Cuban early 1970s, of grey and somber Soviet-modeled bureaucrats towering over artistic freedom. In fact, while the driving forces of the resolutions—and the cultural policy of those years—are the preservation and popularization of what was considered the apex of bourgeois (or 'universal') culture on one

hand, and the reorganization of the means of production and dissemination to develop a national culture of equal technical caliber on the other, an understanding of culture as a whole way of life begins to etch a place for itself as well: illustrated by the recurrent concern with mass media (radio and television in particular), the search for the meeting point of production and play, the rekindling of alienation and the category of the everyday in cultural discourse, and the interest in the cultural praxis of youth and children, these were elements that resonated with the language of socialist humanism characteristic of the global left of those two decades.[32] These cultural aspirations sought to intervene in the social reality based on an understanding of the relationship between education and the superstructure that was certainly very much in the vogue then, namely, the assumption that the reproduction of the dominant culture relies, above all, in the education apparatus.[33] At the same time, the cultural apparatus sought to develop a corpus that could compete and eventually replace the cultural offering of the foreign culture industry—and above all, the influence of North American cultural goods and imaginaries. It is precisely that aspect that often bolstered continued alliances, at least from the point of view of foreign observers, between the broadly defined global new left—eager to leave the orthodoxy of earlier decades behind—and the renewal potential of the discourse of Third World Marxism of which Cuba was perceived to be a paradigmatic representative.[34]

Was the greater interest in mass communication and cultural education during this period simply the sideshow import of grey Soviet guidelines for socialist realisms? Was it a populist façade to conceal and justify a more active repressive apparatus, a rustic, gauche rehash of reductionistic and revisionist ideas about humanist values in culture? Or was it a byproduct of the bureaucratic anti-intellectualism against cultural elites that reigned in the 70s, especially from 1968 - 1976? Whatever the case, the aesthetic experience of the 'regular citizen' within the

Revolution is a recurrent topic in the cultural production of the 1960s and, I would argue, even more so in the 1970s. (I do not think it would be a stretch to say that there are is a shared semantic zone between voluntario—a key term to understand the semiotic codes of behavior and identification of the subject within the everyday politics of participation in the Revolution—and aficionado or amateur.) Music critic and journalist Joaquín Borges Triana—in an unrelated review of a recent album—recalls:

> Quienes fueron partícipes en Cuba del rico movimiento de artistas aficionados que se desarrollase durante la década de los 70 de la anterior centuria, recordarán que en el contexto de la corriente ideoestética de la Nueva Trova entre nosotros se pusieron de moda los ritmos del altiplano. Como parte de aquel proceso, en gran medida bajo los influjos del Congreso de Educación y Cultura de 1971, no pocos jóvenes músicos y que por entonces estudiaban en preuniversitarios o en las universidades del país, sintieron interés por aprender a tocar charango.[35]

More concretely, the three senses of the amateur we identified in the first section can be readily located in well-known works and programs associated to the imaginary and the execution of a cultural revolution:

1) As an agent (the actually existing amateur): from the ranks of non professional enthusiasts came many of the most significant and representative new projects of Cuba's revolutionary culture, including the Instituto Cubano del Arte e Industria Cinematográficos, which developed out of the amateur film group of the Ejército Rebelde, and the Movimiento de la Nueva Trova.[36] Though it can be said that many these agents eventually professionalized, the aficionado movement remained an important part of the self-image of the cultural reform and the main objective of the neighborhood Houses of Culture and other community cultural centers. Outside of the vocational schools for children and youth, these hubs of amateur culture for adults—along with state-sponsored workshops (talleres), nightclasses, festivals,

and competitions—were often necessary rites of passage for professionalization in literature, music, and the visual arts.

2) As a thematic subject (trope): cultural reforms and figures of amateurism and socialist voluntarism are thematized prominently in representative works of the period. The mythification of the 1960s and Cuban experiments with socialist realism often met here: that is the case of the popular film *El Brigadista* (1978) and of Manuel Pereira's bestselling novel *Comandante Veneno* (1979) as alphabetization epics, and of the documentaries "El arte del pueblo" (Dir. Oscar Valdés, 1974) and "Simparele" (Dir. Humberto Solás with participation of the Amateur Theater Group of the Union of Haitians Living in Cuba, 1974). Perhaps the most relevant treatment of the amateur for our topic is Pastor Vega's *Retrato de Teresa*, whose protagonist is a textile worker who tries to juggle her domestic duties, her crumbling marriage, 'the socialist emulation,' and her amateur folk dance-theater group amidst conflicting loyalties and new forms of female empowerment.[37]

3) and as discourse (as place of enunciation or as an identity often appropriated or referenced strategically by the artist, the professional, the critic or the philosopher). The documents cited above illustrate how the amateur or aficionado figure functioned to describe and theorize a certain definition of a cultural revolution, as well as to operate as a convenient tag line whenever the anti-intellectualist and repressive manifestations of the cultural bureaucracy were threatened with exposure or accusations. In terms of techniques of aesthetic representation, perhaps the cinematic discourse of the "escuela cubana de cine documental" offers some of the most interesting experiments with realism and the *re*-presentation of the common subject, as well as with the articulations of the "cine imperfecto," that Julio García

Espinosa had theorized in his foundational text and where film offers an exemplary terrain to explore the final unification of art and life in a future socialist utopia:

> Cuando nos preguntamos por qué somos nosotros directores de cine y no los otros, es decir, los espectadores, la pregunta no la motiva solamente una preocupación de orden ético. Sabemos que somos directores de cine porque hemos pertenecido a una minoría que ha tenido el tiempo y las circunstancias necesarias para desarrollar, en ella misma, una cultura artística; y porque los recursos materiales de la tarea técnica cinematográfica son limitados y, por lo tanto, al alcance de unos cuantos y no de todos. Pero ¿qué sucede si el futuro es la universalización de la enseñanza universitaria, si el desarrollo económico y social reduce las horas de trabajo, si la evolución de la técnica cinematográfica (como ya hay señales evidentes) hace posible que ésta deje de ser privilegio de unos pocos, qué sucede si el desarrollo del video-tape soluciona la capacidad inevitablemente limitada de los laboratorios….Sucede entonces no sólo un acto de justicia social: la posibilidad de que todos puedan hacer cine; sino un hecho de extrema importancia para la cultura artística: la posibilidad de rescatar…el verdadero sentido de la actividad artística. Sucede entonces que podemos entender que el arte es una actividad 'desinteresada' del hombre. Que el arte no es un trabajo. Que el artista no es propiamente un trabajador. (13)

These are, in any case, but sketches that attempt to locate historically some of the scenes of amateurism described in the first two parts. As explained in more detail in the previous introductory chapter, the readings that follow are not meant to be a grand theory of culture in the dawn of the Cuban Revolution; rather, and more modestly, it is my intention to identify both the afterlives of revolutionary culture in Cuba and the sites where the imaginaries of democratic transitions are sustained by operations of decomposition and recomposition of earlier visions of culture. The multiple genealogies and definitions of the category of the amateur I have outlined here will therefore be referred to, and elaborated further, in the context of some of the phenomena and social actors I discuss in the following chapters. This exercise should not be understood as one in which I find actors and works that neatly correspond to the figures I have outlined here. Rather, I would like to focus on how the scenes of their interventions in a politically mined cultural field allow me to posit and investigate the fate of the amateur as a

central category of the concept of cultural revolution. In addition, I hope to demonstrate how focusing on these actors as cultural agents in addition to political ones helps to map further the reorganization of the cultural field in post-Cold War Cuba more generally and, in particular, in the wake of the Special Period.

What is also undeniable—though we have not explored it in as much detail here—is that, in the cultural as in the political imaginary, the discourse of the Revolution presented itself as a skillful articulation of both epochal preoccupations and national intellectual traditions: many of the classical texts of José Martí[38] and the early-twentieth century intellectuals who returned to Martí and to the 19th-century pedagogic-philosophical Cuban tradition (Féliz Varela, José de la Luz y Caballero, Enrique José Varona) in order to examine the intersections of nation-building and culture in the nascent republic. Jorge Mañach's classic, "La crisis de la alta cultura en Cuba," is in fact a text that as early as 1925 explicitly criticizes the growing specialization, the pragmatic professionalism, and the driving utilitarianism that hindered the production of intellectual and cultural discourses worthy of the new nation. This entire corpus framed the original questions of the debates around national culture in the early days of the Republic, and many of these same questions would continue to haunt the dreams of politicians and cultural producers alike under the rubric of a socialist cultural revolution.

Different identities of the amateur have populated the imagination of cultural and revolutionary theories in the 20th century, and Cuba was no exception: whether as an aristocratic privilege, as a site of socialized reception, as a dissemination agent, as a potentially subversive actor, or as a temporary station in the road to artistic professionalization or citizen-author-producer, we begin to see how figures of amateurism have interacted, overlapped, and been

conflated in multiple intellectual traditions that separate and come together under the banners of different political programs.[39]

[1] We could recall, for example, the logic of organization of rules and agents associated to various discursive foundations that are constitutive of any organized system of knowledge or discipline, as described by Michel Foucault in *The Order of Things*.

[2] While we will not embark into a complete etymological study here, perhaps a modest diachronic attention to the word's appearance is not out of the question. The French word *amateur* does not enter Spanish until much later, instead it is translated as aficionado which is the equivalent Spanish word (aficionado later entered, in turn, English to convey the knowledge of the loving, expert user as in 'cigar aficionado') (*Diccionario universal, francés y español*. Antonio-Maria Herrero Madrid Imprenta del Reyno. 1744). In the 1611 *Tesoro* Covarrubias only equates *aficionado* with *enamorado,* but by 1726 the definition has expanded to include things and activities:
[1726] "Aficionado,da. part.pas. Inclinado à otro, ò à cualquiera otra cosa. Lat. Allrélus, FR. Luis de Gran, Guía de pecador. Part.2.cap.18. Un hombre carnál *aficionado* à una muger empléa toda su razón y entendimiento en ella…." *Diccionario de autoridades.* Madrid. Imprenta de Francisco del Hierro Impresor de la Real Academia Española 1726. Tomo I
[1817] "Aficionado/da. Adj. El que es instruido y aplicado a alguna arte sin hacer profesión de ella. *Amator litterarum…" Diccionario de la lengua castellana.* Real Academia Española. Madrid: Imprenta Real, 1817. Quinta Edición.
[2001] aficionado, da. (Del part. de aficionar).
1. adj. Que siente afición por alguna actividad. Aficionado a la lectura.
2. adj. Que cultiva o practica, sin ser profesional, un arte, oficio, ciencia, deporte, etc. U. t. c. s. **U.t. en sent. despect.**
3. adj. Que siente afición por un espectáculo y asiste frecuentemente a él.

Diccionario de la lengua española. Real Academia Española. 2001. Edición 22a. www.rae.es.

[3] The same argument, and the same pessimistic—and I would argue, incorrect for *our* times—conclusion regarding the impending disappearance of the musical amateur has been put forth recently by David Byrne in his *How Music Works* (San Francisco: McSweeney's, 2013). While some of his descriptions of the role of the musical amateurs in the history of 20th century popular music are very much on point, he fails to see how the digital age is precisely the apex of the amateur rather than the harbinger of its extinction. He is correct in arguing that public investment on education and cultural production are vital to the enfranchisement of a wide array of cultural agents, but simultaneous attention ought to be paid to the nontraditional circuits in which learning and cultural education and production are also taking place and are therefore deserving of investment, before declaring defeat and mourning for a golden age of amateurism that never was for it thrived on exclusions of class, gender, race, and social status.

[4] See, for example, Dieter Hildebrandt's *Pianoforte, a Social History of the Piano* and James Parakilas's *Piano Roles: Three Hundred Years of Life.*

[5] A great deal of cultural analyses and more recent theory—from semiotic studies to structuralist, poststructuaralist, feminist, and British and American cultural studies—have since rightly criticized a Frankfurt School influenced view of the spectator as a passive consumer in mass culture. However, while the degree of agency in production, negotiation and subverting of meaning within mass culture products in seemingly passive subjects continues to be a worthy research imperative, the distinction I will be making throughout the project (and one which is at the heart of Adorno's and Buck-Morss' passage) is one between the active and indeterminate element of interpretation on one hand (where redemptive readings of the consumer/reader/spectator can be located), and the moment where spectators and consumers take an active role in cultural production and dissemination not just by interpreting but by putting forth a cultural object of their own that then circulates, is consumed, and reflects on the 'original' object which inspired it. A classic example would be fan fiction, whose writers often become popular on their own and become professionalized eventually.

[6] A quick look at the bibliography around publications for amateurs in the 19th and early 20th century shows a wealth of magazines published indiscriminately for amateurs, an expert public, and professionals. Early advertisements for photography equipment, for instance, catered almost indiscriminately to both groups (since photography had not fully professionalized as an 'art'), and even those advertised for amateurs tend to emphasize as a selling point both high quality and user-friendliness. See, for example, "The Scovill Portable Dry Plate Outfits for Amateurs" (Outfits A to C) in J. Traill Taylor, *Photographic Amateur.* New York: Scovill Manufacturing Co. 1881

[7] Recall for instance Tolstoy's Vronsky, the epitome of a declining aristocracy who dabbles in the arts to fill empty time: "this palazzo…maintained the agreeable illusion in Vronsky that he was not so much a Russian landowner, a chief equerry without a post, as an enlightened amateur and patron of the arts—and also a modest artist himself—who had renounced the world, connections, ambitions for the woman he loved" (466). As an amateur painter himself, Count Vronsky embodies the aristocratic origins of cultural amateurism, of the very concept of hobby, while his internal crisis and increasing sense of purposelessness, at the same time, thematizes a dying class. (Any discussion of European salon culture would be incomplete without an analysis of the different cultural agents—connoisseurs, dilettantes, patrons, fanciers, amateurs—that reenact the period's aesthetic debates in Tolstoy's work. After the above quoted passage, for instance, we are gifted a discussion about the relationship between talent, technique, and training in painting apropos of a meeting in Italy between a Russian painter and Anna and Vronsky. Throughout Ana Karenina Tolstoy uses different words—cyrillic renderings of their French originals—to distinguish between amateur (любитель) and dilettante (дилетант), and depending on the translation there are at least six or seven scenes when some notion of amateurism and dilettantism is involved in the construction of the scene.

[8] This short essay appears in the catalogue of "Amateurs," an exhibit held in 2008 [April 23 - August 9] at the California College of the Arts Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts. This otherwise outlier art show, seemingly far removed from the context of this project, bears on this discussion for two reasons: it will be referenced comparatively in the chapter on space—specifically with regards to home exhibits—, and above all, its catalogue includes two succinct

but exemplary reflections on the relationship between the visual arts, artists, and amateurs. One of them is the above-quoted essay by John Roberts, who has reexamined the figure of the amateur in relation to the historical avant-garde and to cultural revolutionary practice in the early Soviet Union, and the other by the curator, Ralph Rugoff.

[9] Stebbins engages in a detailed typology and review of the literature that distinguishes between at least six types of 'actually existing amateurs'—the hobbyists, the dabblers, the devotees, etc.—but since what we are doing here is merely sketching a possible genealogy that allows for its metaphoric and conceptual use as an interpretative categories the ethnographic dimension of Stebbins' work is less useful (and it is also specific to the context he is observing, the Anglo-Saxon and American worlds of the postwar period up to the 1970s).

[10] In *Distinction* Bourdieu discusses at length the choice of music pieces for their surveys—the Blue Danube for instance—to explain how they corroborate the assumption that societal perception of what constitutes classical music and what does not shapes taste formation and perceptions of cultural belonging along class identity. Incidentally, as part of the proceedings of the First Congress of Culture and Education of 1971 celebrated in Havana, one of the presentations discussing how to extirpate commercial taste from the students' musical universe and how to best use the radio and the tv in the classroom reads: "El primer contacto con el 'arte' que varias generaciones de cubanos tuvieron en los **kindergarten** del pasado, dejaron su huella fácilmente reconocible en los jóvenes y adultos cuya música favorita es **Danubio azul** o la **Rapsodia Húngara no. 2** de Liszt, que decoran las paredes de su casa o las libretas de notas con láminas de almanaques comerciales…" (emphasis on the original, *referencias* (1971) 2:3, 74) They recommend instead that during breaks, meals, and playtime students in school are exposed to Mozart, Beethoven, Bartok, Ignacio Cervantes, Leo Brower and that walls are decorated with artistic reproductions by Renoir, Portocarrero, Picasso and Amelia but without anyone calling attention to it, so that environmental good taste develops naturally and without fetishization. Note that instead of a critique to the political economy of cultural value the concept of universal high art is instead reinforced and only supplemented with additions from the national canon (Portocarrero, Amelia, Cervantes, Brower and Manuel Saumell).

[11] Avant-garde group around the eponymous journal to which Mayakovsky, Eisenstein, Vertov and other figures of the Soviet avant-garde were associated, agglutinating various though not always harmoniously commensurable tendencies of the period.

[12] The soaring final words of *Literature and Revolution* are representative of this current of socialist enlightenment that sought to recuperate from the vault of bourgeois cultural accomplishments and the entire Western canon of art, literature, philosophy an expanded form of humanism, identifying a positive motif of emancipation that evolves with each historical stage and would reach its final form via the revolutionary path (so that Shakespeare is more 'human' than Aeschylus and Goethe a step beyond the Bard, and so on): "It is difficult to predict the extent of self-government which the man of the future may reach or the heights to which he may carry his technique. Social construction and psycho-physical self-education will become two aspects of one and the same process. All the arts – literature, drama, painting, music and architecture will lend this process beautiful form. More correctly, the shell in which the cultural

construction and self-education of Communist man will be enclosed, will develop all the vital elements of contemporary art to the highest point. Man will become immeasurably stronger, wiser and subtler; his body will become more harmonized, his movements more rhythmic, his voice more musical. The forms of life will become dynamically dramatic. The average human type will rise to the heights of an Aristotle, a Goethe, or a Marx. And above this ridge new peaks will rise." (n.pag)

[13] For instance, mentioning Bakhtin, Gramsci, Hoggart, Raymond Williams, he claims that though they identified and recognized a "parallel…'plebeian public sphere'" such legitimation was mostly limited to a cultural rather than a properly political and economic theorization of the ways in which these spaces of consumption offered their participants avenues of access to forms of politics: "…we have provided scant theoretical frameworks for understanding these popular circuits as forums where there emerge networks for the exchange of information and citizen apprenticeship relating to the consumption of contemporary mass media." (22-3). Though Canclini tends to single out Stuart Hall later, I would not agree either with Canclini's claim that a Gramsci or a Williams recuperates the cultural but not the political dimension of the 'plebeian public sphere'. Even a cursory look at Williams' classics like "Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory" or "Culture is Ordinary" leaves little doubt to the affirmation that questions and attitudes constitutive of the kind of 'citizenship' Canclini is talking about are inherent to Williams's (via his reading of Gramsci) concept of hegemony. Did they consider the act of consumption per se as a form of citizenship? Surely not. Canclini's point that cultural studies scholars previously dismissed cultural consumption specifically in favor of other forms of cultural practices and sites of reception might be a fair observation to make, but I fail to see how by virtue of that choice they emptied out the political and civic dimensions of spheres of the 'plebeian public sphere.'

[14] This builds upon a theoretical distinction in the analysis of modern capitalist modes of production: the distinction between the *economic* division of labor as a (modern) technical necessity and the *social* division of labor (along asymmetrically empowered classes). See *Capital*, esp. Chapter 14, sections 4 and 5.

[15] A passage of M. Bakunin's "God and the State," sometimes abridged on its own as a free-standing essay ("What is Authority) sounds eerily familiar in its critique of the effects of social hierarchy in all branches of knowledge, and the distinction between his own critique and the naive critique of specialization and division of labor. See Mikhail Bakunin, *Selected Writings.*

[16] After Gramsci, we ought to insist on the necessary deconstruction of the sense of exclusivity that their concern with traditional intellectuals rests on—meaning those involved professionally in the production and dissemination of knowledge: academics, scientists, writers, artists, teachers—because it assumes precisely that which the idea of amateurism challenges; namely that one's skills, knowledge, social positions, and demands of political engagement are never entirely exhausted by one's professional station or occupation at a given time.

[17] Since this is a fairly canonical text, exegetical commentary has been prolific. This is not the place to engage with it, so the two central questions of the essay—on one hand, the historically

specific authorities Kant is addressing, namely the enlightened despot Frederick the Great and the church, and on the other, the concept of autonomous understanding, or the cult of reason, which shall be the object of criticism from the 19th century onward—must remain unattended along with the hermeneutical corpus it has given occasion to.

[18] The use of the adjectives private and public in the text are restricted to very specific social functions, and define two distinct positions of enunciation vis-à-vis external authority. Their use here departs from their now accepted common usage, that is, *private* as speech or action relegated to the intimacy of the individual space (living quarters, circle of friends and family), and *public* as that which is shared with a large audience only brought together momentarily by their object of attention. Instead, for the private use of one's reason, Kant understands the actions and speech carried out by a subject in the fulfillment of his/her duties as a result of one's formal subordination with respect to external authorities, be they religious or political. (In the contemporary context professional conscription would be the comparable factor.) He gives three examples: a military officer, a tax-paying citizen, and a clergyman, all of which must obey or acquiesce the requirements of their stations—obeying commands, paying taxes, and communicating doctrine to a congregation—but who, simultaneously, ought to be free when addressing the community as a whole (as a *public*) to question errors in service, point out the injustice of decrees, and argue about matters of creed and church, respectively. In all three examples, public use of one's reason is the quintessential exercise, for Kant, of the faculty of autonomy on which the entire essay and his definition of the project of Enlightenment is grounded: "to make use of one's understanding without direction from another" (n.pag.) (Its opposite, the condition of the non-emancipated, non-autonomous thinker, which has been variously translated as nonage, tutelage, or minority, is a condition that is both self-imposed out of laziness and cowardice, says Kant, and bolstered by the self-appointed guardians of the masses who perpetuate and reproduce the asymmetrical administration of knowledge.) In any case, in Kant's formulation, the idea of freedom of thought exercised in the private sphere—a Lutheran motif running through liberal Protestantism and its politico-juridical texts—is a logical contradiction.

[19] CCW Taylor, "Politics," *Cambridge Companion to Aristotle.*

[20] The relationship between expert knowledge in politics in comparison with expert knowledge in other crafts, which is so clear cut in Plato, is something about Aristotle, as far as I can tell, remains intuitively ambivalent: the very last pages of the *Nichomachean Ethics,* concerned with the figure of the legislator, oscillates between what *is* (a handful of men who might be in positions to craft a good constitution) and what *ought to be* (more citizens and men of virtue capable of political excellence): "It would seem from what has been said that [each man] can do this better if he makes himself capable of legislating" (201). In the *Politics*, the focus on education (including the music and the arts) makes it increasingly clear that the just constitution and the good polis will be that in which the individual citizens lead the best lives, but at the same time, it is also affirmed that the common good is not simply an *a posteriori* aggregate of individual excellence. More relevant for us is Aristotle's discussion of citizenship in relation to practical and political wisdoms, which "are of the same state of mind, but their essence is not the same" (*Nicomachean Ethics* 109). (Practical wisdom, or phronesis, is the central concept of

Aristotelian ethics and is generally concerned with the government of one's own affairs and the ability to determine one's own good, while political wisdom, as expected, is the skill in governing and determining that which is good for all.) In *Politics,* Aristotle distinguishes between three power relations that engage differently an individual's practical wisdom according to distinct realms of action: the self, the household, the legislative/political space. To each corresponds a type of ruling, that is, a situated power relation: that of the household and by extension that of kingship is defined as the ruling over those who are free but unequal, like women and children; that of mastership, which involves administration of property and includes slaves who are neither free nor equal; and, finally, the ruling of the statesman inherent to citizenship which is the art of ruling over, or governing among, those who are free and the equal. In a discussion of friendship and justice in the *Nichomachean Ethics* we get, however, a fuller picture of what is involved in the ruling over the free and the equal—that is, one's fellow citizens: "The friendship of brothers is like that of comrades; for they are equal and of like age, and such persons are for the most part like in their feelings and their character. Like this, too, is the friendship appropriate to timocratic government; for in such a constitution the ideal is for the citizens to be equal and fair; **therefore rule is taken in turn, and on equal terms; and the friendship appropriate here will correspond**" (156; my emphasis). Surely I am engaging here in some amateurism of my own by bracketing the centuries of debate among philosophers and classicists regarding the subtler points of Aristotelian political philosophy, the revivals enjoyed by his *Politics* in recent years, and the main arguments and concepts put forth by the text.

[21] In fact, we get here a rudimentary theory of the politics of recognition as constitutive of citizenship, since consciousness of the self develops along a consciousness of others as "selves": "…if as the virtuous man is to himself, he is to his friend also (**for his friend is another self**)—if all this be true, as his own being is desirable for each man, so, or almost so, is that of his friend. Now his being was seen to be desirable because he perceived his own goodness, and such perception is pleasant in itself. He must, therefore, perceive the existence of his friend together with his own, and this will be realized in their living together and sharing in discussion and thought; for this is what living together would seem to mean in the case of man, and not, as in the case of cattle, feeding in the same place" (*NE* 178). Even though Aristotle was no declared friend of democracy but seemed to espoused, rather, a form of aristocracy (literally, rule by the most excellent citizens), under certain conditions knowledge in the collective can be productively and desirably harnessed: "For the many, who are not as individuals excellent men, nevertheless can, when they have come together, be better than the few best people, not individually but collectively…" (*Politics* 83)

[22] See also 345d, 374a-d. There are some translation and disciplinary problems I am not taking into account here. The term *techne* (craft) was not neutral, but its positive or negative connotations depended on the context in which it was used (to refer to the arts, to the crafts, or in comparison or opposition to *episteme,* i.e. theoretical knowledge). However, insofar as other contemporary theorists I will engage with throughout the argument (Ranciere, Sloterdijk) use them in similarly whimsical fashion, the classical scholar will have to indulge these likely misreadings. A proper consideration of the genesis of labor and leisure narratives with respect to the ethical and political virtues would require an engagement with the philosophical corpus from Plato and Aristotle to Heidegger and Arendt that deal with the redefinitions of and relationships

between key terms that have influenced later philosophers: poiesis (and its kin techne), praxis, theoria.

[23] There is a pending discussion that arbitrates between the Rancière/Bordieu polemic that is beyond the scope of the present work. The problem of cultural capital as defined by Bourdieu and as a politically charged social relation in the specific context of revolutionary and post-revolutionary Cuba merits a more in-depth discussion that would take us away from the topic at hand. Suffice it to say for now that while Rancière's readings often opened avenues of interpretation for the dissertation, I disagree with the ultimate conclusions he draws from them (and with his reductionist methodology): "We do not have to transform spectators into actors, and ignoramuses into scholars. We have to recognize the knowledge at work in the ignoramus and the activity peculiar to the spectator. Every spectator is already an actor in her story; every actor, every man of action, is the spectator of the same story." (*The emancipated spectator* 17) This is because Rancière does not operate, as Bourdieu does, with a concept of the cultural object as a commodity, that is, as depositories of exchange value in addition to use value. Against Rancière, I would hold that political actors are necessarily involved in representing to themselves and to others the agonic contradictions of distributive injustice in aesthetic terms, and these are often embodied in cultural objects and practices, and, in turn, the idea that we are all always already our own discerning critics does not necessarily exclude the fact that cultural practices are often mediated by ideological ones, not because ideology is a lie that conceals the truth, but because, as Žižek has often argued, ideology—via cultural representations as much as social practices—structures reality itself.

[24] The irony being that the language around political decisions of the early years of the Cuban Revolution is improvisational, has an air of proud dilentattism that dates in fact to the foundational act of the July 26th Movement, the taking of the Moncada, which was a poorly planned and executed military action but a symbolically decisive event in the aftermath of the movement. The imperfection of humanity and the errors from which we learn as revolutionaries in the making is a leitmotif in Fidel's speeches: "Es decir que ustedes saben muy bien—posiblemente mejor que ningún otro sector, por la función que ustedes desempeñan dentro de la economía nacional—de cómo la Revolución, en medio de todos sus cambios, que se producen de manera vertiginosa, que muchas veces improvisa, se cometen muchos errores, una serie de errores; errores de los cuales lo que debemos hacer todos los revolucionarios es sacar experiencias, sacar experiencias y aprovechar las lecciones que de ellas deben derivarse." (n.pag, Discurso a los empleados del sector bancario, October 2nd, 1961, http://www.cuba.cu/gobierno/discursos/1961/esp/f021061e.html) A similar theme runs through another famous passage in Che Guevara's *El hombre y el socialismo en Cuba* (1965): "El socialismo es joven y tiene errores. Los revolucionarios carecemos, muchas veces, de los conocimientos y la audacia intelectual necesarios para encarar la tarea del desarrollo de un hombre nuevo por métodos distintos a los convencionales y los métodos convencionales sufren de la influencia que los creó." (Reproduced in *Revolución, letras, arte,* ed. Virgilio López Lemus p. 43)

[25] worldcat.org offers an incomplete but informative catalogue of Ediciones Huracán with a simple category search:

http://www.worldcat.org/search?qt=hotseries&q=se%3A%22Ediciones+huraca%CC%81n%22

[26] Hans Magnus Enzenberger, who after a short trip to Cuba in 1968 had written the op-ed "On Leaving America" in the New York Review of Books resigning his post as Fellow at Wesleyan and announcing a longer stay in Cuba would, by 1970, write a bitter chronicle about the Cuban Communist Party for *International Socialism* titled "Portrait of a Party": "Flattened and coarsened beyond recognition, certain motifs out of the thought of Che return here: an extreme voluntarism, which, vulgarised, results in a permutation of subjective and objective conditions, as if Marx could be stood on his head. The consciousness of the individual worker, once put in its place, is supposed to determine the economic base. This moral exertion is supposed to be sufficient to drag the society out of the morass of underdevelopment. The effect of this idealism is even more piercing as it obviously is not dependent on cognition. It could almost seem as if it were aiming at consolidating its own ignorance. … Of course, this does not explain at all adequately the hostility of the party and its leadership towards theory, which borders on blind hate. It is thoroughly unmarxist and its roots lie not even in the revolutionary praxis of the Cubans. They are rather to be sought in the intellectual tradition of the country. Outside the old CP the transmitted theoretical material is meagre; a wide reception of the Marxist classics did not take place. …The confusion of dogma and theory belongs to Fidel's permanent repertoire." (n.pag.)

[27] Virgilio Piñera's well-known interventions on the radio and the press are exemplary of these concerns. As early as April of 1959 Piñera participated in a radio program aired on the CMQ station called "Posición del escritor en Cuba." Both his eponymous intervention and the open letter that preceded it "Al señor ministro Fidel Castro" have been widely reproduced.
These cautioned but enthusiastic attitudes went hand in hand with the international perception of the Cuban Revolution as allied in the critique against orthodoxy, and as part of the general movement toward destalinization of the Left movements from the 50s onward. And this cultural record, along with its eventual missteps, was not only the Cubans', there was a sense that it was a collective, international enterprise. José Revueltas, who spent some time in Cuba in the early 1960s, wrote his own contribution to the Padilla affair in "So that Maiakovski's suicide not be repeated" (1970) to warn both the Cuban cultural workers and the readers of *International Socialist Review* about the avatars of orthodoxy in cultural policies, and to align himself with Cortázar's position along the lines of a critical commitment: "The UNEAC leaders are very young and did not have the opportunity to familiarize themselves with, or get to know in a direct way, all the experience of how Stalinism, step by step and *against* the Soviet Communist Party, slowly usurped power until it had erased any trace, alive, real and revolutionary, of the principles Lenin had fought for….A tremendous and incredible historical amnesia exists in Cuba and in all of Latin America. This contains the danger that revolutionaries of all countries may fall into the same negative experiences of which there are so many examples in the history of the Soviet and international communist movement. But there are books, there are documents, there are publications and it is unjustifiable that they not be read by the revolutionary youth of Cuba and all countries of the Americas in order to forewarn our revolution and our movement lest identical errors befall us; errors which history has already proven to be real betrayals of communism." (n.page)

[28] Along similar lines, Juan Antonio García Borrero writes “Las aporías del gris: Cine cubano en los setenta” to argue for the need to revisit this decade without denying that production decreased, or that themes became more conforming, or that it was an undoubtedly difficult era. To find an alternative reading beyond the two versions of the ‘quinquenio gris’ or ‘decenio negro’ highlights how filmmakers negotiated their options, as well as the ways in which the ICAIc remained engaged in other daring experiments: “Al hablar del "síndrome de los 70", pocas veces ha podido conseguirse entre nosotros algo tan fatigoso…El cine cubano de ese período, con sus limitaciones y aciertos, puede y demanda ser estudiado con similar nivel de desprejuicio, hondura e imparcialidad, sin temérsele (todo lo contrario) al debate que las nuevas valoraciones han de originar, pues al fin y al cabo, el crítico, el ensayista o quien sea, debe escribir con la convicción de que la más difícil de sus misiones no es convencer a los hombres, sino en todo caso al Tiempo.” *La gaceta de Cuba*. La Habana nº 5 (sept.-oct. 2000) p. 22-5.

[29] The importance of that particular intervention in establishing guidelines for the rapport between revolutionary politics and cultural producers for decades to come can hardly be denied, since policy in general relied in the last instance on the often contradictory records of Fidel’s major speeches. In fact, the speech already forewarns that one of the most important cultural tasks of the new society will be to spur and harness talent from the aficionado movements (afición y aficionados are mentioned at least four times in that context). However, the somewhat disproportionate magnetism *that* speech exerts on both adherents and detractors alike is a telling symptom of the way most Cuban cultural and literary studies singularly focus on the historical tensions between intellectuals and artists on one hand, and the Communist State and Party ideologues on the other.

[30] The Padilla affair and Fidel’s closing speech for the Congress mark the rupture of Cuba with international writers and intellectuals who had enthusiastically supported the Cuban Revolution in its initial decade, but who publicly decried the latter’s increasingly authoritarian character, which seemed to have definitively crystallized with the imprisonment and public process of the poet Heberto Padilla on the basis of his politically objectionable poems and persona.

[31] The controversial film of 1992 *Alicia en el Pueblo Maravillas* tells the story of one of these theater instructors in a rural town. Out of this period, the Casas de Cultura, or “Houses of Culture” would be created in 1978 after the Soviet and Eastern European model, as would the official “Dirección Nacional de Aficionados y Casas de Cultura” in 1979 to coordinate between the Movimiento de Artistas Aficionados and the local chapters of the Casas de Cultura which organized classes, events, and provided rehearsal space as well as some material support whenever it was available. These locales were immortalized in a 1985 episode of the Soviet cartoon Nu pogodi!, “The House of Culture”, where a wolf’s attempts to catch the hare are always interrupted by their accidental participation in the House of Culture’s events. (The premise of the show, immensely popular in Cuba too, was the same as that of the Road Runner cartoon, but its protagonists were a disheveled, heavy-smoking wolf and an androgynous hare, who frolicked around Soviet Russia.)

[32] The 1979 report, written by Gerardo Mosquera, will emphasize courses for adults and the formation of the schools of the arts, though by the late 70s the support of the Soviet Union and

its function as a role model are explicitly acknowledged: "A partir de la fundación de la Escuela Nacional de Arte se ha extendido sistemáticamente la enseñanza de las artes, accessible a todo el que, en cualquier parte del país, manifiesta una vocación. Esta incluye becas para continuar estudios de alto nivel en el extranjero. La creación del Instituto Superior de Arte ha permitido ampliar esta esfera y satisfacer una parte de sus necesidades en el propio país gracias al apoyo brindado por la Unión Soviética." (14) The 1979 report claims that in 1979 there are already 50 houses of culture functioning throughout the country where the amateur movement is being pushed to new levels: "En ellas se organiza y desarrolla el movimiento de aficionados y se realiza el trabajo cultural en las comunidades. Con estos fines se ofrecen charlas, seminarios, conciertos, festivales, exposiciones, círculos de interés, actividades recreativas, conciertos, talleres de artes plásticas, clases de música, cine-debates y otras manifestaciones. Estos centros no pretenden formar profesionales. Su objetivo es acercar las grandes masas a las distintas manifestaciones artísticas para sensibilizarlas en el disfrute estético y brindarles una oportunidad de crear y desarrollar sus aficiones." (27) Both documents (the 1971 and the 1979 reports) betray anxieties about origins and the search for a language for the universalizability of national traditions whose narratives of recuperation during the Revolution follow histories of colonial threats, concealment, co-optation, and interruption—they both start with Colón and las Casas. The first report focuses more on aspects of the cultural circuit—formation, production, circulation, and reception—and on the new institutions; the second offers a more detailed explanation of the role of the state and the ministry in the promotion and regulation of national culture and profiles the new institutions created throughout the 1970s.

[33] Raymond Williams, "Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory." *Problems in Materialism and Culture.*

[34] Broadly speaking, and as part of the rejection of Stalinist orthodoxy that began in the 1950s after Stalin's death and the Soviet invasion of Hungary, these were the years of the return to the 'early Marx' after translations of the 1844 manuscripts slowly but surely began to be read and studied. Many 'new left' and socialist humanist currents of the 60s and 70s returned to alienation as a central category of analysis and praxis from very different positions: Raya Dunayevskaya's *Marxism and Freedom* (1958), Erich Fromm's *Marx's Concept of Man,* Herbert Marcuse's *One Dimensional Man* (1964), István Mészáros's *Marx's Theory of Alienation* (1970), and George Novack and Ernest Mandel's *The Marxist Theory of Alienation* (1973). Despite the official insistence on Cuba's Revolution as a socialist humanist one, it should be noted that Althusser was one of the most published Marxist philosophers in Cuba in his own time (translations of *Reading Capital* and other essays were published in translation and was featured prominently in the journal *Pensamiento Crítico* (1967- 1971), though Althusser was one of the most vocal critics of the socialist humanisms of his day. To what extent these currents coexisted and were read in Cuba as part of an informed polemic or as patchy texts divorced from their intellectual traditions, that is, whether they can be read as the willful absence of top-down ideological uniformity or as the accidental result of uneven conditions of reception, is a question left open for another occasion.

[35] Joaquín Borges Triana, "Carnaval en Piano Charango."

[36] Even though Tomás Gutiérez Alea, and JulioGarcía Espinosa, founders of the ICAIC, had studied film in Italy in the 1950s (together with Gabriel García Márquez, who would be the founding figure of the Escuela Internacional de Cine y Televisión de San Antonio del Los Baños in Cuba in 1986). See Juan Antonio García Borrero, *Mito y realidad: Cine cubano de los sesenta* for an in-depth study of the emergence of a new cinema in revolutionary Cuba. For a discussion of Cuban film historiography, see also Nancy Berthier, "Cine y Revolución cubana."

[37] The socialist emulation was the name of the Soviet model for increased productivity. It relied on the division of production into groups that competed in job (and ideological) performance for moral and token material incentives. In the middle of her marriage troubles, a demanding evaluation of her group's fulfillment of socialist emulation standards, and classes of professional development ('superación obrera'), Teresa becomes the cultural representative of her syndicate, and consequently the coordinator of her work-based amateur dance-theater group—which is so good that has gained a place in a nationwide competition in an amateur festival to perform a folkloric routine called "El baile de la chancleta". On the way to represent the workers in the World Festival of Youth and Students, they appear on TV, where Teresa lies about how well she manages the work-home balance and tries to skirt hints about the platonic relationship between the group's choreographer and Teresa, unleashing an attack of jealousy in her cheating husband (who is watching the program and is adamantly opposed to Teresa's involvement in her dance group). In any case, the announcer's words provide a great example of the symbolic weight and the monumental solemnity attributed to these practices in public discourse (even if in practice, and for the individuals participating it, these activities could be far from the 'voluntary' and 'lofty' cultural experience they purported to be, and coser to being just another part of the job requirements): "Recientemente los trabajadores de Cuba todos han celebrado una serie de eventos con el propósito de buscar los grupos que habrán de representar a la clase obrera en ese acontecimiento internacional de tan gran trascendencia como es el festival mundial de la juventud y los estudiantes. Y aquí tenemos a dos compañeros que representan a un grupo de triunfadores del sindicato de trabajadores textileros…El coreógrafo, que es autodidacta, habla de cómo se selecciona a los bailarines entre los trabajadores y cómo se les convence del valor de la danza [ante percepciones machistas de que bailar no es una actividad viril]" *Retrato de Teresa*. (1979) Dir. Pastor Vega.

[38] From Martí's "Maestros ambulantes," a classic text published in 1884 at least 2 quotes have been culled and replayed *ad nauseum:* "Ser culto es el único modo de ser libre" and "es necesario hacer de cada hombre una antorcha." There is an amusing pseudo-debate about this text, in fact, because of what follows and is never quoted in the famous quote: "Ser bueno es el único modo de ser dichoso. Ser culto es el único modo de ser libre. Pero, en lo común de la naturaleza humana, se necesita ser próspero para ser bueno" (n.pag.) Expat free-marketiers love to quote back that last section, and therefore repeat the very same mutilation exercise they accuse the Cuban revolutionaries of, since the definition of prosperity Martí has in mind here has more to do with an abstract, classical liberal romanticism about the productivity of nature and man's organic relationship to it (to also talk about how a more pragmatic, conversational idea of cultural education would work better in the rural and working environments throughout which these 'wondering pedagogues' Martí proposes ought to be improving—spiritually and intellectually—the general lot of man).

[39] And if we think the manifestoes, works, and essays discussed here so far were mere dreams of earlier, more epic, more dangerous, more urgent times, it may be worth mentioning that the amateur artist has recently found two curious subjects who, arguably, could be said to be seeking a kind of political redemption, or at least some measure of public sympathy, via their amateur paintings: one still subject to the aftereffects of his controversial presidency, and two of the Cuban Five Spies from the jails of the state they were spying on, George W. Bush, and Antonio Guerrero and Gerardo Hernández, have held exhibits of their 'Sunday paintings.' See <http://cubasolidaritycampaign.blogspot.com/2011/08/beyond-frame-contemporary-cuban-art.html>, and <http://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2014/04/george-bushs-paintings-arent-funny-105664.html>

CHAPTER TWO:
Public Homes, Private Spheres: Post-Socialist Redefinitions of Space

It is not down in any map; true places never are.
Herman Melville, *Moby Dick*

I. Private homes, public spaces

In May 2012 prominent blogger, multimedia artist, and self-described autodidact Lía Villares published in her blog *Habanemia* an invitation by independent artist and curator Sandra Ceballos to defy the boundaries of the XI Havana Art Biennale:

> Les estamos invitando a que visiten nuestros espacios no oficiales -galerías, estudios, talleres o locales diversos- que están abiertos al público con frescas, dinámicas y aglutinadoras muestras de Arte.
> Se exhiben obras de muchos artistas: cubanos y foráneos, emergentes y afamados, muy jóvenes, jóvenes y adultos.
> ¡¡No se guíen tan sólo por los programas gubernativos y prueben también el excitante fruto de la exploración!![1]

In 1984 the Havana Art Biennale emerged as an alternative circuit for Third (World) Art, but its claim as a forum for the art of the global south has been increasingly complicated by Cuba's domestic politics, since the event brings into relief the common conflation of the concept of national sovereignty with popular sovereignty, that is, it does not differentiate between national self-determination with respect to a hegemonic global order, and self-government as an inalienable component of the concept of modern democracy. As part of the commercialization of Cuban art and the consequent politics of selective tolerance it is sustained on, the last two decades have seen not only the inclusion of highly polemical works in the Biennale but also a growing number of alt-events that seek to challenge either its spatial and curatorial boundaries and/or exploit a moment of high-exposure to gain visibility for tangential demands. Ceballos's statement was accompanied by a profile of some of these home-galleries and a map of Havana where such spaces were located: a different cartography for art in the city, and parallel to the one provided by the Biennale's well-oiled publicity machine. (figs. 4,5)

The author of the invitation, Sandra Ceballos, is also the co-founder and director of Espacio Aglutinador, the oldest independent art space in Havana. Operating since 1994 in her home, Aglutinador has systematically criticized the practice and theory of Cuban art curators and critics, especially those associated with official discourse and institutions. But even Aglutinador, I would argue, has undergone a transformation that reflects the new relationship between the underground or unofficial cultural scene and other projects from the new, self-proclaimed civil society, which are of a more explicitly political nature and which deal with a landscape continuous but not identical with that of the Special Period. In its earlier period Aglutinador served as a launching pad and as a lab for many emerging visual artists. It was known for attracting both established and new artists to a single space, as well as for defying the limits of accepted aesthetic languages that, after a period of flexibility in the late 80s, had been reined in by the authorities, from one end, and eroded by the mass exodus of cultural producers in the early 90s, from the other. In the last decade Aglutinador has hosted more cross-disciplinary projects and has attracted social actors beyond the relatively small circle around the Instituto Superior de Arte and the San Alejandro Academy of the Visual Arts.

Curadores go home! a 2008 exhibit organized in Aglutinador is an excellent example of the internal challenges faced by the type of new collaborations that, I argue, have been more common between the informal art scene and emergent social actors from a politically bolder, self-proclaimed civil society. When the National Counsel for the Visual Arts got wind of this alternative art show it pushed to suspend it and circulated a public declaration accusing the independent gallery of organizing “a propaganda show whose main participants include representatives of the genocidal Bush government and known mercenaries…” (n.pag.) After some back-and-forth negotiations and postponements, the show would go on without the

participation of some of the most politically compromising pieces (including a multimedia project about the legal case of Porno Para Ricardo singer Gorki Ávila prepared by Yoani Sánchez and Claudia Cadelo).

The Havana Art Biennale and other such state-sponsored projects have demonstrated that the new policies of the market-friendly, single-party state not only tolerate certain forms of criticism but also promote them (case in point, the ruin as allegory of the national). In this sense, the poster of *Curadores go home!* is worth dwelling on: it is a remake of the Second World War Soviet poster *Motherland is calling*! (1941), where a red clothed, stern female in an epic pose holds on a first plane the Red Army Oath and, with the other hand raised up, directs the gaze of the called-upon observer toward a geometrically ordered gathering of bayonets in the background. In Aglutinador's version, the Cuban flag has been pasted on the background. The empty paper held by the center figure perhaps points to an ideologically empty call, while the exhibit name, "Curadores go home," invokes the classic Latin American anti-imperialist slogan "Yankee go home!" The poster calls upon a subject trying to make sense of mixed signals, and where the pastiche of Soviet iconography and market signs personified in the figure of the curator effectively achieves the graphic juxtaposition of complicit orders. Here the spectacle of consumption and the spectacle of authoritarianism are addressed as one and the same, an order of representation where the subject of the spectacle is caught in a passive role in both. Against this, the space of the private home deployed as assembly permits a symbolic and a (limited) real reorganization of those terms.[2] The following year, Aglutinador convened another exhibit whose topics were the mechanisms and effects of the growing commercialization of the Havana Art Biennale and of Cuban art in general, and the absence of a culture of art collection in Cuba and therefore the lack of a Cuban infrastructure for the model of privately supported, domestic art

markets that prevails in much of the world. *Perra subasta* (2009), whose motto was "Artistas de la 10 Bienal de la Habana, 2009: ¡a venderrrrrrrrrrrrrr!" played with the Cuban use of the adjective *perra* [bitch] to mean huge or intense in addition to its standard pejorative use. It was simultaneously presented as a virtual exhibit in the blog *palaDeOindDeleite* and on Aglutinador's own website, and its catalogue consisted of a series of questions about the art markets posed to an art professor, a dealer, an artist, a foreign collector, a foreign art philanthropist, and an ambulant street egg-seller.

