

# **KINOCUBAN**

**The Significance of Soviet and East European Cinemas**

**for**

**The Cuban Moving Image**

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I, Vladimir Alexander Smith Mesa, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

## **Abstract**

*KinoCuban: The Significance of Soviet and East European Cinemas for the Cuban Moving Image* examines a piece of evidence that has been misunderstood in the existing body of Cuban film studies. The first revolutionary legislation concerning the arts was the creation of the ICAIC in 1959, a fact that demonstrates the importance of cinema for the new cultural project. This thesis argues that the moving image was radically affected by the proclamation of the socialist character of the Revolution on 16 April 1961. What was it that the distant audiovisual culture, film theories and practices of the Soviet-bloc offered Cubans? Is it not the case that Soviet-bloc cinemas had an influence upon the shaping of the Cuban moving image, if one takes into consideration the very few films co-produced in 30 years? It should be stressed that during this period, the moving image was the direct or indirect effect of the different waves that arrived in Cuba from ‘the other’ Europe, which were born at the same time as the first films that were co-produced in the 1960s, particularly from the unique experience of Mikhail Kalatozov’s masterpiece *Soy Cuba*. The present study reveals that the most important outcome from that influence was the conceptualisation of the cinematic discourse of the Revolution, so well represented in ICAIC and its socialist films of commitment. The experience included the introduction of new practices in television in order ‘to de-colonize’ the moving image. *KinoCuban* analyses the impact on four main subjects: film theory and criticism; film administration; the filmmakers’ works (films, videos, and television practices) and the spectator. *KinoCuban* works within the area of postcolonial studies and takes Ortiz’s transculturation as its starting point. *KinoCuban* argues that the experience was a process of give and take, thus ‘lo exacto es hablar de continuidad’.

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**To my daughters Arielle Alexandra and Fernanda Danielle**

**To my wife Melanie Jones**

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## Table of Contents

### Acknowledgments

• <b>Introduction</b>	.....	<b>9</b>
• <b>Chapter I</b>	.....	<b>49</b>
Pre-Revolutionary Cinematic Discourse		
• <b>Chapter II: The 1960s</b>	.....	<b>81</b>
The Emergence of the Socialist Cinema of the Cuban Revolution (Committed Films: Socialist in Content and National in Form)		
• <b>Chapter III: The 1970s</b>	.....	<b>144</b>
The Socialist Institutionalisation of the Moving Image		
• <b>Chapter IV: The 1980s</b>	.....	<b>223</b>
KinoGlasnost and the Return of the Cuban Vernacular		
• <b>Conclusion</b>	.....	<b>275</b>
• <b>Bibliography</b>	.....	<b>295</b>
• <b>Filmography</b>	.....	<b>312</b>

### Notes on languages and transliteration

Apart from English and Spanish, the text of this PhD thesis contains words from Slavonic languages, particularly Russian, which are set in italic type. I have used the Library of Congress transliteration system for Cyrillic script.



## Introduction

### The Most Important Art...

‘Una película debe ser alguna cosa de importancia cuando ustedes están tan interesados a ella; tiene que ser alguna cosa muy bonita y de importancia’

The above suggestion comes from a peasant woman, one of the one hundred people in the village of Los Mulos who saw a movie for the first time in April 1967. Her testimony is recorded in *Por primera vez* (For the First Time, 1967), a ten-minute black-and-white documentary directed by Octavio Cortázar.<sup>1</sup> The documentary recalls one of the finest moments of the Cuban Revolution, ‘la campaña de alfabetización’ (the literacy campaign), when film art reached people living in some of the poorest and most isolated rural areas, who had until that time had been completely forgotten.

In one sequence of the film the same woman explains that many people in the village do not have the chance to go to cinemas; certainly, previous governments had not been interested in showing films to them, from which it can be deduced that for the cultural mentors of the Revolution, cinema was of great significance, a movie: ‘tiene que ser alguna cosa muy bonita y de importancia’, she remarked. Sadly, we do not know the names of those who were interviewed. Nor were the names of those who formed the ‘cine móvil’ (mobile cinema) crews recorded for the benefit of posterity. Peasants and crew members are all just part of the masses, testimonies to a cultural experiment. In the sequence in

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<sup>1</sup> For more on Octavio Cortázar, who was trained at FAMU (the Prague Film School), see chapter 2.

which the crew members are interviewed, the spectator can see the letters ICAIC on the side of a truck.<sup>2</sup> *Por primera vez* reflects a belief in cinema as an art form that could have a direct relationship with society, and thus in its social and political role in shaping the human mind. The composition and editing, and the montage of the film as a whole, reflect the film style of the ICAIC, which was engaged in an urgent social quest for new forms of communication. For Cuban film-makers, 'hacer cine revolucionario fue cambiar totalmente la concepción de hacer cine, además, la posibilidad de hacer la revolución en el cine'.<sup>3</sup>

The first piece of legislation concerning the arts following the Revolution was the Cinema Law (Ley 169). The Cuban Institute for the Cinematographic Art and Industry (ICAIC) was created in the first year of the revolutionary government — on 20 March 1959 — a fact that demonstrates the great importance of cinema within the political project of the Cuban Revolution. Cinema was considered the most important art for the Revolution because it could embody its ideals; it was at the vanguard of socio-political thought and action from 1959 onwards. Therefore, the cinematic discourse had become closely bound up with the socio-political one, a real expression of the Revolution itself. Was the leading role assigned to cinema an idea which was original to Cuba?

The answer has to be found within the context of the Cold War in the analysis of the Soviet dimension of the Cuban moving image and, in particular, the cinematic discourse of the Revolution. *Por primera vez* recalls the central position of cinema within Soviet cultural

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<sup>2</sup> 'Cine móvil' was part of the Departamento de Divulgación Cinematográfica, founded in April 1962. The 'cine móvil' had 32 Soviet GAZ trucks. See Abel Prieto Jiménez (Cuban Minister of Culture), 'Gala homenaje por el 50 aniversario del ICAIC', in *Cine Cubano*, 171 (2009), p. 4.

<sup>3</sup> In my interview with García Espinosa he refers several times to the role of the film-maker in the Revolution. See his essay 'En busca del cine perdido', in *Un largo camino hacia la luz* (La Habana: Ediciones UNEAC, 2000), p. 31.

history and something that Vladimir Illich Lenin, the leader of the Russian Revolution, is alleged to have said: ‘you must develop production on a broader basis and, in particular, you must promote wholesome