The exhibits held so far at Xoho gallery space—hosted in a home and operating intermittently since 2008—and their presentation texts are also useful to contextualize how these cultural agents understand their own relationship to the cultural field, and how the latter's dynamics are addressed by these practices.[3] Xoho's exhibits and texts stress a desire for greater horizontality and transparency in the relationship between curators, artists, works, and public, featuring the conception of the art exhibit more along the lines of a party than along the sober order of the art auction:

> Xoho es un espacio cultural alternativo e independiente que pretende darle promoción a artistas en muestras donde la música, las artes plásticas, el audiovisual y las artes escénicas son bienvenidas.…Su objetivo es reunir diferentes manifestaciones del arte en cada evento propiciando el intercambio entre los diferentes públicos. ("Proyecto Xoho")

Other elements worth highlighting that distinguish the Xoho project and that are shared with Aglutinador and similar uses of the home, are explicitly outlined in its objectives: favoring experimental aesthetics over more traditional forms of visual and artistic production, and the principle of eclectic and non-discriminatory participation for both artists and public. "De 1000 amores," the first exhibit held at Xoho, on the 14th of February of 2008, included the participation of the marginalized punk band Porno Para Ricardo, while in "El Maluarte cubano"

or "Bad Art" artists, but also non-artists, were called upon to submit an original artwork that answered the following questions:

> Basta de intentos fallidos en la búsqueda de la belleza, de la subjetividad y del No arte, del oficio, de buscar mercado, de ganar concursos y bienales, en fin de tratar de hacer una 'obra'…
> Pregúntese si su obra es lo suficiente mala para participar.
> Pregúntese si es capaz de hacer una obra artística bien mala.

This call for artwork stages the anxiety of cultural producers vis-à-vis the collapse of aesthetic value as a stable category in the 20th century, but also highlights aesthetic discrimination as a particularly acute problematic in Cuba, where Culture with a capital C—in the absence of industrial modernization capabilities—has been a state project in the strong and narrow sense of the word: the absolute expression of an overbearing national essence offered by the revolutionary project as testament of its success. The Spanish play on words "maluarte" (the contraction of bad art) sounds like "baluarte" (bastion), which problematizes not only the effects on cultural producers of the obsolete and oppressive conception of art and culture as a national asset, but also introduces the suspicion that success and reward in the Cuban art world are intimately bound to questionable systems of aesthetic valuation. (figs. 7,8)

Lázaro Saavedra's piece for the Bad Art exhibit is worth dwelling on, for while it continues the artist's characteristic preoccupation with how both the political and the commercial intersect with the creation of an artwork, it does so purposefully borrowing an amateur aesthetic. (fig. 9) The small frame shows an anthropomorphic figure raising its arms (in excitement?), speaking to the street from a balcony, and drawn with a permanent marker on what looks like a dry erase board: "I am in the Ludwig Foundation," says the speech balloon. The piece is entitled: "Atribuido a Lázaro Saavedra." The piece and its setting (the Bad Art exhibit), as much as the borrowed pose of the nonartist suggested by the rustic stroke of the marker, naturally raise two

problems. It introduces a momentary separation between the citizen nonartist Lázaro Saavedra (who draws the childish doodle) and the artist by the same name (to whom the statement is attributed). That schism, in turn, raises the question of whose work constitutes the "bad art," and why: the citizen's doodle, or the artist's participation in the Foundation.[4] Elsewhere, Saavedra has elaborated explicitly on the position of the post-Socialist artist:

> I think my generation, artists who were trained in the 1980s, grew up with a deformed idea of what a gallery is…At the time we thought of them as philanthropic spaces in which an artist communicated with the public. We didn't glimpse until much later that we needed to think of them as commercial spaces. It was a time when it didn't seem that important to create a certain type of work to sell it. People had a contract with the Cuban Fund for Cultural Goods on one hand, and on the other they made art, which wasn't really for sale, although maybe, more or less by chance, it sold anyway.[5]

This resonates with Ralph Rugoff's emphasis on the continued relevance of the amateur as a site of disciplinary and institutional critique that voices the anxieties of professionalization of the modern artist as much as the lived reality in which he/she produces, and which can be seen at play in Bad Art too: "…inasmuch as the 'failure' of nonprofessional performers renders their labor transparent, it prompts us to conceive of them as individuals grounded in a real-life existence outside of the artwork, and so provokes us to fashion a double reading of the work as both document and art piece" (11).[6]

Beyond Aglutinador and Xoho there have been other homes dedicated to, and publicized as, spaces of alternative cultural scenes (and where the adjective alternative is understood differently in each case, that is, subject to what it presents itself as an alternative to). Impossible to catalogue them all, I will only mention two instances that play with the subversion of the private-public divide as a primary aesthetic strategy, and that rely on the discourse of the nonprofessional, autodidact, or citizen artist as a primary mode of representation. The first is the performance, poetry, and visual arts collective Omni-ZonaFranca, which has received the most

critical attention, and which was initially housed in a community cultural center in Alamar, though many of their events are held now in their members' homes (referred to as "casas-templo"). Though in some ways some of their members have undergone a thorough professionalization—traveling and performing abroad—their new age sensibility continues to exploit the poetics of the unvarnished, childlike creativity of the non artist, stripping "art for art's sake" down to "creativity for creativity's sake." Another peculiar space is the autonomous cultural community project Coco Solo Social Club, whose neighborhood parties and grassroots artistic events in the outskirts of Havana are held at a private residence. (Their audiovisual projects constitute a bizarre combination of mock video clips, stop motion animation, voice-overs, and improvised choreographies that are scattered in YouTube and distributed locally via USB memories and CDs).

The ephemeral and often secretive nature of that underground or informal scene renders a meticulous catalogue of these spaces a practical impossibility. Even a cursory profile of the known ones would be material for a separate project, since in addition to spaces like Aglutinador, Xoho, el Círculo, or Galería Cristo Salvador, which maintain or have maintained an ongoing identity as meeting and exhibition spaces, there are also many other homes that do so only occasionally and that include the participation of both professional artists borrowing the discourse of the non artist, or multidisciplinary practitioners borrowing the logic of the curated exhibit and occupying the role of curators, visual artists, and critics for the occasion. For example, La Paja Records, the home recording studio for independent bands created by Porno Para Ricardo and named in honor of legendary Basque group La Polla Records, held a visual art exhibit and party in 2010 taunting the local chapter of the Committees for the Defense of the Revolution (CDR). Here, too, professional and nonprofessional artists hung works in the wall

without differentiation, and the exhibit had no other logic than that of its own happening: "La Paja Recold presents: Expo Colectiva "Pusimos el cuadro y qué." (figs. 10, 11) In a similar fashion, Estado de Sats, a discussion and activism group who organizes multidisciplinary events and panels and debates on contemporary politics and culture, hosted in 2012 "Cocodrilo Smile," a political humor exhibit where many cartoonists, including Cubans living abroad, sent works that are otherwise only available online to the few people in Cuba that can access and afford a regular Internet connection (and where loading images at 45 kb speeds is structurally prohibitive with regards to image download).[7]

Almost invariably, these alt-happenings have the trope of the party as a fundamental principle of convocation, rekindling the social significance of *la fiesta* [the home party] in the organization of youth countercultures that reject, lack, or are excluded from mainstream public spaces. A strategic retreat from the pull of post-revolutionary Cuba public spaces toward the museological festivity, or the watched party as Antonio José Ponte has called it ("la fiesta vigilada"), and amidst the proliferation of home-based small businesses, these gatherings advance neither commercial nor institutional goals. The home party also functions as a potentially protective rhetorical devise; the deployment of the meme "but we were just having a party" becomes a complicit code of collective dissimulation.

Other shared features of these gatherings include the deployment of neo avant-garde aesthetic procedures such as participatory and open artworks, interdisciplinary projects, the mocking of the art market and of official cultural politics, the parodic citation of official symbols, the use of mixed media and found-object aesthetics, and the principles of multiple authorship. Ernesto Menéndez-Conde (2012) has approached some of these spaces along similar lines. When it comes to the role of the spectator in the completion of the work, for example, he

too recognizes that it is “las relaciones entre los espectadores las que parecen constituir la esencia de la creación artística.”[8] Menéndez-Conde is also in agreement with the diagnosis that commercially successful artists and state supported ventures produce a spectacle of tolerance to be consumed by a mostly foreign audience. Menéndez-Conde’s approach, however, focuses on a trend that situates both the official and the unofficial scenes of visual arts in Cuba in a global conversation about art that reads these aesthetic principles in terms of their chosen sites of intervention: the pop up gallery, the art party, the happening. In other words, he reads them as examples of a growing trend in relational and participatory art in the field of the visual and conceptual arts as a whole. In fact, we could (and should) go further than Menéndez-Conde and ask: what is the global political context in which the commonality of those trends become significant, that is, not stop at reading Cuban art trends vis-à-vis global art trends but ask instead what they both respond to, and if the similarities and differences of these responses allows us to read the totality any better.

Here I am concerned, however, with the singularly political effect of those events that explicitly situate themselves outside of what they perceive to be the established, official or institutional discourse of aesthetic legitimation by using the private home as a public space. These public events, held in private homes, challenge established patterns of aesthetic representation, and operate in ways that are either not allowed, reluctantly tolerated, or without any kind of value producing clout. It could be argued that, in the tradition of salons dating back to 17th-century France, there is certainly a social and cultural capital being cultivated in these gatherings, and which in this case acquires political prestige in some circles. But it should also be clear that the events are not organized along models that purport to be lucrative or politically expedient. The social significance of these approaches to cultural space is largely derived from

their setting, that is, from the importance of the private home in the social imaginary of the Revolution vis-à-vis the latter's attempts to insinuate itself in the home (and whose history is the subject of later sections in this chapter).[9] These examples are particularly relevant to the function of art in post-socialist contexts, where the opening of a cultural market is misperceived as the arrival of the liberal notions of aesthetic freedom that very quickly are revealed as anything but. By the same token, these actors are engaging a question of global relevance: In the world market of cultural exchange, are there any spaces left from which art can contest political power? How does the cultural field reproduce or is sustained by power structures that belie its newly proclaimed autonomy?

Another question raised by these examples is whether we can still talk about these phenomena as part of an underground scene. Underground subcultures, whether by choice or by necessity, are by definition off the grid; they are shrouded in mystery, or the perception thereof, and maintain a limited circle of initiates that enjoy the privileges of membership. But this scene becomes more organized from the 1990s onward, suggesting that the political function and profile of this underground has changed: it has been made *public* as a standing invitation to all, yet is kept from the street as much as possible by the gatekeepers of the (official) grid and by the structural design of the cultural field. Other recurrent characteristics include the description of events as intentional forms of self-exclusion from institutional and official circles of culture, and the use of alternative media to publicize these events (hyperlinking in blogs and websites, twitter, email lists, artisanal posters and fliers, sms messages, and word of mouth), and to maintain and expand their impact beyond the spatio-temporal confines of the home-event. Nonetheless, the home's twin function as a site of alternative gathering has no *real* place in the established allocation of city spaces. Therefore, if turn-of-the-century Havana can be read as a museum of

sorts—as critics, architects, and artists have tended to read the city's relationship to symbolic time—then these spaces constitute a special kind of intervention in social space; the entire home functions as an *installation* in the city grid. This would be a way to read Alexandre Arrechea 1994 installation in Aglutinador, "Dos nuevos espacios," a dollhouse replica of the Aglutinador house that showed the subdivisions in the home that allowed it to function on one side as a gallery and on the other as living quarters.

If the medium of installations is space itself, and if installations are effective insofar as they *install* objects and subjects in new relationships among themselves, *what* do these scenes *install*?[10] That is, what and who do they reposition and with respect to what? These spaces convene the works exhibited, but they also act upon the subjects who produce them, as well as upon those who attend the gathering: by asking the spectators to be participants of a potentially risky enterprise from the standpoint of politics, all participants are provisionally activated as both political and cultural actors, whereby a concept of participatory art compromises all involved as political actors as well. Their intervention, therefore, is not merely symbolic, since it challenges the rules of visibility and of value production of the wider context in which it appears. Their logic resembles what Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel have united under the concept of 'public assemblies' in *Making Things Public,* because these gatherings explore vernacular notions of the democratic outside of the field of politics narrowly-conceived, and attribute to aesthetic space a calculated civic function.

These sites are the flipside of what Cuban-American artist and academic Coco Fusco has tried to capture in her 2012 work "La plaza vacía." A video installation that offers long takes of a mostly desolate Plaza de la Revolución, "La plaza vacía" meditates on the square's present and its past as the main historical place for political mass gatherings after the Revolution. Most

significantly, Fusco's masterful editing is accompanied by a text narrated by 'dissident' blogger Yoani Sánchez. The emptied, abandoned spaces of a lost utopia are eerily territorialized by the most popular(ized) new voice of alternative Cuba, whose own path to public visibility has been paved with vicissitudes and whose home also functions as a meeting place for bloggers and activists.[11]

My objective here is not to romanticize voices of dissent or to recuperate fringe spaces of symbolic resistance. It is, rather, to map the reticular network of local scenes of gathering that, as Jürgen Habermas has shown, are the constituting embodiments of the abstract concept of public sphere. These spaces of assembly, therefore, *install* themselves in the public sphere by linking the idea of an informal or 'kitchen culture' to political engagement; and by producing a body of documentation, criticism, and publicity on their own, they publicly mobilize a private subject's cultural resources:

> …simple and episodic encounters can be expanded and rendered more permanent in an abstract form for a larger public of present persons. …These public spheres still cling to the concrete locales where an audience is physically gathered. The more they detach themselves from the public's physical presence and extend to the virtual presence of scattered readers, listeners, or viewers linked by public media, the clearer becomes the abstraction that enters when the spatial structure of simple interactions is expanded into a public sphere. (Habermas 1996: 361)

There is a possible contradiction in arguing, as I have done, that these spaces could be read both as non-places and as local sites of the public sphere at once. That is their oddity: They are not (just) pop up galleries; above all, they are *pop-up public spheres*, where the act of making public the private transgressions of a cultural agent becomes a political gesture, and where the space of the installations is extended and lives indefinitely—even after the exhibit/party is over—in the virtual hubs that promote, document, and comment on the happenings.

In the introductory essay of *Making Things Public,* Latour has proposed that we rethink

the spaces where the *res publica* has been traditionally thought to be housed: the agora, the parliamentary domes, the royal palace, that is, that we revisit the delimitation effects that the types of spaces for gathering *as* public for the purposes of political action/discussion have on our concept of politics. Latour asks that we question, for example, what kinds of assemblies the architecture of these sites facilitated, what visions of politics were they symptoms of, and when and how have political actors subverted the uses of these spaces. Latour's proposals are, in fact, meant to accompany an exhibit: "an assembly of assemblies" as well as of dissembling practices that seeks to ask:

> What would a truly contemporary style of assembly look alike? It's impossible to answer this question without gathering techniques of representation in different types of assemblies. The effect we wish to obtain is to show that parliaments are only a few of the machineries of representation among many others and not necessarily the most relevant or the best equipped….because if we are all politically-challenged, if there is no direct access to the general will, if no transparent dome gives any global visibility, if, at best, the blind lead the blind, then any small, even infinitesimal innovation in the practical ways of representing an issue will make a small -that is, huge- difference. (31)

These are common lines of inquiry with thinkers of the post-Soviet condition, as evidenced by Boris Groys's, Svetlana Boym's and Susan Buck Morss's interest in domestic hubs of politico-aesthetic assembly in the *Kommunalka* or as part of a wider underground scene of art—something we will address in the next section on the genealogy of socialist conceptualizations of space. Latour and Weibel's *Making Things Public* project, however, raises issues of contemporary global reach to which the analysis of these spaces can therefore contribute: The contemporary crisis of representation in modern democracies is hardly a local one, whether we are speaking in terms of political representation as a relation of institutions, actors and issues, or referring to its aesthetic dimension, that is, to the re-presentation of political demands, subjectivities, and power through cultural codes that mediate the politics of our lived realities.

Similarly, in looking at these phenomena in contemporary Cuba, I am interested in the idea of spectators turned actors, that is, on finding spaces that linked the public as the political subject concerned with something in common (the *res publica*) on one hand, and, on the other, the public as an audience, concerned with the ways in which something (an emotion, a story, an object, a subject) is being represented aesthetically. Looking at private homes as public assemblies sought to answer a fundamental line of inquiry in my current research: in which scenarios is the political play of contemporary Cuban discussions of democracy and culture being represented? Rather than reading these alternative spaces as yet another opportunity for symbolic conceptualization, where the social history of the revolutionary project or the cultural and spatial politics of the state can be simply read in the private space as a grand narrative writ small, I would argue that they can be understood as heterotopic spaces in the sense in which Henri Lefebvre articulates appropriated or counter-space in *The Production of Space:*

> An appropriated space resembles a work of art, which is not to say that it is in any sense an imitation work of art. Often such a space is a structure -a monument or building- but this is not always the case: a site, a square or a street may also be legitimately described as an appropriated space. Examples of appropriated spaces abound, but it is not always easy to decide in what respect, how, by whom and for whom they have been appropriated. (165)

In fact, without quoting either philosopher, Latour may be said to be negotiating a position between the recuperation of a more comprehensive, diverse, and aesthetically attuned concept of the Habermasian public sphere and a Lefebvrian understanding of heterotopic space. Latour's approach can be then understood as part of a growing trend that seeks to revisit and galvanize the work of Lefebvre on relational space (where space, like the commodity, is not a 'thing' but the expression of a social relation), after several decades of dominance of the field by either the semiotic (De Certeau) or the poststructuralist (Foucault) approaches. John Roberts (2006) provides an excellent account of those shifts and the background theoretical debates, but it is

David Harvey's *Rebel Cities* that highlights the avenues opened by that corpus:

> Lefebvre's concept of heterotopia (radically different from that of Foucault) delineates liminal social spaces of possibility where 'something different' is not only possible, but foundational for the defining of revolutionary projects. This 'something different' does not necessarily arise out of a conscious plan, but more simply out of what people do, feel, sense, and come to articulate as they seek meaning in their daily lives. Such practices create heterotopic spaces all over the place. We do not have to wait upon the grand revolution to constitute such spaces. (xvii)

Other points made by Harvey in *Rebel Cities* raise another question that would certainly problematize the singular focus of this chapter: why the city? Is my focus on these relatively elite actors—those with a certain cultural wealth, with access to the Internet above the median, located in the cultural center of the country—reproducing the kind of unfair invisibility the provinces have historically suffered with respect to Havana?[12]

I would speculate that the urban locus of these phenomena allows them to multiply and to gain notoriety more easily because Havana has been traditionally construed as the cultural and symbolic center of the national imagination and, simultaneously, as the site that unshapes—aesthetically and politically—the totality to which power aspires, so that permissibility has always been greater in the city than in the provinces. I will wager here that the city provides, architectonically and socially, more spaces with heterotopic potential, nodes and networks of exchange, and routes of escape and circumvention (the police has been known to pick up activists on their way to events), and improvisation in the face of changes. It must also be recognized, however, that the privilege I have placed on Havana is partly the result of the logistical limitations of research, and that the provinces, their cities and their towns, still await their own story. (In the same way, a more historical and transnational comparative history of salon culture and their changing social functions is both necessary and impossible at this point.)

We must also account for the fact that informal, precarious scenes of creative youth with high cultural capital and low political or economic sway have also risen in other places, against what Angela McRobbie has described as "the impulse to privatize all aspects of the cultural sphere" and the ideological discourse of the creative industries. (n.pag.) In "Everyone is Creative" McRobbie notices a trend that involves culture and entrepreneurs in a new way:

> Self-employment is the mantra. Set up your own businesses, be free to do your own thing! Live and work like an artist!… this 'selling' of creative work (or a creative attitude to work) is particularly appealing to youth because the implied emphasis on uncovering talent feeds off young people's proximity to the fields where the space for creativity seems greatest: popular music, film, art, writing, acting, fashion, graphic design… (n. pag.)

In a world where, increasingly, public funding for culture and education are always already threatened, and where the words corporate and brand ubiquitously partner with the noun culture, a certain conception of the figure of the artist becomes an ideological model for youth. The romanticization of positive traits related to being autonomous, free floating, flexible, bohemian, and with high cultural capital, underpins and reinforces a labor market where underemployment and overextension, chronic displacement, and the precariousness of long-term employment, labor, and benefits, are reimagined and naturalized as the desirable and necessary conditions of possibility for a creative force (and lifestyle).

To be sure, the emphasis of the raulista reforms on the sole trader model (*cuentapropista*), however incomplete or imperfectly implemented, has certainly promoted a local version of these ideas as normalization of black market practices becomes integral to the new mixed-economy landscape. In addition, as Groys has argued, the representation of the social enemy in the popular imaginary is still monopolized by the political façade rather than by a sober account of the role of the global market in the perpetuation of those very same political structures:

> In the west the relation between culture and the marketplace has for decades stood in the center of critical reflections, both on the part of the intellectual as well as on that of the artist, and their theoretical and artistic activities have chiefly aimed at curbing the influence of the marketplace and establishing the primacy of politics. But in the communist east the marketplace had long ago been eliminated and the primacy of politics was pervasive. Thus for the east the marketplace represented utopia. As a result eastern intellectuals and artists placed their faith in a marketplace of a western character – even, and especially, if their discourse and works of art shared the same emancipatory impulses as those of their western counterparts. Whimsically put, radical intellectuals and artists in the west embraced Marxism, while those in the east became card-carrying Reaganites. ("The Post-Communist Condition" Project)

The desire for the (full) arrival of the market, obscured by the permanence of the political apparatus, can be said to be a general expectation in turn of the century Cuba, even though the relationship between artists, writers, and the market is a recurrent topic problematized in music, literature, and the visual arts. The coming capitalist openings are not viewed as constitutive elements of the citizens' current and future continued dispossession, but as their ultimate chance at redemption instead; an idiosyncratic neoliberalism is reframed as democratization, as economic opening. In the absence of a coordinated system of credits, investments, and raw materials, the new economic paradigm requires aspiring *cuentapropistas* to be extra-creative. After all, the ethos of survival of the Special Period was reinforced by a strong narrative of how creative and innovative Cubans were in coming up with ways to ride out or escape the crisis. (Hernández-Reguant) Was not this type of actor already latent in the attempts to commercialize Cuban culture, rehearsed in the late 80s and officialized in 1994 in the arts too, by allowing writers and artists to sell their work and collect royalties without the direct involvement of a state institution as intermediary (but without the possibility of forming their own associations, unions or guilds)? This model extended to the artisanal fairs, the street bookshops in Old Havana, the first *cuentapropistas*, and more recently the range of new arts, trades, and crafts sanctioned by the economic reforms to be pursued independently. In the post-socialist economy, self-employed

entrepreneurs and independent artists become a single class of 'creative' sole-traders without any other juridical or social protection as a group; in the aftermath of the Communist Party's VI Congress (2011), the Cuban state continues to push measures of fiscal austerity and discipline (very much in line with global neoliberal discourse) without breaking apart the monopolies that make it a *de facto* (and rather inefficient) governing corporation.[13]

Studying similar trends to the ones sketched by McRobbie, Marion von Osten has also mapped in Germany alternative art collectives, work centers involved in cultural production, and interdisciplinary projects that could be understood as a response to the same threatening conditions she observes in Europe:

> El sujeto excepcional clásico, incluida su situación ocupacional precaria, ha adoptado en el actual discurso económico el papel de un actor económico….Por un lado, la creatividad aparece aquí como la variante democrática del genio: la capacidad le es dada a todo el mundo. Por otro lado, se exige de todo el mundo que desarrolle su potencial creativo…El artista [se convierte] en modelo para la autodescripción de la nueva fuerza de trabajo flexible…De este modo se forman subjetividades contingentes que corporeizan como experiencias individuales positivas las funciones fallidas del libre mercado; las privatizaciones y transformaciones estructurales del ámbito político, social y económico son tratadas como desafíos personales. (84-7)

For his part, Nestor García Canclini (2013) reaches the same conclusions following similar lines of inquiry in México. A global pattern emerges here: Culturally rich, but materially poor urban youth and young professionals —although still constituting an elite in terms of technology and cultural capital—are faced everywhere with the precarization of labor, the retreat of the state from public goods and services, and the disillusionment with traditional sites of political power and forms of participation. The way they, as cultural producers and consumers, respond to these conditions, both in their aesthetic choices, and with respect to the development of political debates, alternative networks of support, sociability, circulation, and dissemination, are therefore at the center of attempts to map the ideological and political uses of creativity as discourse.

The dangers of and limitations in lionizing these spaces as viable substitutions of public spaces for culture, rather than seeing them as symptoms of a complex and historically specific conjuncture, are clear: it could serve to perpetuate the collective suspicion of public space, etched in the political imaginary by memories of populist rhetoric and rigid social disciplines. These suspicions are picturesquely reflected, for example, in the popular names given to La Plaza de La Revolución (Revolution Square) and the Tribuna Anti-Imperialista (Anti-imperialist Stage, set up in front of the US consulate in Havana, and where a lot of performances and acts associated to the campaign "Battle of the Ideas" took place): 'The Eye of Sauron' and 'Mordor' respectively.[14] The illusion that private sphere could not only supplement but in fact substitute the variety of places for public assembly required for a functional cultural and social sphere could very well play into an ideological narrative of the private space as an acceptable proxy for public fora. A distinction worth repeating here is that these spaces are independent, and unofficial because they oppose or reject the support and aegis of public institutions due to the particularly and contingent authoritarian configuration of the Cuban state; they are nonetheless conceptually bound to an idea of public culture. That said, the site in which that scene has found refuge, the home, is also threatened to be negated as appropriated space if the state of affairs where independent self-enterprising citizens supplement the necessities of the public wherever the state is found wanting is simply accepted.

There is another specification I would like to make with regard to the distinctions I have used between unofficial or anti-official spaces on one hand, and official spaces on the other. While the term official has generally been used here to refer to spaces that are managed and funded by state institutions, there is a great range of variety when it comes to the degree of autonomy afforded to these places. Local Casas de Cultura have often hosted fringe and daring

cultural and political projects—perhaps one of the best examples is “el Patio de María” whose homey name prevailed over its official Casa de Cultura Comunitaria Roberto Branly—and there are locales such as the Casas del Joven Creador and “La madriguera” that, though answering to the Asociación Hermanos Saíz, enjoy a great deal of leeway when it comes to cultural programming. What tends to happen, however, is that they are ultimately subject to the kind of explicit, politically motivated, and nonnegotiable censorship that still prevails in many cultural institutions in Cuba. In these cases, one miscalculated program will quickly cause higher authorities to intervene: The initial meetings of Estado de Sats, for example, were held at the Casa Gaia, a semi-autonomous theater and performance space. However, first the presence of the performance group Omni-ZonaFranca, and later the open participation principle of their encounters, brought on the intervention of the cultural censors and eventually drove ‘Estado de Sats’ to meet at its organizer’s home instead.[15]

The opening story of Chris Kraus’s *Where Art Belongs* (2011), which recounts the rise and fall of the underground Los Angeles art collective Tiny Creatures, can be easily compared to some of the spaces I have described here: informal scenes where the boundaries between art, life, professionals, and amateurs, after all, still happen everywhere. But the institutionalized discourse against which they arise as counter-spaces is not the same, at least not in the surface. Kraus’s description of Tiny Creatures suggested that a reading of the Cuban scene might have to go beyond comparative studies with other post-Socialist cases in order to engage with a more general paradigm: urban global youth united under similar living conditions in the intersection of cultural capital, new media technologies, and capitalist universality. We would have to look then at cultural symptoms and aesthetic representations in the face of the normalization of precarious labor and the disappearance of the welfare state that Canclini in México, von Osten in Germany,

Kraus in the States, and Angela McRobbie in England have already mapped in their work. The demons of their Cuban counterparts would seem to suggest that Cuba is, rather than a (post-) Socialist exception, part and parcel of the same universality of capitalist privatization, with a significant difference. The aesthetic language of these actors engages specifically the contradictory history of the revolutionary cultural politics, and is still able to both interpellate political society directly, and to elicit the equally direct response of the state apparatus. The conceptual and historical links between unsanctioned and at times actively policed cultural practices on one hand and more or less organized cultural initiatives on the other (Paideia, Diáspora(s)), incursions into public spaces by visual artists and performance groups like Arte Calle, Grupo Profesional, Arte y Derecho first, and Omni-ZonaFranca in the contemporary scene, private exhibit spaces open to a wider public like Aglutinador, Xoho, el Círculo, independent home libraries) must be understood as part of a single field of meaning where the political, in its narrow sense, remains at stake in aesthetic experience. It is not incidental either that the development of these singular initiatives articulated around named collectives took shape in a context of multiplication of new 'urban tribes' (Rojas) and subcultures—frikis, mikis, repas, emos, skaters—and of diversification and development of the culture black market and myriad trade crafts: artisanal wares, antique book dealers, video and game rental banks, music traders, and foreign language teachers (at the height of the turn of the century tourism investment fever, never was there an entire city more invested in learning English, French, or Italian).

In this context, still unfolding, I seek to explain how contemporary, post-Special Period social actors understand differently the political and aesthetic potentials of the private home, and how, consequentially, they might reappropriate urban space for practices that attempt to resist both of its dominant forces: the residual orthodoxies of the bureaucratic apparatus, and the rapid

commercialization of popular culture for a foreign audience, which as I have suggested are two mutually reinforcing aspects of the same, post-Cold War, political order. Via the political mobilization of the home as the center of an informal, clandestine cultural scene, the cases profiled here tie precisely two aspects of cultural production: culture as a daily praxis in the private sphere, and participation (of a particular kind) in a system of organized aesthetic value. In the historical overview that follows, I will show that their historical debts to politically transgressive forms of private cultural consumption in the home, and the centrality of culture to the political project of the revolutionary state, are precisely the two elements that invest with disproportionate significance (and personal risks) practices that would be politically innocuous elsewhere.

II. Socialist and post-Socialist spaces in Havana

The transformative hand of the Cuban Revolution left the architectural grid of Havana mostly untouched. Former sites of Republican power were refurbished as emblems of a new era—headquarters of the ousted order like the Columbia base (now Ciudad Escolar Libertad), the Capitol, and the Presidential Palace were turned into museums, schools, and cultural centers. New constructions, however, were often erected either in the outskirts of the capital or in the provinces, such as the 1970s microbrigades project of Alamar, East of Havana, and the infamous boarding schools Institutos Pre-Universitarios en el Campo (IPUECs) and Escuelas Secundarias Básicas en el Campo (ESBECs) of the 1970s. The Revolution channeled its energy toward urbanizing rural areas; the capital, instead, was not the target of physical, cosmetic changes as much as the symbolic center of a campaign to clean the country of the seedy and immoral behaviors associated with foreign capital's excesses and their exuberant nightlives.[16] A reading

of contemporary cultural practices in urban interiors of Havana will require a historical overview of the politics of space that takes into account these particularities.

It could be argued that the relatively successful consensus building of the early revolutionary years made the institutionalization of the new ascetic morale relatively easier in public spaces and with respect to large-scale projects. But the resemantization of space brought on by the Revolution would also redraw the hitherto understood limits between the public and the private, and therefore, the range of the jurisdiction of the revolutionary state regarding behavioral permissibility across those limits. Is there, in this sense, a more highly contested site of social meaning, a more ubiquitous monument to the material histories of the collectivist past and its transition narratives than the private sphere housed in the home and conceived as the last, and arguably the definitive, frontier to be conquered in the ideological wars of the 20th century? In her analysis of early Soviet domestic space, Buck-Morss reminds us that "'Good' was defined as the other of the other (that is, as what the enemy rejected), entwining them in a dialectical death embrace that ensured neither side would escape the binaries of the discursive frame that contained them both" (191-2). Describing the origins of a certain "war against domesticity," Buck-Morss provides conclusive evidence to the claims that "If the bedrock of capitalism was private property, which in domestic life meant the private home, then socialism would need to be 'anti-home.' That was indeed the policy of early Bolshevism. Domestic coziness was viewed as an enemy" (192). If really existing capitalism and socialism were in fact not that different in terms of the organization of capitalist production as far as the organization of labor power was concerned, and, in addition, the two powers competed as rival imperialists in their geopolitical projections, it is *mostly* in the realm of daily life where their differences—ideological, material, institutional—were experienced.[17] Boym and Groys have also argued in the Soviet context that

the private home has been as much a fundamental site of political encroachment as it has been a place where 'strategic' and 'tactical' responses to competing ideological excesses have been rehearsed. (Boym leans more heavily on the recuperation of an affective dimension of microresistence that builds upon the language of semiotic indiscipline characteristic of de Certeau's approach to the everyday.)

However, unlike other countries that experimented with collectivist ideologies and 'actually existing socialisms' the private home and the intimate spheres were not, *comparatively*, as heavily demonized and actively policed in Cuba as they were in the former Soviet Union.[18] In fact, in terms of construction and planning, scholars Rosendo Mesías-González, Patricio del Real and Joseph Scarpaci, and Jill Hamberg, to name a few, have noted the grassroots and semi-autonomous character of many housing initiatives in Cuban cities throughout the Revolution. In addition to the predominantly unsanctioned building taken up by private individuals who have increasingly relied on the black market or their respective social networks for their housing needs, a strong component of self-management was involved even in those projects which originated in central state directives, such as the program Esfuerzo Propio y Ayuda Mutua (1960), the creation of the microbrigadas in 1970 (where workers participated in job-related programs to build their own homes), and the multiple other community development projects, like the Talleres de Transformación Integral de Barrio (1988), that have existed at the local level. Many of these scholarly accounts also point out that, however, a combination of bureaucratic inefficiency in material support for these projects, technical and managerial deficiencies, ideological dogmatism, worsened scarcity of materials and information, and the corruption that these factors necessarily engender, have severely obstructed and even impeded the effective completion of most of these enterprises. Architect and professor Mario Coyula, in the

particularly disgruntled essay "The Bitter Trinquennium and the Dystopian City: Autopsy of a Utopia", criticizes the long-term effects of the governments ongoing policy of 'ruralization of the city and urbanization of the countryside,' as well as the results of what he perceives has been a systematic undermining the architectural profession by the Cuban government:

> A combination of anonymous egalitarianism, technocratic bureaucracy, and dogmatism in people who deemed themselves to be repositories of absolute truth imposed rigid models copied form other climatic and cultural contexts, undermined the authority and image of the architect as creator, and killed conceptual and formal experimentation. A few special works, promoted by very-high level authorities, rose above that amorphous mass, but they had little weight in the image of the city because of their inaccessibility, due in part to subjects and users who were also *special*. (37)

The first housing reform law (Ley de Reforma Urbana, 1960) eliminated speculative rent by creating low or no rent properties that the government lent in semi-permanent basis to occupants; the second law in 1984 granted further legal adjustments to properties occupied without formal claims (for example, in cases of death, emigration, constructions, and subdivisions).[19] In revolutionary Cuba, housing reform was deemed a top national priority early on, but pragmatic and logistic factors seem to have discouraged experiments in the fashion of the Soviet *Kommunalka*. As Coyula notes,

> The General Housing Law of 1984 turned 85 percent of the population into homeowners, a radical change considering that in 1958 three-fourths of habaneros paid rent, sometimes up to half of their income. The law kept people in the places where they already lived, paradoxically limiting the mobility that is always necessary to adjust to changes in the makeup of the family nuclei naturally produced over time and to changes in the possibilities and expectations of the residents. (40)

These particularities caused their own set of problems and the generalized housing crisis has placed upon the home symbolic and real values of epic proportions. As the subject of Juan Carlos Tabío's 1984 *Se permuta,* for example, it takes the film to set up stories of complicated loves and obsessive ambitions of mobility amid a byzantine scheme plotted by one of the main

characters, involving the simultaneous and coordinated house-swapping of more than five families so that each gets what they want or need. And more than a decade later, *Amor vertical* (1997), a film faithful to the narrative of the 90s crisis, depicts in no exaggerated if colorfully reimagined terms the tribulations of a suicidal architect student and her male nurse to find a suitable space for their sexual encounters.[20]

As evidenced by the two major housing laws of 1960 and 1984, revolutionary housing policies were not collectivist nor socialist in content; they retained the bourgeois notion of the home property owner, even if they were part of central planning designs to deal with an inherited and still today unresolved housing crisis. But, insofar as property ownership and the benefits of housing were subsequently understood by the state and communicated to the people as a political gift of sorts, the home as a physical site would not retain, in public discourse, its corresponding, classic bourgeois character as the vessel of interiority vis-à-vis the social. In the imaginary of this collective paternal 'gift,' housing (together with the other often-eulogized revolutionary triumphs: education, health, culture, sports) was meant to operate as a conditional reward in an affective economy; housing redistribution, its norms of occupancy, and the activities it sheltered were subject to official scrutiny.

To be sure, these tensions between existing psychosocial attitudes and the spatial discourses brought about by revolutionary institutions were not necessarily expressed in narrowly political terms. The central concern of Sara Gómez's daring film *De cierta manera* (the first long-feature film by a woman in Cuba), for instance, pushes the revolutionary narrative of moral asceticism and revolutionary militancy to confront ongoing social challenges along notions of class, gender, and race from angles that were seldom part of the 1960s postcards and not often brought up other than in triumphalist claims of achievement. The film, completed and

released by Tomás Gutiérrez Alea and Julio García Espinosa in 1977 after Sara Gómez's death, seeks to answer how the transformation of poor slums in the outskirts of Havana into better housing units, which were never fully finished and lacked many basic services a decade after construction began, had impacted the social attitudes of its inhabitants, and to find out why, in many cases, the 'moral conversion' to model revolutionaries expected of the beneficiaries had not crystalized. Part fiction love story, part social documentary, part ethnographic study, *De cierta manera,* like no other work of that period, explored and exposed the national drama resulting from the missed encounters of its three constitutive elements: the programs for the physical transformation of the city, the revolutionary anxiety around the construction of its 'new subject,' and the way aesthetic forms intervened politically in the representation of contested topics to a wider public.

More often than not, however, spatial contradictions did take on political overtones in the narrow sense of the word: in a city peppered by reminders that "La calle es de Fidel" [The streets belong to Fidel][21] the home could be thought of as an extension of the street, and the street, coextensive with the nation, was often the terrain in which the ideological wars between 'revolutionaries' and 'counterrevolutionaries' unfolded in the minutiae of the everyday. As such, the new mass organizations—most notably the Comités de Defensa de la Revolución (CDR) in 1960—were designed to intervene in the home and even more in the private sphere, in relation to sexual orientation, political opinions, and cultural consumption habits, for example. Fidel Castro's discourse of September 28th of 1960 describes how these neighborhood committees would enforce (and very often end up abusing) both actual laws and tacit norms associated to the revolutionary order:

> vamos a implantar… un sistema de vigilancia colectiva revolucionaria que todo el mundo sepa (sic) quién vive en la manzana, qué hace el que vive en la manzana y

> qué relaciones tuvo con la tiranía; y a qué se dedica; con quién se junta; en qué actividades anda.[22]

Coded in the new cultural imaginary of the Revolution, such interventions in the private sphere have also included neighborhood surveillance and mandatory neighborhood watches ("la guardia pioneril" or the "pioneers' watch" started in elementary school), job and school based mobilizations both to city squares and to targeted flash mob events ("mítines de repudio"), home inspections and censuses, and coerced 'volunteer' work. (fig. 12)

These daily rituals of accountability to the fatherland-the people-the state as a single protective and patriarchal entity, while not always perceivably ominous and often taken up with dutiful delight, did involve a kind of repetitive training in the arts of quotidian compliance that disciplined the body politic from an early age. As routines of social discipline, these practices drew Cuba closer to an ideological framework that shared features with the one described above by Buck-Morss, where the home was conceived as a suspicious shelter of bourgeois improprieties, a potential incubator of counterrevolutionary intrigue. Along with the mobilization of a cultural imaginary of revolutionary spatial critique, these interventions would transform the concept of lived space—both public and private—articulated as they were as part of the Revolution's total program of national renewal; and they would do so especially in Havana, despite (or precisely because of?) the absence of major architectural revolutionary projects in the country's biggest urban center.[23] Moreover, the hegemony-building of the new government after 1959 was heavily supported by other forms of spatial investment: the cultural infrastructure for a distinctly revolutionary cultural capital described in the last chapter—new schools, programs, and spaces for the arts, theaters with affordable programming, local Casas de Cultura, etc.—constituted wagers for the creation and maintenance of the cultural relevance of the revolutionary project and its institutions.

If we can insist on cultural representations of living space as starting points for a diachronic approach to spatial practices, then Cuban film offers a lush repertoire of supporting images: its penchant for *costumbrista* aesthetics, its institutional and symbolic links with the revolutionary process, its domestic popularity, and its dominant position in the cultural field, have rendered cinematic space a necessary reference that both registered and informed collective understandings of living space. To look at the cinematic codification of interiors in action, we could recall two scenes of Gutiérrez Alea's classic *Memorias del subdesarrollo* (1968). In an early take, when Sergio returns from the airport after saying goodbye to his family, we are offered a long eye-line matched shot that squares the spectator's gaze with Sergio's as he takes inventory of the decor in his fashionable but empty modern apartment, located in El Vedado's trendy Edificio Naroca.[24] The metonymic function of Sergio's apartment with respect to his inner psyche can hardly be underestimated within the narrative of the film: it is from one of its windows, through the telescope, that Sergio begins to analyze critically the promises and the ongoing changes of the new order, and juxtapose them with the phantasmagoric, severed past which lingers in the wake of his family's departure to the United States. This spectral presence is highlighted in the film by family photographs, music records, art, the marital furniture, or his wife's dresses, showcased in the careful composition of the different scenes that take place inside Sergio's flat. The space of the private home allows these Proustian objects to be interwoven with the narrative of the manuscript he is writing, and which feeds his voice-over. Also within those walls will Sergio's foibles take place—the puerile sexual fantasies with his religiously fanatic cleaning woman, the lustful but emotionally detached affair with the underage and emotionally immature Elena, the self-absorbed reminiscing about his broken bourgeois past, the final scenes of his unraveling purposelessness.

In a later scene, the questions asked by the newly created Urban Reform (Reforma Urbana) representatives who visit him in his apartment, and their general demeanor, are more explicit reenactments still of the spatial reformulation demanded by revolutionary taxonomies characteristic of that decade: "Are you the proprietary? Where does your income come from? How many people in the family nucleus? What kind of construction is this, how many square meters and rooms does it have?" asks the male Urban Reform surveyor while the female functionary looks with resentful discomfort at the apartment, at the art hanging from its walls, at the lush solitude of Sergio's modishly Europhile flat. (fig. 13) Everything he stands for in the mind of the lampooned archetype she embodies—a begrudging civil servant with newfound power—transpires in her facial expressions. Her poorly disguised disdain builds up with each of his politically inadequate answers: unemployed, lives off rent from other properties, propertied owner, alone, too many square meters per person in a solidly constructed, centrally-located apartment.

The politicized anxiety about the permeability of spatial boundaries between the public and the private also serves as a very effective premise in in *Los sobrevivientes* (1979), another Gutiérrez Alea film, co-written with Antonio Benítez Rojo and loosely based on one of the latter's early short stories "Estatuas sepultadas" (*Tute de reyes* 1967). Here, the images of the propertied family home as the epitome of aristocratic-bourgeois decadence, of ideologically suspect glut, return even more forcefully. In the film, the well-to-do and numerous Orozco family, organized around a prominent patriarch, closes the doors of its multi-acre mansion to the changes taking place beyond its walls, that is, to the triumph of the Revolution and to the institutionalization of its new government. By closing itself to change, the family rejects social evolution, conceived as the ideological and material progress promised by the Revolution's

wager as an alternative modernity. Through a series of unfortunate events, the family and its estate begin to regress, stage by stage, in history. Both the mental states of the dwindling family members and their material surroundings (the house, its gardens, the clothes, the food, the toilette) portray a passage through historical stages in reverse.

Surely, to denounce the ills of the old republican past and to highlight the positive emphasis on revolutionary social progress was pro forma for much of the aesthetic language of the 1960s and 1970s, which engaged a national aesthetic of socialist realism (even when done with a touch of irony).[25] The release date, 1979, when such caricatures of the old social forms as a tool of national consciousness building were no longer a formal priority, would tilt the balance toward reading against the grain, that is, more as a historical and psychosocial thought experiment than as a specific diatribe against the bourgeois decadence that had been left behind. Moreover, as is often the case with Gutiérrez Alea's filmic language, the subtle ambiguity of the scenes mocking the blindness of the upper classes can be easily read as an indirect commentary on the excesses of any ideological orthodoxy.[26] In that sense, it is possible to reject a reading of *Los sobrevivientes* in the spirit of the socialist realism codes which it only appears to be quoting—the classic trope of showing the contrast between the negative bourgeois past and the positive revolutionary present. Rather, it allows for the mansion to be read as an allegory of the nation, anticipating the discourse about moral and architectural ruin that would take root in the wake of the Cold War. The wall of the mansion and the Iron Curtain can then be read as semiotic doubles, while the question as to which side of the divide is depicted in the film—in essence, not in semblance—becomes a moot distinction. Read along these lines, as we will see in the last section, *Los sobrevivientes* would foreground the cultural discourse of the 1990s in more ways than one.

The censorship that accompanied the gradual sovietization of all spheres of public life in Cuba between the late 60s and the early 70s spurred the private sphere into supplementing the artificial scarcity created by domestic censorship and geopolitical isolation. The private home has, therefore, historically hosted social spaces either legally or de facto proscribed from the street. Discovered by independent journalist Jorge Luis García Vázquez in the declassified Stasi archives, and commented by Antonio José Ponte (mostly because of the presence of Lezama Lima as a named case of active surveillance), the language of a recently unveiled catalogue of what appears to have been an exhibition of ideologically objectionable examples sent in the early 1970s by Cuban intelligence to their German counterparts corroborates the more anecdotal and spotty accounts of the era's level of micromanagement of the private sphere.[27] The introduction of the pamphlet explains how the work of 'diversionismo ideológico' [roughly ideological divestment] by foreign counterrevolutionary forces "has been particularly intense and subtle in the terrain of culture." (3) While the specific mention of the *causes célèbres* of intellectual and literary censorship has naturally been the focus of attention (Ediciones El Puente, the journal *Pensamiento Crítico*, Heberto Padilla, and Lezama Lima, among others), it is the preoccupation with the entirety of cultural practices and media, the comprehensive understanding of the cultural realm in which social meaning is produced and reproduced that jumps out of the pamphlet:

> Room B: You are listening to a recording of the program 'El show de la nueva ola', broadcasted in 1968 by 'Radio América' and with two stateless announcers [apátridas]. This program fostered the creation of youth groups with extravagant names and symbols…. Foreign magazines and materials with erotic content that try to penetrate our territory through different routes…. Influenced by external propaganda, antisocial youth groups had their heyday in Havana in 1968. In the last few months, a resurgence of this activity has been detected. The exhibit shows, necklaces and other objects for personal use, blackjacks and other garments used by these youth in their activities….
> Room C: …"Family or friendly" correspondence is another resource for the dissemination of 'diversionismo' with the remittance of clippings from the foreign press, photos, and consumer goods. (9-10, 15)

Responding to religious, ideological, biological, or aesthetic demands that have had to be satisfied in private, be that as a result of legal restrictions, social pressures, exaggerated feelings of persecution, or simple scarcity, the home has served as a surrogate meeting place for various alternative social and cultural practices. It is in the house where labyrinthine constructions maximized scarce space in multi-family homes with minimal and inventive resources. During high points of revolutionary fervor it was also in the private home where music, books, letters, and films smuggled from abroad were enjoyed among friends and family.

The treatment of spatial divides in the now classic *Fresa y Chocolate* —Diego's home replete with art, books, music, collectibles, and photos contrasting with David's street adorned with political murals, school pioneers, and official signs—is also organized according to these cultural and ideological dispositions (in addition to gendered ones). In fact, in their very first meeting, Diego tries to lure David to his home with the promise of hard-to-find books: "Te interesa Vargas Llosa?...en casa tengo otros ejemplares. Además tengo a Severo Sarduy y a Goytisolo completos, ¿vamos a buscarlos?...Aprovecha niño ¿dónde vas a encontrar esos libros?" (David then conspicuously flashes his party credentials.) Directors Gutiérrez Alea and Tabío inevitably retreat to the same routine binary to produce dramatic tension: the stereotypical uncultured doctrinaire and the marginalized intellectual. In this sense, the film obviously exploits commonplace assumptions about cultural habits and political positions, which are then minimally but significantly (within the narrative of the film) subverted in the course of Diego and David's unlikely friendship.

Mario Bellatin's 1993 story "Canon perpetuo" is also worth recalling here because it offers a fictionalized description of an all too typical house arrangement, and features a semi-clandestine intellectual soirée of the kind central to the cultural record that concerns us here.

(The story is told as a day in the life of a woman whose interactions with a deeply unstable setting unfold her psychological unhinging.[28]) The protagonist's name, Nuestra Mujer [en la Habana], together with the text's spatial markers, suggest at the very least an elliptical play with an estranged Havana as the setting of the narrative:

> Llegó al hogar de la amiga del trabajo precisamente cuando el poeta foráneo llevaba a cabo una de sus habituales tertulias, a las que había bautizado con el nombre de Paideia. El hogar era amplio, y todos los miembros de la familia de la amiga del trabajo tenían el mismo derecho a ocuparlo. Para evitar problemas lo habían dividido en partes estrictamente definidas. A la amiga del trabajo le había tocado el vestíbulo con el cuarto de los paraguas, más el salón principal y parte de la cocina. Los padres contaban con los dormitorios, el pasillo de distribución y la otra mitad de la cocina. Las hermanas gemelas eran dueñas del comedor, la despensa y las terrazas. Los maridos de las hermanas, quienes se habían divorciado hacía algún tiempo, vivían con sus nuevas esposas en el jardín y en la antigua área de la servidumbre. Si bien habían logrado una relativa armonía en la división de los espacios, no habían llegado a un acuerdo con respecto a los sonidos. Los televisores puestos a volumen alto, solían invadir con su mezcla de ruidos las Paideias que semanalmente organizaba aquel poeta. (33)

These tales of immobility and wacky improvisation seem all the more jarring in the twilight days of the Cuban Revolution. As Coyula has argued, they speak to how urban reform did not solve but often intensified the inherited housing crisis. The 'Paideias' organized by the foreign poet, moreover, will be reminiscent of the eponymous, short-lived group of writers and scholars formed in Havana in 1989. Against the lofty cultural models evoked by the group's neo-Hellenic moniker, Bellatin's vignette lodges their cultural activity in the middle of a housing nightmare—the literary readings are prosaically invaded by the sound of nearby television sets. The story softly mocks the supposed transgressing, autonomous liveliness expected of the literary soiree, an image evoked by their (real) texts and self-produced history in any case: during the gatherings, the comings and goings of the foreign poet to carry out dubious transactions in the threshold of the home threaten the literary rendezvous with dissolution. The scene dramatizes both organized and non-organized really existing practices that in one way or another were

defined by their relationship with revolutionary space and with the home:

> Con su ausencia, los ánimos en la *Paideia* decaían hasta producir un silencio casi total. Los poetas se dedicaban a mirarse unos a otros con disimulo. Sin la protección del extranjero seguramente temían la aparición de algún peligro. (345)

The comings and goings of the poet, Nuestra Mujer observes, reveals in turn the importune interruption of the literary discussions by what appears to be the small-scale traffic of various foreign items in which the foreign poet is involved: pants, sunglasses, electronics, Coca Cola, hair accessories. This emplotment of the arrival of the market cleverly reframes the foreign element (which is a recurring dispositif in the narrative structure of the story) in a deeply ambiguous position: it both protects or makes the gathering possible as a space, but it also taints the Paideia's sanctity, divesting it of any claim to authenticity and thwarting any possibilities for its success as a genuine intellectual dialogue.

Any genealogy of the cultural and political interventions on public and symbolic space that grappled with the limits and the negotiation of autonomy must include the really existing inspiration for Bellatin's fictional Paideias. Among Paideia's merits was the attempt to intervene in the unproductive distribution of symbolic and public space along politicized binaries in culture, calling for "la superación de la falsa disyuntiva *oficialidad-marginalidad* en el campo de la cultura. Para ello postulamos y aspiramos a promover la idea de la diversidad metodológica junto a la de la unidad programática y de la libre asociación a la par—y no en oposición—que la institucionalizada, de modo que la diferencia no sea interpretada como disidencia, ni la discrepancia—como segregación, ni la alternatividad coexistente—como *marginalidad* antagónica" (5). One of their proposals, for example, was that Paideia receive the support of the institutions and spaces of the Ministry of Culture for workshops, research, conferences, exhibits, programming, etc. (including airplay and promotion on mass media) but on condition of absolute

academic and aesthetic freedom. At a critical conjuncture, Paideia, too, return to and invoked the foundational tropes of Ancient Greek political thought we sketched at the beginning.[29] In fact, if one were to insist on the images that the political imaginary of the classical Greeks offered these Cuban letrados at the end of the 80s, the possibility of the reconstitution of the polis out of the renovation of culture would certainly be among the most important. In "Memorias de Paideia" Rafael Rojas remarks that "Paideia demandaba, pues, la recuperación del ideal griego de la cultura, cuyos valores democráticos eran primordiales, para formular, en términos lezamianos, 'otra manera de regir la ciudad': una política del espíritu." (n.pag.) Along these lines, I would call attention to the codification of spaces we have been describing, for the resulting symbolic capital of the home as a potential space for public convocation provides an imaginary associated with the private made public for with the purpose of subverting various spatial disciplines, and where the promise of a different city can first be adumbrated.

This is the sense in which the proposed name of Paideia's publication, Oikos, can be interpreted: "una publicación periódica que recogiere, desde una perspectiva crítica, las actividades de PAIDEIA y se pudiera constituir en espacio e instrumento de reflexión colectiva sobre la cultura…OIKOS, como emblema de nuestra vocación de construir, con PAIDEIA, una nueva *casa*..." (n.pag.) The following excerpt of one of Prats-Páez's poems from those same years can be read in a similar key,

> (…)
> He buscado la casa y he encontrado
> escuelas, guarderías, hospitales
> abarrotados por la revolución, elementales
> muros, hechos por manos elementales,
> elementales patios divididos
> entre los restos de la gramática. He buscado la casa
> y he encontrado
> oficinas, refugios, pedregales
> arrebatados por la revolución

entre rudos decretos, como salmos
desollados. He buscado la casa y he encontrado
ergástulas, polígonos, prisiones
como museos de sed
junto a las fuentes prohibidas.[30]
(…)

Founded by Rolando Prats-Páez (who would later organized the more politically oriented "Tercera opción" as well) and other intellectuals including Radamés Molina, Ernesto Hernández Busto, and Reina María Rodríguez, Paideia consisted of a group of writers, professors, artists who out of a series of informal readings, debates, and encounters came together to formulate in the cultural scene one of the first coherent group projects that sought cultural autonomy without antagonism vis-à-vis the state cultural institutions. Under the influence of rereadings of Gramsci, Jaeger, and the wave of postmoderns and poststructuralists making the rounds from hand to hand in these reading circles, the intellectuals around Paideia used adjectives like organic, horizontal, revolutionary, and democratic to propose cultural practices and dialogues that would help the cultural field renovate itself at such defining moment (Paideia was officially born in 1989). But caught in the crossroads of the Rectification era—between the artists and intellectuals' expectation of new possibilities and freedoms on one hand, and the collective disillusionment and political paranoia that already foreshadowed the nascent crisis on the other—Paideia was short-lived. In "Memorias de Paideia" Rafael Rojas has convincingly argued why Paideia's conceptualization of a parallel autonomy was rejected by the cultural authorities: at that moment, "la estrategia de despolitización de los intelectuales y de canonización de Lezama y *Orígenes*" that would characterize the Ministry under Abel Prieto and the end of a conception of culture as a revolutionary weapon had not yet taken place. (n.pag.) The Paideia project certainly deserves a more lengthy discussion because of the novelty of its proposals and for the rigor of their articulation, as much as for the impact it would have, not as a project in its own time, but on

those who belonged to it and on later cultural initiatives that followed on its steps. The weekly literary gatherings in the rooftop of poet Reina María Rodríguez's home—a space that could be described, in some sense, as the less political and more strictly literary successor of Paideia—constituted another well-known forum in the alternative cartography of cultural spaces, before moving to its current headquarters at the Instituto del Libro, now with the name "Torre de Letras" and with a publishing collection with the same name. (As in many other Latin American cities, rooftops, which tend to be accessible and of flat concrete, are important centers of social activity in Havana, especially among youth.)

Another notable example of initiatives from this earlier period that problematized the absence of public spaces for free assembly and for experimental cultural projects is Victor Varela's Teatro Obstáculo. Varela traces the 1985 beginnings of the group and of its legendary and scandalous work "La cuarta pared" to the living room of his home, and describes how the theater group had to negotiate with the Ministry of Culture for a performing space confronted with prohibitions to continue organizing spectacles at their private residence. ("La cuarta pared" was an experimental, open-ended and participatory work about a character that, after being discarded by 'the author' attempts to break the invisible wall that separates the fictional space of the theater from the spectators.) Victor Varela recounts their move from a home to a semi-official space open to the wider public:

> Con esta carta en mano la PNR me visitó y me advirtió que estaba prohibido hacer teatro en la casa. Hicimos caso omiso de tal prohibición y actuamos para Patrice Pavis, Irena Slavinska y Jaseslaw Ivanov. Al día siguiente la policía interrumpió el ensayo y me llevaron preso. Fue una estancia muy breve, no más de una hora, con el objeto de intimidarme, pero la noticia se corrió como la pólvora. Entonces apareció la tan anhelada Sede, antiguo taller de muñecos en los bajos de la logia masónica "Los hijos de la patria"…Por qué no nos aplastaron? Simplemente porque teníamos toda la moral. Lo hacíamos por amor al arte, no cobrábamos la entrada.[31]

Both organized initiatives like Paideia and Teatro Obstáculo, and the myriad anonymous representatives of a parallel or informal scene of culture were responding to the same paradoxical conjuncture: a horizon in which the revolutionary utopian currents of the socialization of art were still operative for cultural producers, but a context in which political society rejected and subdued the capacity and vocation of those aesthetic languages to overflow to the realms of the political and the social.

In the Cuba of the 1980s, despite the echoes of glasnost, it was still uncommon to hold an unofficial but organized event in one's home, much less to publicize it to a larger crowd beyond one's immediate circle of friends and colleagues (especially a gathering that could be, even remotely, politically misunderstood). First a meeting point for these concealed informal networks of cultural life, through the late 1980s and the decade of the 1990s the private home came to host a more organized, public, and *publicized* space that has persevered in parallel to the official, regimented public sphere, and that has been either explicitly anti-official or simply unofficial. Practices that, in the 60s and 70s, could get a person arrested, fired, or singled out, like playing rock music; wearing 'American' clothing; sharing ideologically objectionable writings and books, were subsequently organized into some of the intellectual salons, home galleries, and private libraries which we have profiled here, and which would receive different and alternating treatments of tolerance and persecution.

This point also concerns literary spaces and their study, because in many ways the idea for this chapter began as a way to map informal scenes of literary reception and reading through their changing dynamics from the Socialist to the post-Socialist paradigm. Looking at the eruption of digital literary magazines and online news outlets, alongside the explosion of the blog phenomenon, it seemed only natural to also ask what the connection was, if any, between

these new realms of writing and reading and earlier practices of samizdat and other concealed paths of cultural circulation. Even the books that have dealt at length with literary culture in revolutionary Cuba from a sociological perspective were stared in the face by a dark matter of practices that could not be quantitatively or even qualitatively historicized but whose impact in that very culture scholars were attempting to describe was enormous.[32] Ambrosio Fornet's *El libro en Cuba* (1994); Pamela Smorkaloff's *Readers and Writers in Cuba: A Social History of Print Culture, 1830-1990* (1997); Rafael Rojas's *El estante vacío: literatura y política en Cuba* (2009); and Par Kuwaraswami, Antoni Kapcia, and Meesha Nehru's *Literary Culture in Cuba: Revolution, Nation-Building and the Book* (2012); whatever their individual merits or blind spots, do not deal with issues of alternative reception, invisible circulation, and both the international and highly lucrative black market trade of vintage and antique books, and the informal trade among friends and acquaintances.[33] Rafael Rojas, for example, is right to point out the poor record of domestic publication of Cuban writers of the diaspora but is only partly fair in describing its effect on reading patterns.[34] What he calls 'the estante vacío' or the empty bookshelf, a metaphor of the uneven construction of the national literary canon, has been nonetheless partially filled with books that are read, brought in, traded, lent, and sold, though much less conspicuously than it would be were they available openly in libraries and bookstores. In fact, the very people who traveled on official cultural or educational missions brought many of these materials back, often returning with, and disseminating, otherwise scarce cultural goods, from French poststructuralist theory, to the latest films and novels, to Basque radical punk. Other times, these materials arrived in Cuba via official channels and were stored away and simply not shown to the general public but were still available to cultural agents who worked for the state institutions and moonlighted as disseminating agents as a result of their privileged access—this

is, for example, the case of Pedro Almodóvar's films before the 1990s, which had been sent by the director to Cuba but had been deemed inappropriate for exhibition by the Distribuidora Nacional ICAIC.

Besides the black market of antique books, there are at least three different levels of extra-official literary circulation: book loans and exchange among friends, book collectors or scholars with semi-organized trading or lending systems, and independent libraries. The latter label refers almost exclusively to the Movement of Independent Libraries, which began in 1998 and whose first library was "Félix Varela" in Las Tunas, a province in the Eastern region of Cuba. Humberto Colás and Berta Mexidor, the founders of "Félix Varela," are actors associated to a more traditional political opposition: they tried to form a political party, "Los Pinos Nuevos," in 1994 (Colás went to jail for a brief period and both eventually lost their jobs). Moreover, they would later be involved with other dissident and human rights groups, in reporting news to the Miami based *CubaNet* website, and in creating other libraries throughout the country. The *CubaNet* project was one of the first to report news on the Internet by Cubans living in Havana, including independent journalists (news that were dictated by phone before email), but because they depended on U.S. based intermediaries and because CubaNet is funded directly by the National Endowment for Democracy, among other (aesthetic and rhetorical) reasons, it was not as successful a project of citizen journalism as the alternative blogs have been.[35]

In any case, the Independent Library Movement was and still is strongly associated with a dissident movement whose members do not have the rhetorical tools to represent themselves publicly in the domestic sphere, was never exempt of internal strife, and often depended materially on U.S. funds—however meager—to develop their initiatives. Therefore, these actors

suffered a chronic crisis of credibility and lacked the kind of self-representation that many of the actors profiled elsewhere in this project have been able to achieve and maintain. Nonetheless, in an interview for cubaencuentro.com, Berta Mexidor explains that the material available in these libraries, the number of which reached the double digits and is impossible to determine today due to the political sensibility of the topic, was not related only to political topics. She itemizes a number of literary works characteristic of the libraries' catalogues and that is indicative of that mirror, supposedly absent corpus from the 'empty shelf': "Es una necesidad de los cubanos. Si esos libros que hoy están en las bibliotecas independientes, los de Reinaldo Arenas, Zoe Valdés, Guillermo Cabrera Infante, Carlos Alberto Montaner y otros estuvieran en las del Estado, no habría necesidad de crear alternativas" (n. pag.).[36] With the support of the Czech Embassy in Cuba, these independent libraries are also involved in the small-scale publication and distribution of literary works, as was the case with Orlando Luis Pardo Lazo's 2009 novel *Boring Home Utopics*, winner of the prize Novelas de Gaveta Kafka prize and named in homage to Guillermo Rosales's classic *Boarding Home* (another of the books that circulates in Cuba extra-officially). The latter competition is sponsored by the Czech Embassy in Cuba and by the Czech independent library Libri Prohibiti. Given yearly beginning in 2008, the call for works stipulates that,

> El ganador recibirá una retribución económica y la casa editorial FRA publicará su obra en español en una edición de 500 ejemplares. Los libros se distribuirán en Cuba a través de la red de bibliotecas independientes. El autor contará con 50 ejemplares para su uso personal y con una presentación del libro en República Checa y otros lugares.… El concurso fue creado para apoyar a los escritores que no pueden publicar en la Isla por no pertenecer a las organizaciones oficialistas dedicadas a la literatura, y guardan sus textos en una gaveta a la espera de una oportunidad para publicarlos.[37]

Cuban art critic and scholar Ernesto Menéndez-Conde has provided another example of the kind of semi-organized private libraries that, though never part of any movement, had an important

role in shaping the city's intellectual scene. I reproduce here a great deal of an email (which I requested in lieu of an interview) that describes the personal library of writer Jorge Ferrer in Havana, because it is an unusual chronicle of how these social literary networks actually operated:

> No creo que la biblioteca de Jorge Ferrer, en su apartamento de Línea y L, tuviera algún nombre. O al menos yo nunca le escuche hablar de nada semejante….Era, a no dudarlo, una biblioteca a la que tenían acceso sus amistades. Ferrer había establecido un principio muy simple. Él prestaba tres libros y a cambio recibía otros tres, igualmente en calidad de préstamo.…
> Se trataba de una biblioteca admirable, donde podían encontrarse volúmenes de pensadores post-estructuralistas franceses y en sentido general de filósofos -como Heidegger, a quien Ferrer leía con fascinación- que eran pseudo-prohibidos o distorsionadamente etiquetados como reaccionarios, "idealistas", burgueses o fascistas. El carácter clandestino, si pudiese decirse así, se debía sobre todo a los títulos, que en Cuba eran raramente promovidos por las instituciones culturales y de enseñanza. Allí tuve ocasión de leer textos de Foucault, Derrida, Bachelard y Panofsky. Libros que no era sencillo conseguir en las bibliotecas estatales, como tampoco era fácil encontrar a personas dispuestas a prestarlos.[38]

But this is only one of the examples that call into question sociological studies of literary culture that rely on traditional categories of classification for this particular context.

In a post titled "Bibliografía en flash" from the blog *Octavo Cerco*, which will be the subject of the next chapter, Claudia Cadelo documents the transformation of reading networks brought on by portable memories:

> …últimamente los mejores libros los recibo en digital… lo que hay en la calle es una bomba:
> -De la dictadura a la democracia y la Relevancia de Gandhi en el mundo moderno, ambos de Gene Sharp.
> -Rusia: Algo menos que democracia, Entrevista con Alexander Podrabinek.
> -No vivas en la mentira, de Alexander Solzhenitzn.
> -La salida del comunismo, de Jakub Karpinski.
> -El régimen, la oposición, "Solidaridad", de Marek Tarniewski.
> -La controversia de la purificación, de Petruska Sustrová.
> -El poder sin poder, de Václav Havel (del libro "Las Ideas Democráticas: Armas de la Libertad").
> -La Democracia como valor universal, de Amartya Sen.
> -Hazlo tú mismo.

-ABC de la democracia.
-El camino de Solidaridad.[39]

Art critic Mailyn Machado also locates contemporary independent audiovisual production in conversation with these liminal or extra-official spaces and their transformation in the digital age, both in terms of its aesthetic strategies, and with respect to the sites of reception, circulation, and thematic focus of audiovisual artworks: "La red alternativa cubana de hoy mezcla el boca a boca de las relaciones tradicionales con las recientes redes cibernéticas…Lo que circula de mano en mano y de ordenador en ordenador no sufre la mediación de la censura política ni del interés comercial" (39). The arrival of digital capabilities, with large storage, fast reproducibility, and hassle-free portability, and long-distance communication, has rendered some of those former circuits of exchange, precarious and social-network dependent, practically redundant, in the sense that it has become easier and less risky—for those with access to the technology—to participate in those networks. We must recognize that the virtualization of these circuits of exchange and consumption has therefore also become largely independent from the physical networks of sociability—of fraternity—upon which those practices previously relied to copy or reproduce the material. Alongside of what Machado calls a "trueque fraterno" [fraternal barter] of cultural and literary works, which simultaneously delocalizes and expands the public and the artistic community, coexists a much more widespread, inclusive, and profitable burgeoning market of pirated American TV series and mainstream commercial music—pirated by both the official TV that broadcasts reruns of American series and by the private consumers in search of the newest ones. The brief experiments of private makeshift 3D movie "theaters" at home, formally prohibited by the government in 2013—and before them parabolic antennas and international TV signal decoding boxes—show that the economic activities authorized to be pursued as part of the flexibilization and expansion of private enterprise do not tolerate the kind

of private leaps ahead of the government's capabilities that would abrogate two of the revolutionary state's most guarded, if never fully attained, missions: the introduction of new technologies and the dissemination and furnishing of culture and entertainment. In any case, these new if beleaguered virtual and commercial circuits would seem to put into question the need for and local impact of the recreation of public assemblies on which we focused at the beginning. But perhaps herein lies the significance of those public events held in private homes: first, by *installing* spaces of assembly at home they serve as reminders of the lack of public physical spaces in the city, and second, as heirs in the genealogy of spaces that have hosted both anti-official and unofficial cultures—that is, alternative networks of cultural production and circulation from those of the state and the market—public homes highlight the history of politicization of those conditions of informal circulation and reception.

This informal and often clandestine character of cultural consumption, reproduction, and dissemination in revolutionary Cuba has been marked by the ways in which improvisational ingenuity and personal social capital have intersected with the use of new technologies in a context of low technological penetration and highly polarizing ideologies. Cassette and videotape culture, for example, had to deal with the initial scarcity of players and recorders and of blank cassettes, and books were almost impossible to photocopy privately or at one's workplace, therefore relying more on trust, barter, and the closer social networks formed within particular subcultures around cultural goods.[40] Simultaneously, it was the state's own policy to overcome technological shortcomings by improvising technological solutions that were highly utopian if not always pragmatic. Smorkaloff's discussion of the *libros fusilados* mentioned in the previous chapter was an exceptionally successful example of this phenomenon in which the state legitimized a rogue practice of mass reproduction. We can add to this modus operandi the less

successful programs of teleteaching with TV and radios, or the Computing Centers for Youth. (Among its pilots and longest running programs was Educación Musical, a 30-minute program functioning since the late 1960s, early 1970s dedicated to musical appreciation—classical and national—broadcasted three times a week for use in the classroom, and meant to fulfill the musical training demanded by a lofty humanistic curriculum while compensating for the lack of knowledgeable teaching personnel.)

As we saw in the previous chapter and in this one, both official and unofficial cultures produced or at least imagined themselves as ushering in new cultural agents: this motley crew was made up of the now public intellectuals and the writers-cum-bureaucrats, the new art instructors ("not formed to become artists but to detect, guide, sensitize and stimulate artistic activities among the population"), the foreign cultural emissaries that embraced the Revolution as their own, the new artists from the rank and file, and the spectral, future incarnation of the cultural revolution: "Creemos que si el hombre del futuro ha de ser un hombre integral y pleno, en última instancia será también un intelectual en la medida en que sea dueño de las herramientas, de los instrumentos de la cultura y tenga acceso no sólo como testigo y espectador, sino también como protagonista en el campo de la cultura " (Otero 1971: 16). Less conspicuous and sometimes embodied in the same persons, there were also the myriad anonymous Diegos and Paideias, the travelers who functioned as 'book mules' or 'music mules,' the amateur collectors and the for-profit traders (sometimes these two coincided in the same person), the owners of the first reel-to-reel players (magnetófonos), betamax players, and projectors who lent their equipment or organized viewings and parties at private homes, and the amateur garage bands who have covered American music since the 1960s, like the now revived Los Kent.

These scenes in which both the official and unofficial cultures managed their cultural

capital by bloating the ideological power of culture, by recurring to unorthodox uses of technology, and by relying on new agents produced in those conjunctures, was not exempt of its oddities. The zealous cassette and videotape scenes were nurtured exponentially both by the arrival of the first Cubans in exile after President Carter's first lift of travel restrictions to Cuba in 1977, and by the increased travel of Cubans within the Soviet bloc. In fact, it was the arrival of the powerful Soviet radios—the famous and resilient 1973 Selena radios from Minsk, accompanied later by the Latvian models Siboney and Varadero made especially for export to Cuba by VEF—that allowed many Cubans along the northern litoral of the island to listen to any radio station from South Florida that broadcasted with over 100 000 Watts of Effective Radiated Power (ERP): radio stations of the 1980s and 90s that influenced local rock and rap scenes, for example, include the nationally syndicated and uber popular "Z-Rock" (1986-1996), WEDR 99.1 FM "99 Jamz," WIIS 107.1 FM "Island 107," and WEOW 92.5 FM, also known as "Wow 92."

Along similar lines, Boym, Buck Morss, and Groys have studied the development of a 'kitchen culture' in the Soviet context, as well as its foundational role in the Socialist and post-Socialist unofficial and underground art scenes. A comprehensive, periodized catalogue of the emergence in Cuba of the equivalent of what Boym and Buck-Morss refer to as a 'kitchen culture', and its subsequent organization into intellectual salons, private galleries, and independent libraries with more defined and self-aware identities has never been carried out. With the intention of contributing to the development of that project, I have ventured here a few working hypothesis that I hope will open avenues of further research.

Buck-Morss has demonstrated that within the lived realities of the private home—what was otherwise a highly ideologized symbolic space in the political imaginary of the Soviets—emerged practices of coping that, in many cases, developed into more active forms of resistance,

or at least were imagined as such by the subjects involved. Discussing the *Kom*munalka, and elaborating further Boym's anecdotal and autobiographical account of the same phenomenon in *Common Places,* Buck-Morss effectively maps the semiotic and functional transformation of the commons:

> This hellish arrangement had one advantage, however. The space was deideologized in the sense that the contradictions of the system were experienced there with no covering gloss. In the 1960s, when a counter-collective culture emerged in the Soviet Union based on a new intimacy among freely chosen friends, it became a 'kitchen culture,' reappropriating this space for citizen resistance. When unofficial art needed a place for exhibition, apartments became galleries for the viewing public. (199)

In *History Becomes Form*, Groys has also traced the birth of Moscow Conceptualism to the private showings and the informal scene forged by unofficial and then amateur artists that eventually flourished as the 1970s underground art scene. Their aesthetic discourse, argues Groys, anticipated in form the structural and ideological collapse of the utopian project of an alternative modernity while, simultaneously, taking its aesthetic precepts to its last and most radical final form.

However, the communal apartment (*Kommunalka*) was not an institution of Cuba's socialist order, though related forms of home life did take root in urban Havana. Abandoned mansions, whenever they did not become a state office or a school, or were confiscated as homes for officials and foreign dignitaries, did become multifamily homes or 'solares'. Whimsical subdivision of homes and inventive inward building certainly prevailed in the informal private sector to cope with the changing need of families. The microdistrict (*microraion*) model was emulated in many construction projects undertaken after the 1970s, and state boarding schools in rural zones were plagued by the many of the same vicissitudes. We should also take into account that what Buck-Morss coins as the Soviet 'war against domesticity,' or the negation of the

(capitalist) other, also had an affirmative double—that is, a war *for* domesticity—which pervaded public discourse about, and cultural representations of, domestic space: a struggle to conquer 'the hearts and minds' of the people. The structural privacy of one's home and the objects and routines that constituted it as a space—the radio, the TV, domestic labor, gender roles, family time, the susceptibility of childhood, gatherings among friends, personal possessions—were understood as the final frontiers of the revolutionary process. The loss of that privacy and the desire for its recuperation might have been more intense in the *Kommunalka* of the Soviets, but it was both the real and the symbolic process of redefining the home as non-private space (insofar as privacy was another bourgeois ideological crutch) under the Revolution that made it a battleground.

Naturally, the severe management of and restrictions upon other types of public spaces made whatever precarious privacy the home could still afford the only viable option for questionable meetings and practices. However, the singular forms those battles have adopted, that is, an understanding of the home as a politically effective space for cultural action must be accounted for. It seems increasingly implausible to ignore that a) the historical, interior spaces of transgressive cultural consumption, b) the heterogeneous rather than the homogeneous character of the revolutionary state's cultural politics, and c) the subsequent proliferation of illegal, informal, but organized and publicized spaces of alternative cultural life, are coterminous aspects of the same social formation.

In other words, the Cuban case can contribute to comparative studies of the post-Socialist condition by showing that the contingent architectonic constraints of these types of precarious communal spaces (*Kommunalka*) were not necessary nor determining preconditions, as Buck-Morss and Boym have hinted at in the Soviet case, for the development of a 'kitchen culture,'

nor for its subsequent reorganization into a full-fledged alternative scene. Instead, I would argue that these concerns are characteristic of late socialist culture because their specific form of articulation has its origins elsewhere: they show how the very first impulse of democratizing access to culture as a cardinal goal of the revolutionary promise begat both the fetishistic status of culture and the insubordination of the public. This is sustained in a kind of 'anti-establishment cultural wealth,' which is the double effect of the total politicization of culture by the revolutionary event on one hand, and of the citizens' rejection of its ideological paternalism, on the other. Both processes harbored intense fetishes around cultural goods and information that continue to operate in the post-Communist moment. This does not mean that space as a social category (Lefebvre) and as an experience eminently phenomenological (as has been theorized in the tradition of architectural phenomenology after Gaston Bachelard) are elements to be disregarded in shaping the cultural uses and the political meanings of the home. Quite the opposite, since it is precisely the redefinitions of the boundaries of that space, and the organized attempts to link the historical process of the revolution 'outside' to the activities and the objects that shaped subjectivity in the 'inside' which burdened the home as a narrowly politicized space to begin with.

III. Other critical approaches to Havana: Urban readings of the Special Period and beyond

In the first section we saw the politically charged link between unsanctioned cultural practices and the space of the home, and, to explain why it was the case, the second part reviewed in broad strokes the historical relationship between the revolutionary state, the politics of housing, and dwelling. Then I invoked the origins and cultural representations of those informal, parallel scenes of culture and their transformation into the 21st century to argue that a

political readings of the contemporary spaces profiled earlier has roots in earlier decades of the revolutionary period, both in institutional practices and in the citizens' responses to them. It only remains to provide the necessary overview of how other scholars have approached urban space in post-Socialist Havana and to situate this study in the scholarly critical dialogue.

If there is an irony in revisiting the above-cited film *Los sobrevivientes* with today's prevailing depictions of urban space in Cuba in mind, it resides in the recurrent portrayal of contemporary Cubans and their habitats as survivors of a long and subtle war of attrition against history itself. This ethos of survival is most legible in the overwhelming number of narratives from the 1990s onward structured around subjects who struggle to overcome challenges determined by their habitats, engendering patterns of representation where the landscape can be read as history made image and where the city—usually post-Cold War Havana—becomes the real protagonist. The weight of this particular view of Havana looms large on the narrative of most writers of turn of 21st century Cuba: Daína Chaviano, Pedro Juan Gutiérrez, Leonardo Padura, Ena Lucía Portela, Eliseo Alberto, Antonio José Ponte, Ángel Santiesteban, Amir Valle, Zoe Valdés, and Orlando Luis Pardo Lazo, to name a few. If the mansion of the land-owning Orozco family of Alea's *Los sobrevivientes* stood for a regressive rebuff of history that mimicked an unjust social order, the Special Period imaginary and its residual narratives could be read as a kind of prophetic reversal of the premise of Alea's *Los sobrevivientes*. Urban space, state institutions, and its surviving subjects have become themselves congealed in history like the characters of *Los sobrevivientes.* At the cost of their own sustainability, as accomplices in their own deterioration—physical and moral—they measure up unfavorably against the imagined success and the derailed promises of a now bankrupt national teleology of alternative socialist progress. It is within the space of the revolutionary state, not that of the bourgeois private home,

where misguided obstinacies and opportunistic ideologies seemed to have brought about most visibly the community's ostensible retrogression.

This sense of going backward in time had an unlikely bedfellow: Cuba's entrance in the global market in the mid 90s. The country's major investments to refashion itself as an object of desire for global tourism have in fact contributed to the marketable exoticism of photogenic poverty, to the obsessive reiteration of the ruin as allegory of the nation. Post-Cold War Cuba has advertised itself to the world as an untrodden destination for tropical, and archeological socialism: ¡now you can travel to *utopia*—in the ideological and climatic senses! Consequently scholars Ana María Dopico and Antonio José Ponte have both read the city of Havana as a 'thematic park of the Cold War,' a local variation of what Groys has observed for Russian and Eastern European contexts: "Post-Communist life is life lived backward, a movement against the flow of time…." (155) Reinsertion in global capital, in business as usual, clashes against the idea of a radically *new* historical project, a promised future that must now be left behind.[41]

Inevitably, these transformations have pushed many trends in Cuban cultural criticism toward a position rightly identified by Groys as representative of the theoretical discomfort of cultural studies with the post-communist condition.[42] In *Art Power*, Groys argues that cultural studies as a discipline has theorized insufficiently or inadequately these sites of cultural production as a result of the inherent, temporal anomaly of the post-communist imaginary. Cultural studies, according to Groys, is unable to reconcile the idea of a democratic transition as a form of political progress with the aesthetic particularities of the corresponding cultural community: "On the one hand, this path of evolution seems to be the familiar, well-worn path from a closed society to an open society, from the community to a civil society. But the Communist community was in many ways much more radically modern in its rejection of the

past than the countries of the West" (155). He goes on to explain how the sudden entrance into global markets and the disruptiveness of these collective negotiations over new economic and cultural identities resuscitates old models of capitalist culture rather than promote the creation of new ones: for example, the only images of capitalist practices that former Soviet subjects 'remember' are the ones recreated in 19th century novels. Groys rightly argues that this collective shock, coupled with a sense of cultural orphanage, and with the aesthetic and political demands of global consumers, critics, and onlookers, takes hostage post-Communist culture and politics. This, in turn, obscures the specific methodological approaches demanded by these contexts. The irony, as Groys suggests, is that these phenomena would constitute materialized instances of a running post-communist joke with a twist: That communism was merely a long detour [back] to capitalism:

> The post-Communist subject must feel like a Warhol Coca-Cola bottle brought back from the museum into the supermarket. In the museum, this Coca-Cola bottle was an artwork and had an identity—but back in the supermarket the same Coca-Cola bottle looks just like every other Coca-Cola bottle…. This post-Communist quest for a cultural identity that seems to be so violent, authentic, and internally driven is, actually, a hysterical reaction to the requirements of international cultural markets. (155, 157)

The Cuban case has had to address, in addition, the absence of a transition to formal democratic politics and the instability of the belated, and extremely limited, economic reforms rehearsed since the collapse of the Soviet bloc.

The cultural 'boom' that begun in the mid-1990s and accompanied these shifts in Cuba impacted literature, the visual arts, music—whose paradigmatic phenomenon was the Buena Vista Social Club—and urban space as well. But in post-Communist times, the fictions of survival that have characterized the Cuban cultural discourse since the 90s are also bolstered by commercial enterprises where cultural producers and the state both participate in the makeover

of Cuba's image for foreign consumption, and where all actors have vested interests from political *and* financial perspectives. Some examples of this are Paradiso, the (misnamed) agency designed specifically to promote Cuban culture as yet another touristic destination, and the project of Habaguanex SA: the renovation of Old Havana under the care of the financially semi-autonomous Office of the City Historian, Eusebio Leal.[43] Becoming one of the most profitable models of the new economy, the Office of the City Historian has carried out a kind of Disneyfication of the colonial part of the city. This physical reconstruction, which extends only to the properties inside a demarcated radius of touristic activity, has been complemented with the proliferation of self-enterprising human mascots in colonial wear (the dandy, the habanera, the fruit vendor, and the child beggar). These projects were later followed by greater economic reforms pushed by the state under Raúl Castro, reforms that promoted the sole trader model and announced the *formal* retreat of the state from public goods and services (since *de facto* it had long stopped functioning as such). As Carmelo Mesa Lago (2011) and other economists, including Cuban scholars such as Omar Everleny Pérez Villanueva and Pavel Vidal have pointed out, the new economic reforms discussed at the 6th Congress of the Cuban Communist Party (April 16 – 19, 2011) are not only insufficient, but, in addition, do not compensate either for the sudden normalization of some black market practices with the adequate credits, investments, and policies required for their success. In recent years, the housing crisis has only intensified in the capital, even in the face of mass emigration, an aging population, and low birth rates.

The cultural and social impact of these transformations and the way the temporality of the Revolution intersects with spatial discourses have been well-studied and documented by Antonio José Ponte, Rafael Rojas, Ana María Dopico, Esther Whitfield, and Iván de la Nuez, among many others. These critics have highlighted how the juxtaposition of the ruins of the socialist

project, alongside the repainted façades courtesy of new foreign capital investments, underpin the cultural imaginary from this period onward. Art critic Iván de la Nuez, for instance, has summed up the administration of cultural goods and of the country's dual image as both the last socialist survivor of the Western hemisphere and a revamped tropical playground as a transformation of the very nature of political authority: "del Máximo Leader al Máximo Dealer" (De la Nuez 45). Along with the spectral return of Cuban pasts, and the success of the 'ruinologists'—to borrow a word from Antonio José Ponte—, the privatization and commercialization of space, the far from smooth economic reforms begun in 1993-4, and the new aid from oil-rich ally Venezuela have all made their mark in both the social and economic logic of the period, steering the country, however clumsily, out of the bleak Special Period crisis. These factors have doubtlessly contributed to the tropological emphasis on architectural ruins as a metonymic representation of the physical state of urban spaces, and, additionally, as an ideal allegory of the revolutionary project and the morale of its constituents. After all, in today's Havana, a zombie apocalypse movie like *Juan de los muertos* (2011) finds a more natural mise-en-scène and ready-made setting than *The Walking Dead*'s American landscape, glossily wrecked by AMC's visual-effect experts.

The thematization of ruin and decay is registered in much of the literature, film, photography, and criticism produced in the wake of the economic, ideological, and social crisis of the early 1990s. These are narratives colored by tales that capture the everyday tribulations, successes, and identitarian conflicts of those navigating the newly conformed economic landscapes. In later representations of space, the approach to these themes is also compounded by the state's flirtations with market economy from 1993-4 onward. Among Cuban critics, Rafael Rojas has also addressed the participation of the state in this contradictory makeover of

Cuba's image, highlighting the state's vested interest from both political and financial perspectives in the new commercial enterprises. Rojas argues that in the early 1990s, the sudden disappearance of Soviet influence in Cuban politics and culture was a necessary component of the effort by Cuba's political society to distance the country from the destiny of its former allies. Rojas's treatment of this new configuration suggests that the rapid rearrangement of symbolic and ideological codes corroborates the malleability of the Cuban Revolution and its capacity to swiftly adapt its legitimizing apparatus in order to preserve its power structures. In "Souvenirs de un Caribe post-soviético" Rojas identifies the reemergence of 'all Havanas' as part of a concerted effort to refashion the ideological and symbolic codes of post-1989 Cuba, whose effects are felt in the social fabric and are registered by the cultural production of the period:

> Aquellas ciudades espectrales reaparecían por obra de una política institucionalizada o informal de la memoria: los fantasmas urbanos que no reproducía el turismo o la Oficina del Historiador, regresaban solos, por pura nostalgia o por una misteriosa recuperación de roles perdidos. Con la añoranza de la Colonia y la República, la comunidad volvía a representar personajes del pasado como la jinetera y el proxeneta, el dandy y la cabaretera, el gallego y el negrito, el mendigo y el «maceta» o nouveau rich. (*Souvenirs* 18)

Antonio José Ponte's poetics similarly belong to this form of approximating national history via readings of the urban text, as exemplified in works such as *La fiesta vigilada*, "Un arte de hacer ruinas" (en *Cuentos de todas partes del imperio*), and "La Habana: ciudad y archivo." In his oblique reconstructions of the historical scene, the aesthetic problems of the city are leveled with the political shortcomings of the Revolution. Ponte aptly describes the recurring —and lucrative—images of Cuban landscapes as pieces of a whole better read as a "museum in ruins" (178).

These eventual 'returns of the past' to the cultural and political imaginaries of post-Cold War Cuba, despite their touristic profitability, do not follow the patterns of the cultural industry

of collective memory theorized by Andreas Huyssen in *Present Pasts*. That is, they do not emerge as an effect of memory artifacts inundating the cultural media market fueled by local commercial excesses. Rather, for these Cuban critics, the phenomenon is fundamentally a product of lack, indicative of scarcity and of a certain orphanage: for both Rojas and Ponte the returns of Cuban pasts signal the abrupt vacuum of national traditions made visible by the fall of the Berlin Wall. They point toward an incapacity for renewal, to an impoverished aesthetic language brought about by decades of faulty cultural politics: "…La Habana es menos ciudad viva que paisaje de legitimación política" (204). In addition, the falsified nostalgia for an artificially and barely reconstructed past that predominates in the marketed images of the 'new' Cuba, is restaged and complicated by Ponte's poetics in order to denounce its sterility. They are unable to catalyze a national reckoning at the level of community, and they do not typify a community that reflects in any critical way about its own past. In *Present Pasts,* Huyssen has identified this function as a possibility to be demanded of the cultural industry of memory: "For it is precisely the function of public memory discourses to allow individuals to break out of traumatic repetitions" (9). In the case of Cuba, the failure to engender a public memory debate, the saturation of falsified images, and the lack of a critical debate about public memory align these representational codes with those identified and critiqued by Huyssen in other jurisdictions of the global cultural industry: "If the 1980s were the decade of a happy postmodern pluralism, the 1990s seemed to be hunted by trauma as the dark underside of neoliberal triumphalism" (8).

The constellation of images that organize spatial relationships as social text in this landscape converges then around conjecturally specific themes that recur ad nauseam and that chart the timid transformations of turn-of-the-century Cuba. These discourses participate, in some form or another, in the same archeological poetics that inform their repetitive tropes: the

ongoing collapse of city structures and their general state of decay, the selective reconstruction of landmark neighborhoods for their touristic profitability, the durability of a *sui generis* socialist success against all odds, and the falsified nostalgia for a pre-revolutionary glam associated with the 1950s (in the same vein of Groys' point regarding the 19th-century character of capitalist cultural references in contemporary post-Soviet Europe, Ponte suggests that this is the last decade 'remembered' by the city for its careless debauchery). Esther Whitfield has described very well how Cuba's atypical entrance in the global cultural market registered, both structurally and aesthetically, the country's role as producer and exporter of symbolic goods, when its own power of acquisition as consumer and importer remained limited. As Whitfield nicely phrases it, from the mid-1990s onward, Cuba and its cultural industry "became less a site *of* consumption — that is, a place where consumers themselves were located — than a site *for* consumption" (18). This dynamic not only favored certain patterns of aesthetic representation above others—reinserting Cuban culture in a postcolonial cultural logic by demanding it perform only stereotypes of its own exoticism—but also impacted the physical space of the nation, as well as the bodies on which a new history of sexual exploitation and trade has been written.

In "Picturing Havana", Ana María Dopico has focused instead on how the production and circulation of images of Havana for tourists and for the Cuban diaspora fuel a scopophilic contest over everyone's favorite Havana: "…a virtual Havana being exported through photographs" (453).[44] What Dopico's analysis effectively explains is how these multiple Havanas, ultimately, are linked isotopically to consuming gazes via the affective as much as the economic subtext of the onlooker's relationship to Havana:

> Where images are multiplied and repeated, one wonders what is being covered over, what is left out of the picture. My reflections record an anxiety about representations of Havana as visual field and ideological geography. This unease increased with the flood of recent images of Cuba that promise clarity,

> transparency, and visibility at a moment of obscurity; images that promise a time of suspension to consumers overrun by speedup; images of a real nation functioning as historical theme park; …images of collapse marketed to a world intent on rebuilding and expansion. (452)

For Dopico, these reified images of space conceal the new economic logic, but also, most seriously, the darkest remnant of an increasingly self-effacing but not less insidious post-Cold War geopolitics: the Guantánamo U.S. base and its invisible, *unrepresentable* prisoners.

It can be readily seen why in much of the critical literature reviewed so far lurks a dangerous caveat. This fascination with the most photogenic contradictions of late socialist landscapes extends to the critical sphere: the critical commentary, as much as the cultural production that relies on both exoticized ruins and haunting pasts, seldom goes beyond the analysis of the symbolic conceptualization of space to address either alternative readings which are not subordinated to grand narratives of national ontology, or spatial practices as lived by the urban subject proper. The institutionalized politicization of culture carried out by the Revolution explains, in part, why Cuban cultural criticism continues to conceptualize the constitution of all subjectivity always in relation to the symbolic space of the nation. Foundational discourses dating back to the end of the 19th century and rooted in the 20th century have also contributed to that overbearing semiotic monopoly. (This monopoly can be said to be one of the overarching subjects, for example, of Virgilio Piñera's classic poem of 1943 "La isla en peso": "…Si no pensara que el agua me rodea como un cáncer hubiera podido dormir a pierna suelta…")

As Rojas and González Echevarría have suggested, cultural production—and literature in particular—has traditionally been read in Cuba as a symbolic space of alternative political imaginaries that seek to compensate for, and respond to, the perceived political failures of the nation—first independence, then the republic, then socialist democracy, and now the post-communist transition (or lack thereof). However, as I argued in the Introduction, the interpretive

reading of those foundational symbolic spaces should not foreclose analyses of the structural transformations of the cultural field, that is, lines of inquiries that address intersections between aesthetics and politics seen from materialist and sociological perspectives as well. Otherwise, spaces that do not fit certain patterns of relevance as objects of cultural study remain undertheorized and understudied. This is why earlier in this chapter I sketched alternative constructions of the political community taking as my point of departure concrete cultural practices and their site-specific interventions.

From the critical corpus, Patricio del Real's field research on *barbacoas* offered ways of framing the relationship of Havana's inhabitants to their living space along different questions from the approaches reviewed above.[45] Del Real suggests an exit with respect to the spatial accounts that focus exclusively on ruins, present pasts, and the marketability of their aestheticization:

> We believe that this notion of a passive subject is an ideological discourse supported by the misleading ideas of a heroic political subject, nostalgic views of a cosmopolitan capital city, and elite cultural perspectives. … We aim to bring to light another Havana, a city in which one can see, among the ruins, the melancholia of its people and the harsh reality of everyday living, not a happy, bright, and musical city but, rather simply, a city built by its inhabitants. (54)

Because these are illegal and informal constructions, del Real and his cowriter Joseph Scarpacci emphasize the importance of the reliability of networks of sociability and of personal experience to secure materials, labor and know-how involved in these enterprises, which does away with the need for professional, technical knowledge inaccessible in any case:

> In contemporary Cuban society the barbacoas are illegal and informal constructions. They are illegal because the government does not officially recognize or sanction these constructions. They are informal because rarely do these enterprises get any form of technical or design assistance by professionals sanctioned by state institutions. In this dual condition of illegality and informality, the barbacoas share similar instances and characteristics with other forms of illegal and informal settlements, like the favelas in Rio de Janeiro, the ranchos of

> Caracas, the *villa miseria* en Buenos Aires…This suggests that the barbacoas really represent a version of the new frontier in the new millennium. They provide the only available option for an individual or household to conquer new and unclaimed spaces. (69, 70)

In addition, they revisit, critically, the history of revolutionary urban policy to identify historical links between these semi-clandestine private initiatives and tensions in the history of revolutionary housing reform, and which alternated, often contradictorily, between centralization and local autonomy. Moreover, they read the city beyond its historical exceptionality in order to identify wider trends that connect it to other cities in Latin America, understanding Havana's spatial dynamics in ways that are not so easily reducible to the established codes of national and revolutionary ontology.

I found affinities between their analysis of physical spaces (from the architect's point of view), and the more semiotic reading of the particular spaces with which this chapter was concerned, in the need to account for a fundamental gesture of agency by subjects who are actively constructing—within their circumstantial limitations—quite literally, their living spaces. Against the inertia of a city in ruins, in the margins of the new lucrative circuits of cultural commodities, the homes I profile here host gatherings where aesthetic experimentation, risqué forms of political criticism, and eclectic social actors converge at once; where, perhaps, the reconfiguration of the home as a new social space provides lines of flight for a subject who can be unstuck from inert, post-communist time, from an image of history that holds her hostage as a human prop in someone else's playground. The inward construction movement described by Del Real and carried out independently by improvising and enterprising semi-autonomous agents has had, as we saw, a parallel process in cultural circulation and, to a lesser but increasing extent, in cultural production.

The scope and the working hypothesis of the dissertation project have limited my focus to only a few particular spaces of public gatherings for cultural action in private homes, and to an equally fragmentary account of the informal circuits of cultural circulation and reception that inform their stories. But if any claims about the politicization of space and its cultural uses in the socialist and post-socialist paradigms were to be made at all, that seemed to require, at the very least, going beyond the *cultural representations of lived space* to look at *the spaces of lived culture*. With that admittedly rustic construction, I have suggested ways of reading and documenting two necessarily ephemeral but no less important objects of study: some physical sites where cultural practices—be they production, reception, and/or circulation—are and have been taking place (in this case often inconspicuously), as well as the kinds of social relations that either made possible or were established by these situated interactions.

I have given preference to alternative spaces of cultural production and circulation hosted in private homes, rather than everyday space as a more inclusive category, because these gatherings constitute test sites of the working hypothesis of this dissertation. These spaces allow us to locate spatially the links between the three guiding threads of my inquiry: the contradictory legacies of the Revolution's cultural democratization, the emergence of informal spaces of culture in reaction to its tutelary logic, and the way new media and technology refurbish and appropriate earlier forms of cultural participation to produce contemporary forms of political engagement that publicly mobilize a subject's real or perceived cultural wealth and literacy. In other words, by looking at both the cultural representations of (private) space and the spatial mapping of culture and its transmission, we can account for the technological optimism of post-Special Period Cubans, the collective expectations generated around new media and technology in general, as well as examine the political and social significance of associated practices by

recognizing their genealogical debts to the transgressive character—real or imagined—of certain clandestine or semi-clandestine practices of cultural transmission and production that have historically taken root in revolutionary Cuba.

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[1] http://habanemia.blogspot.com/2012/06/muestras-privadas-en-estudios-galerias.html

[2] In April of 2013, Aglutinador began to host a series of events or 'Exercises' as part of the cycle: "Curadores come home!" and is described by Sandra Ceballos as a dialectical operation:

> Curadores, come home! es un hecho cultural que surge como contraposición del evento que le precedió en el 2008, Curadores, go home!
> El primero: Tolerante, insolente y anarquista.
> El segundo: Elitista, intransigente y discriminador.
> Los dos: coexistencia, democracia, codeo necesario.

[3] I am grateful to Xoho's Ruben Cruces for granting me access to the documentation of the gallery during a visit to the space in the summer of 2009.

[4] The Ludwig Foundation is one of the few and more powerful non-governmental institutions that appraises, represents, and coordinate sales and exhibitions for Cuban artists abroad, in addition to hosting several fellowships and programs of cultural exchange. It's funded by the Ludwig fund and other donors, advised abroad by American art dealers Alex and Carole Rosenberg among others, and its president is Cuban Helmo Hernández who also has ties to the National Counsel for the Visual Arts.

[5] Quoted in his bio for Havana-Cultura's website http://www.havana-cultura.com/en/nl/visual-art/l-zaro-saavedra/cuban-conceptual-artist. Havana Cultura is a project to promote and exhibit contemporary Cuban art sponsored by Havana Club International, S.A.

[6] Rugoff's introductory essay as curator of the exhibit "Amateurs" unearths the debt of the 1960s countercultural art scene to the amateur specters that inhabited it—in particular Warhol's work at the Factory.

[7] See also the posters photographed announcing Glexis Novoa's and Hamlet Lavastida's 2009 "La luz permanente-La Habana" event at a private residence, and described as "Power-point projection, local DJ music and leisure time;" and the events at Cristo Salvador Galería, including the presentation-making of the artisanal publication P350, a project of Yornel Martínez. http://www.cristosalvadorgaleria.com/2013/05/presentacion-de-la-revista-p350-yornel-martinez/

[8] Ernesto Menéndez-Conde, "Arte participativo y el papel del espectador en el contexto cubano."

[9] Perhaps it is necessary to clarify that this observation does not stem from a theoretical position affiliated to the Arendtian desire, and I would add ill-advised effort, to preserve a sacred space of interiority from the political and the social as she argues in *The Human Condition* and elsewhere.

Rather, my point here is to provide a historical overview, and a criticism of, the implementation of certain politics which, in fact, were a misunderstanding of what was the great contribution of feminist and civil rights of the sixties: instead of 'the personal is political' many of these home invasions, symbolic and real, were the obverse of that, taking the form of 'the political (narrowly understood) ought to be personal.'

[10] De Oliveira et al., *Installation Art*; Bishop, *Installation Art*. See also curating as a form of mediation, and figures of resistance, in the new relations of production in art as sketched by Marion von Osten in "Salidas incalculables", part of the collection *Producción cultural y prácticas instituyentes*.

[11] Fusco has followed up this work with a very lucid reflection on the increasing visibility of Cuban dissident subjects—and the changing meaning of the concept—published in e-misférica's issue on "Dissidence." See Coco Fusco, "Cuban Dissidence in the Age of Political Simulacra."

[12] However, I am only using this example to illustrate the trend opened up by Lefebvre's rereadings, not extrapolating here from Harvey's more general argument about the city, since he is concerned with actors of an anti-systemic insurrection proper. My focus here is, rather, on scenes in which the political transition is staged and debated, and in which the cultural politics of different stages of the revolutionary project are tested and challenged. Harvey's *Rebel Cities* emphasizes that instead of trying to resuscitate various specters of the absolute historical subject that incarnates the capitalist contradiction (classically the proletariat) and therefore the coming insurrection, any challenge and resistance to the system will come from less messianic actors, that is, from the alliances of forces of demands wherein the power to disrupt the current system, structurally, is strongest. Harvey demonstrates how the centers of financial capital and decision-making are supported in major urban centers of the world by the daily operations of those very same actors whose systematic dispossession and discontent is most visible and, in principle, whose lives and labor are interdependent and closest to each other in the city grid (taxi drivers and other transportation workers, hospitality workers, food service industry, secretaries, nannies, undocumented workers); close enough to facilitate communication in activism and to maximize the unsettling effect of their organized actions. It would be absurd to use this argument in order to place an undue political expectation in these cultural agents.

[13] For an in-depth look at the discussions about the way economic opening would take place, and how that has changed from the 1990s to the Raúl era, Carmelo Mesa Lago's (2012) *Cuba en la era de Raúl Castro* provides the most comprehensive analysis to date.

[14] http://octavocerco.blogspot.com/2009/08/cantar-en-el-ojo-de-sauron.html

[15] Antonio Rodiles "Espacio de Sats: Donde confluyen arte y pensamiento." *Espacio Laical* April 2010: pp. 22-3 http://espaciolaical.org/contens/24/2223.pdf

[16] The literature about legal reform, urbanization, and architecture throughout the different periods of the Revolution history is rich and has been increasingly the focus of new and more comprehensive approaches. Fernández Núñez's 1976 classic study of the history of republican

housing crises offers a detailed account of early revolutionary housing reform that is obligatory reading in this corpus. Of more recent vintage, the special dossier of the journal *Encuentro de la cultura cubana* “La Habana por hacer” (No.50, Fall 2008), *Havana: Two Faces of the Antillean Metropolis* (1997), Loomis’ superb *Revolution of forms: Cuba's forgotten art schools* (1999), and the collection of essays gathered in *Havana Beyond the Ruins* (in particular Mario Coyula’s, Patricio del Real and Joseph Scarpaci’s, and Jill Hamberg’s contributions) are works worth consulting for chronologies and profiles of various construction projects and policies after 1959. These works all address different aspects of the changing attitudes adopted by revolutionary institutions regarding the uses of the city, architecture, and urban planning, while highlighting the different approaches to the city—sometimes antagonistic, and others collaborative—not only of government agencies but also those of dwellers, neighborhood organizations, architects, and engineers.

[17] The turning point of this process is widely recognized as the Stalinist revision of state capitalism not as a stage to be overcome (as in Lenin’s view of state capitalism as the expression of dictatorship of the proletariat and a historical stage) but as the realization of socialism itself. It is true that the absence of a domestic capitalist market and the role of the centrally planned economy produced their own peculiarities in terms of the availability of commodities, the growth of the domestic economy, and the rate of industrialization. But those features did not entail necessarily the absence of a capitalist mode of production, since wage-labor and therefore extraction of surplus value—by the state instead of by individual capitalists—remained in place however inefficiently reinvested and redistributed (that is, socialized). The background debate of this phenomena and their effects is the changing role and theorization of the concept of ‘state socialism’ in the history of really existing communism: in Lenin it was a stage that had to be achieved and to then be overcome, in Stalin it became the structural expression of socialism itself (‘socialism in one country,’ ‘actually existing socialism’). Later theorists elaborated on the concept to show how not only it had become a form of counterrevolutionary social, political and economic organization with little to no *socialist* character (CLR James, Raya Dunayevskaya, Castoriadis and Lefort, other currents of international Trotskyism) but constituted in and of itself a modern form of state organization in its own right (that is, it had severed its teleological connections in history to the development of socialism); one that was evermore linked to the (global) consolidation of bureaucracies as the definitive form of 20th century State reorganization after the Second World War. (The bureaucracy form was characterized by the (continued) consolidation of both economic and political power in the same handful of actors under the guise of centralization of the state power as a response to the need to maximize efficiency and long-term planning as required by industrialized modernization, and where in practice representative democracies emphasized the (supposedly) representative role of politicians more than the democratic link that legitimated their power.

[18] The public role of women and the complex interplay of gendered negotiations between images of revolutionary women, of working women, and of domestic women in the early years of the Revolution would require a separate study of its own. Marifeli Pérez-Stable offers a general but informative account of the social and political role of the Federation of Cuban Women (FMC) in Chapter 6 of *The Cuban Revolution: Origins, Course, and Legacy* (1993). While many triumphant accounts of the role of women in the revolution exist, a critical study of the

contradictory forms of feminism developed throughout, and co-existing in, the revolutionary articulation, as well as an anthropologically and sociologically attuned in-depth analysis of the category of the everyday in relation to gender roles and revolutionary changes, have not been privileged subjects of research. The closest source to this approach is Mona Rosendahl's 1997 *Inside the Revolution: Everyday Life in Socialist Cuba.* The ethnographic study is valuable because it focuses on rarely studied rural communities and how they experienced the institutionalization of the planned economy and the presence of the new state, but the author not only draws problematic generalizations from a singular case study, in a town that, to boot, was recommended by the Ministry of Culture to do research in. Though self-aware of the potential methodological limitations of those conditions, the monograph often gravitates toward folklorizations of socialist solidarity.

[19] Ley General de la Vivienda (1984), *Gaceta Oficial de la República de Cuba.*

[20] In 2013 (at the height of growing expectations about urban reform laws promised by Raúl Castro's reforms), a quick look at Cuba's version of craigslist.org, www.revolico.com indicates, to boot, that real state prices in Havana have soared in the last decade (and rather disproportionately with respect to GDP growth). The new real state market has speculated on prospects of a return on investment, which have greatly improved with the possibility to rent and to buy and trade houses more flexibly, with dollars from a parallel in-crowd economy profiting from tourism, the fledgling *cuentapropistas* (sole-traders), and heavy remittances from the diaspora. For contemporary attempts to correct the housing situation see especially articles 292 and 297 of the 2011 resolutions of the VI Congress of the Communist Party in Cuba. These measures constitute the so-called 'raulista' reforms, and aim at the retreat of the state institutions from the micromanagement of housing, allowing therefore a greater flexibility in construction and mobility.

[21] This is a common slogan shouted during mass street demonstrations in favor of the government and usually organized to compete with other events or to intimidate dissidents. In addition to civilian-clothed 'rapid response units', demonstrations are organized in the workplace or the school, or in the case of smaller ones in the neighborhood CDR (Committees for the Defense of the Revolution). The participants can be even bused-in to the designated location, so despite their appearance as spontaneous, voluntary support these so-called 'mítines de repudio' (meetings of repudiation) are very far from constituting any grassroots political participation and hardly representative of the personal convictions of the individual participants.

[22] http://www.cuba.cu/gobierno/discursos/

[23] There is a rich tradition in urban studies examining the ways in which cities have embodied, defined, or subverted modern nation-building projects. I'm invoking here the particular ways in which the city by its very nature—with an identity and a history of its own, with more fluid and heterogeneous agents and practices—challenges homogenizing national programs. See also James Holston and Arjun Appadurai's classic introductory essay "Cities and Citizenship" in the Holston's edited volume of the same name for a helpful overview of these approaches.

[24] And a textbook example of Laura Mulvey's male gaze (1975) if there ever was one, where the now empty domestic space is associated to Sergio's memories of his unhappy marriage and with a frivolous, nagging woman once the object of his desire.

[25] Virgilio Piñera's "La sorpresa" (1960), Jesús Díaz's *Los años duros* (1966), Manuel Cofiño's *La última mujer y el próximo combate* (1971)*,* and Manuel Pereira's alphabetization novel *Comandante Veneno* (1977) are key examples of this corpus, but perhaps the best representative work of this paradigm is Nicolás Guillén's "Tengo" (1964):
Cuando me veo y toco
yo, Juan sin Nada no más ayer,
y hoy Juan con Todo,
y hoy con todo,
vuelvo los ojos, miro,
me veo y toco
y me pregunto cómo ha podido ser.

[26] It is worth pointing out that while the short story was written in 1967, the film goes much further in its exploration of the compounded effects of isolation and conservatism on the decomposition of subjectivity both at the individual and the collective levels. (The release of the film in 1979 was to be followed by the surprising exile in 1980 of Antonio Benítez Rojo, who until then had been at the helm of the editorial labor of the Casa de las Américas.)

[27] Other documents from the archive can be found in Jorge Luis García Vázquez's blog, http://stasi-minint.blogspot.com/. Ponte's piece, "Lezama en los archivos de la Stasi" was published in *Diario de Cuba* on June 10th, 2011 along with a pdf version of the catalogue: http://www.diariodecuba.com/cultura/1307701546_1423.html

[28] Evoking the title of Graham Green's *Our Man in Havana,* Bellatin's Nuestra Mujer (Our Woman) is the main character of "Canon perpetuo." Fantastical elements, noir suspense, and the naturalization of sordidly bizarre scenes are combined in the story to warp the familiar details of the unnamed but easily recognizable location (Havana). Possibly the result of the protagonist's own psychopathologies, the story's unfolding can be said, furthermore, to be ultimately determined by the effects of her physical surroundings—her apartment building and her social relations are impregnated with adjectives that convey decay, encumbrance, paranoia, and emotional detachment. And while biographical components are not necessarily relevant to all the possible interpretations of (his) fiction, Bellatin's poetics are usually singled out for their capacity for mimetic estrangement and the reversibility of fiction and autobiography. His engagement with a 'literatura de autoficción' (Alberca), as critics such as Reinaldo Laddaga (Espectáculos the realidad) and the author himself have argued, and the unconcealed if fictionalized local references that trigger Nuestra Mujer's gradual unhinging, make it worth mentioning that Bellatin's arrival in Havana to study at the Escuela Internacional de Cine y Televisión in 1987 coincided with the dawn of these intellectual and artistic forays. As a side note, there is another, unnamed literary referent that would also seem to inform Bellatin's "Canon perpetuo": a short story in one of Virgilio Piñera's lesser known books: "Lo toma o lo deja" from *Muecas para escribientes,* published posthumously in Havana precisely in 1987.

[29] Words read at the launching of the Paideia project at the Centro de Promoción Cultural "Alejo Carpentier" on February 16th, 1989, by founding member Rolando Prats-Páez: "Cuando, reunidos en el patio de Calias, Protágoras y Sócrates discurrían sobre la posibilidad de formar la virtud por la educación y la enseñanza, estaban situando en el centro polémico de la *paideia*, de su *paideia*, es decir, de su visión de la cultura, el problema primero de la existencia misma: la dimensión ética del individuo, el punto prodigioso por donde el logos atraviesa al hombre y lo devuelve al universo como hacia aquel río de aguas sucesivas donde ningún instante se separa dos veces…La raza de Sócrates y de Protágoras, de Heráclito y de Parménides, de Platón y de Plotino…nos ha legado, en ese nombre, a la vez un proyecto y una clave. Proyecto porque ninguna sociedad de clases ha trascendido la división de la cultura, ninguna sociedad ha superado el viejo desgarramiento entre el púlpito y la plaza. Clave porque sólo en la unidad de la cultura podrá el hombre proyectar la figura y su imagen…" (n.pag)

[30] Rolando Prats-Páez ,"Himnos," *Sin Ítaca*.

[31] Victor Varela, "Album de familia," Blog *Victor Varela* Teatro, 28 January 2014, Internet. See also Victor Varela "Una bitácora para el actor," *Diario de Cuba*, 9 Februrary 2014, Internet; and Jorge Ignacio Pérez's interview with Alcibíades Zaldívar "El gobierno nos masticaba, pero nunca nos tragó," *Diario de Cuba,* 12 April 2012, Internet.

[32] Some of these concerns arose in part out of conversations with Professor Graciela Montaldo during the process of the first list of the M.Phil, though any poverty in their execution remains my sole responsibility.

[33] These practices account for most of the reading being done in Cuba (in comparison to the books published and read domestically which are, after a crisis from which the once remarkable state publishing apparatus never recovered, few and far in between, hard to find, and mostly irrelevant to the interests of the general readership). Here I enter into anecdotal and therefore dangerously nonacademic waters, but it is crucial and therefore necessary to the point I want to make next: even in the late 80s state publishers still had the capacity to make echoes in the Cuban reading—not necessarily academic—circles, as was the case with the Spanish translations of Umberto Eco's *El nombre de la rosa* and, more surprisingly, Mikhail Bulgakov's *El maestro y margarita*, both of which came out in 1989 in Editorial Arte y Literatura and which by the mid-90s were very hard to find and even harder to be trusted enough to be lent a copy. As for the black trade of books, one former book trader would recount the process of looking for these high-priced editions thus: buyers or dealers in the know would give the scouts the titles to look for, and in their network of contacts—which included particular collections, small libraries in the provinces, depositories of confiscated books, acquired personal libraries by unsuspecting heirs—one or more titles would eventually be found, and then pass from the scout, to the dealer, to the international buyer. (One of the most sought-after prizes, for example, is the 1857 *Los ingenious de Cuba* with original drawings by Edouard Laplante, fetching today close to $10 000 on amazon.com)

[34] The publication of Cuban writers of the diaspora has been somewhat and problematically corrected as of late by publishing or discussing works by select, redeemable figures that include

Virgilio Piñera, Lydia Cabrera, and others. (Those discussions and publications have always come together with a heavily edited or 'mutilated' biographical account: the Ecured page for Reinaldo Arenas, for example, opens with "Novelista cubano. Hijo de una familia campesina humilde pudo gracias a la Revolución que triunfó el 1 de enero de 1959 completar su formación escolar y profesional. Escritor autodidacta, a los 19 años publicó su primera novela…") "Reinaldo Arenas." EcuRed.com. Internet. Accessed 14 December 2013.

[35] http://www.cubanet.org/sobre-cubanet/

[36] http://arch.cubaencuentro.com/entrevista/2002/09/23/6117/4.html

[37] https://www.escritores.org/index.php/recursos-para-escritores/concursos-literario/9176-concurso-literario-novelas-de-gaveta-franz-kafkacuba

[38] Ernesto Menéndez-Conde. E-mail message to author. 8 September 2010.

[39] Claudia Cadelo. "Bibliografía en flash." 28 March 2009. Octavo Cerco Blog. http://octavocerco.blogspot.com/2009/03/bibliografia-en-flash.html

[40] How did these underground networks work? In the case of rock music, for example, you had people who travelled or people with contact with a family member who would be asked to bring mostly American and British groups and merchandise. In the 1980s and the early 90s there were usually a handful of people with large collections and access to new music, and they were curiously divided by neighborhood, so one had for example the guy who recorded music in Alamar, and the guy who did in Centro Habana, and another one or two who did in El Vedado (neighborhoods of Havana). The collections usually did not overlap, and just because one had the money one did not necessarily had access to them, being part of the subculture was a requirement, that is, one needed social capital and expert knowledge of rock music and history in order to be let in, as it were. Before dollarization of the economy, each bootleg cassette recording cost $10 in Cuban pesos if the blank tape was not included, $20 if it did. Currency also included the posters that came in rock magazines brought from abroad or the magazines themselves, like *Metal Hammer, Mega Metal Kerrang, Hit Parade,* and *Circus*. The now closed Czech House of Culture occasionally sold rock music in a makeshift shop, and there was a music and merchandise flea market and barter venue of sorts that also operated Sunday mornings in the House of Culture of Víbora (a neighborhood in Havana).

[41] Perhaps the most picturesque of these experiments are the golf fields and walled-in residence complexes around them planned exclusively for foreign high rollers, and set to open in the next few decades. Their lack of regard for what has been described as an ecological disaster waiting to happen, and the fact that golf was one of the most maligned sports at the dawn of the Revolution for its wasteful use of space and its structural elitism, are not lost ironies on anyone. The highlight of the venture "Cuba-Kanata Golf SA" is provided by the August 9th 2011 press release in Standing Feather International's website, the Canadian company involved in the development: "We are now proud to announce that the title to the luxury property that home buyers will acquire will not be the standard 99-yr leasehold. Instead, **residential properties will**

be sold with the right to own that property in perpetuity." (http://standing-feather.ca/news.html, emphasis in the original; Internet accessed 14 December 2013)

[42] Some of his observations are very shrewd, especially his treatment of the link between postmodernity's taste for cultural diversity on one hand, and the heterogeneous demands that signal universality of capitalist market, on the other. His homogeneous characterization of cultural studies methodology, however, is rather contentions, insofar as what he understands as cultural studies refers only to how the discipline has sometimes been practiced in the recent American academic context along the lines of identity politics, that is, as a celebration of tokenized differences within an implicit understanding of liberal democracies as a gradual process toward multicultural pluralism: "So we can say that postmodern cultural diversity is merely a pseudonym for the universality of capitalist markets. The universal accessibility of heterogeneous cultural products which is guaranteed by the globalization of contemporary information markets has replaced the universal and homogeneous political projects of the European past—from Enlightenment to Communism." (152) "And that is why the postmodern taste is fundamentally an antiradical taste. Radical politics aesthetics situates itself always at the 'degree zero' of literary and visual rhetoric, as Roland Barthes defined it—and that means also at the degree zero of diversity and difference" (153).

[43] http://www.ohch.cu/oficina-del-historiador/

[44] One may only object to Dopico's conceptual framework and her particular use of simulacra without simulation, since it seems to assume a sharp divide between the proliferation of false images on one hand and a true, real Havana hidden behind them on the other, and argue instead for a more dialectical relationship between simulacra and the social text. In Dopico's reading, in fact, Cuba and its inhabitants are as passive as the landscape in this reproductive circle, their participation in these lucrative circuits of simulation is passed over.

[45] Barbacoas (literally 'grills' or 'barbecues') are informal plaques of various materials built to divide vertically a high ceiling house into two floors, often resembling a mezzanine.

CHAPTER THREE:
Bloggers Unplugged: Self-communication and the Public Sphere

"Thus the actors become authors."
Hans Magnus Enzensberger

I. The alternative blogosphere

The blog has been the most influential, far-reaching platform of communication and self-presentation of new social actors in post-Special Period Cuba. The question of technology has been a latent thread in the text so far: in the first chapter the amateur's lot was tied to the effect of technology on relations of production, circulation, and reception of culture; and in the previous chapter technology was briefly discussed in two contexts, for its role in a self-produced corpus of promotional material, documentation, and criticism that shapes the amplified public character of new independent art events, and with respect to the history of the dissemination and the consumption of extra-official and clandestine cultural goods organized around scarce technological artifacts and informal communication networks. This chapter examines in more detail the intersections between emergent notions of citizenship, interventions in the cultural and public spheres, and their link to new media and technology by focusing on the heuristic role of blogging in the formation of a political subject that experiments with alternative ways of participating in the public sphere.

The Cuban blogosphere has been the main site for the development of an emergent, articulate, and cogent debate about the meaning of democracy in post-socialist transitions, and has emerged as a model platform for political participation proper, though not without limitations. By this I mean that, in addition to the texts published in the blogs, bloggers establish platforms of solidarity with, and provide protective and promotional publicity for, other citizen initiatives. But most important, the blogs became the basis for projects that overflow from the Internet to the street level—the promotion and distribution of portable and information

technology; classes, workshops and competitions; the sponsorship of debates, meetings, and public interventions. The “alternative blogosphere” or “independent blogosphere,” as it has become known, must be distinguished then from blogs written elsewhere about Cuba, and from both official, and personal but “oficialista” blogs,[1] which appeared later and mostly as a reaction to the wave of international popularity and attention gathered by Yoani Sánchez’ blog *Generación Y*, pioneer and most widely read blog of the alternative blogosphere.

Speaking with Ted Henken, blogger and independent journalist Reinaldo Escobar succinctly defines and differentiates the alternative blogosphere by the method its bloggers use to connect to the Internet. Instead of using authorized—and thus more tightly controlled—points of entry (mostly a job-dependent prerogative), they operate relatively free of any ties to officialdom by connecting to the Internet in hotels, foreign embassies, and semi-illegally through borrowed or rented Internet accounts. Moreover, they can be distinguished by how they use this connection as a result of that relative independence of access, thus the epithet “alternative”:

> Quienes están en la [blogosfera] alternativa usan su libertad para hacer cosas prohibidas. Son pocas las personas que usan la libertad para hacer cosas autorizadas. …En Cuba, cualquier actividad que tenga una implicación social y que no esté autorizada es, por su propia naturaleza, contestataria. Y esa es una diferencia entre la blogosfera alternativa y la otra. (Escobar qtd. in Henken, “Cartografía…”)

The development of the blogosphere in Cuba dates back to 2004, with the digital magazine *Consenso* that counted Yoani Sánchez among its co-founders, but it was early in 2008 that Sánchez’s personal blog *Generación Y* made her an international household name. Already documented by academics, journalists, readers and by the participating bloggers themselves from its very beginnings, the trajectory and topography of the Cuban blogosphere has been in the international spotlight since 2008; that year the *NY Times* published the article “Cyber-Rebels in Cuba Defy State’s Limits” and the following Sánchez was named among the 100 most influential

people of 2008 by *Time* magazine (McKinley). While every academic conference on Cuba since has featured the necessary –and necessarily misconstrued– "What do you think about Yoani Sánchez?" question, a comprehensive study of the new role that mobile technology and the net have had in breathing new life into Cuba's rarified and sectarian public sphere, or a reading of how it relates to other contemporary voices, is yet to appear. Henken, a sociology professor at CUNY, has begun a project that attempts to systematically describe and classify a space whose landscape changes at exponential rates; some preliminary and acute observations can be found at Henken's own personal blog, el Yuma.[2] While this type of specific approximations is, indeed, crucial to a thorough understanding of the unique nature of this medium, the domestic impact of its discourse cannot be properly weighed except by addressing it as part of a complex and long drawn history of censorship and struggle for individual autonomy and free speech under the current political party in Cuba. This relationship, in turn, has been historically studied through the cultural policies of the Revolution and indeed, many of the polemics taking place in the blogosphere about Cuban politics and culture have been triggered by confrontations between bloggers and cultural figures and authorities.

The alternative bloggers have challenged in particular the tacit relationship between the political establishment and cultural institutions that insist on exporting the image of a tolerant and participatory public sphere. For this reason the present chapter will focus on the encounters between bloggers and different authorities outside of the space of their blogs—episodes that are sometimes inspiration for their posts, others the consequences of posting. This approach attempts to measure the domestic impact of these bloggers and provide a 'thick description' of the cultural context in which they operate so as to avoid a reading that depends solely on their image in, and interaction with, the amplifying (and often distorting) effects of foreign media circuits. Looking

at the exchanges between alternative bloggers and other off-line actors might contribute, moreover, to the current debate about technology in the constitution and visibility of new political subjects, invigorated by the surge of global protests and social movements in the last decade with constitutive ties to the internet, portable technology, and social media. Adrienne Russell, in her account of scholarly research on democracy and the Internet, cautions us against an homogeneous reading of the medium that is axiomatic to its technical features, and recognizes in early scholarly enthusiasm

> a crucial lack of integration in new-media studies between online and offline realities. The theoretical links scholars have been forging, myself included, between democracy and the Internet generally and blogs in particular form the great bulk of popular as well as official thinking, obscuring variable contexts and hemming in larger realities. (2)

Alternative blogs, when not actively blocked from inside, do not achieve heavy domestic traffic though they circulate off-line in CDs and flash memories, along with other news, videos, and tutorials (figs. 14, 15) The types of online activity available to each user—from navigating only within Cuba's Intranet to more sophisticated forms of circumventing blocked sites via proxy servers—also vary according to expertise, account type (legal, restricted accounts are often shared illicitly among many users), and purchasing power. In addition, the rates of connectivity wane considerably from urban to rural zones.

The study of Cuban political blogging has focused either on the short-term effects of new technologies on policy and regime change, or on virtual presences isolated from other spheres of social meaning. The exaltation of these voices as definitive factors in a future democratic transition, as well as the pessimistic dismissals of the role of the Internet in political change, overlook these blogs as symptoms of a change that has already taken place and yet is besieged by its own limitations. With the exception of Antonio José Ponte, whose work on contemporary

Cuba is the first to gloss that conversation, and Coco Fusco's brief profile of Cuba's new forms of dissidence in "Cuban Dissidence in the Age of Political Simulacra," any attempt to isolate the blogs as objects of study has overlooked the way their writing challenges, reveals, or perpetuates the organization and hierarchy of voices in Cuba's contemporary public sphere in a comprehensive manner. Both pessimistic and optimistic approaches are limited by their focus on the immediate, short-term political effects and a reading that often falls prey to the sensationalist filters of both the international and the Cuban official press. As for Internet and digital technology more broadly, Kalathil and Boas's pioneering work (2003) offers an early mapping of Cuba's information policies in the Internet age, but its account of what happens to those policies on the ground remains limited by data provided almost exclusively by the government.[3] Cristina Venegas's *Digital Dilemmas* (2010) and "Will the Internet Spoil Castro's Cuba?" also provide detailed and comprehensive data on the history of early computing in Cuba and on the evolving and intricate relationship between the information policies of the Cuban government and the political and economic challenges posed by the proliferation of digital technologies.[4]

These studies must be contextualized in a wider field of scholarly concern with the effect of technologies on authoritarian governments, since the potentials and drawbacks of digital technologies for the acceleration and maturation of democratization processes is an ongoing debate among media scholars. One of the most vocal critics of attributing to digital technologies and the Internet any kind of structurally democratic character, Evgeny Morozov (2011) has argued at length against "cyber utopianism" by stacking evidence of what he describes are "the dark consequences of connectivity," which show authoritarian states using technology overwhelmingly in their favor (xiii). The extent to which we can single out 'authoritarian governments' as an obvious category is highly arguable, especially in the post-Snowden era. We

could say, however, that the experience of openly authoritarian governments with the Internet and social media—that is, governments relying on constitutional provisions against civil rights of free speech and assembly—given their exercise of more *explicit* and coherent policies regulating the production and circulation of knowledge and information, is a privileged environment for the study of the link between processes of democratization and the use of digital technologies by new social actors. While the examples Morozov provides are indeed well researched and often insightful, his argument therefore seems useful only to Western policy makers behind international democratic support funds—Morozov's apparent main audience—who may not calculate the possible drawbacks of blind technological optimism. Therefore his overall conclusion can only refute a straw-man version of more complex accounts of the ways both hegemonic and counter-hegemonic agents deploy Internet and social media technologies in particular contexts. He fails to address, for example, why some connectivity might be better than none for agents working outside state and institutional channels; how, even though authoritarian states (very much like those that Morozov would consider non authoritarian) have effectively developed digital updates of the trinity of control—"propaganda, censorship and surveillance"—the structural characteristics of digital technologies have transformed not only the relationship between the state and its constituents but the nature of activism and political participation as well. (82)

Along these lines Manuel Castells has argued for the counter-hegemonic potential and significance of technologies of mass self-communication as symptoms of "a culture that emphasizes individual autonomy, and the self-construction of the project of the social actor" (249). In the case of Cuba, new technologies have provided user-friendly spaces and networks that do not require institutional support to thrive and thus are not accountable to direct

government interference—other than through personal intimidation. The digital age reconfigures the public sphere by allowing the participation of these new actors in spaces of relative autonomy, and where, as blogger Reinaldo Escobar and intelligence officer Eduardo Fontes ("the cybercop") both point out, doing "prohibited things" becomes not only logistically easier, but also contagiously attractive (Escobar qtd. in García Mendez, 2011; Fontes, "Campañas").[5] This has allowed the alternative blogosphere to displace the language of traditional ideological opposition, used by a discredited and rhetorically impoverished dissident discourse, and mobilize in its place an imaginary organized around the demands of the informed, global, tech-savvy citizen of the 21st century: a political subject whose relationship to government and civic participation is not entirely regimented by grand narratives of national teleology but, rather, who seeks to reconstitute the public realm as a negotiated aggregate of plural interests, and for whom access to information and digital technology is conceived as another inalienable right.

The premise of pessimistic accounts of online activism, like Morozov's or Malcolm Gladwell's, is ultimately the false generalization that online activist networks and offline political interventions are insurmountably distinct, and that the only way to measure their conditions of success is through the short-term effects of their mobilization capability weighed against that of the government.[6] Ernesto Hernández Busto, former member of Paideia and now editor-in-chief of one of the most visited website of aggregated Cuban news and culture, follows closely Morozov's reasoning in favor of off-line activism. In "Los límites de la ciberdisidencia," a piece published in *El país*, Hernández Busto is careful to distinguish the short-term expectations created by the media hype from the reorganization potential afforded by social media and other Web 2.0 technologies, but remains skeptic precisely by adhering to the question of regime overthrow, favoring traditional forms of protest in what could be argued is an

ahistorical conception of political participation and a reductive and naïve view of the processes of contemporary political articulation and activism:[7]

> Cada vez más analistas se preguntan hasta qué punto puede derrocarse a un régimen desde esa especie de ilusión democrática (y narcisista) que propicia Internet. A lo mejor en esos escenarios donde el espacio para los reclamos libertarios es por fuerza minoritario y demasiado susceptible de control, hay que volver a los viejos métodos del disidente tradicional: hacer huelgas, salir a las calles, arriesgar un desafío que dependa menos de la imagen mediática.

These perspectives overlook the sense in which the success and future sustainability of the desired political change hinges upon the ability of the political community to commit to new forms of political participation and self-representation. They also gloss over the transformation of the public sphere itself by these technologies, ignoring the novel forms through which new subjects manage their entrance in the public sphere without having recourse to "authentic" forms of activism, and which does not mean necessarily a less effective or less risky (and thus less "authentic") form of activism. To argue that online activism in general cannot achieve many of the same goals that "real" activism can is to disavow the technical and sociological specificities of online communities of political activism across the world (as much as to fail to acknowledge the kind of political process desired by these users, that is, one where their actions online interpellate political society): awareness, fundraising, and solidarity not always stop once we 'like' 'forward' or 'retweet' something (as if street demonstrations had any fundamentally different effect on onlookers, provided any more opportunities for dialogue than online commentaries, or depended any less on media coverage). And if bonds of solidarity created by personal risks, off-line enduring effects, and economic and public disruptions are what critics of internet activism miss, there is neither quantitatively nor qualitatively differences between online and off-line political actions—as flash mobs, mass demonstrations, alternative news networks, governmental surveillance and harassment, and DNS attacks have amply shown. In short, these

lines of questioning may miss the gradual yet enduring mutations in political subjectivity that may not be readily recognizable under the rubrics of traditional political molds.

Despite having very limited exposure at home, and having a much more modest and moderate program as their public identity than previous opposition voices (which explains in part their success), the alternative blogosphere remains an uncomfortable presence for the Cuban government and its institutions, only made worse by the bloggers' ample international coverage since 2008, the journalism prizes awarded to Cuban blogging pioneer Yoani Sánchez, and the off-line interventions of some bloggers to garner momentum, publicity, and sympathy for their cause at home. However, while the combined effects of low connectivity, discrediting, and censorship do not permit us to speak yet of what Manuell Castells has called "*mass* self-communication," blogging has become a type of self-communication that, lacking access to a larger domestic public, nonetheless attempts to gain visibility by engaging a specific set of prominent interlocutors. Therefore, in the case of Cuba, the bloggers' impact on the public sphere must be examined indirectly by the effect it has on the discourse of other actors with access to it.

The nature of this interaction must be rethought because "formally inclusive public spheres" can often conceal the mechanisms through which they reinforce exclusivist politics and perpetuate structural social inequalities, as Nancy Fraser cautions us, rekindling Habermas's notion of the public sphere for contemporary theory (Fraser 1992: 526). This is particularly relevant in light of the government's efforts to recontextualize the political order established with the Cuban Revolution as a socialism *sui generis* where democratic values, global market economy, and socialized profit are rendered compatible with a single party rule. Bert Hoffmann suggests that we consider the notion of a public sphere "with adjectives" for cases like Cuba,

where the state retains a tight grip of the media while seeking to administer rather than suppress claims for reform and greater autonomy—some of which arise from within the ranks of its own institutions (Hoffmann 2011: 6). Yet this public sphere "with adjectives" has degrees of permissibility enforced and policed not only by the official organs of the state but also by the very same actors, such as artists and intellectuals, who bargain for more social autonomy.

The assessment of cultural policies vis-à-vis questions of autonomy remains a contested topic; a history of that debate is beyond the scope of this chapter. However, any discussion of cultural autonomy and government policy in Cuba must acknowledge that throughout the Revolution's history, political and cultural actors put forth diverse interpretations of how cultural producers positioned themselves "within" or "against" the revolutionary project, and how and whether they ought to do so. This, in turn, has allowed some state institutions and cultural programs to operate relatively independently from direct governmental oversight. In this sense, the distinction between official policy and bureaucratic overreach on one hand, and non-official, state-sponsored cultural initiatives on the other, is by no means clear-cut. The specific encounters I examine here, however, purposefully explore positions that test and sharpen those otherwise burred lines.[8] This explains why the alternative blogosphere brings into question narratives of reform and tolerance that continue to play a factor in Cuba's exceptionality with respect to other historical experiences of Soviet-style socialism. First, the bloggers antagonize political society by rejecting the official narrative of the government—in which Cuba's political system is portrayed as a relatively successful albeit beleaguered socialist project. Second, they impugn the government's cultural and intellectual emissaries, whose influence and resources, bloggers claim, are misleading yardsticks to gauge the climate of tolerance and public engagement in the country.

Government censorship in Cuba has been articulated as *raison d'état* against the interventionist policies of the United States or, alternatively, by underplaying civil and individual rights within the misappropriation logic of a pre-existing Marxist critique of bourgeois individual rights.[9] It is not uncommon, therefore, to conflate the critique of censorship in Cuba with the naïve defense of so-called bourgeois freedoms so often touted yet so precariously practiced in "actually existing democracies," to use Fraser's term. While the focus of this chapter does not allow for extant commentary on this problematic, the critique of the government's censorship practices in the name of socialism should not be indicative of either a repudiation of the possibility of radical left politics, or of a regression into obsolete Cold War dichotomies. However questionable the interventionist foreign policy of the United States might have been, or continues to be, with respect to Cuba, it does not immediately follow that vigorous criticism of Cuba's policies is inherently allied with the unquestioned celebration of either U.S. policy on Cuba or a neoliberal political framework.[10] As many political thinkers and philosophers have observed—including those who would consider themselves thinkers of the Left like Etienne Balibar, Nancy Fraser, Chantal Mouffe, Susan Buck Morss, Ernesto Laclau and Claude Lefort—even though there are structural and material obstacles to the *de facto* implementation of so-called liberal values and rights associated to the imaginary of modern Western democracy, and even though the political articulation of those concepts renders them empty signifiers deployed to sustain socially unjust hegemonic orders, once formulated those very same frustrated, violated, falsely universal and never universalized, incomplete, and duplicitous lofty notions of individual freedom and rights, that "nonsense upon stilts" as Jeremy Bentham would called them, it is precisely *in their name,* or in the name of *their* shortcomings, that alternative political, cultural, and social identities and movements seek public recognition for their demands.

On the other hand, there is also a tendency to link, optimistically, the blogs and other initiatives with the creation of a parallel public sphere, or a "virtual Cuba," in which the disembodied nature of the communications—and confrontations—obscures the nuances of that exchange. But the writing body, in our reading, cannot be estranged from its continuity with the physical: its praxis constitutes the intervention of a political and social subject who identifies him/herself as such both online and offline. The blogosphere is not 'elsewhere' by nature of being virtual; it cannot constitute a parallel public sphere. This is a contradiction if we understand the public sphere as the space(s) and mechanisms through which individuals, groups, and institutions identify themselves or articulate themselves as sociopolitical actors, and address each other and the community regarding issues that must be resolved, and are a concern, at the collective level. There is therefore no parallel collective with virtual issues, though the virtual public sphere is not a quantitative extension of the physical one where its dynamics are reproduced identically either. The blogosphere becomes, rather, a forceful rethinking of other forms of participation in the entire public realm by being a qualitatively different space *within* it.

Blog writing in Cuba, where political subjectivity and cultural participation have been historically articulated upon national identity, involves at this particular juncture a search for a new kind of discourse on citizenship that denounces and subverts the power dynamics of the public sphere—though not directly the political order.[11] The way these citizens rehearse, in writing, alternative narratives of their daily experience under that order, while negotiating a visibility and legitimacy for their demands in their encounter with various public authorities, allows us to discern links between emergent notions of citizenship, interventions in the cultural and public spheres, and their link to new media and technology. They present themselves as spectators who have taken an active role within culture at a specific moment, in the sense

understood by Hall, as a strategic site of hegemonic battles for political and social representation.[12] But if, in fact, we were looking at a new form of political subjectivity and praxis, then it would be critical to distinguish these from other attempts at political activism and cultural criticism in content, form, and constituency. The texts or episodes discussed here stage encounters with political and cultural figures—encounters that are structured on an exclusion to speak argued in different ways, tethered to categories like non artists, non intellectuals, non professionals. The objective of this chapter will be then to analyze the discourse and actions of the bloggers in their domestic context to argue the emergence of a democratic discourse that is democratic on two accounts: based on the type of demands they make—demands that are not based on group or identity politics, at the degree zero of citizenship as such—and on their place of enunciation: again, as citizens who have the right to speak as such—not as members of any other class (be that worker or intellectual or artist) or political party.

II. But is it art?

On July 24, 2009 independent blogger Claudia Cadelo entered the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes to attend a concert by Pedro Luis Ferrer, only to find a swarm of moustaches and walkie-talkies guarding the doors of national culture, expecting her. A man with an illegible ID tag dangling from his neck and a smile of visible embarrassment *hailed* the blogger from behind: "The museum reserves the right to deny admission and you two cannot participate in this cultural activity because you are against this [*ustedes están contra esto*]."[13] "To be against this" conjures up at once all the ghosts of political dissidence in a conveniently vague phrase that invokes the sacred pillars of ideological loyalty simultaneously: the Revolution, the nation, the people.

The examination of the cultural politics of the Cuban Revolution inevitably remits to that

inaugural scene when Fidel Castro sat down in 1961 with writers, artists, and intellectuals to draft their contractual relationship with the revolutionary project. Also forged in an incident of censorship (the documentary *P.M.*), Castro then pronounced the much quoted sentence whose very ambiguity would become a spectral but constant referent for cultural politics throughout the following decades: "Within the Revolution everything, against the Revolution nothing" (Castro, 1961). The strange syntax of this sentence where "within"—a spatial preposition—becomes an antonym of "against"—the preposition of an ideological stance—must be highlighted once more, since the contradictions that arise out of this maxim index the precarious place of enunciation embraced by the bloggers. Inspirationally utopian, dangerously ambiguous, and foundational all at once, the speech has since been the backdrop of many projects whose vitality and autonomy varies widely.[14]

The blogger requested an explanation, questioning the mechanism by which she had been recognized and expected at the door. Yielding some confusion, another self-described "cultural government official" reiterated: she was not allowed into the museum on suspicion of being a provocateur. There was no reference to her blog, *Octavo cerco,* but she had lost the privilege of participating in public cultural events as a result of having "sabotaged" one: in March 29th, 2009 she had participated, along with many other spectators, in *Tatlin's Whisper,* a controversial performance by Tania Bruguera at Havana's X Art Biennial. "Do you know what a performance is?" Cadelo asked the official who informed her that she was now *persona non grata* in public cultural events. The blogger was informed that her intervention had not been a performance but a "sabotage," and as such, she was barred from future cultural events. During her intervention in *Tatlin's Whisper*, Cadelo hoped for the day when free speech in Cuba was no longer a performance.[15] It bears remarking on the three-fold meaning of performance in this context: the

artistic performance itself, the performance of the government's apparent tolerance, and the daily performance implied in their invocation of Havel's notion of living "as if," operative in keeping an independent blog and speaking publicly under the protective cloak of art.

Tania Bruguera, the artist who conceived *Tatlin's Whisper #6 (Havana Version)*, had set up a podium during the 10th Havana Biennial that recreated the first address of Fidel Castro to the Cuban people after the triumph of the Revolution, January 8th, 1959. The performance consisted of granting a minute of uncensored speech to anyone in the public who wished to participate: a rationed suspension—recalling the rationing of basic goods by the State—of the government's censorship practices within the space of the artistic performance. Here art assumes a political authority it does not have to 'grant' a minute of freedom, the spectator then appropriates the role of the artist by taking over the performance, occupying (a representation of) power in both the aesthetic and the political sense. But the performance went beyond the mere carnival inversion of binary hierarchies. The mise-en-scène accomplished two irreversible, lasting effects: the reminder that any public speech in Cuba, even that of an art performance, is inevitably linked to the institutionalized power of the Revolution, and a reminder that the legitimacy of that framework has a foundational moment in time and space (to which the setting of the inaugural address alludes).

Bruguera's performances often emphasize the role of the spectator in completing the work of art even at the expense of the preservation of artistic boundaries, that is, the work of the artist is that of staging—or rather re-staging—the political spectacle, but to the degree that the situation is always compromising to the spectator beyond the performance, his/her participation in the work collapses the entire scene into an overt political, in the narrow sense of the word, act.[16] At *Tatlin's Whisper* the tensions were high: the first participant was a woman who grabbed

the mic and sobbed with varying degrees of intensity for 70 very uncomfortable seconds. "Cuba es un país rodeado de mar y es también una isla cercada por la censura…" Yoani Sánchez spoke second, Cadelo third, Escobar had to be dragged out of the stage because he ran out of time. The press, the blogs and Youtube did the rest.

In declarations to the Mexican newspaper *La Jornada*, the Minister of Culture Abel Prieto reluctantly condoned the performance itself, but not the citizens that participated. The artistic gesture was deemed valid only as pure form, within the self-referential logic of the space of art. During the interview Minister Abel Prieto referred to the artist by name, but when talking about the participation of Yoani Sánchez, referred to her as "la muchacha famosa esta", "this famous girl." Yet, as an emphatic reclaiming of their right to make themselves visible in the public sphere as citizens, as individuals, these Cadelo and Sánchez have scanned their identification cards with their name, picture, and address, the same documents issued by a government that now refuses to name them,[17] that excludes them from public cultural events.

The assessment of cultural policies vis-à-vis questions of autonomy remains a contested topic; a history of that debate is beyond the scope of this article. But any discussion of cultural autonomy and government policy in Cuba must acknowledge that throughout the Revolution's history, political and cultural actors put forth diverse interpretations of how cultural producers positioned themselves "within" or "against" the revolutionary project, and how and whether they ought to do so. This, in turn, has allowed some state institutions and cultural programs to operate relatively independent from direct governmental oversight. In this sense, the distinction between official policy and bureaucratic overreach on one hand, and non-official, state-sponsored cultural initiatives on the other, is by no means clear-cut. The specific encounters such as this one, however, purposefully explore positions that test and sharpen those otherwise burred lines.

Having received coverage in the international media, Bruguera's piece required yet another tuning in the censorship machine: this time the citizens who spoke at *Tatlin's Whisper* were not allowed to participate in the kind of critique that the performance was designed to produce, based on the accusation that they were not artists. They were not regular citizens either, since this category—non-artists who make troublesome interventions in public cultural events[18]—came annexed to the more familiar charge of being on the payroll of a conspiratorial smear campaign against the regime:

> El Comité Organizador de la Décima Bienal de La Habana, considera este hecho un acto **anticultural**…[V]arias personas **ajenas a la cultura**, encabezadas por una "disidente" profesional fabricada por el poderoso grupo mediático PRISA, aprovecharon un performance de la artista Tania Bruguera para realizar una provocación contra la Revolución Cubana. Se trata de individuos al servicio de la maquinaria propagandística anticubana.

The language is revealing, since the phrase "ajenas a la cultura" denotes both people who are not associated with the institutions in charge of the event, and, most importantly, people who have no relationship to culture or are somehow outside of it, and therefore, presumably, no say in it. For Claudia Cadelo, the old dictum takes the form:

> Dentro del arte todo, fuera del arte nada. … Quizás una nueva estrategia gubernamental haya trazado una nítida línea roja entre nosotros: La crítica desde el arte (válida), la crítica fuera del arte (contrarrevolucionaria). No quisiera que este post resultara ofensivo para nadie, es sólo la opinión de quien critica fuera del arte y sin ánimos de "hacer cultura". ("¿Quién malinterpreta a quién?")

The Committee's phrase "persons foreign to culture" thus appeals to a curious category that cannot exist other than in the conflation of national culture with the political trajectory of the nation. It provides the cultural authorities a safe space to distance themselves from other independent initiatives that threaten the model of negotiated criticism that benefits artists, the cultural establishment, and the government. It becomes clear how important it is for the authorities to situate the bloggers in a known oppositional place and use them to their advantage:

as testaments to the ongoing campaign to discredit the Revolution.

During the interview then Minister of Culture Abel Prieto gave *La Jornada* about the Bienal incident, he recalls the domestic avenues open to criticism: "Estamos fomentando un arte crítico, de reflexión, que nos ayude a descubrir nuestras distorsiones, a defender la utopía. Cuando se hace la crítica desde una posición de compromiso con el país, los resultados son realmente fecundos" (Prieto, *Jornada*).[19] Part of the difficulty seen here in publicly managing the bloggers' personas is fueled by the latter's ability to produce and articulate a competing narrative of that *utopia* from the inside. These narratives circulate, however limited, much more than previous attempts at open confrontation from traditional dissidents, and they try to disentangle, precisely, the two options given: within or against. Not being isolated occurrences, as we will see in detail, these circumventive practices of un-naming designate a group of individuals denied public presence who have been de facto stripped of their full status as citizens, as constitutive subjects of the nation, demonstrating once again the ideological contingency of that category. These practices of exclusion—which include discrediting, criminalizing, dismissing, and publicly offending the bloggers (and other related initiatives studied here)—target the incipient space opened by these voices; they unveil the murky pacts between cultural policy, political critique, and the public sphere in contemporary Cuba while both the political and the cultural establishments engage in them—members of the government and the secret police as well as cultural officials, artists, and intellectuals.

The aftermath of *Tatlin's Whisper* poignantly highlighted the necessity of studying both the online and offline exchanges of the bloggers with other social actors, as it was one of many similar encounters between alternative bloggers and key intellectual and cultural figures. At first glance, these episodes appear as just another example of governmental strategies to contain the

blogosphere within the realm of the virtual—and thus beyond the reach of the average citizen. However, while the bloggers' encounters with government authorities is straightforwardly hostile, their interactions with cultural and intellectual figures reveal far more both about the possibility of autonomous citizen action and about the limitations of institutional reform in Cuba today. The texts discussed here touch on the tacit parameters of participation that allow academic and cultural institutions to export the image of a participatory public sphere while maintaining a monopoly on government criticism that benefits both the authorities and the cultural establishment. I would argue that the peculiar language of dismissal that the cultural establishment deploys in its interactions with the bloggers, on one hand, and the sustained reflection around issues of autonomy and citizenship furnished by the bloggers' responses to these strategies of exclusion from the public sphere, on the other, yield another aspect of the social text where the cultural policy of the Cuban Revolution and the emergence of new political actors intimately intersect.

If there is any doubt regarding the surviving continuities between the second half of the 1980s—when the acknowledged fissures of the ideological bedrock of really existing socialisms everywhere fanned the fires of transition in both the popular and the artistic imaginaries—and the reconfiguration of the cultural field after the crisis of the Special Period, it would be enough to compare the declarations of the Bienal's Organizing Committee cited above and those of the National Council of the Arts seen in the last chapter with the reaction of the cultural establishment to the more radical and legendary artistic projects of the end of the 1980s (Arte Calle, Grupo Profesional, Arte y Derecho, Proyecto Castillo de la Fuerza). In his thesis/documentary about Arte Calle, called "Viva la Revolú" (1988) after a performance by group member Aldito Menéndez, Pablo Dotta, then a student of the Escuela Internacional de

Cine y Televisión, interviews one of Arte Calle's members about the group's notable intervention in the Galería de L y 23, titled "Ojo, pinta" which led to its closing:

> Yo le estaba contando que hubo una mujer que creo es la directora de la galería o no sé qué cosa de cultura que dijo que aquello se estaba llenando de gente que no eran artistas y que por eso había que cerrar aquello. Y entonces fue cuando yo, no sé, me exalté y me sentí así, no sé, yo dije bueno el arte en Cuba se hace para artistas no para el pueblo, porque esa gente son pueblo indiscutiblemente.[20]

The narrative voice is heard over the archival footage from the event, while the camera focuses on shaggy-haired teens that are head banging and playing air guitar to metal riffs.

The sequels of Bruguera's *Tatlin's Whisper* confirmed the patterns of selective tolerance that cultural historians have associated to the official cultural politics of the Cuban Revolution since the early 1990s, also discussed in earlier chapters.[21] In turn, what the official responses have unveiled in this case was the recognition, albeit by negation, of new actors who would not have a public 'name' until they knew how to deal with them. The spatial prepositions of Fidel Castro's old dictum continue their protagonic role, as the sole criterion of citizenship seems to be from what "position" one speaks. For Rafael Rojas, critical of the way the state's ideology mediates in cultural affairs, this model was rehearsed in the 60s: "cuando la pluralidad ideológica de las élites imponía cierta flexibilidad, lo determinante para asegurar la circulación no es una u otra idea socialista, sino el respaldo al sistema político insular o la oposición a la hegemonía mundial de Estados Unidos" (*Estante* 19). The vital difference, however, is that this confrontation is no longer between artists and professionals, nor do these new voices try to negotiate a cultural space within the Revolution, as censored writers and artists once did—and arguably still do—, but the very parameters upon which the right to exercise those exclusions hinge. In this sense it denounces a power structure that falsifies political representation by assigning its constituency a social role that does not include speaking on behalf of its own

interests (echoed in Rafael Hernández' ideas on political participation under the socialist system). The category of citizenship itself and its corollary rights become then ideologically contingent and at the cost of the integrity of the entire public sphere.

The double performance of many artists or public intellectuals with respect to the state and toward their own public thus becomes passé as an aesthetic solution and as a form of critical engagement. Many artists whose performances and work were scandalous during the late 80s and early 90s, like singer/songwriter Carlos Varela, or writer and filmmaker Eduardo del Llano, continue to work with formal concepts like allegory or absurd humor, but they publicly shy away from political disagreement shifting the responsibility onto the interpreting agent. This disavowal of the narrow political implications of their works in interviews and statements often appeals to matters of interpretation, or underscores the universality of the problems they address instead of acknowledging their potentially controversial local referents. This is not an ethical demand that all art must legitimate itself by being politically committed (this is a moot point when all spheres of life are subordinated to ideology where the political content—or lack thereof—of anything is always already an issue). Rather, it is a recognition that certain forms of political intervention are no longer solvent, and in fact, what then was brave and revolutionary, now is a sign of inability to perceive, exactly, what has changed and what has not in the relationship between aesthetics and politics.

Cadelo's post "Who misinterprets whom?" illustrates the disappointment of the contemporary spectator with this position particularly well. The post is a chronicle of the presentation of the documentary *GNYO* (2009) on the work of the 80s humor group Nos-Y-Otros, which Eduardo del Llano cofounded in 1982. During the question and answer period the old comedians distanced themselves from their once bold shows by differentiating humorous

social criticism from overt political disagreement with the government. Here Cadelo laments that well-worn disclosure that denies any critical character of the artist's work to be construed as a political statement:

> ...sobre todo si se supone que yo deba levantar la mano y hacer una pregunta, dar una opinión. El otro día estuve en un debate y salí deprimida: ninguna pregunta real, ninguna respuesta real. En algún momento alguien dijo: "Imagínate, pueden pensar que soy un gusano"; y yo me dije: a partir de este instante si levanto la mano y comienzo una pregunta, por cuestiones inherentes a mi personalidad me veré obligada a comenzar diciendo "Como gusana me encantaría saber si…" (Cadelo "¿Quién malinterpreta a quién?")

Del Llano, director of the documentary, is a paradigmatic example of the duplicitous nature of the public persona required of artists to continue working as such under institutional aegis. He has become known, especially, for humorous and highly critical short films produced independently, which circulate virally both inside Cuba and on the Internet. After the first of those shorts achieved controversial notoriety and was featured prominently in Miami, del Llano quickly appeared in a Cuban cultural review, *La Jiribilla,* for a symbolic product recall, arguing that his film *Mount Rouge* had been reproduced without his knowledge and his political views had been manipulated:[22]

> Yo he criticado cosas y lo voy a seguir haciendo, como cualquiera, pero cuando se critica algo, hay que saber primero cómo funciona, qué parte funciona mal, y por ahí de manera seria o satírica, atacar. A mí no se me ocurriría nunca atacar a la Revolución, a Martí, Fidel, son cosas más sagradas. Todo el mundo sabe lo importante que ha sido el trabajo de la Seguridad cubana que incluso ha evitado más ametrallamiento de gente y sabotajes, o sea, todo eso que han hecho las lanchas de Miami, en los campos de caña y las otras mariconá. ("No se me ocurriría…")

There is a possibility that the *mea culpa* might just be part of the performance too, though Del Llano's persona as the quintessential lukewarm progressive artist, critical but committed, is the subject of most of his own blog posts. But Del Llano's appeal to the story's absurdity as an obstacle for finding any referent in Cuban reality is absurd enough to introduce an element of

ambiguity: they could have been Martians who ask for water, he claims in the interview. Instead, they were two secret police agents who ask for permission to install surveillance equipment, why would anyone take this specifically as a criticism of the Cuban secret police is, he claims, beyond him. Del Llano's winks may be obvious to anyone reading even a little between the lines, but they betray the knowing spectator by being a reproduction of his/her own state vis-à-vis authority and thus a complicit nod, however irreverent, to the state of things.

Del Llano's language becomes more relevant to the topic at hand when he is discussing the production and circulation of his work inside of Cuba. He emphasizes that the work was produced independently, not to be confused with clandestinely. He highlights that it was not an illegal work; it had merely been produced outside of institutional channels—as if these were unproblematic categories hardly unfamiliar to a known writer, comedian, and now film director such as Del Llano.[23] Del Llano's statements regarding the politicization of his work have appeared both in his blog and in the publication *La Jiribilla*, but have gone further than what is expected for a personal defense of his work. In his blog, for example, del Llano accuses blogger/writer OLPL from *Lunes de post-revolución*, after OLPL's negative review of his work, of not liking anything "Cuban," accompanying it with unfortunate insults which illustrate the kind of toxicity involved in these exchanges: "sodomized northern farmer," "pederast."[24]

Antonio José Ponte's *Villa Marista en Plata* (2010) maps the ways in which these new voices of dissent and the realm of art become entangled in how they both use and represent technology against a repressive political authority. His main thesis belabors that new technologies—portable memory, the Internet, social networks—provide factual support for what before remained anecdotal, and as such subject to criticisms and denials, accounts of state violence and censorship, especially in the field of culture. Though exquisitely written, Ponte's

book juxtaposes in the same field actors that need to be differentiated: the blogs, the intellectuals, and the artworks that defy censorship through new technologies, appear in his work side by side. The relationship itself between intellectuals, artists, and these voices tangentially related to 'culture' is never looked at in detail and risks coming off as a casual encounter, epiphenomenal to the emergence of these technological innovations. (45) It is precisely the need to distinguish the mechanisms at work in those spaces—however intersected and intermingled in their encounters—that is underscored by the pact between politically critical art and the state's spectacle of tolerance.

Blogs like *Generación Y* y *Octavo Cerco* combine in their posts literary genres like testimonio, crónica, and journalistic reports to create an online persona that effectively captivates the reading public in its intimacy. The evidential multimedia that accompanies their posts, as much as their writing styles, offer a charismatic, informed, and *verifiable* dissenting voice that is unambiguously critical of the political establishment, and attends to a model of participatory politics sustained on what Stuart Hall described, in another context, as "that critical dialectic between 'private troubles' and 'public issues'" ("Life and Times of the First New Left").[25] Straddling multiple concerns with citizen-journalism, technological transformations, and aesthetic representation, these blogs remain in fact heavily indebted to the Latin American tradition of the *crónica*.[26] In "A Cyberliterary Afterword" Edmundo Paz Soldán has argued that "…the literary star of the day is the blog," going as far as affirming that

> The blog is currently threatening to supplant the novel as the great genre in which everything can find its place. Thanks to the appearance of a new technological format we are witnessing, in 'real time', the birth of a new literary genre. In Latin America the chronicle has been, since the end of the nineteenth century, one of the privileged genres of our modernity, capable of giving us many of our classic texts…But perhaps the true contemporary form of the chronicle is being written on the Internet by the authors of blogs. (260)

The overarching tropes that structure these blogged autobiographical reports from the field are no strangers either to similar narrative approaches to literary realism in the literature of the Special Period. The comparison is warranted by similarities with the narrative forms and subjects established by the Cuban literary boom of the 90s. The publication of gritty, blunt, fictionalized accounts of post-Cold War Cuba narrated in first person thrived with the 1993-94 laws authorizing national authors to enter into independent commercial contracts abroad and to earn hard currency. Its favored images involved scarcity, corruption, and moral turpitude, allegorizing the national crisis and the ruin of the revolutionary project through "tales of shame and degradation." They were often either loosely autobiographical and/or made use of an intimate, confessional first-person to produce the effect of testimonial fiction. The tension between fiction and non-fiction often asked of literature to be an indirect praxis of another discipline whose will to objectivity, such as history or journalism, might be in conflict with the official story.

In her excellent study of the subject, Esther Whitfield demonstrates why "in the mid-and late 1990s it was the swan song, and not the birth, of the Cuban Revolution that made the stuff of salable fiction" (21-22). She argues convincingly how this literature and its popularity reflected on Cuba's atypical entrance in the global market, while satisfying the consumption patterns of a public that was mostly international. Whitfield proposes that these authors (e.g. Zoe Valdés, Pedro Juan Gutiérez) reflected critically on the relationship between writing and money, since they reworked in their literature images of the social and cultural effects of dollarization and the deepening of the economic crisis. Simultaneously, they became conscious of the commercial viability of a certain type of marginal discourse, often inserted in the foreign demand for the postcolonial exotic. However, as long as it hinged upon a discourse of scarcity and eroticized wickedness, on an ongoing play on deprivation and depravity, social ills became de-historicized

as a geopolitical misfortune: Writers of special period fiction explore these relationships by embedding elements of them in their work: not as explicit critique, but rather through a series of textual figures that afford their authors both distance from and complicity with Cuba's new socioeconomic order and its new geographies of publishing. (32) Politically, it was a discourse of few demands, protected by and restricted to the category of author and literature.

The point of the comparison is not one of moral or aesthetic value. We can relate them only as distinct discourses engaged with and deeply implicated in a shared socio political horizon. The alternative blogosphere can be distinguished from similar approaches to criticism in art and literature not by the topics it touches on, but rather by the insistence, and the forms it takes, on the fact that the bloggers present themselves as regular citizens, and not as professionals with any recognizable credential or as members of a political group. While different questions of truth and authenticity are unresolved tensions in the blogs as well, that sense of immediacy and spontaneity produced by the blog as form implicates the reader in an intimate bond with the testimony they offer. Accepting some part of the reality of the speaking subject also becomes a necessary premise to continue reading, demanding another type of suspension of disbelief insofar as the reading is mediated by a platform whose trustworthiness is still being negotiated by the media campaigns surrounding the bloggers, and by the conflicting affinities that Cuba still evokes. Most posts follow a simple format, choosing anecdotes that incorporate many of the same images around scarcity and moral deterioration of the 'dirty realism' characteristic of the 1990s literature, but the images always function as vehicles to track their origin in larger institutional or political problems, which are then posed as formal questions to political society. The frustration of the speaking subject is directed explicitly at the political as its site of origin, and always staged at its highest point of antagonism, claiming what ought to be

constitutionally guaranteed rights for citizens by citizens in any society that defines itself as a democratic in the 21st century.

Cadelo's post of October 31, 2009, for example, reads:

> Es la tercera vez que una institución o ministerio me niega la entrada a un lugar de acceso libre….No tienen mi foto y los custodios no conocen mi nombre, no hay una lista que decrete que yo soy persona non grata.
> Yo le exijo al Ministerio de Cultura que emita dicha lista, que aclaren las razones por las que no puedo asistir a conciertos y participar en debates, que den la cara y dejen de ampararse en el vago concepto *La institución se reserva el derecho de admisión*. Yo quiero que Abel Prieto articule legalmente esta exclusión para así yo poder, legalmente también, ponerle una demanda al Ministerio de Cultura por discriminación cultural e ideológica. ("El Ministerio y yo")

This and related posts are accompanied by video and audio of the confrontations, often recorded with cellphones, as well as facsimiles of legal demands and citations. If certain subjects became a question of commercial viability for Cuban literature then, the question here is that of the political viability of another kind of text. That writing acquires political urgency only in this specific context, since it projects a new mode of being by reclaiming the individual's rights to seek information, to make public one's own private convictions, and to intervene in the administration of one's rights, duties, and property precisely by virtue of being a citizen (and not as artists, or intellectuals, or writers, or any other official position recognized by the proper institutional channels and/or protected by ideological loyalty to a particular order). So that it is this place of enunciation, not the content, or the quality of elaboration that sets them apart. Perhaps it could be called a certain attitude, a positioning, in the sense of a language that is simultaneously a writing and a stance. These actions and their accompanying posts call upon a right that, to be satisfied, would require the overhaul of the entire political system necessary for free speech, freedom of association, and freedom of information; so that citizens that are not artists, are not intellectuals, and are not politicians, can create their own discourse by having

access to information and use it to intervene in the public sphere.

The cultural interventions of bloggers like Sánchez, Cadelo, and Orlando Luis Pardo Lazo (OLPL)—who in 2009 presented his censored novel *Boring Home* in a courtyard in front of, and excluded from, Havana's Feria Internacional del Libro—upset this balance and therefore must be read against this backdrop. Cadelo's post "Who misinterprets whom?" cited above, illustrates the disappointment of the contemporary spectator with the public projection of many Cuban artists. The exclusion from that cultural zone and its rules of engagement—as a person "foreign to, or outside of, culture"—delimits the very space from which it is possible to voice an uncompromising critical stance. This is not an ethical demand that all art and criticism legitimate itself by being politically committed or by addressing a political theme (this is a moot point when the political content—or lack thereof—is *always already* an issue). Rather, it is the recognition that for the contemporary spectator certain aesthetics of political intervention are no longer solvent. The criteria at work in playing art sponsored or tolerated by the establishment off the criticism put forth by the alternative scene should not suggest an indictment of the ethics and choices of the individual cultural actors, nor remit us to judgments regarding the aesthetic value of concrete works. They can be related only as distinct discourses engaged with and deeply implicated in a shared socio-political horizon; discourses that nonetheless register each others' effects in indirect and direct dialogues such as the ones discussed here. The bloggers' engagement in political criticism often relies, then, on an oblique relationship with culture as they bargain for public exposure at home: temporarily fulfilling the role of critics or artists by commenting or participating in events and performances; sponsoring alternative outlets for their works, such as the literary supplement *Voces* and its predecessor *Boletín de Voces Cubanas* (fig. 16); organizing workshops and festivals like Academia Blogger, "Una isla virtual," and "Festival

Clic"; and supporting controversial artists like Omni-ZonaFranca, Los Aldeanos, Escuadrón Patriota, and Porno Para Ricardo. (fig. 17)

In this sense, the Cuban 1990s debates on autonomy and civil society discussed in the introduction bear a great deal on the public encounters between Yoani Sánchez and other bloggers, and the intellectual establishment, where the *soi-disant* 'organic' and 'critical' features of this field were challenged more pressingly than by its internal theoretical contradictions. During an academic conference in FIU on October 22 of 2009, Rafael Hernández coined a damaging adjective for the alternative blogosphere that would later be repeated by other Cuban intellectuals as a felicitous find in dismissing the blogs. Asked about the independent blogosphere, he referred to it as mere "ciberchancleteo", the virtual equivalent of the sound made by flip flops that in Cuban slang refers to the mannerisms of the uneducated and the poor, the marginal sectors of society. The following month, on November 29, Hernández' magazine hosted in Havana a 'public' debate entitled "Internet in culture" to which Yoani Sánchez, Claudia Cadelo, Reinaldo Escobar, representing independent internet publications in Cuba, were denied entrance. As a response to Hernández' publicized FIU comments, Yoani Sánchez published videos of the hostile reception they received at the door of this event, and of her intervention after gaining entrance under the guise of a blonde wig. The appeal to a banal and elementary disguise, invoking a certain "chancleteo" in its bluntness, was an intentional hint: it proves a viable strategy in exposing the implications of the sanitized language of the academics for a democratic construction of the public sphere.

When in 2010 the Academia Cubana de la Lengua refused to participate in the V Congreso Internacional de la Lengua Española celebrated in Chile because Yoani Sánchez had been invited, the language of the declarations to the press also implies that, in the same way the

bloggers were not artists or people "of" culture, they were poorly qualified to speak in public. In February 24th the international version of *Granma* published the Academy's declaration: "han sido invitadas personas que no cuentan con avales para reflexionar y discutir sobre el destino del español, y cuya presencia en el cónclave solo puede ser interpretada como una provocación política" ("Académicos cubanos no irán a Valparaíso"). It did not mention Yoani Sánchez by name either, nor the fact that she was denied an exit visa to attend the convention.

Apropos of Hernández, Ponte also glossed incisively these incidents to argue how this "excluding debate" exploits the language of aesthetics by marshaling the hierarchical nature of aesthetic categories against competing demands for political inclusion.

> Si acaso Rafael Hernández representa las últimas tendencias del pensamiento oficial cubano, puede deducirse que la sempiterna lucha ideológica se comporta en la actualidad como crítica de las formas. Un pensamiento de esta clase encuentra objetable, no lo que se dice, sino las formas que lo dicho adopta. Lo político pasa a ser entendido estéticamente, y no es de extrañar que la existencia del debate público dependa entonces de un protocolo, de una buena etiqueta instaurada….bajo apariencia de haber dejado atrás los resabios de la política, pueden seguir ejecutándose las exclusiones de siempre. ("Blogs y debate excluyente")

In other words, their formalism is counterpart to the ways in which the arts are allowed a critical discourse within the spaces of circulation previously allocated to it. Ponte is right to see the bankruptcy of the public sphere in the way its custodians measure intellectual sophistication by adherence to socio-political codes of propriety. That is why both Ponte and Rojas read, in a purposively vague theoretical agenda, exclusion practices derived from equivocal notions of aesthetic, cultural, and political autonomies.

In "La ética dormida", Cadelo returns to the dismissal or betrayal of artists and intellectuals when it comes to autonomous and politically controversial projects. In her resignation to engage, Cadelo gives her own concrete reasons for not considering *them*

meaningful interlocutors either:

> Polemizo con un amigo sobre la ética y los intelectuales: ¿Cómo le voy a decir a alguien tan inteligente, tan sabio, algo tan obvio? ¿Crees que no lo sabe? ¿Cómo le voy a decir a un curador que creo que debe suspender su exposición porque los artistas que participan están siendo amenazados por la seguridad del estado? ¿Cómo le voy a aconsejar a un músico que yo creo que lo éticamente correcto sería suspender su concierto porque hay público afuera que no puede entrar, el sitio está tomado por la policía política? ¿Cómo le voy a insinuar a un teórico que yo considero que su conferencia no debería tener lugar porque parte de los interesados en el tema no podrá escucharla, son considerados "contrarrevolucionarios"?[27]

Ironically, the post accomplishes what it claims it should not attempt to do. The text plays with the tension between knowing and (not) telling, while the refrain "How can I tell […]?" reveals a jaded spectator, who is aware that the game has been rigged and that the players know it. Thus the apparently rhetorical question "Don't you he/she knows it?" conveys a subtle yet significant disclosure addressed to another, absent interlocutor: "Don't they think I know too?" The authorial voice deploys a didactic, almost chastising tone in response to the perceived paternalism concealed in the arguments behind discursive inequality, especially when they do not concern specialized academic or aesthetic matters per se but rather issues of public interest such as the management of internet access. Under the tag "Derecho de admisión vs. Cyberchancleteo" *Octavo cerco* has collected the posts recording denials of admission to public events. Together with the saga of Cadelo's legal suit at the Ministry of Justice for "cultural apartheid," this compilation betrays in its most vivid contrasts the dialogical impasse. Posts such as "El Ministerio y yo" cited below—an open letter to Abel Prieto and the Ministry of Culture—, "Escoliosis ministerial," and "Separados por la 'cultura'" attest to how the *public* aspect of public participation in cultural events can be arrested by the arbitrary suspension of rights.[28]

In a post that asks "What is an academic? What is an intellectual?" Sánchez explains her distance from the intellectual world she once partook in and romanticized during her university

years.[29] She highlights the difference between the open demeanor and nuanced statements Cuban intellectuals adopt abroad on one hand, and their timid domestic interventions, or lack thereof, on the other: "…upon returning home, if there is an invitation to exchange ideas from civil society, the opposition, or the alternative scene, he/she pretends not hear it or insults the interlocutor. Discredits, convulses, calls Father State to defend him/her…" In this post Sánchez addresses the 2011 controversy in light of Mariela Castro's participation in LASA as the head of the Cenesex (Centro Nacional de Educación Sexual) and as sociologist of LGTB rights and activism in Cuba. Castro and Sánchez had an earlier exchange in 2008 when the blogger irked Castro by asking her in a conference whether the pursuit of tolerance for sexual orientation entailed a move toward openings in other areas, such as political opinion, that were still considered "closets." Arguing that the subject was beyond her purview, Castro later published comments in the Cenesex website accusing Sánchez of being a mercenary, of being "insignificant" and "poorly educated," called her a lying "gallita" and a "pobre mujer" and invited her to Cenesex where the expert sociologists could help her out of the "vicious circle of chauvinism" in which she was clearly caught.[30]

III. Citizenship, autonomy, and the public sphere

The reception of the alternative bloggers, critical of the kind of organized civic autonomy promoted by governmentally backed cultural and academic institutions, refracts the contradictory pacts of professional conscription. The bloggers' choice of interlocutors, who enjoy a high profile both domestically and abroad, also guarantees an exposure that would otherwise be precarious at best. Moreover, it suggests that bloggers like Sánchez and Cadelo intentionally target figures who, by virtue of their public and professional image as moderates or progressives,

become vulnerable when pressed on social and political issues that are not yet open to public contestation except in highly controlled environments.

Considering Hernández's FIU remark in this context, the alternative bloggers constitute an awkward counterexample that requires more than one front of attack. The bloggers' posts are more difficult to dismiss as the talk of mercenaries, since they consistently and explicitly construct a discourse based on personal experience documented through pictures, video, sound files and other material evidence, they do not belong to any political association, and in fact, insist on their suspicion of any and all political agendas. They are also contesting the meaning of civil society espoused by these intellectuals directly and, for example, are actively engaged in developing an independent debate on the subject through classes on history and law at the Academia Blogger.[31] In *Octavo cerco*, Cadelo specifically addresses the equivocal uses of the term in the press:

> El otro día, por ejemplo, casi caigo en la trampa de un titular del *Granma* : "La sociedad civil cubana denuncia el bloqueo" o algo así, no lo recuerdo bien. Cuando leí "la sociedad civil", al momento me dije emocionada: ¡Están hablando de La Sociedad Civil en el Granma!
> ¡Qué ingenuidad! El artículo lo terminé de mala gana, no recuerdo en absoluto de qué iba, lo que si recuerdo era que la "sociedad civil cubana" del *Granma* estaba formada por Felipe Pérez Roque en primera plana, seguido de Miguel Barnet y otros escritores y funcionarios de las principales organizaciones culturales del país, es decir, las principales organizaciones gubernamentales; porque todos a estas alturas saben que en Cuba un funcionario alto de Cultura, es lo mismo que un funcionario alto de la Seguridad del Estado, ya que su inmediato superior, sin duda alguna, trabaja para la inteligencia militar. ("Dos sociedades civiles")

In its encounter with the intellectual establishment, ciberchancleteo becomes an activity that ought to be far removed from the lofty discussions about civil society. Regardless of whether the exclusions are in the form of hate speech and state-sanctioned violence against the bloggers, or a softer dismissal from the part of intellectuals and artists, they are part of the same discourse about the public sphere, and specifically, about the (im)possibility of another political subject, as

Velia Cecilia Bobes suggests. On the other hand, the alternative blogosphere's self-presentation as civil society might be as inadequate as is their detractors' version. (This is how I understand the usefulness of Kotkin's study—which claims that the collapse of Eastern European regimes was managed from above rather than being the result of political opposition. It allows us to evaluate the critical potential of initiatives like the alternative blogosphere without falling into overly optimistic idealizations.)

The most salient feature of the alternative blogosphere, in contrast to similar approaches to cultural criticism, is not the topics it addresses, but its underscoring of the fact that the bloggers portray themselves as ordinary citizens, and not as credentialed professionals. Most posts follow a simple format, choosing anecdotes that evoke the familiar tropes of scarcity and moral deterioration in a tone reminiscent of the first-person intimacy that marks the literature of the Special Period. Nonetheless, the texts always operate as vehicles to trace the genealogy of these experiences to a larger institutional or political problem, posed as a formal question to political society. The frustration of the speaking subject is directed explicitly at the political as its source, and always staged at its highest point of antagonism, claiming a constitutionally guaranteed right for citizens by citizens in any society that defines itself as democratic. The autobiographical tone of these posts, coupled with the density of the data allowed by technology—photos, video, audio, facsimiles—provides an unusual and disproportionate visibility to the opinions of otherwise regular citizens: That is, not as artists, or intellectuals, or writers, or any other official position recognized by the proper institutional channels and/or protected by ideological loyalty to a particular order. Concerned authorities thus find it more difficult to publicly manage the bloggers' personas given the latter's ability to produce and articulate a competing narrative from the inside. Furthermore, these narratives circulate, however

limited, much more than previous attempts at open confrontation by traditional dissidents; by putting in play their cultural capital and their technical know-how, these bloggers try to disentangle, precisely, the two options given: within or against.

As we saw in the introduction, the issue of autonomy has been a particularly thorny subject to intellectuals engaged in the redefinition of civil society, customarily on the defensive regarding the degree of autonomy that both academic institutions and mass organization actually enjoy in practice. Furthermore, by using the very epithets with which they are excluded in order to legitimate their voice as regular citizens, bloggers embody the fundamental misappraisal of the intellectuals' call, from the theoretical benches of academic debate, for more social autonomy within an imagined revolutionary consensus. The site of enunciation of bloggers, not the content or the quality of elaboration, is then what sets them apart; they are more dangerous as models of citizen autonomy than as models of government criticism. That remains true even if their domestic audience is small: people are increasingly aware that independent bloggers exist and that they provide valuable information not found elsewhere; even if Cubans living in the country do not regularly read their blogs, like the government itself, they simultaneously resent, mistrust, and/or are attracted by, their resources, their disruptive potential, and technical savvy. Occasionally they succeed in emulating the bloggers and join their lot, like the case of Jeovany Jiménez Vega, whose license to practice medicine had been revoked after sending a complaint letter to the Ministry of Public Health, and who opened his own blog called "Ciudadano Cero" in 2010.

By linking their writing to competing definitions of civil society, the alternative bloggers recast all writing by regular citizens, as long as it is consciously done outside the official directives as an inchoate exercise in the kind of individual autonomy required for the success of a

transition to democracy. This autonomy, experienced as a stance made public in the form of an individual demand against authority, transforms the public sphere by bringing into question how the *public* is constituted as both a space and a subject. Such discourse constructs an alternative citizenship by flooding the public space with the disclosure of private experiences. This gesture demarcates their social position as private citizens, enhancing their credibility and authenticating their demands by dint of a rhetoric that often betrays a certain anxiety of legitimation, but whose overly self-reflexive narrative is as much a part of the ethos of blogging as it is an operation of self-validation that challenges the rules of public discourse.

It would be useful to contrast it to what Habermas identifies as perversion of the notion of public in relation to the personal biography, for it allows us to read personal blogs in light of the classic concept of *Publizität*—the process of submitting political decisions and authority to a reasoning political body. Habermas avers that the bourgeois public sphere lost its potential once its public character became a mere simulacrum produced by the mass media and where "…the public sphere becomes the sphere for the publicizing of private biographies" and not a space where the rights of the individual are exercised in public, guaranteed by his status and right to privacy. (171) However, it would be possible to think of blog writing—not as a general practice, but in this particular juncture—as an inversion of that dynamic. Here, the publication of personal biography, where testimony also attempts to articulate a collective right, does constitute a legitimate public exercise by and from the private individual as a site of democratic discourse. Since the publication of personal biography goes against the traditional channels of criticism authorized by the state and its cultural institutions, and the content of that biography belies the narratives about the regime's achievements, the publicizing of private lives unveils mass media's simulation of a political consensus.

Habermas is strictly concerned with how certain notions of *private* and *public* interact to constitute a bourgeois public sphere that is historically unique, but his discussion of how different actors manage their entrance into such a space helps to underscore how these voices contest the meaning of *public*, claiming a right to political autonomy as reasoning individuals with *private* interests and independently formed opinions—a process of formation that blogs consciously and explicitly discuss. For Habermas, that bourgeois sense of political autonomy emerged out of the public pursuit of the interests of the *homo economicus*: private individuals whose claim to autonomy hinged on their double identity as men with natural rights and as property owners. The focus of market interests in the public sphere, while granting it political weight, gradually erodes the democratic, enlightened character of the public sphere transforming it into one of passive consumption of advertisement. (155-6, 175) Now it is the interests and the autonomy of a *homo informaticus* that define a form of citizenship derived from the right to know in the age of digital technology. As developed by these bloggers, this model ushers in an alternative to a public sphere largely characterized by simulated conformity and passive consumption of propaganda.

I do not mean to de-historicize Habermas' notion of public sphere by invoking it as a model here. Referring to growing concerns with the increasing commercialization of media and with the need to theorize the post-Communist world, Denis McQuail has explained well in *Communication Research and Theory* why Habermas' expansion of previous understandings of the public sphere, and why the timely English translation of *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1989), were so influential for communication research in academia:

> A wider concept of a sphere of free publication, discussion and debate within a larger 'civil society' seemed a more realistic and still worthwhile goal, despite its somewhat mythic origins and its elevation of rational discourse above emotion and popular feeling. It was essentially an old-fashioned notion, but it was seen as

> having a potential for renewal and to provide some solid ground for societal claims against the media and for erecting new structures (for instance in cyberspace). The notion also appealed to those emerging from the stern grip of communist regimes and into the embrace of commerce. (9)

Neither does the recuperation of a Habermasian public sphere would subscribe us to Habermas's vision of politics as communicative rationality. Rather, following and building upon Habermas—as Nancy Fraser, Michael Warner and many other public sphere scholars have done—this shows that different notions of *public* and *private* arise out of historically specific conjunctures by asking questions he first posited in his work on the bourgeois public sphere: who is allowed to speak, how and why does that voice gain authority, and what discursive forms and institutional spaces it creates or appropriates.

A worthy project we cannot entertain now would be to look comprehensively at the structural features of the public sphere under "really existing socialism." But, we can tentatively show the way in which the contemporary public sphere in Cuba is being increasingly transformed by how these voices contest the meaning of *public*, claiming a right to political autonomy as reasoning individuals with *private* interests and independently formed opinions (a process of formation that the blogs are consciously and explicitly discussing). Proposed as a universal right, the discourse of the alternative blogosphere accomplishes a formulation of the right to knowledge that appeals to the collective independently of its ideological leanings or other group loyalties. Its role in changing the sense of what *public* means becomes clear if we agree with Habermas in that, as Pauline Johnson nicely puts it,

> …the attention seeking efforts of particular subjectivities in a vibrant civil life can only claim participation in a public sphere if they, at the same time, seek recognition of the society-wide significance, hence reasonableness, of their specific concerns.[…] their quest for self-determination can be secured only if they are permitted to establish the justice of their claims upon resources that are held in common. (169)

In any case, the ideal of the Enlightenment returns in the discourse of the bloggers—as ideal—under the rubric of technological democratization as inalienable from the constitution of citizenship. These are not articulated as the demands of a marginalized minority based on rights constituted by difference—how most of the debates on cultural citizenship are framed—but as constitutive of a degree-zero of citizenship itself.

This is the issue at stake in a key text like Yoani Sánchez's "Habeas data," for instance, which implicates the appropriation of the concept behind a constitutional writ in the construction of an alternative, critical public:

> Atrás han quedado los tiempos en que los periódicos oficiales, el noticiero nacional o la radio cubana, eran las únicas fuentes de información –desinformación– que teníamos. LA tecnología ha venido en nuestra ayuda….Parece imposible ya desactivar esa red precaria y clandestina que nos trae "noticias de nosotros mismos".[32]

The right of *habeas data*— "[we command] you to produce the data" —emerges in the '90s out of concerns for the protection of storage as well as gathering practices of individual information by both public and private institutions.[33] At its core is the notion of "information self-determination;" akin to *habeas corpus,* it is legally construed as a constitutional right against unlawful or arbitrary seizure, in this case, of information. In this text Sánchez uses it to describe a process of developing awareness of that right—and of its absence—through the encounter with technology, but she links that individual claim to the collective right to know data about itself as a political body, which in turn is essential to secure an informed public opinion and to make autonomous political decisions. The interest in knowing one's data arises then out of unauthorized searches for information, out of stumbling upon incommensurable versions of the same reality, but it may also be achieved by publishing one's own data (that can be of public interest), and then spreads with the acquisition of technological proficiency. The public domain

is reshaped by the aggregate efforts of public biographies, of leaked news, of individualized uses of technology embedded in a network of instant mass connectivity through e-mail, flash memories, text messages, and proxy servers. It involves an autonomous subjectivity increasingly invested, and exercised, in this sense of "news about ourselves." The search for, and dissemination of, a certain kind of individual data, links the subject *as* an individual to a larger political body, offering a challenge both to prevailing accounts of social autonomy and information blackouts mediated by the state. This clandestine practice of the right of *habeas data* becomes the first step toward the possibility of a new political subjectivity, activating a shift in the circuits that now mediate the sphere of information, the state, and its constituency. Focusing on the language of representation allows us to gauge the limitations of public participation in these spheres, while taking into account the role of the Internet and of digital technology in prying open that gap.

We must also address, if briefly, another issue germane to the discussion of autonomy. While the claims discrediting the bloggers by accusing them of being fabricated by a host of international enemies must not be indulged at length (see note 10), surely bloggers are not exempt of pressures and interests both personal and external that derive from issues of material support, readership, and media exposure. In this sense, it may well be that the autonomy of the really existing citizen can be compromised, though once proposed, and exercised through the narrative forms that demand acquires, the bloggers' intervention remains a model of sustained reflection on the conditions of possibility for democracy in Cuba. These factors leave bloggers open to a kind of Diderotian 'paradox of the actor:' The more successful and savvy as political actors, the more professionalized and well-known as bloggers they become, the more they begin to lose their ability to appear and/or act as regular citizens, as 'authentically' real underdogs.

This context of reception is also entangled, on one hand, with the perceptions of foreign spectators who only access the bloggers via circuits of consumption and sensationalism—as heroes of the hour, as media constructions. On the other, these narratives can also be nurtured by the images that the bloggers' themselves exploit in order to gain world visibility, garner material support, and remain within the cloak of protective conspicuousness. In this context, the sphere of publicity can no longer be conceived here as separated from that of *Publizität*. *Publizität* here involves real risks, risks that are somewhat mitigated by conscious or unconscious insertion in the trope of the dissident martyr, and whose ethos often appeals to the virtuousness of the underdog, the higher moral ground of the persecuted, or the conviction of the whistle blower. In the domestic context, however, the bloggers' greatest argumentative asset is that they achieve a clear separation from the authority that they are addressing, while reclaiming their role as constituents of the political body and creating corresponding platforms and networks of dissemination and enunciation. The simultaneous risk of separation and self-institution of this discourse is the mark of its autonomy. This is not to say that there is no merit to the kind of criticism that insists that the blogs' readership is located almost exclusively outside of Cuba, and that points out that the sensationalist coverage the bloggers have received, with its tendencies to hagiography (especially *Generación Y*'s reception, Yoani Sánchez's prizes and international help from interested parties), warp the blogs' visibility for a domestic audience and/or their representativeness of a lager public sentiment—in other words, their authenticity. But if one looks at the tone and the topics of most posts by this group of blogs, there are similarities and differences that both explain their popularity—beyond the conspiratorial smear campaign arguments—and suggest their political importance—that is, the specific position from which those voices speak and the structural effect of their discourse. The issue of authenticity becomes

secondary to the effects of expanded or transformed notions of authorship in the public sphere.

These examples also serve to undermine the thesis put forth by Jodi Dean in *Blog Theory,* where the modes of attention and the aesthetic sensibilities of the kind of new communicative capitalism exemplified by the weblog as form have all but "affectively ensnared us" in

> …circulation for its own sake. Drive's circulation forms a loop….This endless loop that persists for its own sake is the difference that makes a difference between so-called 'old' and 'new' media. Old media sought to deliver messages. New media just circulate. Understanding this circulation via drive enables us to grasp how we are captured in its look, how the loop ensnares us.[34] (121)

Dean's argument, furthermore, creates a problematic generalization of a U.S.-based experience of media that via a Freudian Marxist critique is then promoted to *blog theory*; and since "…as long as politics is reduced to communication, it will remain captured," *Blog Theory* reimagines, against the logic of the blog, a Maoist world cyber revolution carried out by underground cells of communist hackers who also happen to have ties to face-to-face community-based activism. (126) In the case of Cuba, the Internet and portable information technologies inaugurate a zone of self-exclusion from spaces intervened and regulated by the government, and offers an immediate public exposure that represents obvious advantages over the limited circulation of more traditional methods of opposition, for example, samizdat style publishing. Blogging is more elusive to censorship by, paradoxically, making surveillance and interception in the traditional sense obsolete (total disclosure is an automatic condemnation but simultaneously guarantees a visibility that, at least from the point of view of international public opinion, seems to provide a relative safeguard against a harsher repression). We must note that, according to Himmelsbach's account of the history of 'blogs,' this follows a global pattern stemming from the birth of the blog itself during the Iraq war: a transformation from passive reader to active public couched in the "rejection of the illusions of objectivity of mainstream media" (920). While it

does not, technically speaking, create a parallel public sphere, its presence, as judged by the reactions of intellectuals and public officials, puts pressure in Cuba's rarified public sphere by confirming that the state monopoly of mass media produces a consensus by projecting distorted images of a civil society that, as we saw, is a theoretical construct rather than a reflection of how mass media and mass organizations actually operate.

Technologies that allow easy self-publishing, and provide alternative routes for information access and distribution, are implicated (though not *necessarily* or *spontaneously)* in the development of autonomous subjects then in two senses: as tools to create and promote discursive spaces independent of institutional support or oversight, but also as pedagogical and autodidactic tools which go beyond a supportive role to develop practices associated with critical thinking and self-determination. In this Clay Shirky agrees with Manuel Castells' analysis of the counter-hegemonic potential and significance of technologies of mass self-communication. As Shirky elaborates in *Here comes everybody*, there is a single differentiating factor that provides the key to the structural transformation of the public realm underway:

> Owning a television does not give you the ability to make TV shows, but owning a computer means that you can create as well as receive many kinds of content, from the written words through sound and images. **Amateur production, the result of all this new capability, means that the category of "consumer" is now a temporary behavior rather than a permanent identity**. (108; my emphasis)

Though criticized by Evgeny Morozov and Malcolm Gladwell for his technological optimism, Shirky has explicitly pointed out that his analysis only applies to particular and even geographical and cultural uses of technology. He does not claim a universal, intrinsic democratic character in it though is correct in pointing out, in a Benjaminian move, that there is something formal, unique to that medium that reshuffles the hierarchies in the social production of meaning, just whether or how that amounts to a form of emancipation is uncertain and context-specific:

"Mass amateurization of publishing makes mass amateurization of filtering a forced move. Filter-then-publish, whatever its advantages, rested on a scarcity of media that is a thing of the past. The expansion of social media means that the only working system is publish-then-filter" (98).

Contemporary gurus of new media studies have profited thanks to the current protagonism of their object of study, obscuring in the process the genealogy of a debate that has its origins before the spread of the personal computer and with the emergence and popularity of the photocopier, videotapes, satellites, videotape recorders, and cassettes. It was with these developments that the hierarchy of production inherent in the broadcast model first came into question as an objective possibility (though already in 1932 Brecht was speculating about the future of radio, dreaming of the possibility of making receivers potential transmitters within a linked system of massive interactivity). And it was Enzensberger (writing and thinking from Cuba) who pointed out that insofar as technologies of reproduction and production had become available to private users, this constituted, in Marxist terms, a significant change in the ownership of the forces of production. The tenor of these debates can, and must, be traced then to Enzensberger's 1970 paper on the transformation of the relations of production in the culture industry afforded by electronic media. A seminal and far-sighted paper that ignited a polemic with Jean Baudrillard, Enzensberger's "Constituents of a Theory of the Media" argued that with productive capabilities the contradictions between producers and consumers had for the first time been *technically* eliminated in electronic media, but were still administratively enforced by economic and political powers.[35] He also took the Left to task citing the high economic cost of censorship when suspicion of technological advancement and democratization of its use resulted in politically inexpediency and worked in fact to the detriment of economic growth and welfare:

> The attractive power of mass consumption is based not on the dictates of false needs, but on the falsification and exploitation of quite real and legitimate ones without which the parasitic process of advertising would be redundant. A socialist movement ought not to denounce these needs, but take them seriously, investigate them and make them politically productive. …Socialists and socialist régimes which multiply the frustration of the masses by declaring their needs to be false, become the accomplices of the system they have undertaken to fight. (24, 25-26)

Furthermore, Enzensberger addressed specifically the new cultural agents that could emerge in this conjuncture and the conditions of their disenfranchisement vis-à-vis the conflicting interests of traditional gatekeepers of cultural and information flows. Enzensberger bemoans the fact that more often than not new cultural producers are accused of being *amateurs* (in the pejorative sense) or are relegated to other categories of social and aesthetic insignificance while investment in other forms of participation is discouraged, ignored, or actively policed:

> Work on the media is possible for an individual only in so far as it remains socially and therefore aesthetically irrelevant. The collection of transparencies from the last holiday trip provides a model. That is naturally what the prevailing market mechanisms have aimed at…The individual, so long as he remains isolated, can become with their help at best an amateur but not a producer. …Here we have a cultural analogue to the familiar political judgments concerning a working class which is presumed to be 'stultified' and incapable of any kind of self-determination. (22-23)

Surely Enzensberger's technological optimism must rightly be taken to task, as Baudrillard did, on account of its mechanistic view of ideology: is it enough to change relations of production for the revolutionary subjectivity of the masses spontaneously emancipate itself from the grips of capitalist ideology? What would emancipation would even look like? Nonetheless, the proliferation of media circuits that rely on horizontal models of sociability on one hand, and the broader trend of technologies of culture toward user-friendly interfaces and miniaturized portability, on the other, suggests a deeper link between cultural amateurism, individual autonomy, and political subversiveness that illuminates ways in which the concept of the amateur might be deployed to speak about other forms of political participation, even if these fall

outside of messianic anti-capitalist revolutions. This is not identical to a position of technological determinism either, because these forms of participation are *necessarily but not sufficiently* determined by these technologies. In dialogue with Benjamin's and Enzensberger's theories of media, this framing simply emphasizes the element of productibility in addition to mere reproducibility that shapes the involvement of new agents in the post-Cold War reconfiguration of the Cuban cultural and political fields. It accounts for a context specific process by which the exclusion of speech is turned on itself: the place occupied by those who are not artists or intellectuals, who are not recognizable subjects of the current constitutive order of the nation, can then speak as to the transformative limitations of the traditional figurations of the political subject.

We should begin to draw parallels between this passage from "consumer" to "amateur production" on one hand, and a figure of contemporary citizenship on the other: a mode of *becoming* citizen that describes the changing roles of this subject, from being a passive spectator of national debates to the development of an autonomous, publicly engaged, political voice.[36] And in the sense that we can trace an evolution of the blog from personal "catharsis"—as both Yoani Sánchez and Rafael Hernández have described her blog—to a self-aware political action, let us keep in mind then the *heuristic* dimension of blog writing in the formation of a new political subject, an *amateur citizen.* By heuristic I mean precisely a gradual process of learning and self-assertion, where the nature of political participation unfolds to that subject, the conditions of possibility for alternative forms of intervention—or the lack thereof—are learned through the public experience of publishing one's writing. The figure of the amateur emerges here as strategic to the transformation of the public sphere, and as the voice of the ultimate democratic demand.

The citizen becomes manifest as an amateur in a double sense: as an amateur in a particular outlet of expression—the professionalization of bloggers *and* the blog's erosion of journalism as a profession is an ongoing polemic—and as an amateur in terms of autonomous political participation—not in the sense of a fumbling dilettante, the inadequacy of which Buden has demonstrated, but in its etymological sense. The exclusion to speak is turned thus on itself: the place occupied by those who are not artists or intellectuals, who are not recognizable subjects of the current constitutive order of the nation, can then speak to the limitation of those roles. This actor is particularly important as a new subject who is able to articulate, in the name of the collective, two rights of the modern, enlightened citizen:[37] the right to know and the right to act, and thus constitute itself as a political subject through the demand for, first and foremost a plural public sphere—that takes the form of the demand for freedom of speech and information—and second, a transition to a democratic government—radically different from internal party reform, which is a position, as we saw, that perpetuates the fantasies of a socialist triumph in progress peddled by an openly authoritarian government. What the voices of bloggers like Yoani Sánchez and Claudia Cadelo offer then is a contrast and a serious challenge to the prevalent modes of protocol criticism, or as Rojas has dubbed it, "protocol criticism." They are dismissed in public and harassed in private by the government but, perhaps more telling, by the cultural establishment as well, threatening the credibility of those places from which one is authorized to speak and produce under government aegis. More important, these claims are post-ideological in the sense that they are not necessarily associated with identity discourses nor with a specific ideological content as we have seen; instead, they address the concept of citizenship itself, questioning the possibility of speaking, the place of enunciation per se, independently of its content and of the subject that speaks.[38] By taking advantage of a medium that rearranges the

hierarchy of production and circulation of social meaning and information, the citizen—as spectator, consumer, and political subject—finds the place of enunciation for his/her demands, that is, the possibility to speak as constituent part of the *res publica* beyond matters of content and regardless of the qualifications of the speaker. Thus appears a public social figure that through a form of cultural amateurism—precisely the quality that is often invoked against them—is also an amateur citizen, the manifestation of an emergent democratic ethos.

In order to investigate the conditions of possibility of this ethos, Peter Sloterdijk (2005) proposes that we rethink the public sphere in terms of atmospheric politics: human praxis and interrelations imagined as ecosystems meant to sustain and optimize particular modes of being. The concept of environment from its origin in biology (in Jacob von Uexküll's 1909 treatise) is made to stand for the technical reproduction of living conditions more broadly understood—Sloterdijk uses as a metaphor the invention of greenhouses in England in the 19th century, which provided hospitable habitats for imported specimens. Democracy comes to mean something like a mode of being (of living in common) no less dependent on a favorable habitat than any other form of sustaining human life, perhaps even a way of optimizing that life (taking to heart Nietzsche's precept that philosophers be physiologists too). "The Greek city", he suggests, "was a greenhouse for people who agreed to be uprooted from the modus vivendi of living in separation and instead be planted in the disarming modus vivendi of living together" (946). Setting out on an imaginative detour through a lost Aristotelian dialogue, Sloterdijk traces back to the polis the link between architecture and politics, between spatial forms and modes of being, to show the centrality of the notion of the urban, including urban planning, to ancient Greek political theory, where "love thy neighbor" is crystallized in the material form of sharing a space with strangers, and in the acquiescence of the individual to standards of life decided in common.

The agora is the earliest example of these "waiting rooms" of democracy, where the political interactions between citizens are determined by the two conditions of democratic sociability: disarmament (when dialogue begins), and the ability to wait (to wait for one's turn to speak, and to listen to the other as a form of waiting), by action and observation.

But the success of that form of life will also depend on the development of its proper political subject and its "virtues" as observer, in the ancient Greek sense of excellence (though Sloterdijk explicitly avoids focusing on the subject, the "Kantian subject" as the prerequisite of rational communication). Ancient thinking about the citizen of this polis is already plagued with anxiety about what Sloterdijk calls its improbability, the artificial and precarious coexistence of subjects whose "sense of commonality" is always at stake and on which the strength of the notions of *public* will determine the success and stability of such order (947). Sloterdijk appeals to the logic of installation art to investigate the function of the agora vis-à-vis the subject of democracy, the citizen of the polis: "The citizen as a highly improbable artificial figure of political anthropology would thus first become possible by a combination of actor and spectator in a single person, and that said, the entire public domain would have to consist of this type of agent" (948). Let us remember that the episode at the center of this chapter is an art installation that becomes performance through the participation of the spectator. The thrust of Sloterdijk's argument is to detect in these spatial democratic relations the architectonic sense of that order in all its implications (is not architecture the conscious manipulation of space to make certain things visible, to induce or facilitate some practices over others, to support particular modes of being?), and to find it realized in media, especially writing. It would seem to suggest then that a citizen's ability to observe and act simultaneously, to approximate that ideal of citizenship, will then depend on the degree to which the realm of culture, the realm of representation of the objects and

things in question, is able to support those political modes of being. Writing as the ability to "slow down speech", to present and to ponder the objects and opinions of that which is considered public, becomes then the technology of democracy itself, both the product and the motor of the two pairs of actions that constitute what Sloterdijk proposes as the essence of democratic sociability.[39] "If the polis was the first historical answer to the question of how to make things public, then the key means to render political objects public is surely the citizen's ability to capture the 'things' for posterity" (949). The origins of the public sphere in the construction of public spaces and the development of writing as its logic of communication mean that it is no accident then that the link between cultural literacy and political participation emerges first as a problem in ancient Greece.

Sloterdijk's atmospheres seem tailor-made to consider the issues raised here. The alternative blogosphere is neither the first nor the only platform to make certain issues public in the sense of disclosure, of revealing anything new as such. But it is unique in how it reflects on the (im)possibilities of making them issues of public discussion, and in creating "atmospheres of democracy": spaces and subjects who, like the revolutionaries before them, also dream of future forms of democratic sociability. It would seem then that to speak of this subject requires that before we look at the technologies of democratic writing, we investigate further the relationship between writing and democracy, that is, writing as a technology of democracy, whose history we cannot possibly tackle here but is put into play by Sloterdijk's thoughts on atmospheres of democracy.

Surely we have long dispelled naïve notions of communication and are well aware of the ways in which language, and writing in particular, approximates and stabilizes traditional centers of power rather than resist them, dependent as they are for their dissemination on circuits where

the administration of knowledge and the administration of the empire, or the state, share the same goal. As a provisional answer I have stressed the heuristic role of blogging in the formation of a political subject that experiments with alternative ways of participation in the public sphere, and *heuristic* here must be understood in both senses, as a method or vehicle of discovery, and as a praxis that in itself encourages or stimulates learning—a kind of learning that in this context acquires a narrow political meaning, tied to the investigation of how a democratic subject would behave, how its duties and rights as a citizen of a state would be defined. In this specific case the features of a form catering to the logic of Do-It-Yourself, and the dispensability of institutional support, have both proved decisive. I hope this has made been clear through the relationship between this subject and the cultural establishment, a step further in the elucidation of how concepts like autonomy and hegemony are not only absent from the cultural politics discourse in Cuba, as Rojas (2011) has remarked, but are the key to understanding the new scene of communication, and the structure of the public sphere, in late socialist Cuba.

The history of these actors and practices is still unfolding. My focus here were the cultural and political ethos of independent blogging in Cuba in its early stages, but many other blogs and digital projects, some ongoing, some short-lived, some barely beginning, could also be analyzed in a study of the digital expansion of the cultural field in particular, and of the public sphere more generally: the blogs *SinEvasión*, *La mala letra*, *Los hijos que nadie quiso, hechizamiento habanémico, Boring Home Utopics, Lunes de post-Revolución, Desde aquí* and the blogging platforms observatoriocrítico.org (of the semi-autonomous project Red Observatorio Crítico) and havanatimes.org; the successful but now defunct crowdfunding website yagruma.org; Estado de Sats's new journal *Cuadernos para la Transición,* launched in October of 2013; literary projects *Voces*, desliz.org ("proyecto alternativo de difusión cultural"),

and the bygones *Cacharro(s)* and *33y1/3*. As I write this, Yoani Sánchez's long-planned project to create the first independent digital newspaper based in Cuba has materialized in June 2014 with the launching of *14ymedio*, at the same time that her Italian translator has caused a modest virtual commotion by repudiating her publicly for opportunism and betrayal.[40]

In a context of explicit authoritarianism and tight control of mass media and communication technology by the state, it had been very difficult to see in action the significance of blogging at home, and even more to see it as part of a larger landscape. This was made worse by the fact that the image and assessment of these bloggers (and, in general, of Internet and social media penetration in Cuba) is usually distorted by the way onlookers relate to their stories through the amplified effect of international media coverage, through the virtual portals in which their writing often becomes divorced from what happens off-line, and through the negative media campaign of the Cuban government against them (a combination that is in fact exacerbated by the United States's own misinformed and clumsy interventions—the Zunzuneo app scandal and the involvement of Alan Gross come to mind). My approach was to study these phenomena looking at moments of interaction with prominent figures of the political and cultural establishment, as well as to see blogging in the context of many other, mainly cultural activities in which the bloggers were involved off-line. That is, I wanted to see what happened both when they were *unplugged* by the authorities, and when they were *unplugged* from the Internet. The chapter aimed to demonstrate how their interventions in the public sphere could also be measured by looking at the way other actors—writers, intellectuals, artists, politicians—responded directly or indirectly to their increasing presence and to their competing narratives. The issue at stake is precisely that the bloggers' demands are incommensurable with the parameters of participation intrinsic to the very organizational structure of the "really existing

public sphere" they attempt to infiltrate. The encounters I analyzed here demonstrate, in fact, how the exchanges between bloggers and political and cultural figures reproduced and corroborated earlier strategies of containment and co-optation practiced by the government's cultural politics since the early 1990s. This approximation has attempted to avoid, therefore, two commonplaces of Cuban analysis: on one hand, technological determinism and the overly optimistic celebrations of what many perceived as simply the new dissidents, and on the other, the skeptical, wholesale dismissal of these particular actors, and of the impact of new technologies in general in the shaping of the public sphere in post-Special Period Cuba.

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[1] Oficialista: The term refers to those blogs and websites that, though apparently "private", repeat and espouse the narratives put forth by the Cuban government: Iroel Sánchez's *La pupila insomne* and *el Blog de Yohandry* (suspected of being a fake name made up to compete with Yoani Sánchez) are prime examples. These blogs deny the existence of censorship or political pressures, deploy reductive definitions of both socialism and capitalism, and actively contribute to discredit independent bloggers. Most importantly, they often connect to the Internet through indirect or direct ties to official institutions: they are also journalists, or writers, or answer to a mass organization like the UJC (Union of Young Communists) or the Ministerio de la Informática y las Comunicaciones or MIC (Ministry of Computing and Communications). Not all private blogs are either 'oficialista' or alternative, some fall somewhere in between, like journalist Elaine Díaz's *La polémica digital* and *La Red Observatorio Crítico*. Other notable exaples include the blogs of cultural ambassadors like Eduardo del Llano's or Silvio Rodríguez's *Segunda cita*. Their political views not always coincide with official narratives, and they differ greatly in quality and depth in specific points, but though they can occasionally be critical of particular policies, their conclusions and analyses always fall short of the underlying political problem precisely by their loyalty in the last instance to the current political order as a legitimate representative of their interests.

[2] See also his interview with Cubaencuentro.com, "Cartografia de Blogolandia." The problems of analyzing the blogosphere extricated from the larger context, as Henken does, at least so far, runs into a serious problem. While he does distinguish in general between official blogs, and alternative ones, in his effort to provide a balanced account of the different views espoused by the bloggers he takes certain claims, such as vocal support of the regime, or a vaguely defined socialist outlook, as individual positions at face value, often overlooking the sophisticate and subtle methods through which the Cuban government creates an image of healthy debate by not only tolerating, but actually producing, "critical figures" from within. Moreover he gives into the domestic confusion between socialist or leftist views and support for the government. In any case, one of the points that this chapter, and in fact, the entire thesis, belabors is precisely the move to work completely outside of institutional spaces as the only guarantee of autonomous

thought –and a relative one at that. On the other hand, the absolute value or unique usefulness of autonomy as an interpretive category for cultural production is certainly arguable.

[3] For example, many of the computing and intranet clubs for youth they single out as examples of positive state interventions are *de facto* inoperable due to either lack of connections, broken or absent equipment, and competition from more unfettered if precarious points of access to information beyond the internal intranet. For a quantitative approximation, from a global comparative perspective, consult the latest annual report "Freedom on the Net 2012" on Cuba. While the theoretical premises underlying Freedom House's project can be taken to task in its rudimentary definition of freedom along the typical commonplaces of ideological liberalism, its 2012 report can be marginally useful insofar as it does provide a point by point global comparison of concrete restrictions of usage: http://www.freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-net/2012/cuba; Internet (Accessed February 26th, 2013).

[4] Exhaustive and informative as they may be, however, her work still gravitates toward conflation of the Cuban government with popular will and civil society, and is representative of the kind of political error that has been detrimental to the reconfiguration of the Left in the 21st century. Despite the occasional disclaimer, Venegas's excessive appeals to the adjective "complex" as a way to explain away obsolete, Cold War schemas of ideological sympathy is reminiscent of Marcuse's "immanent rationality" argument in his *Soviet Marxism* (1958). In their analyses of censorship and cultural policy, for example, both book and article frequently recur to comparing Cuba's *faux pases* to United States's imperialist politics and "hypocrisy," offering as Cuba's raison d'etat for centralized media control the country's heroic resistance to the imposition of outside parameters of "Democracy." Sure enough, if any doubts remained regarding the underbelly of the surveillance and intelligence network that underpins the United States's global economic and political hegemony, the likes of Julian Assange, Edward Snowden, Chelsea Manning, Jacob Applebaum, Barret Brown, Ladar Levison, and Glen Greenwald have provided enough material to vindicate even the wildest tin-foiled-hatters of the world. Moreover, it would seem to me that if one were to criticize the mutually if asymmetrically harmful, toxic relationship between the United States and Cuba from a position of commitment with a progressive, Left worldview, the first step would be to denounce both. I would therefore argue further that one can analyze the prevalence of censorship and its different forms in both social formations and criticize them with equal vigor without either taking one as the mirror alternative of the other, or retreating into the kind of paternalism disguised as postcoloniality evoked by the very title of the article ("Will the Internet Spoil...") That does not mean that we should accept at face value the democratic claims of any state nor readily accept the claims to democratic success offered by caricaturized concepts freedom often found in the political self-image of some Western liberal societies. (Fraser et al) To be sure—and to quote de Tocqueville, an often-misread classic by both the liberal and the Marxist tradition alike—democracy is not inherently good, since there are infinite forms of articulating the rule by the many—and to quote a fantastic article by Bent Flyvbjerg: "…we still do not know what will be meant by democracy in the future; we know only that, as democrats, we would like to have more of it" (219). In any case, the proper balance of popular sovereignty *and* individual autonomy, which constitutes the central problem and the *sine qua non* of modern democratic theory, has a theoretical and historical

legacy whose heterogeneity and variable implementation must be acknowledged and addressed if one's analysis depends on such a comparative political framework.

[5] Eduardo Fontes, better known in the Internet as "ciber policía" appeared in a leaked video instructing military personnel about new technologies and about their use by dissident groups. He recognizes their "cool" factor and the dangers to the ideological commitment of the young cadres posed by indiscriminate socialization on the web. The conference is titled: "Campañas enemigas y política de enfrentamiento a los grupúsculos contrarrevolucionarios" and has been widely distributed, especially through Facebook, YouTube, and covered by news sources *El Nuevo Herald*, *Diario de Cuba* y *Penúltimos Días.*

[6] For more on these debates see for example Gladwell (2010) in *The New Yorker* and the debate between Clay Shirky and Morozov in *Prospect.* (2009)

[7] Hernández Busto carries out an otherwise an excellent work in *Penultimos Días*, (penultimosdias.com) an online aggregate news site hosted and curated by the author in Spain, which links to daily news about Cuban politics and culture on the web, and publishes quality analyses and articles of opinion on current subjects.

[8] Rafael Rojas (2006, 2009), José Quiroga (2005), Antonio José Ponte (2007) have studied these problems at length and will be cited throughout the article. Other Cuban scholars such as Arturo Arango, Rafael Hernández, Desiderio Navarro, and Ambrosio Fornet have sought to reevaluate more positively the history of cultural politics as well as its present logic. For approximations that correlate moments of flexibility or sternness with internal or global pressures rather than with strictly self-serving political motivations see for example Antoni Kapcia's article "Celebrating 50 Years" (*Bulletin of Latin American Research* 31: 58-76, 2012), Kapcia and Gray's *The Changing Dynamic of Cuban Civil Society* (2008), and Cristina Venegas' *Digital Dilemmas* (2010).

[9] A thorough analysis from this angle would require a more sophisticated reading of foundational texts of the Marxist debate about the source and legitimacy of political rights, such as Marx's "On the Jewish Question" and Lenin's "'Democracy' and Dictatorship" (1919), than we can carry out here.

[10] The history of Cuba-U.S. relations and the unfortunate pattern of foreign intervention of the latter has given occasion to accusing bloggers of being fabricated dissidents, which in turn has often steered many a debate toward the question of whether or not the bloggers are "authentic" political actors. Obviously, official responses to the basis of any internal criticism as foreign conspiracies against a perfect political consuensus betray a statistical impossibility. It is true that they receive occasional support from various actors with their own agendas, but, even if one or all of the alternative bloggers were engaged in actions apparently involving political disqualification—if the *content* of their writing were paid by foreign agents, or if the bulk of their notoriety were artificially fattened by fake internet accounts, prearranged prizes, and yellow journalism—it still would not explain neither the response of the cultural establishment that concerns us here, nor the Cuban authorities' obsessively uncomfortable but careful treatment of

them, even less the charisma and pull they exert on the mediatic spectacle (that is, why them and not others?). In fact, a careful reading of the Wikileaks cables coming out of the US Interests Section in Havana, tendentiously used by oficialista voices like former Director of the Instituto del Libro Cubano Iroel Sánchez and French pundit Salim Lamrani to support their claims that the bloggers are CIA agents, shows an U.S. office with its own agenda that, just like that Cuban government, is watching and studying the bloggers, with whom they have met like just like other diplomatic bodies of the European Union and myriad foreign journalists and scholars have. Consider the following confidential cables published by Wikileaks.org: Cable 09HAVANA704, "CUBA UNLEASHES MOB ON BLOGGERS" from November 23, 2009 reads "COMMENT: Sanchez, Escobar and other Cuban bloggers claim that they are not members of the dissident community or the opposition camp. Over the past few months, however, their writing has become more politicized, and they have engaged in increasingly public acitivites." Cable 09HAVANA684, "BLOGGERS BEATEN BUT NOT DETERRED" from November 10th, 2009 is also unambiguous: "Cuba's most famous bloggers were detained and roughd up by GOC agents as they traveled on foot to a public event on November 6….Sanchez, Pardo and Caudelo (sic) told USINT that while the experience was traumatic, and Sanchez was left sore with a bruised back, they are in good spirits. They did not request any assistance from USINT and planned to continue their work as before." Cable 10HAVANA9, "U.S.- CUBA CHILL EXAGGERATED, BUT OLD WAYS" from January 6, 2010: "Much more threatening to the regime are our overtures to and complaints of mistreatment of bloggers, a group that frustrates and scares the GOC like no other. … The conventional wisdom in Havana is that GOC sees the bloggers as its most serious challenge, and one that it has trouble containing in the way that it has dealt with traditional opposition groups. …the bloggers' mushrooming international popularity and their ability to stay one tech-step ahead of the authorities are causing serious headaches in the regime. The attention that the United States bestowed on superstar blogger Yoani Sanchez, first by publicly complaining when she was detained and roughed up and later by having the President respond to her questions, further fanned the fears that the blogger problem had gotten out of control."

[11] As to the short term effects of the blogosphere they could, in theory, be seen as exerting some pressures, as Philip Penix-Tadsen has pointed out, though these are also hard to prove in the sense that they represent general moves toward inevitable changes that have to do with the economic and political survival of the government (tourism, investment, etc.) rather than with the specific existence of the bloggers (nor do they translate necessarily into benefits for the collective at large).

[12] Stuart Hall's approach to the articulation of political subjects in the public sphere through the analyses of cultural representations remains the most rigorous, in my opinion, theoretical underpinning of the work of cultural studies: "…[W]hile not wanting to expand the territorial claims of the discursive infinitely, how things are represented and the machineries and regimes of representation in a culture do play a *constitutive* and not merely reflexive, after-the-event role" (Hall, "New Ethnicities" 224).

[13] The author witnessed this first-hand when she was mistaken for another unidentified blogger and initially asked to leave the event as well. All translations from Spanish, unless otherwise noted, are the author's.

[14] The degree of influence and the fluctuating interpretations of Castro's "Palabras a los intelectuales" have been the subject of heated debates among scholars, cultural producers, and state officials alike, as well as the center of a growing critical bibliography. Par Kumaraswami (2009) has reread more positively Castro's speech by skillfully deconstructing the text and its two structuring tropes "dentro/contra" while downplaying its historical reception and implementation. The polemic between Arturo Arango and Rafael Rojas featured in *Temas* (2011, Vol. 66) is particularly informative because it features two radically opposed points of view regarding the relationship between intellectuals, cultural institutions, and the political establishment. For a more comprehensive study of canon formation and the history cultural politics in Cuba, Rafael Rojas's *Tumbas sin sosiego* (2006) is mandatory reading.

[15] Claudia Cadelo, "Un minuto de libertad por persona," Blog *Octavo cerco,* March 30th, 2009, http://octavocerco.blogspot.com/2009/03/un-minuto-de-libertad-por-persona.html; Internet.

[16] See also Bruguera's essay "Behavior art", and her own critical assessment of the performances at www.taniabruguera.com. About Tatlin's Whisper #6 she writes: "The intensity, credibility and exaltation of socialist revolutions, just as Tatlin's Tower, which was never built, were frustrated and utopia is rethought with the effort implied in a weak whisper. This series reevaluates the desire for moments of active citizenry commitment in the construction of a political reality, while ideologies transform and circulate today as pieces of news."

[17] Since these incidents and after years of international recognition and indirect and direct harassment by the authorities, the first public naming of the bloggers has been in a TV program "Las razones de Cuba" in 2011, as "ciberterrorists," following the logic of the ongoing "La Batalla de las Ideas" campaign. The bloggers responded by uploading to YouTube their own discussion panels called "Razones ciudadanas."

[18] See also the following chapter on Porno Para Ricardo. One of the first group demonstrations of this kind was during a concert by Pablo Milanés where they tried to raise awareness of PPR's frontman Gorki Águila's incarceration.

[19] Abel Prieto has been fundamental to the new rhetorics. See his essay on anticubanía, discussed in the Introduction.

[20] In her insightful "Performing the Revolution," art critic Rachel Weiss has described Arte Calle's "Ojo pinta" as a performance where "nothing was predefined or predetermined…an anarchic spectacle ridiculing the protocol of art openings, the "exhibition" consisted of inviting friends to install whatever they liked. Among the most memorable contributions were a goat tied to the gallery door and a performance by Grupo Provisional, disguised as the trio Rock Campesino, who wandered the gallery incessantly playing a tuneless, drunken version of 'Guantanamera.'" (124)

[21] See Rafael Rojas's *Tumbas sin sosiego*, Antonio José Ponte's *La fiesta vigilada*, and José Quiroga's *Cuban Palimpsests*.

[22] The short made light of the tribulations of two agents of the secret police while installing surveillance microphones in the house of one of Del Llano's recurrent character: an average joe, Nicanor. There are plausible rumors that Del Llano himself has distributed his videos to people (including alternative bloggers) who presumably will do just that, distribute his work along politically compromising channels of consumption and circulation.

[23] These kinds of independent productions exist in a sort of institutional limbo, an uncertain space of arbitrary tolerance that is increasingly related to a greater availability of production technology and alternative spaces of consumption in the form of portable cameras, editing software, portable memory, the Web; they inhabit the black market and the netherworld of extra-official media. The exception is the audiovisual annual forum of La Muestra de Jóvenes Realizadores sponsored by the ICAIC, though it too has been the scene of overt interventions by the censors—one of them occasioned the resignation of its director Fernando Pérez in 2012—and the material there is never exhibited again in the national media circuit.

[24] See Del Llano's entry "La noche y el día," February 16th, 2012, eduardodelllano.wordpress.com; Internet (accessed February 17, 2012).

[25] It may seem, at first sight, sacrilegious to borrow the phrase, but in fact in its common rejection of Soviet statism and party Marxism, in its view of the terrain of culture and that healthy dose of ideology critique, emphasis on self-organization, and the disavowal of traditional class analysis, they share a common view of political participation.

[26] See also *Latin American Cyberculture and Cyberliterature*, ed. Claire Taylor and Thea Pitman.

[27] Claudia Cadelo, "La ética dormida," Blog *Octavo cerco*, December 17, 2010; Internet.

[28] The language of the oft-cited constitutional articles 53 and 54, which deal with association and expression rights in Cuba, is significant in this regard. Citizens enjoy unlimited freedoms only as "members of social and mass organizations," as constituents of socialist society. The right of association is reserved for the "working people," though the category of women appears unqualified: "los trabajadores, manuales e intelectuales, los campesinos, las mujeres, los estudiantes y demás sectores del pueblo trabajador" (Artículo 54). The infamous Law 88 of 1999 would explicitly penalize providing information to third parties, particularly the United States, that could further foreign interests in destabilizing the political order in Cuba.

[29] Yoani Sánchez, "La intelectualidad cubana: debatir o esconderse," Blog *Generación Y,* May 26th, 2012; Internet. As of February 2013 Yoani Sánchez has been allowed to leave Cuba after a general reform on Cuban exit permits went into effect. While she has been invited to participate in various events and conferences in Europe and the Americas, it remains to be seen if it will

impact her image at home, and whether the government's travel reforms are indicative of more flexible information policies to come.

[30] They have since been taken down from the Cenesex website: http://www.cenesex.sld.cu/webs/diversidad/opinion.htm. Another related incident is covered by *Diario de Cuba* at http://www.diariodecuba.com/cuba/7996-mariela-castro-llama-parasitos-despreciables-yoani-sanchez-y-otros-twitteros-disidentes; Internet (accessed September 15th, 2011).

[31] Academia Blogger, and you tube series: Razones ciudadanas

[32] This post opens with a comparison between the little-known uprising of '94, the Maleconazo, and the publicity of the UCI incident, where student Eliecer Ávila confronted President of the National Assembly Ricardo Alarcón about the limitations imposed on Cuban youth in a leaked Internet video, found in Yoani Sánchez, "Habeas Data," Blog *Generación Y*, February 12th, 2008, http://www.desdecuba.com/generaciony/?p=190&cp=all; Internet (accessed September 15th, 2011).

[33] The notion of *habeas data* has gained worldwide importance with the rapid development of security risks, given the new patterns in which our personal information circulates the globe: from a simple credit transaction, to a Google search profile, to stored data on company and government servers. Various versions of these laws refer to both the protection of an individual's data and to his/her rights to access it and/or be informed of their existence and collection.

[34] In many ways it can be understood as an abstract radicalization of Cristina Venegas's argument cited above about the justified suspicions about and the potential dangers of the (American made) Internet for 'a socialist society like Cuba' and a version of Baudrillard's arguments regarding the lack of interaction and reciprocity in mass media.

[35] See Jean Baudrillard's "Requiem for the Media" (1972), where he argues against the inherent technological restructuralization identified by Enzensberger in new media because he considers the infrastructural changes of technology either false, insignificant and/or irrelevant to the logic of the economy of the sign, that is, the lack of real social interaction embedded in what he sees are models that reproduce the irrelevance of the user even when the latter is included in the circuits of production: "The mass media are anti-mediatory and intransitive. They fabricate non-communication—this is what characterizes them, if one agrees to define communication as an exchange, as a reciprocal space of a speech and a response, and thus of a *responsibility*…" (Baudrillard 1981: 169) In a later essay, "The Masses: The Implosion of the Social in the Media" (1985) Baudrillard changes his position from "pessimistic" to "antagonistic" in his words, arguing that what he saw before as the hopeless passivity of the masses can now be understood as the only possible strategy of resistance, as "the ultimate refusal of meaning and the refusal of speech," to the double-bind of being-object/becoming-subject that characterizes our relationship to and within mass media. (Baudrillard 2001: 222)

[36] 'Becoming' in the sense that they approximate the figure of an ideal or impossible citizen, since most citizens in 'real democracies' are not active participants, not even sometimes informed voters on their respective governments' policies. But "amateur" because there isn't really a continuing tradition of democratic participation (Bobes), but also because often—though not always (we will deal with this and with professionalization in the amateur chapter)—they are amateurs in the forms or practices they choose to express themselves.

[37] I am building here on the figures of political amateurism discussed in the first chapter.

[38] For a discussion of the relationship between alternative bloggers and other opposition groups with more defined political platforms, see, for example, Miriam Celaya, "Contrarréplica sobre los comentarios," Blog *SinEvasión,* April 11th, 2011; Internet (accessed September 15th, 2011).

[39] This echoes Derrida's *Signature, Event, Context,* where he starts from the premise of writing as a mark that assumes and becomes necessary in the foreseen absence of producer and receiver of the text, but then he goes on to criticize the semantic stability of the notion of context from which a definite meaning of the text can then be derived. How is this absence related to a democratic ethos?

[40] Giordano Lupi's open letter, in any case, is a great example of the kind of naïve messianic desire for purity and sacrifice around poster childs of political martyrdom that still drives the popular imagination (and that no doubt fanned much of Yoani Sánchez's own popularity):
…Ho avuto il torto di credere nella lotta di Yoani Sánchez ritenendola una lotta di David contro Golia, una lotta che partiva dal basso per colpire il potere, una lotta idealista per la libertà di Cuba. Mi sono dovuto rendere conto – a suon di cocenti delusioni – che l'opposizione di Yoani era lettera morta, per non dire di comodo, come per far credere al mondo che a Cuba esiste libertà di parola. Ho cominciato a dubitare che Yoani fosse non tanto un'agente della Cia – come dicevano i suoi detrattori – quanto della famiglia Castro, stipendiata per gettare fumo negli occhi. Ma anche se non fosse niente di tutto questo, basterebbe il fatto che mi sono reso conto di avere a che fare con una persona che mette al primo posto interessi per niente idealistici. Una blogger che conduce la sua vita tranquilla, che a Cuba nessuno conosce e che nessuno infastidisce, che non viene minacciata, imprigionata, zittita, che non ha problemi a entrare e uscire dal suo paese. Per la sua bella faccia mi sono preso offese e minacce di castristi e comunisti italiani, per aver condiviso una lotta inesistente, un sogno di libertà sperato da molti, ma non certo da lei, che pensava solo al denaro proveniente da premi e contratti. A questo punto non lo so se Yoani Sánchez è un'agente della Cia o della Rivoluzione Cubana. Non lo so e non m'interessa neppure di saperlo. So solo che non è la persona che credevo. Tanto mi basta. … ("Yoani Sánchez. Il suo periodico e la mia libertà")

CHAPTER FOUR:
Language and Ideology in *Porno para Ricardo*: Punk Obscenity as Political Currency

> There is not much mental distance between the feeling of having been screwed and the ethic of total retaliation, or at least the kind of random revenge that comes with outraging the public decency.
>
> Hunter S. Thompson, *Hell's Angels*

I. ¡Y de que van, van!

Barthes's classic *Mythologies* opens with an aphorism, derived from a verse of Horace's *Ars Poetica*, that I would like to borrow here: 'bis repetita placent,' or things that are repeated are pleasing.[1] Music and poetry both are ontologically dependent on that very principle. But repetition can be said to be pleasing in other less pleasurable and mundane ways, sometimes turning a tiresome melody, a silly jingle, or that awful summer pop hit into something too familiar, into something that invades, tricks, and seduces our sensorial memory, making us hum it all day even in spite of our own will. Repetition of something unpleasant, like a slogan—commercial or political—or a chorus, can in fact make us eventually immune to the aesthetic revulsion they might have initially provoked, perhaps even wholly indifferent to it, like the jaded passerby who no longer acknowledges or looks at the ugly, inoperative, colossal monument built somewhere in his daily trajectory through infinite urban signs. Does this indifference render the monument—or the repeated refrain—a useless sign, a wasted effort, a canceled space (as described by Robert Musil in his seminal 1927 essay)? Or is indifference a mark of our own capitulation to the imaginary and physical spaces that the slogan or the monument has claimed for itself? In the late or post Socialist landscape of 21st-century Havana, for instance, what possible mobilizing function can a Party placard with yet another political slogan have? The effects and function of the material culture of ideological orthodoxy that still prevails in Cuba's streets, public sphere, and official discourse cannot be attributed to mobilizing purposes, but

must be sought in the ways through which addressees interact (or not) with them, are interpellated by them, and respond to them. (figs. 18,19)

Repetition as an aesthetic procedure, whichever *kind* of pleasure it generates, succeeds by playing—and preying—on the affective economy of recognition. Building on the works of Benjamin, Bourdieu, Foucault and semiotician Omar Calabrese around repetition, seriality and replication, and quoting Beatriz Sarlo's *El imperio de los sentimientos*, Jesús Martín Barbero has also reflected on the importance of seriality and repetition as formal principles for the analysis of the relationship between mass and popular culture and the dynamics of leisure and work in late industrial societies:

> Mirado desde la televisión el tiempo del ocio cubre pero devela la forma del tiempo del trabajo: la articulación del fragmento a la *serie.* Dice Foucault que el poder se articula directamente sobre el tiempo porque es en él donde se hace más visible el movimiento de uniformación que atraviesa la diversidad de lo social. Pero el tiempo de la serie no habla sólo el idioma del sistema productivo—el de la estandarización—pues bajo él pueden oírse también otros idiomas, desde el del cuento popular y el relato de aventuras hasta el de **la canción con estribillo**: aquella otra serialidad propia de una estética "donde el reconocimiento funda una parte importante del placer y es, en consecuencia, norma de valores de los bienes simbólicos." (5; my emphasis)

By means of recognition and indexicality, many kinds of music buttress the spatial and temporal compartmentalization of our daily routine: there's music for work, for exercise, for elevators, for dancing, for waiting, for eating, for crying, for sex, and for rallies; there's the music that indicates our favorite news program is about to start, that wakes us up in the morning, or that prevents us from going to sleep at a sound hour. Almost everywhere in the world today, the song form—and with it the catchy refrain—is a ubiquitous part of our own personal soundtrack.

There is yet another dimension to recognition and seriality that concerns the aestheticization of politics, and among whose exemplary forms we find the political slogan. In Smorkaloff's discussion of the newly alphabetized public of the 1960s in relation to the political

cartel as form (she gives the example of how the front page of the newspaper *Revolución* was turned into a cartel), the author claims that "No es lo mismo 'La defensa civil eres tú mismo' o 'Todos somos uno' que 'Tome Coca-Cola y sonría' o 'La vida es mejor con Pepsi'" (130-134). But how and why are they not the same? Their possible difference is not simply a matter of (ideological) content, for even if we were satisfied by a simplistic understanding of ideology as a false illusion covering an exploitative reality, we could in fact argue that they are *exactly* the same. Consider, for instance, the classic film *They Live* (1988), which Žižek also uses in his *A Pervert's Guide to Ideology*: would the premise of the film still not work if the advertising images covering the aliens' subliminal messages to humanity—OBEY, MARRY AND REPRODUCE, STAY ASLEEP, CONSUME, etc.—were instead political slogans like "Patria o muerte," "Los niños son la esperanza del mundo," and "A trabajar duro"? The incentives might be different—material versus moral—and so would the conditions of their satisfaction—immediate gratification versus heroic sacrifice for a future to come—but their disciplinary functions would remain the same. An important though arguable distinction, however, might be introduced if we consider the rhetorical structure of the political slogan, where the slogan as form resembles less a communicative structure—of the kind sender-message-receiver that makes the advertisement a vehicle for selling something in a concrete transaction that moves from the symbolic to the material—and more of a linguistically ciphered imaginary space for mutual recognition within a community of like-minded subjects. The advertisement offers you what is between you and the happy life; the political slogan—shouted by your neighbor, written in the street—tells you are *always already* happy, by virtue of belonging to the political space—usually the nation state—that the slogan delimits. (In this sense political propaganda is hardly about conversion, whereas the conditions of satisfaction and the authors of the Coca-Cola and Pepsi

ads are both more easily identifiable and more immediately realizable.) Plastered on public spaces, reverberating on the airwaves, shouted by the convened masses on a square, slogans are eminently allographic even when reproducing an autographic quote; they are written by an anonymous hand that is the instrument of the very same collective that is being addressed: all and none.

Moreover, when performed at massive political gatherings, slogans—along with other compositional elements like the parade, the hymns, the attention to colors—materialize into a single voice the aggregated screams of the anonymous mass of individuals, thereby effectively anthropomorphizing, embodying, reenacting, the abstract concept of the people. As Ana Miljacki observes, propagandistic elements characteristic of these political events have to be considered not only, and not even primarily, for their ideological content, but in addition to their disciplinary effects, they should be read also for their performative value as vital components of the aesthetic and emotional experience of the spectacularization of the political: “If we dismiss the very personal aesthetic effect of communist parades, we will miss something that was at the core of this type of assembly” (235). (In turn, this operation also works the other way around: Marifeli Pérez-Stable (1993) has described how commercial advertisement used the colors of the July 26 Movement in the early days of the Cuban Revolution; and, after all, is not the name of possibly the most popular Cuban musical band of the 20th century tied to the slogan of productivity of the Ten Million Sugar Harvest, “Los diez millones van, y de que van van?”)

In order to think about the hypothetical interchangeability between the political slogan and the chorus or refrain as rhetorical forms that give shape to the body politic, and to posit the possibility of subversion of the former by the latter that this parallel might allow, we could invoke the more explicit ways in which Laibach’s classic “Tanz Mit Laibach” exploits the

triumphalist mirth proper to martial rhythms and deploys an ambiguous totalitarian imagery to effectively blur the difference between a dancing song and a marching hymn. In a similar play on genres, a notable contemporary Cuban author signed a novel with a complicit wink to the band's vulgar register and mock-slogan aesthetics: "Para decir el lema: a la una, a las dos y a las tres…¡¡¡El comunismo es una pinga!!!" The note illustrates particularly well the effect of the band's lyrics on Cuban listeners reared in a common revolutionary soundscape, and follows up nicely on Miljacki's critical reading of the history of representing the political body cited above:

> In fact, in the age of real time, direct image and instant message, claims about truth are simply too facile. And thus the issue lately has not been whether there is a discrepancy between reality and its representations, or that representation itself might be reality, but how uncomfortable we are with the way we have been represented and with the hegemony of the narrative served to us as mirror. (243)

The scribbled note of the novelist suggests that the public disclosure of the very private and uncivil act of swearing, now circulating in the form of catchy choruses and mock slogans, provides a provisional rhetorical space from which to return the official slogans' Althusserian calls, offering a temporary relief that interrupts the slogans' persistence on the subject's aural memory.

Keeping these principles in mind, my reading of the belated recuperation of punk aesthetics by the underground—though now better known—band Porno para Ricardo (PPR) is anchored on both the formal and the historical links between the political slogan and the song refrain, reading them as sites of enunciation *and* interpellation that are simultaneously collective and individual, disciplining and subversive. These approaches speak to the importance of the political slogan in PPR's poetics, but also to the strong national tradition —a Latin American one, in fact—in which they operate; a tradition where the song and the bard retain cohesive and foundational roles in narrative forms of communal life and social reality. It was often in the

popular and the folk song forms, like the *bolero, repentismo*, or the sung versions of the *literatura de cordel,* where oral mythopoeic practices were conserved (if also transformed and absorbed in nation-building imaginaries), and where collective fantasies were unleashed via imagined but politically consequential conflicts fought between musical tastes, performance rituals, popular myths, and national identity. Cuba's part in a broad Latin American movement of protest song and singer-songwriters that gained track especially during the 1960s and 1970s, known as the Movimiento de la Nueva Trova, was institutionally bound to revolutionary political engagement. By framing the intervention of the band within the history of the song under the Revolution, the band's links to a space in-between the trova and rock lets us revisit revolutionary Havana's relationship to youth subcultures seen through the tension between revolutionary utopia and its institutionalization, which, historically, has considered urban youth as both a problematic threat and an ideal ally to be won. (fig. 20)

In this specific context PPR's particular use of obscenity, vulgarity, and pornography to produce a space of curtailed or threatened fantasy can also be read under the terms of Dick Hebdige's vintage *Hiding in the Light* (and those of Thompson's epigraph). In this text Hebdige follows up on his earlier study of punk subculture by exploring the relationship between photography, punk aesthetics, and the love-hate tension between media and punk. Looking at this scene as a way for disgruntled youth "to *pose* a threat," to turn the fact of being under surveillance into the pleasure of being observed, Hebdige locates in punk aesthetics and similar other youth subcultures the pleasure of scandalizing a social body that they reject, or that shuns them, or both. By looking at Porno para Ricardo, its domestic and international reception, and their confrontation with authorities, I reflect here on their uses of insult and obscenity as rhetorical resources, and on the ways they shape PPR's presence in a highly contested and tightly

managed public sphere. I also suggest that their exploits destabilize the aesthetic procedures that redress public discontent vis-à-vis the recodified ideological horizons of the Cuban Revolution in the 21st century. This reading of PPR sheds light, therefore, on the social significance of discursive peripheries engendered by new forms of political critique and practiced by PPR and other associated acts. At the same time, it locates these projects at the center of ongoing debates regarding musical production and the meaning of autonomy vis-à-vis the commercialization of culture in Cuba's late socialism.

How does the band's music speak to these multiple concerns? First, it addresses the crisis of authority of a certain aesthetic language that informs the works of other Cuban cultural producers in the context described already as a state capitalism that thrives on a spectacle of tolerance. Second, and as a response to that crisis, the band's imagery and lyrics articulate a reaction shared by other contemporary projects against the social and cultural policies of the Cuban state in the wake of the Special Period. These new policies follow a certain identity politics of nominal inclusiveness along gender, religious, racial, or socio-cultural lines. In so doing, the state embraces the postmodern multicultural discourse whose formulaic heterogeneity, as Groys has highlighted, is both market-friendly and the kind of superficial integration which outside of the real value of specific political goals often stands-in as a symbolic redress in the structural failures of liberal democracies. This is done by accelerating the systematic professionalization and the ostensible integration of social identities and cultural practices that are now allowed and even promoted, but which not long ago were unthinkable outside of the black and grey markets of culture (though *market* is a problematic term, parallel or informal perhaps would be more accurate adjectives to describe this kind of prototype of peer-to-peer economy). Third, the band's discourse also stages a generational response to the lingering

presence of the official symbols of a wholly discredited ideology in the public space, now devoid of any mobilizing power or communicative function, or even of meaning proper, since the ideological horizon in which they acquired meaning has been in crisis since the mid to late 1980s with the ricochet of Soviet glasnost. Fourth and last, a reading of PPR would show how the belated recuperation of punk aesthetics, together with technological developments allowing music production at home, and alternative networks of sociability, of international visibility, and of crowd funding, deploy the logic of Do-it-Yourself and the figure of the amateur toward explicitly political ends. To be sure, PPR's notoriety is conjunctural and their following inconstant; the response the band has generated in Cuba and abroad has less to do with their untimely punk than with a propitious confluence of three elements: their linguistic register, the political moment, and the media environment, as can be gleaned from Erik Maza's excellent double profile on the diverging paths of PPR's Gorki Ávila in Cuba and the tribulations of Gil Pla (the founder of Cuba's first punk band Rotura) as a struggling amateur musician after immigrating to Miami. Tom Astley (2012) and Laura García Freyre (2008) have also written detailed profiles of Porno para Ricardo that approach the production of the band in academic terms. I am therefore less concerned here with profiling the band as such as with reading their intervention as part of a larger discursive landscape symptomatic of post-Special Period Cuba. As the Cuban state selectively retreats from more directly interventionist roles without necessarily abandoning its commitment to centralized power, as Cuba's erratic rapprochements with global markets in the mid-1990s enter a more mature phase, and as digital technologies and more flexible travel policies reshape the circuits of production and dissemination of cultural goods, a comprehensive examination of the reconfiguration of the cultural field in the wake of

the Special Period requires a look at how new and old social and political identities use aesthetic strategies to survive in the new playground.

II. The return of punk: Autonomy as style

Certain words, at a given moment, have the power to rattle the discursive fabric of an entire community. In 2006, the bad word *pinga* was at the center of one such event in Havana, since it was featured in a chorus unexpectedly tied to Fidel's title of 'Commander [in Chief].' It began to circulate widely among, and be hummed by, groups of young habaneros. In the summer of 2009 it was still played, if *sotto voce*, by surreptitious guitar aficionados—including the guitar player of the band—and accompanied by enthusiastic voices who gathered in the park of "G y 23" to pass the time under the watchful eyes of the police post and the new street cameras at the end of the park. PPR's "El Comandante," which called Fidel a cocksucker, lacked the double entendre that often sugarcoats lyrics politically or socially critical of Cuban reality. (To put it into context, that summer the two competing choruses in the street were the trova song "Lucha tu yuca taíno," an allegory of everyday life in Cuba set in a Taíno village where "El Cacique tiene el power absoluto," and the reggaeton hit "Échale un palo," a metaphorical attempt at describing a demanding sexual encounter.) At first sight the lyrics of "El Comandante" may appear as nothing other than a trivial vulgarity. Yet the rhetorical ease with which such a common, but unmistakably and necessarily private phrase—and sentiment—is catapulted into the public imaginary in the form of a catchy chorus, dotes the song with a significant sociopolitical value, and makes it a fruitful starting point to read the relationship between language and ideology in late socialist Cuba. With that gesture, the band not only interrupts the accepted and acceptable canons of song-writing in contemporary Cuba, but, by doing so, it also repositions in the public

eye a vernacular subject who, via the bad word as aesthetic procedure, seeks new forms to establish herself in public, in order to address, and to confront, a sociopolitical order that she perceives as hostile, that both shuns her and is rejected by her.[2]

The band came together in 1998 and secured a couple of shows in local rock music venues. (Rock is a genre historically marginalized and informally played and listened to in Cuba, but through the 1990s it gradually became more accepted, both socially and politically, if still rarely part of the mainstream musical scene.) In 2002, after releasing a homemade EP (*Pol' tu culpa*) and recording a first album (*Rock para las masas…(cárnicas)*), they were nominated for the Lucas Prize, a national music video price, for their rendition of the song from "The Bremen Musicians." Sang in its original Russian, it is based on the soundtrack of the Soviet cartoon Bremenskie Muzykanty (1969), oft-played in Cuba during children programming on TV and thus very well known among people who were born and grew up after 1970. However, Porno para Ricardo's general reception, and with it the image of the group, underwent a quick change as a combination of incidents contributed to radicalize the political position of the band. In April of 2003, PPR frontman Gorki Ávila was arrested during the annual rock festival of Pinar del Río, and after a controversial legal case he was condemned to four years of prison, serving half of it and being released in 2005. (Ávila's arrest coincided with the imprisonment of 75 dissidents, mostly independent journalists, which came to be known as "The Black Spring" and began in March of 2003.) Meanwhile, Ciro Díaz, the band's lead guitarist and composer, then a mathematics instructor at Havana University, had his university title revoked (deshabilitado) and lost his teaching post. These events signaled a moment of radicalization for the band, which began to occupy a highly polemical space, and burdened with toxicity by association any other bands still willing to play with them. Consequently, their lyrical platform became more explicitly

antagonistic, especially with the recording of a double album in 2006: *Soy porno soy popular*, a play on words with the slogan of the national brand of cigarettes, and *A mí no me gusta la política pero yo le gusto a ella, compañeros.* Two more albums would follow, the *Álbum Rojo Desteñido* in 2009, and in 2013, *Maleconazo ahora*, the latter named after the little-known, violently repressed uprising along Havana's famous Malecón that took place in 1994. Gorki's arrest in 2003 began an international campaign of support for his freedom that offered the group its first exposure to a wider public, and was launched partly by the alternative blogosphere. This same publicity helped when a new accusation and brief custody in 2008 for 'peligrosidad predelictiva' did not result in a new prison sentence.[3] A new visibility in musical and journalistic circles invited the intervention on behalf of the band of some public figures and even of Amnesty International, making them thenceforth a necessary reference among the new generation of voices critical of the Cuban government.

The interest generated around PPR in some media outlets beyond Cuba indirectly fueled a newfound notoriety and an increased censorship for the band in the local scene. This interest must also be read in the context of similar initiatives at the global level that have garnered international attention. Two notable examples are the underground punk movement in Burma and its flagship band Rebel Riot, and the most famous of all, the legal case of Pussy Riot in Russia.[4] The global coverage of these projects stacks evidence, even today, of Hebdige's argument in his classic study of punk as an always already potentially spectacular subculture, and of the mixture of "dread and fascination" with which the media, since the early years of punk, has always related to the phenomenon. (93-4) In the context of contemporary geopolitics, these roles have mutated, for (these) punks no longer constitute an internal threat to good customs and middle-class decorum. Instead, they are celebrated internationally—also as

spectacle—as voices of resistance to manifestly authoritarian forms of political repression. These contemporary punks enjoy a new kind of standing in the same circles where a closer coexistence would warrant them perhaps the same kind of rejection—if for other reasons—they receive at home. (It was not too long ago that the Dead Kennedys were taken to trial on obscenity charges for distributing H. R. Giger's "Penis Landscape" as a poster included in their Frankenchrist album of 1985.) These belated, narrowly politicized punks become, in many ways, sexier poster children of the opposition to governments openly antidemocratic in the Western liberal imaginary. They are seen as not (only or primarily) concerned, as the historical punks, with reacting against mainstream social norms, political conformism, or consumerist culture, but with resisting more universalizable villains instead.

Late appropriations of punk discourse—and we could also think of Rock Radikal Vasco, whose influence in Cuba is notable—complicate, in some sense, the theses of Hebdige and other theoreticians who declared the death of punk at the end of the 70s due to the convergence of three main factors: the political limitations of symbolic violence, the successful commercial exploitation of punk rebellion as style, and their ideological absorption by hegemonic discourse via the effective management of their representation and classification by the media.[5] Žižek and Pussy Riot's Tolokonnikova's correspondence, partially republished in English by *The Guardian*, touches very well on two issues germane to these phenomena. First there is the conflicted position of the mainstream global spectator vis-à-vis Pussy Riot's notoriety: "All hearts were beating for you as long as you were perceived as just another version of the liberal-democratic protest against the authoritarian state. The moment it became clear that you rejected global capitalism, reporting on Pussy Riot became much more ambiguous. What is so disturbing about Pussy Riot to the liberal gaze is that you make visible the hidden continuity between

Stalinism and contemporary global capitalism," writes Žižek. (n.pag.) Second, there is the issue of how punk aesthetics might sneer at the manufactured complexity of global booms and crashes spun by the kind of expertise that lives off (and makes us hostage to) the broken-window fallacy, of how a certain appropriation of punk may strike a disagreeable chord in the illusion that late capitalism is "flexible and eccentric," writes Tolokonnikova: "The anti-hierarchical structures and rhizomes of late capitalism are its successful ad campaign" (n.pag.). Moreover, even the question of contemporary punk's untimeliness or belatedness itself might be open to question, as the editors of the 2013 *Social Text* issue on punk have remarked:

> Young twenty-first-century radicals immersed in the anarchist and DIY ethos of movements like Occupy may roll their eyes skeptically at historical punk, even while punk as an ongoing, autonomous, international subculture rolls on. But if punk can never quite give up the ghost, perhaps that's because we are still trawling through the political and economic wreckage that prompted its emergence in the first place, whether we locate its much-disputed origins in Detroit in the late 1960s, New York in the early to mid-1970s, or London and a score of British cities in 1975-77. …if punk has an afterlife, it is because we are still sorting through the shards of history that cling to its edifice—and its ruins. (1)

Punk, moreover, is the amateur musical genre *par excellence,* since its simple song structures rely on two or three chord changes, and regardless of its questionable origins—former band-manager Malcolm McLaren infamously claims in *The Great Rock'n'Roll Swindle* that the Sex Pistols were, ironically, a marketing plot—and of the ultimate limitations of punk's claims to the political (Hebdige et al), punk subcultures everywhere were understood by their constituencies as rising against the glamorous commercialization of music and the cult of the rock star, against virtuosity and professionalism, and against mainstream conformity as a requisite for functional adulthood: punks emphasized the aesthetics of a spontaneously messy party, they recuperated the concept of playing, possibly badly, among and for friends, and they thrived on home-made material cultures and unconventional circulation networks.[6] In this sense

the punk ethos against standardized, mass-produced music and merchandise informed the practices that have historically sustained punk subcultures even if the industry eventually cannibalized the punk aesthetics: they gave currency to stapled, photocopied fanzines, to ragged clothing, and to the looks of the cut-n-paste (after the collages of Jamie Read). These components were the binding practices of a more general Do-It-Yourself identity that thrived on repurposing and recycling, on peer-to-peer networks, and on the self-reliance of lo-fi cultures, posed beside or against the compromises implied in hi-fi musical production. (Spencer 2005)

In PPR the appropriation of punk has different objectives, and different too is the band's context of reception, from that of punk subculture in its historical articulations. This has to do in part with the checkered history of punk in Cuba, where the genre was not favored by rock listeners, and therefore produced very few homegrown punks. Cuban rock historian Humberto Manduley attributes this to the fragmentary access that Cuban listeners had to music from abroad as much as to the internal (under)development of the local rock scene:

> El punk marcó un punto y aparte en la historia del *rock*, pero la evolución en Cuba era distinta y por tanto sus coordenadas no encontraron terreno fértil. No había que contrarrestar un gigantismo inexistente, una comercialización impensable, un exceso de virtuosismo que no se había alcanzado. No estaban 'quemadas' las etapas para llegar a las conclusiones que motivaban a los jóvenes músicos (o no-músicos) en otros países. Tampoco la moda *punk* con sus cortes de pelo estilo 'mohicano' y cabezas rapadas, tuvo muchos seguidores, ya que el pelo largo masculino, lejos de ser un signo caduco, implicaba todavía un alto grado de actitud contestataria. En realidad el *punk* nacional solo se fraguó más adelante, alcanzando sorpresiva fuerza ya en el siglo XXI. (Manduley 2014: 78-9)

To be sure, PPR circulates not only in the absence of a stable punk scene, but also in the absence of a domestic market of commodities capable of popularizing and commodifying their imaginaries as was the case of their British and American precedents. In many of their interviews and the coverage around these incidents, PPR's actual music is eclipsed by a previously structured discourse in which political opposition figures are simply plugged in, and thereby they

are threatened by other forms of absorption. In fact, their exceptionality has been limited to highlighting the sensationalism of the punk rebellion in its more elemental political aspects. (A separate study would be needed to account for the Venezuelan commenters on their YouTube videos and for the short-lived graffiti of the band's name in huge blue letters that appeared in Quito's La Carolina park in the summer of 2010.) But is the shock value of their randy and irreverent lyrics a mere short term injection of lyrical indiscipline that amounts to little more than a passing curiosity? My intention is to read them instead in relation to other responses to the new configurations of the cultural and political fields in post-Special Period Cuba we have seen in the dissertation so far.[7] They are not merely the new face of the old political opposition as much as a symptom of new and emergent forms of political opposition.

If they do not belong to a youth subculture as such, or partake in the external markers of punk rebellion, where else to find *the meaning of their style*, to borrow Hebdige's phrase, if not in the pursuit of an antagonistic language of autonomy with the power to disrupt their own specific political and social context? Their association with other projects that also present themselves as initiatives in an alternative culture, seeking to strengthen the notion of independent civil society, suggests as much. All these projects, some of which we have discussed in earlier chapters, seek to maintain spaces whose search for autonomy, however limited, links them to generational (in the epochal more than in the sense of their age) expectations for self-representation, for entrance to the public sphere in their own terms, and for participation in the construction of the social project outside of the grand narratives of legitimation of the revolutionary project. These voices explore, in fact, critical registers that explicitly challenge the parameters of participation and cultural production available to Cuban youth in late socialism, defining themselves as alternatives to the forms of mobilization and inclusion that have

characterized the revolutionary government, and that continue to do so despite the latter's post-Cold War ideological and structural rearrangements. These patterns still rely on the model of state-sponsored mass organizations and state-affiliated cultural institutions (where the problem is not the state or public nature of its formal structure per se, but the climate of paranoia, suspicion, self-censorship, and arbitrariness that often plagues them as a result of the nature of their particular political history). As studied in depth by Velia Cecilia Bobes (2007) cited earlier, these forms of cultural and social organization gravitate strongly toward vertical hierarchies, and are ultimately bound by the directives of conservative and out-of-touch political authorities.

Therefore, as opposed to other punk acts, PPR does not emerge entirely as part of a well-defined urban tribe, since they do not represent an ascertainable socioeconomic group, nor do they display recognizable signs as part of their personal identity that can be traced to a specific sociocultural group: there is no argot, no outrageous clothing style, no Mohican hairdos, no cornucopia of piercings or tattoos linking them to an exclusive membership on display. In any case, PPR does not follow the classical, visible parameters of punk style—they are middle-aged late comers to music to boot—and for the most part the band has distanced itself from the family of domestic rock in the process of professionalization. (The domestic rock scene did follow the pattern of resistance, dissemination, and cooptation theorized initially by Hebdige for the British punks, though commercially it has been much less successful than Cuban rap.) But PPR's musical style, its lyrics, the amateur character of their musical production, the imagery of their songs and graphics, and the intimate, antisocial and clandestine mood of their shows, do inscribe them within the punk logic.

Among the mock interviews that are part of the album *Soy porno soy popular*—where they often misrepresent themselves as a wildly successful group that has toured internationally—

there is an instructive sound recording of their only TV appearance in the program Cuerda Viva (before they were too well-known to be prohibited and as a result of the fleeing popularity of their cover of “Los músicos de Bremen”):

> Interviewer: “¿Ustedes no son músicos ni na’?
> Gorki: No, no, ¿‘Tás loco? Dios nos libre…nada que ver…
> I: Ven acá…¿y reconocen alguna influencia…?
> G: (Interrumpe) No pero espérate nosotros no somos humoristas, ¿tu dijiste que nosotros éramos humoristas?
> I: Ni humoristas ni músicos…¿bueno y qué hacen ustedes?
> …
> G: Bueno hacer rock es tremendamente difícil pa’ nosotros. Pa’ tocar un rock and roll nosotros es dios y ayuda. (*Soy porno, soy popular* track 17)

These spoken interludes also illustrate their use of the concept album, and of the album as metonymic artifact of everyday sound bites: the songs are often organized around intermissions that parody national media outlets—radio, television, and live venues—, and the graphics mimic symbols of official ideology—using images of ration cards, the color red, made-up acronyms, and mock slogans. The logo of the group, for instance, are a hammer and sickle, but the handle of the hammer becomes a penis that pierces the blade of the sickle, distorting obscenely the legendary symbol. Yet it is never clear who abuses whom: if the logo denounces the imposition of an authoritarian power onto an unwilling subject, or if they are committing a symbolic violence against the official signs of power in revenge. (fig. 21) This operation is systematically repeated with images of everyday life in contemporary Cuba, the slogan of the national brand of cigarettes Popular, “I'm Cuban, I'm Popular” becomes “I'm Porno, I'm Popular.” The parody of official slogans that are part and parcel of routine language in schools, workplaces, mass mobilizations, and state media, is also prolific: “Pioneers for communism, long live ‘ideological diversionism!”, “Don't self-medicate, break your TV set!” Like the historical punks, who also created their own share of slogans—like “Never trust a hippy,” “Punks not dead,” and “No

future"—the band's mock slogans and choruses offer their own responses to official mottoes as generational rallying cries: "No comas tanta pinga Comandante," "A mí no me gusta la política pero yo le gusto a ella…compañero," "El policía de la cultura…es un obrero de la censura," "Chamamé al Yuma," "Hacen falta más, muchos Maleconazos. Más, ya vienen más, Maleconazos," and "Porno pa' Ricardo no saluda la bandera, de los comunistas de la gran escena" are all part of refrains that can give a general idea of their tone.[8]

The end of the song "Tipo Normal" from the album Rock para las masas…cárnicas, features the following dialogue between Gorki and Ciro, founding members of the band:

> Gorki: Oye, asere, no vamos a decir tantas malas palabras en este disco.
> Ciro: ¿Y por qué es que no vamos a decir malas palabras?
> Gorki: Asere porque mira, si tú dices pinga y cojones no te ponen en la radio y es de pinga que no te pongan en la radio, es tremenda perra mariconá… (a fast rock and roll interrupts the laughters and the dialogue with the first verses of "Felación": "¡Haz que te la mame bien!")

Despite the changes introduced by digital radio, in the world of commercial music the distribution of airplay is still largely tied to the promotional and marketing interests of the mainstream music industry.[9] Surely those mechanisms generate their own zones of exclusions, and American and European musical scenes are hardly free of outright political censorship—what are the chances of Ministry's "Señor Peligro," part of his anti-Bush trilogy albums, being played uncensored in the airwaves? In these cases nonetheless one closed door does not equal all. However, when all the legal and professionally equipped means of music production and distribution are managed by official organizations—rendering these state agencies comparable to the tentacles of a single giant record company—and, to have access to them, musicians must belong to official guilds, the act of making sure the band is preemptively unplayable in the radio (and anywhere else for that matter), as PPR does here, complicates even further any shot at local success. Moreover, despite their international but fleeting notoriety, the kind of provocation that

has attracted media attention to the band has not translated into actual profits, since that coverage does not secure a reliable audience for the music proper. The independent production of albums, the eventual set- up of the home recording studio La Paja Recolds, the illegal performances, and their self-exclusion from cultural organizations, are however necessary pre-conditions to continue to criticize the government without recourse to indirect or metaphoric language. Their use of pornography (they have played naked at least once), of insults, and of bad words, becomes a strategy of affirmation of an otherwise unrepresentable individual autonomy, which is further defined by virtue of not belonging to the official sphere of cultural production. Their rhetoric may not indicate aspirations to construct a future democratic civil society (*pac*e the occasional, overly romanticized readings of the band as some kind of political visionaries), but PPR flaunts in very *loud* terms the desire to break from the orders of representation of the present political moment; the boorish, rustic tunes capture and give shape to a non-linguistic frustration, a bodily excess that is irreducible to the narrowly constituted frameworks of political subjectivity in place.[10] More than a simple epiphenomenon of punk indiscipline, the use of the bad word, that unmistakable sign of impropriety in the public sphere, constitutes a premeditated act of self-exclusion from the political and social body.

This use of the bad word can be profitably compared with the use of profanity in Puerto Rican reggaeton duo Calle 13, as read by Frances Negrón-Muntaner in "Poetry of Filth: The Post-Reggaeton Lyrics of Calle 13." The critic interprets Calle 13's witty vulgarity as the language of a symbolic space where residual images of the subject's daily consumption are recycled and redeployed to criticize reggaeton itself, the music industry, celebrity fads, and artists. Negrón-Muntaner highlights how their language successfully exploits common places of pop culture imaginary while simultaneously criticizing and subverting them to target the culture

industry, with the critical self-awareness that they belong to it. In the case of PPR, the use of obscenity also targets their concrete political reality but from a fringe, parodic space further away from the commercial viability and professional projection of a Calle 13.[11] (12)

Parody has a complex history in the art of late socialism, and cannot be fully addressed here. Insofar as it constitutes a form of pastiche, the imitated object, the parodic target, undergoes a transformation where the order and the meaning of the elements that make it up is subverted or distorted; consequently, so is the system of values within which it functions as a significant. The object of parody, never again intact, is reveled under a new light that inoculates its authoritarian potential, that is, its symbolic function in the field of power, at least as long as the humorous effect lasts. Already in the 70s and 80s artists of the socialist bloc anticipated aesthetically the dissolution of the political society of these countries. Their work registered the disillusion, the desire for change, and the failure of the utopian projects via the formal deconstruction of the symbols of official ideology and through the reworked imaginary of everyday life. PPR's parody of officialdom links them to the work of Cuban visual artists of the late1980s who first experimented with the concept of post-communist art, and who pioneered, and were censored for, these aesthetic procedures in the national context. However, as art critic Gerardo Mosquera has argued, theirs was a discourse that relied on the language of art as a privileged space of critique, since these formal adventures remained circumscribed precisely within the circuit and logic of art (even if their dares would carry with them both personal and professional risks):

> However, the critical sense, protected 'ritually' behind a greater tropological density and a cynical attitude, has expanded. I say 'ritually' because, in the final analysis, everybody knows what the works say, but the important thing is that it not be said in explicit terms, giving art a margin of ambiguity as happened in Spain during the Franco era. (Mosquera 2003: 241)

The relative intimacy of art's ritual language, and the ways implicit pacts between power and the creative function protect art's critical audacity, guarantees a semantic game of indefinite truces between political and social criticism as art's prerogative, and the power on which it adjudicates. However, PPR's use of direct insults in both their graphic images and their lyrics substitute for the meticulous deconstruction of the Cuban political imaginary carried out by the art of the 1980s. There is no witty, sophisticated semantic game as in the visual arts; they don't speak the language of clever grotesqueness, but of jocular grossness; they are not deconstructive, but mostly destructive. (fig. 22) In the same manner, PPR's wager on obscenity and the vernacular, that is, the systematic rejection of lyrical subtlety as an expressive possibility, exiles the band from the corpus of the national songwriting tradition. (Incidentally, the first listeners of Spanish punk in Havana—those who originally brought in and played groups like Loquillo, Los Ilegales, La Polla Records, Eskorbuto and Kortatu in parties were not the usual rock scenesters, who overwhelmingly preferred metal and advocated the exclusivity of English for rock lyrics, but the art students of the vocational art school Escuela Elemental de 23 y C, of the San Alejandro Academy, and of the Instituto Superior de Arte instead.[12])

If, as I would argue, PPR's discursive register stands for a paradigm shift in the rock scene as much as in the strong critical tradition of the song under the Revolution, against which patterns should they be examined? This requires a detour to settle some genealogical debts. One option would be to descend to the urban music scene of rockers and 'pelús' or 'frikis' (from freaks) for a brief history of rock in Cuba, beginning with those who tuned to the Beatles in clandestine radio stations, trafficked cassettes, wore jeans, and grew their hair, humming the youth hymns of the times: "You say you want a revolution, well, you know…." To do justice to the history of that understudied underground we would have to look at how the rock scene of the

1980s and 1990s responded with incorrigible social indiscipline to the general air of uncertainty that prevailed during the final unraveling of the Cold War.[13] Suffice it to say for now that the precedents of rock prohibition in the 1960s crystalized later in the local rock scene as part of a social and cultural identity around the rejection of the manifest, integrationist anxieties of state institutions and mass organizations with respect to youth. Challenging the calls to be combative, to adopt the revolutionary integrity demanded of the guevarist New Man, these proscribed tastes made all the more visible the discrepancies between the rhetorical construction of utopia and its quotidian faces. Those who were not effectively mobilized were drawn instead toward a foreign, hybrid aesthetic taste as far as possible from the national norm (first classic rock, then metal, grunge, industrial, and electronic music), since American and British music of this sort were ideologically objectionable on multiple fronts. Rock was not only the *music of the enemy*, it was also a music of social protest whose natural antagonists—bourgeois apathy and middle-class virtues—were supposedly absent or on their way out in revolutionary Cuba.[14] This tension speaks as well to the missed encounters and troubled rendezvous between 20th century revolutionary cultures and youth counter-cultures. As a result, rock adepts in Cuba have been a problematic and unruly subculture for more than two decades. Their tastes were absolutely insoluble with respect to the fiercely nationalistic ideals sought in cultural production, and yet took root in youth sectors completely educated according to the revolutionary plan, and whose ears had been filled with political slogans from early on. (figs. 23-27) The song "Estado tan loco" from PPR's first album links the mental state of the narrative voice, and the state as instituted power, to the same psychopathology. It captures the ambiguity of a mobilization articulated within a symbolic economy of gift, reflecting on the uncomfortable debt with the failed project that wanted to harvest its ideal subjects—the New Men—among the youth: "Yo

quisiera creer en ellos/Yo quisiera pero no puedo (…)/Soy un hijo malo/se quejan todos ellos/gastaron su dinero/en enseñarme lo que quisieron" (*Rock para…*).

The microcosm of rock music in Cuba has also been featured in the work of writers like Atilio Caballero, Raul Flores Iriarte, Eduardo del Llano, Yoss, and Ena Lucía Portela. Yoss and Portela have touched particularly well on the historically tense relationship between listeners of rock in Cuba—the *frikis*—and both mainstream national culture and political authorities. Ena Lucía Portela's footnotes for the Stockcero edition (2010) of her novel *Cien botellas en una pared* (originally published in 2002) are especially relevant in this regard. Signed with the initials "ELP" to complement the original notes of a first-person narrator, signed "Notica de Zeta," the footnotes introduce Ena-Lucía-Portela-the-author as a *cronista* and as a cultural guide into the setting of the novel, the Havana of the 1990s. Inventory, *testimonio*, tour guide, urban dictionary, microhistory, and encyclopedia all at once, the footnotes give background information about national events, local personalities, governmental censorship, autobiographical data, and both classical and pop cultural references in equal measure. Most notably, the footnotes themselves also function as a space of alternative circulation insofar as they provide backstories on how the author's own oblique relationship to cultural referents is mediated by the (narrowly understood) politics of her lived reality:

> Note 30 to "talaje punk": El *punk* fue un movimiento musical aparecido en Inglaterra en la década del 70, que surgió con carácter de protesta juvenil y cuyos seguidores adoptaban atuendos y comportamientos no convencionales. "Talaje" es la forma abreviada de "estalaje", ambas palabras del argot cubano, que significan "apariencia física", "porte", "facha", etcétera. (El Titi fue precursor del talaje punk *en Cuba*, donde esa onda ultrachirriante y feroz estuvo oficialmente satanizada hasta hace muy poco. Allá en la pérfida Albión se podía protestar, o al menos hacer el intento sin que te metieran preso, en los años 70; aquí no. Entre los escandalosos inglesitos de The Sex Pistols y los escandalosos cubanitos de Porno para Ricardo media casi una generación. ELP) (108)
> Note 46 to "el Patio de María": Local en el Vedado donde se celebraban conciertos de rock en los años 80 y principios de los 90. (Quedaba a unas cuadras

> de mi casa, en una callejuela oscura. Aunque era legal, la policía nunca lo vio con buenos ojos. Cuando cerró, en medio de la crisis, todos los que alguna vez fuimos rockeros, pelús o frikis, nos sentimos un poco huérfanos. La banda Porno para Ricardo alude a esto en su tema "¿Te acuerdas?", que junto a otros tan conocidos como "Alpidio comunista chivatón" y "El comandante", circula clandestinamente en la isla en CDs quemados de manera artesanal. (ELP)

The space of the annotation becomes then an extension of the informal circuitry of bootleg recordings and bartered readings, acquiring a disseminating function for both a personalized history of alternative conditions of reception (Portela discusses, for example, her contraband readings of Milan Kundera and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn), and for clandestine or semi-clandestine cultural referents who share space with canonical figures like Virginia Woolf or Virgilio Piñera (as is the case with the visibility given here to Porno para Ricardo, which puts the reader in touch with a world of objects and references that is, at the same time, either unreachable or not easily procured).

The moment in which PPR emerges into the limelight comes immediately after the period in which *Cien botellas* takes place. A time of domestic tensions around professionalization in the small world of Cuban urban music (in hip hop and rock in particular), the avenues of professionalization opened by the creation of the Cuban Rap Agency (2002) and the Cuban Rock Agency (2008) corroborate the argument made in earlier chapters that the Ministry of Culture has invested in showing itself open to cultural initiatives previously unthinkable within official spheres. After constant run-ins with the police and other urban tribes, rowdier spaces like "El Patio de María"—a historical meeting place for rockers in Havana—have closed or have been repurposed—like the puffed-up club "El Submarino Amarillo" that has been built in place of the divey "El Atelier," and the Rock Agency's new theater "Maxim Rock"—while both established rock groups in the local scene and emerging bands have been brought in under the auspice of the

newly created institution and its subsidized festivals, gigs, and touring and recording opportunities. (figs. 25, 28, 29)

Claudia Cadelo's post "La Agencia del Rock (pequeñas anécdotas urbanas)" in the blog *Octavo cerco* sardonically records a scene representative of the hostilities between the band and the Agency's director, who shortly after the agency was created unveiled a set of behavioral norms that appeared to be designed almost exclusively with the band in mind, and whose very bureaucratic name "Estatutos del Nuevo Friki" verged on the absurd:

> -No decir malas palabras.
> -No desnudarse en público.
> -No conducirse de manera indecente.
> -No invitar a tocar a los conciertos a grupos que estén prohibidos.

PPR's churlish revenge to this and similar confrontations came in the shape of castigating songs like "Agencia del Rock," "El Agente Yuro," and "Comunista Chivatón": the refrain of "Agencia del Rock" is exempt of any lyrical elaboration ("Fuck fuck fuck fuck fuck el movimiento del rock, fuck fuck fuck fuck fuck La Agencia del Rock"), and "Comunista Chivatón," dedicated to the former president of the Asociación Hermanos Saíz Alpidio Alonso, is a catchy tune with an unforgiving caricature ("Alpidio Alonso/no es más que un comunista chivatón,/ que se hizo una casa/ con el dinero de la Asociación,/ y escribe unos versos/ que nadie quiere oírlos por son…"). In these and other songs PPR has explicitly objected to the restrictive parameters of the institutionalization of rock music in Cuba. Considering the historical tensions between rockers and the state on one hand, and rock's nonconformist, hedonistic legacy on the other (as perceived by devotees in any case), the band has unambiguously criticized the new alliance between such strange bedfellows. In addition to the known confrontations of PPR with the authorities, the band's hostilities with the cultural institutions have caused PPR its share of unfriendly relations with local rock and trova musicians who shun their political stance, or who distance themselves

from the group due to their potentially contagious toxicity. In a revealing interview with Havanatimes.org, Michel Matos, the organizer of Cuba's only independent, now defunct music festival "Rotilla," has detailed his discussions with cultural authorities regarding Porno para Ricardo's prohibition to play in the festival, describing the pressure and threats to which the festival was subjected when representatives from the Ministry found out that PPR guitarist's side project, La Babosa Azul, had participated.[15] In 2011, when Porno Para Ricardo was banned from playing in public, they decided to play in the balcony of the home-studio-rehearsal space La Paja Recolds and to the street, choosing the soundtrack music of "The Bremen Musicians." The act was quickly interrupted by a mini-flash mob made up of local CDR authorities and was abruptly brought to an end when the electricity to the home was turned off. During performances, the band often plays songs from both PPR and La Babosa Azul, but La Babosa Azul is lyrically a much milder act that builds on PPR's guitarist and composer Ciro Díaz's background as an amateur troubadour and on the links between Cuba and the Eastern European experience. (La Babosa Azul's foundational project was the production of Spanish versions of hits by famous troubadours of the Soviet block, the Russian Vladimir Vysotsky and the Pole Jacek Kaczmarski. The album, "Cuando amanezca el día," was sponsored in part by the Polish Embassy in Havana, and included a version of Luis Llach's "L'estaca" entitled "Los muros.")

Here we abandon the rock scene in favor of PPR's relation to the songs of the trova, so that the band is situated in the space between those two tendencies, both intimately bound to attitudes and practices of the urban youth sector, to their position as paradigmatic subjects of the Revolution. In other words, PPR takes advantage of the libidinal, untamed energy that has fueled the amateur rock scene in Cuba but, at the same time, competes with the discursive monopoly of the trova song as a space of social commentary. They verbalize the wild body of punk rebellion

to denounce, in its own terrain, the disciplined poetic language of the trova singers and circulate new slogans in the form of choruses:

> Te gusta el Rock and Roll/si antes la trova./Te gusta vivir de lo que está de moda Hacías letras enrevesadas/con musiquita latinoamericana./Pero los tiempos han cambiado mi amigo/le pones a la cuerda otro sonido./Y te buscas un Distorchon, y un Delay/Y haces que suene como Alice in Chains./Pero le falta bomba a ese sonido/le falta un toque más agresivo (…)/Desmaya esa trova con distorchon (…)Trova con distorchon no puede ser./No puede ser, no suena bien. ("Trova con Distorchon, versión 0.2" *Rock para…*)

The description of a first epoch in the trova song invokes, expressly, the climate of Latin American solidarity in the first decades of the Cuban Revolution. Indirectly, it also comments on the way in which the national cultural field functioned as an agglutinating space and an aesthetic laboratory for an entire generation of Latin American intellectuals—that new political intellectual group profiled by Claudia Gilman in *Entre la pluma y el fusil* (2003). That 'you' who wanders through the first verses, through the history we have tried to summarize here briefly, is doubtlessly the synthesis of a multigenerational figure: the second person pronoun does not interpellate a particular artist but the trajectory of the singer-songwriter as an archetype. Along the same lines, "that which is fashionable" does not refer to a complicity with the musical market or the taste of the consumer, as much as to a structure of ideological conformism that allowed the protest song to betray its own function as the poetic voice *par excellence* of the Latin American left. "Drop that trova" deploys the colloquial connotation of the word *trova*, referring to a narrow-minded spiel of moral or disciplinary tone that attempts to persuade you of something. "Trova with distortion," in the newer generations of troubadours, commutes the instrumental update—the use of electric guitars with pedals and amplifiers—into something contradictory: the incorporation of the apparently rebellious component of rock music is canceled by lyrics wholly domesticated. The same could be said about PPR's criticism of the local rock bands when it

parodies, for example, their English singing in their cover of "Don't you cry tonight," pronouncing the words phonetically in Spanish: "don ju cree tonee." The band suggests that these bands sing in English either because of naïve fashion, or to evade censorship, rather than because they really understand what they are singing (if singing in English was politically toxic in earlier periods, it no longer is). At the same time, they insert themselves in the tradition of punk in Spanish while intervening in the internal dispute among international rock listeners about the viability of rock music in languages other than English. This position has resulted in the exclusion of the band by authorities, but also by many local fans of both rock and trova.

The weight of the song in the soundscape of the Cuban Revolution can hardly be underestimated, as the enthusiastic choruses of omnipresent revolutionary songs played alongside political slogans in schools, political events, public squares. The Movimiento de la Nueva Trova from the 1970s onward had a vital role as a leading voice of the Revolution's cultural project: they were the musicalized poetic vanguard that, in many ways, put at the service of that political project its didactic voice, while the figure of singer-songwriter and the marriage of poetry, protest, commitment and song were revamped along the way. During this time, the choruses of the Nueva Trova's protest song, as mirrors of the political slogans, became simultaneously symptoms and generators of collective attitudes and desires: "La era está pariendo un corazón," "Hasta siempre Comandante," "Amo esta isla" and "¡Cuba va!" are just a few examples. In other words, the function of the song would compromise its refrain as the *sensual double* of the political slogan.[16] PPR exploits this relationship by parodying those songs as much as by chastising directly the institution of the trova. In this fashion they position themselves as the disillusioned sons of the legendary guitar-carrying-poets too, breaking loudly and publically with that tradition that conceives of the song as a privileged place of social

critique. They reject lyrical opacity but preserve the idea of the protest song—in whose death the intentionally obscuring metaphoric language of the classic troubadours has become an accomplice. Their jejune and boorish tunes startle the aural immunity to shock that decades of endless repetition—of the same political slogans, of the same refrains—have produced in the listeners.

This position contrasts starkly with even the most critical and sophisticated of the troubadours of later generations. From the end of the 1980s onward, singer-songwriters like Frank Delgado and Carlos Varela rehearsed from their own performances biting political and social criticism that were also met with suspicion by the authorities and with equal enthusiasm by a public that had come of age during the 1980s. In spite of their break with more traditional singers, however, their poetics maintained a certain faith in filtering the real through the song, be that as exegesis or as catharsis. Above all, their lyrics remained invested only as an indirect intervention in social reality. PPR's contrasting stand suggests that as long as the changes in discursive modality can be subsequently assimilated within the official cultural landscape, even with "distortion and delay" the conciliatory role of the troubadour remains intact. In other words, the trova's song form has outlived its critical potential, and it is denounced by PPR as a sterile criticism that does not question the institutional bonds that ultimately determine its conditions of possibility, and that, in the worst case, goes along with the status quo as a cathartic palliative.

This crisis in language is not limited to the song form, and therefore PPR's disruption of the gradual flexibility of the limits of what can be said publicly refracts a more general situation. The erosion of the exegetical and referential function of the song form has an equivalent process that takes place in the network of social information and communication at the street level, as has argued, for example, Vincent Bloch (2008). In "Los rumores en Cuba," Bloch describes how the

triumph and decline of the Revolution's hegemony has seeped into the representation of everyday reality, changing the ways of talking about it and the forms of configuring oneself as a subject within it. Bloch argues that the government's demands for total participation in political life, on one hand, and the informally tolerated practices, especially of economic nature, that are need it to support it (participation in the black market, for instance), create a collective double personality that undergirds "the fictitious character of revolutionary commitment" in all sectors of the population. (4) The normalization of that fissure after the Special Period depends, in turn, on the emergence of an improvised, interpersonal street-level network of news and knowledge that tries to correct state-controlled mass media communications, which are unreliable and inefficient, and whose paradigmatic form is the rumor. The rumor, argues Bloch, seeps into all spheres of daily life, proposing an alternative hypothesis to the official version, or speculating about the absence of news in official media: "Así, las condiciones de reproducción y de difusión de los rumores en Cuba se inscriben dentro de un imaginario cuyo sentido de lo real ha sido desquiciado por la experiencia revolucionaria…" (5-6). Bloch rightly observes, following Hanna Arendt's reflections on totalitarianism, ideology and propaganda, that the back and forth between opacity and transparency, and the entire system of codes and rumors that sustains it, does not challenge but reinforces instead the stern grip of the political authorities on the public sphere. By generating a social climate of uncertainty and paranoia any attempt to confirm facts is always already foiled. (7) That cognitive schism between what might be, what circulates, and what one knows to be untrue does not unsettle the widely discredited official narratives in as much as it just concedes it victory in its jurisdiction, allowing it to continue without interruption in spite of the generalized disbelief and distrust of the public.

The duplicity of informative sources and the crisis of poetic language are both aspects of a collective subjectivity characteristic of the post-hegemonic political moment in 'actually existing socialisms.' It might be worth recalling here Žižek's reading of the subject of late socialism described by Vaclav Havel. With the example of the greengrocer, Havel theorized this dual identity as constitutive of this particular historical subject, as a form of life: the greengrocer participates in state rituals, saves the national holidays, displays the flags and symbols and repeats slogans in public, while, in private, complains about the political order and criticizes the ostensible corruption and failures of its leaders. This attitude generates, for Žižek, a collective culpability where the double morality of the subject deeply implicates his/her own ethical bankruptcy with that of the system he/she criticizes. This is what allows the deep, co-dependent disjunction between the public and the private. Political discontent is drowned in private cries, while the ideological mechanisms and the symbols of power of the established order remain intact in the public sphere.

To be sure this dynamic has changed in the surface as an adaptation to the selective but greater flexibilities that characterized cultural policy from the 1990s onward. Certain forms of social criticism, as long as political society is not confronted directly are, in fact, the prevailing aesthetic norm, fitting to boot the logic of Cuba's new market socialism. Singer-songwriter Frank Delgado, for example, whose lyrics tend to be bitterly critical of the post-Soviet reality in Cuba, revives the song form as an urban chronicle, conjoining the art of stand-up with witty rhymes. In his "Trovatur," the protagonist of the song, an alter ego of the troubadour, begins to participate in the emergent tourist industry, and reflects on how the tourism industry has been very lucrative in its legal forms as much as in its derivative, unsanctioned practices (in the shape of apartment rentals, prostitution, guided tours, and artisanal souvenirs). As a cultural agent

looking to profit too, the song's narrative voice portrays a slick improviser who benefits from white lies to seduce foreigners and enter thus the glossy, dollarized world of the new Cuba. At the end of the adventure, however, the narrative closes with his redeeming return to a Cuban girl:

> Yo era un trova-tur en La Habana./Filántropo de los basureros/Y me pasé las noches y el alba/cantando sólo para extranjeros (…)/Yo era un virus tropical, Latin lover comunista/traficando con la Revolución/y con sus puntos de vista. Mezcla de Eusebio Leal/con ministro sin cartera,/yo lo mismo citaba a Carlos Marx/que a Doña Lydia Cabrera…(la audiencia se ríe)/Y Dios que es la inconciencia de mi alma/me castigó por ser tarambana./Y un día de octubre en medio del viento
> Yo me casé con una cubana. (*Trovatur)*

The duplicity of the late socialist subject finds in this conjuncture its ultimate, most developed phase: it consists on mastering a strategic maneuver between points of view according to the situation, in navigating to his advantage the codes of a chaotic system of signs. Delgado's protagonist, as singer qua citizen, is at home in that order, even if it is a subject in crisis, capable of self-criticism and even self-mockery. The apologetic humor naturalizes his surviving strategies emptying the song's rhetoric of concrete political content, portraying both his poetic lament of the lived reality and the profitability of his ethical shortcomings as the subject's small victories.

"Estado tan loco", the PPR song already cited above, begins by sketching a different kind of subject: "He estado tan loco todos estos años…qué quieren hacer de mí, otro títere a su antojo, así me he puesto tan flaco, fumando cigarros, he ido al trabajo, sin ganas y amargado, …yo quisiera pero no puedo." This subject does not know how, or does not want to, survive in the real and symbolic operations that both the trova-tur and Havel's greengrocer have mastered. This leads him to propose a kind of abstention, a self-exclusion from the social body via the pursuit of scandalizing obscenity and improper pleasures. But PPR begins this without disregarding the very same rhetorical forms constitutive of the social and political codes they reject. *A mí no me*

gusta la política, for instance, opens with a "Comunicado manifiesto" that recycles the political lexicon of daily propaganda. It deploys them in a parody of the call and response that restages the demand for total participation characteristic of the slogan culture and the forms of subject interpellation typical of the Revolution:

> Coro: ¡Nosotros!
> Gorki: Miembros del colectivo Porno Para Ricardo queremos ratificar nuestro juramento inquebrantable de lucha por la causa que nos dé la gana.
> Coro: ¡Nos comprometemos!
> Gorki: A no darle ni pie ni pisada a las patrañas de nuestros enemigos porque no tenemos ni cero coma una razones para estar en su fiesta. Queremos hacer una fiesta propia, para eso trabajamos…
> Coro: ¡Juramos!
> Ciro: No serle fiel a ningún partido a no ser el propio, el individual, no somos de izquierda ni de derecha ni del medio, no queremos marchar. Mas bien reposar, sentir placeeeeer…

Improper hedonism, rather than simple withdrawal, is the subject's response to the more insidious forms of political compromise. This combination of punk attitude, parody of officialdom, systematic insult, and pleasure in obscenity, results in the impossibility of negotiating entrance to the public sphere even under the new rules of increased tolerance. Provisionally at least, they postpone the possibility of being absorbed or managed "by the left, by the right, [or] by the center."

As an exit strategy from the simulation tactics of late socialism, PPR does not adopt its antisocial opposition from the idea punk understood as a nebulously rebellious subculture, since this would simply amount to reinsertion in a known category. Instead, the emphasis on porn and sex rekindles the idea of an undisciplined body, while the concrete insult draws in their prominent targets into their own debased, graphic, socially unacceptable symbolic space. The targets of these insults can be cultural organizations (like the Asociación Hermanos Saíz),

particular social groups (the cowards, the snitches), or individuals of high public profile—like Alpidio Alonso, Abel Prieto, Raúl Castro, and Fidel.

It is not incidental that the band's best-known song is "El Comandante," for it carries out the unthinkable task of insulting Fidel directly. But while the private humor around the figure of Fidel is prolific, the song, in addition to giving private irreverence a public voice, engages in a direct insult that threatens the authority of Fidel in different ways from how common humor debases it. That distinction resides in the structure of the insult around which the song is built. A metallic voice begins the first lines of "El Comandante" in a circus-like atmosphere, and a group of voices intervenes to finally converge in a catchy refrain: "No coma tanta pinga Comandante!" [Literarily "Don't be such a cocksucker!" in the grammatical second person formal address]. Instead of only mocking Fidel's person, however, the speaking subject opts for using the vulgar colloquialism to refuse to comply with what is demanded of him:

> El comandante quiere que yo trabaje/ pagándome un salario miserable./El comandante quiere que yo lo aplauda/después de hablar su mierda delirante. No, comandante./No coma usted esa pinga comandante.

The insult disarticulates the symbolic authority of Fidel's command to join the revolutionary project, thereby shifting the hierarchy organizing the discursive space of each of the song's imaginary interlocutors: the song's singing voice, that of a common citizen, and the addressee, a political leader, unquestioned head of government at the time.

The phrase is an aggravated version of the one directed at the trova singers: "desmaya esa trova con distortion" [forget that *trova* with distortion]. Under the song's terms, the group addresses the highest official figure of the land with the same rude colloquialism that any two youths would tell each other to 'fuck off' in the street, hinting at a social equivalence that is unheard of in the public square. At the same time, the grammatical formality with which the

second person formal address is used highlights the recognition of the authority in question and underscores the contradiction of the insult launched from the precarious authority of an obscure punk band. The generational argot is deployed here in favor of unmasking a duplicitous pact: it challenges the ways the moderate criticism of the political subject in the late socialist public sphere eventually overcame the sharp schism between the private and the public without really transforming its power dynamics.

Toward the end of the song, another icon is brought into the spotlight: the singer's voice is artificially modulated until it blends with a familiar one, that of Silvio Rodríguez, the popular singer-songwriter and arguably, the very voice of the Revolution in Cuba and Latin America. This 'song within a song' parody of Rodríguez's "Te doy una canción" questions the lyrical education received, and reclaims for itself the prerogative to denounce the youth idols of another era, to expose their present sterility, their museum quality.[17] In this case, the insult goes beyond the creation of a symbolic space of protest and functions as a form of the performative in Bourdieu's sense.[18] This would suppose a possible way out of the indifference that decades of repetition of a jaded iconography have transmuted into a strategy of survival, as I suggested at the beginning drawing a comparison with Musil's piece on monuments, since those symbols demarcate the jurisdiction of a real political authority. The subject constituted through the insult and the bad word, unsettling the hegemonic operations of said authority, would shake the status quo through a kind of exorcism, forcing authority to "a vulgar display of power" and revealing the psychosocial mechanisms and the cultural imaginaries that sustain the political order.[19]

Porno Para Ricardo, whose future is now uncertain, is hardly an isolated phenomenon; it is part of a constellation of groups and individuals who operate from a radical place of enunciation and spouse a decidedly oppositional discourse, but who also seek to retrace the

boundaries of what is official and admissible in their own terms and in their chosen platforms: from private galleries, from blogs, in meeting groups of artists and intellectuals, in public performances and flash mobs. In 2008, PPR's music and a photography set of the band by Claudio Fuentes also occupied a privileged space in Aglutinador's exhibit "We Are Porno Sí," and they have played in Xoho gallery as well as hosted their own art exhibit-party. To zoom in on the punk aesthetics of PPR is therefore also to look at the poetics of multimedia producers whose work in the last two decades has bared the logic of arbitrary flexibility governing the limits of what can be said in the public sphere. In so doing Porno Para Ricardo and comparable initiatives are faced with a crossroad: how to avoid participation as citizen-artist in the political schizophrenia inherent in the ritual practices of late socialism, insofar as to participate is to reproduce, and to function within, a dynamic of double pacts, that is, to perpetuate ways to conform in public to the official guidelines and simultaneously complain in private about the shortcomings of the system. In the cultural field this produces a poetics of fundamental ambiguity whose critical potential flirts both with the demands of a foreign consumer—as was the case of the literary 'boom' of dirty realism of the 1990s—and/or with the censorship apparatus—which causes double entendre, allegory, and innuendo to prevail as aesthetic procedures to guarantees the domestic circulation and political toleration of creative works. As a first step, PPR and associated projects do not pursue official legitimation participating in spaces authorized and supported by the state, not even those which, being more open and flexible, opt for the ventilation and disciplining, rather than the outright repression, of emergent critical attitudes. Instead, they seem to ask: What discursive spaces are not colonized by this logic yet?

The official responses to phenomena like PPR are no less significant and can be grouped into three categories: 1) the design of exclusion strategies based on their tight grip on mass media

communication; 2) the direct intimidation of participants (especially flash mobs, citations, interrogations, and short-term arrests); 3) the set-up of equivalent cultural responses and the selective support of some actors over others under the rubric of the spectacle of tolerance. These strategies are favorably exploited, in turn, to cultivate an image of opening, of increasing flexibility, projected by the authorities to please global audiences, old school sympathizers, and foreign political leaders and think tanks in the Cuban democracy watch list.

As Hernández-Reguant (2009) and Rafael Rojas (2006) have suggested, the late Cuban socialist paradigm features the uneasy convergence of a bureaucratic order and ideological orthodoxy with the modest liberalizing efforts and the lucrative promises of emerging markets. Alternative cultural projects attempt to articulate themselves outside of those two forces: on one side, reacting to pressure by a government invested in the symbolic reorganization of the revolutionary project and in new parameters for censorship, and on the other, engaging with the effects of Cuba's entrance in the global market and the subsequent commercialization of popular culture for mostly foreign consumers.[20] To sketch a genealogy of these practices as responses to a double crisis—in the language of representation and in creative autonomy—depends therefore on the profile of informal spaces of culture that have thrived and evolved within the transformations of the Cuban cultural field at the turn of the 21st century. In this sense, Porno para Ricardo's aesthetics are able to speak to the specificity of the post-socialist subject precisely by their simultaneous anachronism, conjunctural relevance, and relative commercial inviability: punk as such has disappeared as a current musical genre (though not perhaps as an *ethos*), their singularly-focused thematic antics have meaning only as long as the political order they rise against remains in power, and the absence of a committed, long term audience for punk anywhere spells unlikely sustainable success. But a reading of Porno Para Ricardo's poetics and

the response by political and cultural authorities it has elicited might further contribute to showing how these new voices respond to, and denounce, the discursive hollowness of the political imaginaries sustaining Cuba's late socialist landscape: they make visible the representational crisis that pervades it by reimagining the use of parodic obscenity as a form of political currency.

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[1] "Haec decies repetita placebit." Horace, *Ars Poetica*, line 365.

[2] Their discourse evokes parallels with both the successes and the limitations of phenomena such as 'The movida madrileña' during Spain's transition to democracy and the Basque Radical Rock movement as well.

[3] This criminal category is notoriously and infamously vague and, though its origins date from the republican past, it has often been used to curb politically or socially suspect threats to the established order.

[4] See also the *Social Text* issue on punk (No. 116, Fall 2013) and Anya Bernstein's "An Inadvertent Sacrifice: Body Politics and Sovereign Power in the Pussy Riot Affair" in *Critical Inquiry.*

[5] "…The cycle leading from opposition to diffusion, from resistance to incorporation encloses each successive subculture" (Hebdige 2002:100). See also Hall, Clarke, Jefferson and Roberts in "Notes on Subcultures."

[6] In their most extreme incarnations—the undisputed title goes to G.G. Allin—punks unwittingly inheritted the original *Kynismus* that Sloterdijk traces back to Diogenes the Cynic—another public masturbator and defecator: "In the picture book of social characters [Diogenes] creates distance with his mockery, a biting and evil individualist who pretends not to need anyone and who is loved by no one because no one escapes unscathed his crudely inmasking gaze. His social origins point to an urban figure who received his cutting edge in the bustle of the ancient metropolis. **One could characterize him as the earliest example of a declassed or plebeian intelligence. His 'cynical' turn against the arrogance and the moral secrets of an established, higher civilization presupposes a city setting with all its successes and shadows. Only in the city, under the pressure of public speech and a general love-hate, can the cynic clearly emerge as the negative profile of the city.** An only the city can accept the cynic, who demonstratively turns his back on it, as one of its eccentrics, who attest to the city's penchant for developed, urbane personalities" (Sloterdijk 1984: 191, my emphasis).

[7] This approach will also put us into dialogue with readings like Rey Chow's "Listening Otherwise", which looks at how particular ways of listening to music in communist China can

render a different interpretation for seemingly analogous practices in Western societies, depending on the particular geopolitical context in which they take place.

[8] The song "Comunista de la Gran Escena" is another nod to La Polla Records, borrowing chord changes from La Polla Records's "Hipócritas (católicos)" from the *No somos nada* (1987) album. (De la Gran Escena, or From the Great Scene, was a long-running, didactic TV program of classical music and world music performances.)

[9] See, for example, Jeff Sharlet's investigative report on "How Clear Channel programs America."

[10] The historiography that produced that common understanding of punk, and rock more generally, as occasionally reactionary and almost always exclusive—that is, as being mostly the domain of straight white males—has increasingly been challenged, especially in the face of *other* untimely and international punk scenes, which show that "the familiar center-periphery and diffusionist models of mapping the affective territories of punk are woefully insufficient to tell all the stories that could be told" (Brown, Deer, and Nyong'o 6). But consumption of rock subgenera in Cuba, with some exceptions, was and still is the domain of urban, young, straight, white males, even though it was often fueled by resistance to and self-estrangement from chauvinistic stereotypes of national identity in culture, it remained positively exclusive in other ways. From the point of view of gender stereotypes, for example, PPR's sexual imagery is traditionally sexist.

[11] Any complete inventory of the new soundscapes that inhabit these uncharted terrains half-way between underground and officialdom, and which were opened by the post-1989 state cultural politics, the new commercial circuits, and the new technologies of production and dissemination available to private individuals, should include a discussion of hip hop as well (*mutatis mutandi*, Porno para Ricardo's homologous acts in hip hop are Escuadrón Patriota and Los Aldeanos, with whom they collaborated in a videoclip version of "La política"). Cuban hip hop, and how the genre and its thriving subculture have negotiated political and social protest with the new opportunities of professionalization and state-sponsorship, however, have already been the subject of many articles and book-length studies, like the aforementioned works by Sujatha Fernandes and Geoffrey Baker. While the individual political stance of specific bands has been a source of confrontations and censorship controversies, the study of hip hop has been more attractive to cultural scholars for its timely relevance in the global soundscape—unlike rock and derived subgenres whose popularity has been in decline for decades—and for its active discussion of social antagonism and political dissensus through issues of race, class, and gender—dimensions sorely lacking in Cuban rock subculture, for the most part the music of an urban, white male population, and whose social and political defiances were more intuitive than self-aware. Moreover, hip hop has been friendlier to fusions with Cuban popular music and, therefore, enjoys a stable domestic audience and has been able to exploit already existing niches of commercialization by incorporating rhythms from Afro-Cuban traditions, salsa, and reggaetón. It is understeadable, therefore, that music scholars have privileged Cuban hip hop as a field of analysis and as a window to a more general historical moment. The insistence on a sharp historical distinction between the absence of a music market and the arrival of commercial

opportunities that sustains many of these studies framed from the point of view of hip hop as a developing genre, however, has tended to produce a language of authenticity that obscures, as I have argued, both the absorption strategies of the state cultural apparatus and the nature of specific historical formations: Fernandes (2006; 2011), for instance, has studied in depth the pros and cons of state sponsorship in Cuba in the case of hip hop, but has focused on a language of exceptionality that advances little in the way of historical and global parallels, and neglects the dynamics of the 'cut-n-mix' (Hebdige) at work in these practices: "But we can also recognize that some things, like the distinctiveness of Cuban rap, may be lost as the country opens up to a global market economy. It's worth remembering that imposed, even self-imposed, isolation can be a crucible for artistic creativity" (2011: n.pag.). One thing is to claim that cultural phenomena can and must be read in their contextual specificity—that is, that the meaning of cultural practices is bound to, if not exhausted by, its conditions of production and reception—and entirely another to claim epistemological exceptionality, or 'authenticity,' as a marker of scholarly, aesthetic, or political significance.

[12] The bridges and ideological twists between Havana's rock scene and Basque punk materialized with Negu Gorriak's 1991 tour. Negu Gorriak was the second group of Fermín Muruguza, the frontman of the notorious Basque punk group Kortatu, and whose controversial political sympathies made him a relatively safe figure for the Cuban authorities. (The cover of the 1991 Gora Herria LP uses a famous photo by a Cuban photographer, Raul Corrales's "The Cavalry" (1960), which showcases members of the Revolution's Ejército Rebelde riding horses and wearing hats in the style of *mambises,* as the soldiers of Cuba's 19th-century national independence army were called.) During the international tour with Mano Negra that took Negu Gorriak to Cuba, however, a lot of the band's equipment was 'lost,' including a valuable Gibson Les Paul. Most likely the result of Cuban amateur musicians's own unscrupulous but not uncommon doing, it is entirely possible that many of the Basque rockers' pedals, cables, and coveted guitar served to nurture, this time in the material sense, the sounds of domestic rock bands of the 1990s starved of instruments and accessories. Fermín Muruguza and other Basque promoters would later return to Cuba and be actively involved in the production and promotion of Cuban rock albums in the Basque Country, such as the punk/rap fusion group Garage H's "Sin Azúcar" (1997).

[13] Inventorial chronologies of that history do exist, in shorter press articles by writers like Eduardo del Llano, Camilo Ernesto Olivera, and Joaquín Borges Triana, and in the two monographs by Humberto Manduley. This history is also the subject of the ongoing project Cartografía del Rock en Cuba, sponsored by the International Association for the Study of Popular Music and part of Cartografía del Rock en América Latina, and its methodology has been outlined in Liliana González Moreno's "Rock en Cuba." These histories tend to be anectodal and descriptive rather than analytic, and due to the ephemeral nature of the material archive it has been impossible so far to map the informal networks that characterized cassette culture, the mechanics of its barter practices (where knowledge, bootleg recordings, drugs, magazines, and ornaments all functioned as forms of currency), the listening habits, and internal codes of indentity and behavior that organized the rock scene as a subculture. (Sujatha Fernandes and Geoffrey Baker have studied the equivalent phenomenon in hip hop, looking at the birth of the Cuban Agency of Rap, the commercialization of Cuban rap music, the new state cultural

politics, and the popularity of reggaeton.)

[14] Unfortunately, neither the authorities nor the listeners of the 1970s had heard of Red Shadow, which could have possibly boosted arguments for ideological compatibility on both sides: with songs like “Understanding Marx,” “Ass to the Class,” and “Stagflation,” this American amateur rock band was the brainchild of three economics PhDs.

[15] Yusimí Rodríguez, “Cuba’s Rotilla Festival Out in 2011, Back in 2012?” *Havanatimes.org,* 17 August 2011. Web. Accessed 25 September 2011. http://www.havanatimes.org/?p=48844

[16] I have borrowed the phrase from Alenka Barber-Kersovan’s article “Music as a Parallel Power Structure,” which argues for music as a sensual doble of politics.

[17] The Rodríguez fragment cited in “El comandante” is “Te doy una canción y hago un discurso/Sobre mi derecho a hablar./Te doy una canción con mis dos manos,/Con las mismas de matar./Te doy una canción y digo Patria,/Y sigo hablando para ti./Te doy una canción como un disparo,/Como un libro, una palabra, una guerrilla:/Como doy el amor.”

[18] "Insults, blessings and curses are all acts of magical naming and, strictly speaking, prophecies which purport to be self-verifying. In so far as it always implies a more or less socially justified claim to perform a magical act of institution which can usher in a new reality, the performative utterance creates a future effect in words used in the present.” (Bourdieu 262)

[19] I’m alluding to that extraordinary exchange between Father Karras and the possessed Reagan in *The Exorcist* (1973), when the biblical scene of the temptation of the dessert is reversed by Karras:
Demon: “And I’m the Devil. Now kindly undo these straps.”
Father Karras: “If you are the Devil, why not make the straps disappear?”
Demon: “That’s much too vulgar a display of power, Karras.”

[20] As I have insisted on before, this is not to say that individually many of these agents aspire to professionalization or become professionalized in the course of their practices.

CONCLUSION

To look back at these five chapters opens more questions and bares more lacunae than offers concrete answers: now that I may know how to set about this work—to paraphrase the epigraph of Bernhard's *The Loser* in the first chapter—it is already over. To begin with, the 'contemporary' adjective in the title has expired. I submit the qualifier 'post-Special Period' as a placeholder for the long decade at the center of this dissertation's concerns. This period, if it can indeed be called so, can be said to begin in 1998, with the rise of Hugo Chávez and the ensuing reprieve that Venezuelan support afforded Cuba's fledgling economic recovery, and to end with the discreet reforms that characterized Raúl Castro's administration up to, and in the immediate aftermath of, the 6th Congress of the Cuban Communist Party in 2011. As with any premature periodization, these are porous and speculative signposts. In addition to the political and economic changes experienced in Cuba in the wake of the Special Period, the decade that followed it also registered three other factors: the arrival and dissemination of digital, web, and portable technologies; the lingering effects of the mass exodus of cultural and other professionals beginning in the early 1990s; and the far-from-smooth new partnerships between state institutions, emerging cultural producers, and diverse social agents, tailgating the post-Cold War global pattern of invigorated identity politics, or as Ernesto Laclau put it: "the rebellion of various particularisms—ethnic, racial, national, and sexual—against the totalizing ideologies which dominated the horizon of politics in the preceding decades" (1996: vii).

To take up where cultural historians and scholars of the Cuban Special Period had left off, I worked from the premise that in order to examine the reconfiguration of the cultural field in post-Cold War Cuba from the point of view of the present, a double approach was necessary: I would need to identify both continuities with, and points of departure from, the transformations

brought on by the Special Period. This seemed, and still seems important for three reasons. First, this approach was inspired by the continued need to theorize and understand the post-Socialist condition, which as scholars like Boris Groys, Slavoj Žižek, Susan Buck Morss, and Shu-mei Shih have argued, is a global rather than a geographically and historically local experience: In the same way that 20th century revolutions were planetary events and constitutive parts of the imaginaries of commonly shared mass utopias, the cultural and political reconfigurations of their demise as collective projects provided more clues still for critical reevaluations of what they *had* been (as opposed to what they *called* themselves), while offering interpretative tools to diagnose the unfolding of a common geopolitical present. Second, the momentous currency of the concept of 21st century socialism, popularized by Latin American self-called Left governments—e.g. the Revolución Ciudadana in Ecuador and the Revolución Bolivariana in Venezuela—which claimed for themselves, if unevenly, the legitimating legacy of the Cuban experiment transformed to meet the expectations of modern constitutional democracies and market economies, demanded reexaminations of that legacy and of the ongoing dissensions between intellectual traditions, historical experiences, and the rhetoric of professional politicians. Third, and more specifically, a changing Cuban cultural field offered a *social text* where it was possible to evaluate the maturation of the cultural politics set in motion in the decade of the 1990s, as well as to map the emergence of new cultural and political actors that were consciously and critically operating within them. In turn, I have argued here, their practices and narratives, and the contextual dilemmas to which they arose as a response, were uniquely positioned—which is not the same as to say epistemologically privileged—to comment on the rapport between aesthetic experience and political participation, and on the limitations and expectations that fanned democratic desires—and debates—in post Cold War, and one could add, post revolutionary

Cuba. To borrow Beatriz Sarlo's formulation (2004), it was not the "technical imagination" of modernity but the "democratic imagination" of post-Socialism that these converging factors activated in actors newly arrived in the public sphere, as much as in traditional sites of cultural production.

The double inscription of the amateur—as agent, as discourse, and as trope—in both political and cultural traditions suggested that figure as an interpretative key for the period during which some of the dialogues between established and non established actors documented here take place, not the least because this framing could address three additional concerns: the identification of political desires that still spoke to the imaginaries of democratic citizenship outside of specific identitarian demands; the viability of cultural discourses that did not fit comfortably with the officially sanctioned commercialization of Cuban culture and the subsequent reshuffling of the cultural state apparatus; and the possibilities of finding the residual ethos of the historical figure of the amateur, or *aficionado*, that was integral to cultural revolutionary mythology. For if "in Cuba, as it had been in the countries of the Soviet Bloc, the inventor-worker contained the hope for national independence and material progress for a besieged country," I argue that the worker-aficionado was its counterpart in the programs of socialist enlightenment that were to accompany the socialist emancipation of labor with equally emancipatory leisure practices. (Hernández-Reguant 2012: 200) Moreover, if the cultural effects of the Cuban Revolution were to be analyzed in any comprehensive manner, it seemed necessary to depart from the traditional categories of cultural analysis that the processes associated to the cultural revolution had attempted to do away with—the divide between high culture and mass culture, reified notions of authorship, vanguard conceptions of intellectuality—and to begin from the categories at the center of the cultural democratization it claimed to have carried out instead.

As I argued in the introduction and in the first chapter, these framing difficulties responded both to the challenge described by Groys apropos of the missed encounters between theorization of the post-Socialist condition and cultural studies as a discipline, and to the internal development of simultaneous and contradictory notions of cultural democratization in Cuba. Two brief examples can further illustrate what inspired this approximation.

The first is the Cuban short film Utopia (2004), directed by Arturo Infante, and the interpretative consensus it seemed to inspire. The plot of this critically acclaimed short film builds on three tableaux: the first presents an after-work domino game fueled by rum, *choteo*, and vernacular language between what seem to be four auto mechanics; the second shows a Special Education teacher coaching a student to recite Borges's "El golem" for a political activity at school; and the third depicts a technical debate about *La traviata* between three women who are fixing their nails on a rooftop, and who identify strongly with the melodramatic and the stylistic elements of romantic opera: "Pero déjame decirte que ese libreto no es de Verdi, yo lo vi el otro día en el [canal] 4, lo escribió un…un escritor ahí también romántico igual que Verdi, Francisco María Piave creo que se llama….[They argue about whether the opera was written by "Pusini' (sic) or Verdi] Atiende pa' que aprendas porque además me acuerdo perfectamente. Esa opera es de estilo romántico lírica, ¿tú sabe' por qué? Por el virtuosismo vocal, ahí los cantantes cantan así, con ganas, así AHHHHH! [gesticulating] Además apúrate ahí que tengo los frijoles esos que se van a pegar." The four mechanics, in turn, begin to discuss where one of them could burn a rare CD of Cecilia Bartoli arias, but the conversation quickly escalates and turns into a full-blown argument about the authenticity of a Latin American style of Baroque architecture: "¡Mira compadre, el barroco latinoamericano no existe ni pinga!" While these two arguments end up in violent fights, the school girl manages to complete the rendition

of *El golem* after many frustrating attempts, though seemingly without understanding its meaning (she fumbles *judería* with *jodería*, and pronounces [Gershom] Sholem as golem). The film's humorist procedure relies on the seemingly incompatible coexistence of high cultural capital and vulgar manners. The referenced contextual premise is the programs of mass dissemination of 'universal culture' characteristic of the cultural politics of the revolutionary state (and discussed in the first chapter), while the short's *denouement* (the third and fourth acts are titled "Agitato e con fuoco" and "Patetico") suggests a contradictory link between the lofty content of the arguments and their failed vehicles of communication, between (high) culture and violence. On the surface it can certainly be read as a general commentary on tutelar and rigid notions of cultural validity, which engender obsession with cultural wealth for its own sake, rather than a critical understanding of its functions and of aesthetic pleasure more generally.

Sure enough, the immediate and prevailing readings of the film, following its suggestive title, praised it as a daring denunciation of the utopias of the Cuban Revolution. This would not be controversial in itself if not for the particular language of failure invoked. Both Antonio José Ponte and Duanel Díaz, for example, wrote about *Utopía* along very similar lines. The subtitle of Ponte's essay is self-explanatory: "¿Un retrato real del Hombre Nuevo?" His text builds on the imagery of the golem as an allegory of the *Cuban* New Man specifically, instead of finding precisely the shared utopia between the ideas of humanist enlightenment and socialist humanism that constitute the basis of the expectations that allow these processes to be read as failures: "Más que pelear entre ellos, dentro de los personajes de Utopía pelea la incompatibilidad entre cultura y dogma incubada por el proyecto revolucionario: un humanismo beligerante contra cualquier disentimiento, receloso ante la libertad individual, monologador antes que dialogante" (n.pag). Díaz, who goes further than Ponte in conflating Marxism, communism and the Cuban

revolutionary government, but who does acknowledge the question of the enlightenment dialectic raised by Adorno, reads it instead as a continuation of *Memorias del subdesarrollo* though from the point of view of a Sergio horrified by the people's "chusmería":

> La chusmería, uno de los aspectos más pintorescos de la cubanidad contemporánea que este filme muestra, no es, evidentemente, una consecuencia de la miseria económica, pues no se halla entre los sectores marginados de otros países de América Latina, pero no es tampoco un componente esencial del 'carácter nacional,' sino más bien un producto del régimen impuesto en la Isla desde 1959…destruidos los antiguos valores de la educación formal propios de la sociedad republicana y erosionados los que promovía la cultura socialista, sólo queda en Cuba la chusmería. (n.pag.)

Whatever valid criticisms of the repressive nature of the revolutionary apparatus could and should be made in historical balances, to read Infante's short solely along these lines is an exercise of historical (and aesthetic) reductionism on multiple accounts; and which selectively forgets that many of those mass enlightenment programs were supported and engineered by intellectuals whose own notions of cultural wealth had been cultivated precisely in the republican era.

In fact, in both critics there is an implicit horror at the possibility of discussing high culture in vulgar language (ignoring an undercurrent of *erudición con choteo* in vernacular key that sustains the poetics of voices as distinguished as those of Virgilio Piñera, Reinaldo Arenas, and Ena Lucía Portela), while it is their language of *failure* of enlightenment that seems to take for granted that the possibility of *success* was ever in the horizon, that is, they seem to maintain two mutually exclusive positions: that massification of high culture is an inherently impossible and/or undesirable pursuit, and that it was terribly miscarried by the revolutionary government. While both Ponte and Díaz have shown to have an in-depth command of Cuban culture, much like the domestic Cuban intellectuals discussed in the Introduction but from the diametrically opposed position of the diaspora, their singularly focused pursuit of political criticism leads them

to oversights regarding the heterogeneous and conflicting theories of culture at the center of the concept of cultural revolution and of its Cuban experience. Both texts lose the opportunity to reflect instead on how bourgeois notions of "high culture" retained their prestige as cultural capital, and on why culture is still something worth fighting about, and fighting for, in 21st century Cuba. This is why I proposed in the introduction that to investigate the link between cultural and political autonomy, and to map the double and seemingly paradoxical mechanism of promoting and politicizing cultural wealth while simultaneously attempting to contain it by canceling its social effects and open circulation, attention had to be paid to what happened when these types of debates took place in the margins or beyond the official cultural sphere, and with participants that were considered double outsiders, but whose demands for participation operated within the same horizons of cultural hegemony.

The second example is furnished by the flashback scenes to 1968 in Jesús Díaz's *Las palabras perdidas* (1992), where four young intellectuals are planning a cultural revolt within the bureaucratic cultural apparatus *and* the established literary circles (they come up with a dare that involves meeting with canonical writers like Guillén, Carpentier, Piñera, Lezama and Diego and reciting them cleverly composed epitaphs in the literary style of each):

> -Tenemos que hacer una revista *nuestra*, que circule como suplemento de un periódico que lea todo el mundo…Algo que *influya* en la cultura, algo *grande*.
> (…)
> -Un sueño…¿Quién te va a autorizar?
> -¿Quién nos tiene que *autorizar* a pensar?…Nosotros *somos* el poder, los hijos de la revolución…Dime: ¿a *quién* le vamos a pedir permiso?" (42-3; italics in the original)

The impeccable thematization of the Cuban writer's plight in Jesus Díaz's novel is symptomatic of the post-Cold War intellectual generation's characteristic disillusionment, but it was also prophetic of an enduring crisis in the search for aesthetic experiences and possibilities of

autonomy that did not affect the *intelligentsia* exclusively, and that is rarely acknowledged in cultural terms outside of broader generalizations about political or civil rights. In fact, a scene so eminently recognizable as the Cuban intellectual's own as the one above, we have seen it reenacted here, now in circles that consciously locate themselves outside of the cultural state apparatus even when they reenact similar models of intellectuality, now *remediated*. An incomplete task remains ahead then, as suggested in the second chapter: to map the changing notions of cultural autonomy in the different initiatives that have conceived of themselves as alternative, or oppositional—to use Raymond Williams's distinction—to official and/or dominant culture.

This emphasis would suggest that the actors that emerge as cultural and political agents in the post-Special Period moment are in fact in conversation with earlier moments when the relationship between civil society, culture, and politics has undergone a critical redefinition—polemics that intensified from the mid-1980s onward when the ideological edifice began to unravel and aesthetic language set out to explore the limits of cultural autonomy within and beyond Cuba's revolutionary order. The first moment of this shift, sketched in the second chapter, can be traced to the aesthetics of the 1980s visual artists and to Paideia first and Diáspora(s) later, two of the most notable independent groups formed by Cuban intellectuals and writers. This period saw the official politics of "Rectificación de errors" in 1987, the affair of *Alicia en el pueblo de Maravillas* (1991), and the exodus of a large number of cultural producers of a generation fully educated in the Revolution in the early 1990s. A second moment centers on the recuperation of Gramsci's theories of hegemony by Cuban intellectuals that stayed in Cuba. If, whatever their merits, their strategies of criticism from the inside have been exhausted as consequential forms of protest, it would be pertinent to see then who has inherited their place. It

could be argued, for example, that Estado de Sats, a project that describes itself as a place "donde confluyen arte y pensamiento" takes up the tradition of salon culture and of clandestine cultural dissemination discussed in the second chapter and reorganizes it as a civic-cultural project that seeks to maintain both a physical and digital presence in the public sphere: organizing debates and events, and producing multimedia material, that are later published and documented online and digitally, along with the journal *Cuadernos para la Transición.* Their domestic public continues to be as limited as that of their more established counterparts, though in addition to the more culturally and politically diverse themes and participants convened by Estado de Sats as a discussion platform, the key difference is their ability to elicit direct responses from the authorities—their meetings have been interrupted, the project's founder, physicist Antonio Rodiles has been arrested, etc.—because of their place of enunciation with respect to political society. In other words, in this third moment, while critical but committed criticisms of established actors in intellectual circles consider political society legitimate interlocutors yet do not interpellate them directly, projects like Estado de Sats and others I have documented here denounce the revolutionary government as an illegitimate interlocutor but address their representatives directly by provoking them with unsanctioned actions. In many ways, they too remain trapped in the official narrative whereby *a* transition—if indeed that is an adequate term—has not already happened, and where it is the continuities rather than the differences between the "really existing communist" and the "really existing capitalist" frameworks of operation that become obscured in these particular articulations of democratic desire. In terms of cultural analysis, what is highlighted by the links between earlier attempts to articulate autonomy from the lettered city and the new actors who present themselves as outside of it is that the latter's struggles of recognition, since they also seek to enter the public sphere as agents in their

own right, involve anxieties around proving their worth in terms of the same cultural capital; a look at many of the topics of their meetings (literature, music, history) and at the table of contents of the journal (which so far have always included literary texts, for example) would confirm a continuation of a pattern in which in order to talk about politics one must also talk about culture (and vice versa).

In this sense, as I argued in the introduction, the focus of this thesis was to read the post-Special Period through the narratives of newly arrived cultural and political actors and to develop a framework that could relate these types of initiatives both among themselves and historically. Each chapter therefore focused on documenting scenes where aesthetic strategies and political demands combined to resist, in one way or another, forms of culture organized by the remnants of the bureaucratic apparatus, but that did not do so necessarily as part of the global cultural market in which Cuba began to participate from the mid-90s onward (since that had been the critical focus of cultural studies so far). The intention was not to describe a sociological or cultural movement, nor to delimit categorically an object of study as such, but to critically examine the specters of democratic citizenship in the culture of the post-Special Period through the lens of this hypothetical subject latent in the various encounters, fragments, agents, spaces, and objects discussed here. Within the limits of the dissertation's scope, that required a formal aesthetic attention (and therefore a concern with narrative, style, materials, traditions, and influences) but also a sociological one (a concern with social relations, with networks of circulation and dissemination, with the production of value and meaning, and with demographic and generational markers).

This approach was also an attempt, as I argued in the first chapter, to examine a concept of cultural citizenship that did not converse with the notions of equal participation through

difference (Renato Rosaldo, Spivak's 'strategic essentialism' and other postcolonial approaches like Walter Mignolo's 'decoloniality' and 'pluriversality') or the political uses of culture as a resource (George Yúdice, García Canclini) that have prevailed in Latin American scholarship, but had more to say perhaps about the encounter of 20th century utopias of politicization of culture (and '*enculturalization* of politics') and the remediated 21st century democratic imaginaries, for not only cultural works but theories too are remediated, that is, reworked in other media with subsequent transformations in they ways they treat publics, procedures, networks, and producers. Furthermore, as discussed in the second chapter apropos of García Canclini, von Osten, and McRobbie's work on ideologies of creativity, it would seem that just like there are kinships between the historical conditions of black markets and the new provocations of peer-to-peer economies (also collaborative economy or shared economy), the concept of cultural undergrounds and the historical formations that produce them could converse with contemporary forms of resistance to various forms of organized culture—be that by the state, by the market, or by both as a single entity. Each chapter, then, documented acts and works where the spectator is activated as actor, and where the private realm—the space of the home, the intimacy of the blog, the spontaneous expletive—is mobilized publicly for political recognition, but relies on aesthetic modes of attention: seeing and being seen, reading and writing, listening and singing along.

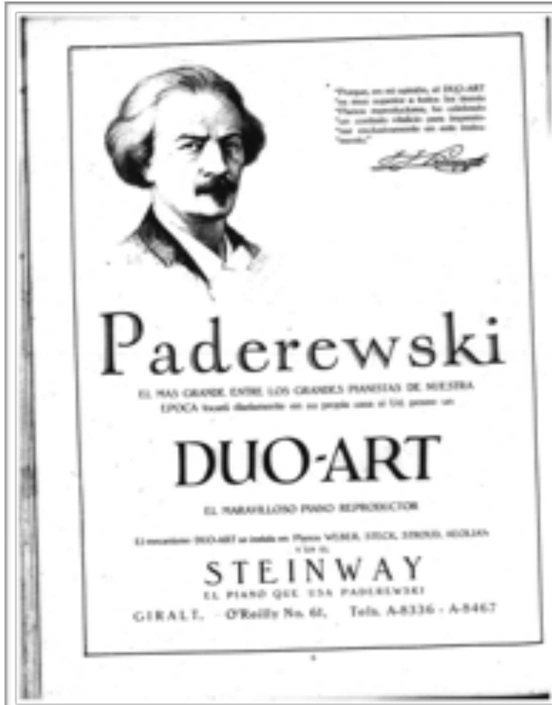
The interest in the figure of the amateur responded as well to ongoing disciplinary concerns in cultural analysis that combine two fields of inquiry: first, the mapping of transformations in aesthetic procedures, publics, and producers opened by new technological paradigms, where publishing interfaces and production capabilities signal the horizontalization, and consequently the amateurization of the access to the public sphere; and second, the

suggestion of a political dimension that is reworked in relationships between professionals and nonprofessionals in cultural production, and which builds on conceptual legacies of the historical avant-garde that have become staple creative principles in participatory art and relational aesthetics. The analysis of scholars like John Roberts, who, like Hal Foster, reject the categorical failure of the avant-gardes and who look instead at the afterlives of their *futures past*, was crucial in this regard: "Relational aesthetics and postrelational aesthetics, the new community-based and participatory forms of art practice, and the widespread forms of digital interactivity and intervention all subscribe in various ways to the new ethos: art is no more and no less than an ensemble of diverse artistic and nonartistic practices and skills that find their expression as socially constituted moment of exchange between producer and audience in a continuum of other socially constituted exchanges" (Roberts 2010: 722). Along these lines, three conceptual (but porous in practice) distinctions were proposed to organize the readings: a) the artists' and the philosophers' appropriation of the figure of the amateur—as an abstract concept, as an ideal or alter ego; b) the aesthetics of collaborative actions between professionals and nonprofessionals, as well as of that of moments of clashes between them; and c) the amateurs as such, that is, specific social actors and cultural agents who engage in different activities but who do not pursue them professionally (which is not to say, as the work of Stebbins suggested, that they do not operate with or aspire to professional standards, or that they eventually professionalize, etc.). From the three forms in which we could talk about the amateur— the trope, the discursive strategy, the agents—the scholarly work that predominates and is discussed in the first chapter emphasizes the second and the third senses of amateurism. The challenge for this project was to attempt to combine all three by also looking at what kind of agents were perceived as amateurs or were self-represented as such, since they too can be said to belong to "the 'dark matter' of the

unofficial economy of occasional artists, part-time activist-collectives and various hit and run ecopractices" that are characteristic of these new conditions of production and, as is the case with other manifestations of what Roberts calls the 'suspensive avant-garde', they usually remain "unnamed and dissolve once the political struggle has moved on" (726).

In the context of post-Cold War Cuba, *moving on* has usually meant emigration, tolerated anonymity, or absorption by the state cultural apparatus. As traveling restrictions have been further lifted, for example, some of these actors have traveled abroad, temporarily or indefinitely, while the Cuban government changes its sights from Venezuela to the BRICS but remains in the same position of cautious economic opening and political stagnation. The inherently ephemeral nature of these projects renders a detailed epilogue redundant in some cases, premature in others. For example, the alternative blogosphere has taken steps toward professionalization, with the inauguration of *14ymedio* in June of 2014 as a digital newspaper, effectively erasing the blogs as blogs. By adding *Generación Y* as a column and moving the entire blog to the site, for instance, the blog's history as blog has also been lost along with the fights and interactions among the commentators. Digital documentation remains online in other blogs, in dead websites, in people's hard drives, as infinite extensions of the installations of public assembly we discussed in the second chapter. Alternative galleries and exhibits come and go, as do blogs, bands, digital literary journals, and multimedia producers: some of them we have discussed here, but a comprehensive catalogue is, as with any cultural record, always a work in progress.

ILLUSTRATIONS



Figs. 1, 2, 3. Three of many advertisements of technologies of music reproduction found in Havana's haute society magazine *Social,* taken from the numbers corresponding to February, March, and April of 1926 respectively. Together with electricity, bathroom fixtures, and automobiles, these three items—player pianos, radios, and phonographs—are some of the most recurrent products advertised. The ads always highlight incorporation of the latest scientific advancements, high sound fidelity, and the capacity of the artifacts to recreate the physical presence of the artists in the comfort of the home.

Fig. 4 Official map of the 11th Havana Biennial (2012).

Fig. 5 Annotated map of Havana showing alternative sites for art events and exhibits during the 11th Havana Biennial (2012).

Fig. 6 Poster for *Curadores go home!* exhibit at Aglutinador.

HOW BAD-ART YOU?

XOhO

Fig. 7 Catch phrase for Bad Art exhibit.

XOhO le invita a participar en la nueva y única muestra de arte malo.

"El Maluarte Cubano"

Basta de intentos fallidos en la busqueda de la belleza, de la subjetividad y del NO arte, del oficio, de buscar mercado, de ganar concursos y bienales, en fin de tratar de hacer una "obra".

Si en todo este tiempo se siente que no lo ha logrado (o quiza lo logró pero sabe que su obra no esta a la altura de esas condiciones) ya no tiene porque rendirse Xoho le abre las puertas al arte malo cubano.

_PREGUNTESE SI SU OBRA ES LO SUFICIENTEMENTE MALA PARA PARTICIPAR.

_PREGUNTESE SI ES CAPAZ DE HACER UNA OBRA ARTISTICA BIEN MALA.

RESPONDASE A USTED MISMO Y CONTACTENOS.

NOS ENCANTARÍA CONTAR CON USTED.

XOhO (encargado Rubén Cruces)

teléfono : 8813973

dirección : Calle 43 no. 1127 entre Kohly y 36. Nuevo Vedado.

e-mail : albisu@infomed.sld.cu

Fig. 8 Call for artworks for the Bad Art Exhibit.

Fig. 9 “Atribuido a Lázaro Saavedra,” Bad Art exhibit.

Fig.10 Official logo of the Committees for the Defense of the Revolution (CDR): "Con la guardia en alto."

Fig. 11 Poster for exhibit "Pusimos el cuadro y que" in Porno para Ricardo's home studio La Paja Recold.

Fig. 12 1973 poster of the municipal CDR of Centro Havana neighborhood in the style of the British, American and Soviet "I want you" political poster series. Source: Archivo de Connie.

Fig. 13 Still frame from *Memorias del subdesarrollo* (1968): representatives from the agency for Urban Reform (Reforma Urbana) visit the protagonist as part of a citywide census.

Fig. 14 Materials from Estado de Sats and tutorials for new Cuban bloggers distributed from hand to hand.

Fig. 15 Homemade tote bag publicizing the alternative blogging platform Voces Cubanas.

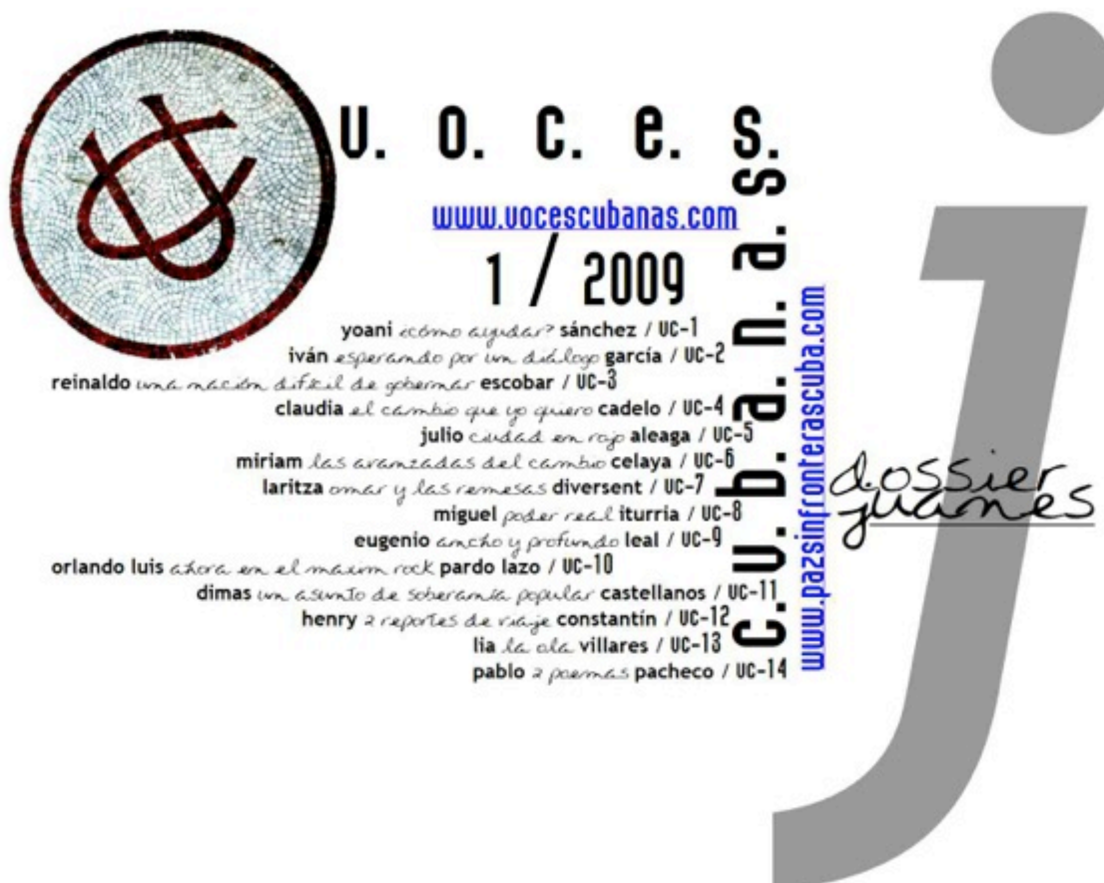


Fig. 16 Table of contents for the first issue of the Boletín de Voces Cubanas.

AcademiaBlogger	Jun 15, 2014, 11:59 AM	--	Folder
1 El otro Martí	Nov 9, 2013, 8:29 PM	--	Folder
El partido y la guerra en Martí.doc	Apr 30, 2013, 11:45 AM	30 KB	Microsoft Wor...04 document
José Martí para Contodos. Abril.doc	Apr 30, 2013, 11:44 AM	47 KB	Microsoft Wor...04 document
La república martiana. Estación de destino.Encuentro.20.01.doc	Apr 30, 2013, 11:44 AM	134 KB	Microsoft Wor...04 document
17 A qué convoca Martí.doc	Apr 30, 2013, 11:44 AM	25 KB	Microsoft Wor...04 document
Martí sobre el socialismo de Spencer.doc	Apr 30, 2013, 11:44 AM	32 KB	Microsoft Wor...04 document
Martí. cap. del libro de Dimas.doc	Apr 30, 2013, 11:44 AM	38 KB	Microsoft Wor...04 document
cultura_cubana	Nov 9, 2013, 8:29 PM	--	Folder
Taínos.pptx	Apr 30, 2013, 11:44 AM	15.3 MB	Microsoft Pow...t presentation
La visión de los conquistadores.pptx	Apr 30, 2013, 11:44 AM	674 KB	Microsoft Pow...t presentation
La conquista.pptx	Dec 4, 2009, 5:11 PM	63 KB	Microsoft Pow...t presentation
CursoTwitter.ppt	Oct 22, 2013, 12:45 PM	2.7 MB	Microsoft Pow...presentation
El HONOR, limitación a la libertad de información.pptx	Apr 30, 2013, 11:44 AM	1.9 MB	Microsoft Pow...t presentation
Reconstruir la sociedad civil- academia bloguer.ppt	May 29, 2012, 10:39 AM	709 KB	Microsoft Pow...presentation
Pasos para activar el servicio de MMS.doc	Sep 16, 2010, 9:31 PM	24 KB	Microsoft Wor...04 document
LA CONSULTA.docx	Feb 27, 2010, 5:02 PM	14 KB	Microsoft Word document
Los medios oficiales.doc	Jan 8, 2010, 8:44 PM	32 KB	Microsoft Wor...04 document
Curso_Blogger.doc	Oct 17, 2009, 12:37 AM	31 KB	Microsoft Wor...04 document
Tutorial_Blogger.doc	Aug 25, 2009, 6:54 PM	125.7 MB	Microsoft Wor...04 document
JavaScript Tools Guide CS3.pdf	Jan 7, 2009, 9:40 AM	2.9 MB	Adobe PDF document
introduccion_css.pdf	Mar 15, 2008, 12:28 AM	3 MB	Adobe PDF document
introduccion_xhtml.pdf	Mar 15, 2008, 12:19 AM	1.9 MB	Adobe PDF document

Fig. 17 Screenschot of USB flash drive with materials from Academia Blogger.

Fig. 18 Monument “Mariana Grajales” located in Havana’s El Vedado neighborhood (23 y C), honoring mother of independence general Antonio Maceo. José Martí writes in “La madre de Maceo” that upon seeing her wounded older son she exhorted her younger one, Marcos, to grow up and get taller so as to join the fight. (July 2009)

Fig. 19 Official billboard on the side of the Habana Libre Hotel (23 y L), in El Vedado neighborhood. (July 2009)

Fig. 20a *Cantan los pueblos, cantan los niños*, 1960 [Songs of the people, children songs]

Fig. 20b Songs: Cara A 1 - "Himno Nacional"… 4 "La Pájara Pinta" …Cara B 1 – "Los pollos de mi cazuela"…9 - "La Marcha del 26 de Julio." Description: "'Cantan los pueblos…Cantan los niños' es un disco para cantar. Pero también es un disco para escuchar activa e inteligentemente. …Bellos romances infantiles, se ofrecen aquí sin perder nada de su tradicional pureza, revestidos por una instrumentación fresca, vigorosa, de calidades artísticas tales, que prepara al niño para enfrentarse a las sonoridades de su tiempo. …La práctica del folklore es el camino más natural para llevar al niño a la verdadera apreciación de las grandes obras musicales….Cada canto ha sido grabado más de una vez. A fin de ofrecer siempre un modelo correcto para oír, antes de ser cantado…" Source: Archivo de Connie

Figs. 21 and 22 Homemade posters of Porno para Ricardo.

Fig. 23 Porno para Ricardo's *Album Rojo…(Desteñido)*. Recorded and designed in the home studio La Paja Recold, this was the band's first CD to bemanufactured and launched abroad in México and the United States.

Fig 24. Official banner in El Vedado neighborhood. Corner of 23 y G where urban tribes congregate unofficially on the weekends. (July 2009)

Fig. 25 Caimán Rock Festival site in Lennon Park, corner of 17 and 6 streets in El Vedado neighborhood in Havana (July 2009).

Fig. 26 Rock concert in 1989 in the Alamar neighborhood in Eastern Havana. Photo from *Facebook* group “Los que fuimos frikis en Cuba.”

Fig. 27 Press clip from the program “Sumando a los demás” which, according to anecdotal accounts, provided unemployed urban youth with room and board (including rum) in exchange for light work in the fields. It was short-lived but attracted many free floating, strung out headbangers. The caption of the photograph reads: “Entre los jóvenes que seguirán sumándose, llegarán algunos sin vínculo laboral o estudiantil que han pedido ir para allá.” The name of the initiative, “Sumando a los demás,” is a line from the chorus of Silvio Rodríguez’s “Vamos a andar” (*Rabo de nube,* 1980). Source: "Los que fuimos frikis en Cuba," *Facebook* group.

Fig. 28 Club “El submarino amarillo,” in Havana’s El Vedado neighborhood. (August 2010)

Fig. 29 Maxim Rock, headquarters of the Agencia del Rock in Havana. (August 2009)

Fig. 30 Banner in the intersection of streets 23 y D in El Vedado, Havana. (July 2009)

Fig. 31 Graffito and mural in front of Havana's "Parque de G" where youth get together on weekends: "De estos hombres se hace un pueblo." (August 2010)

Fig.32 People defacing money during a private garage band concert. The stamp reads: “Conmigo no cuenten.” (July 2009)

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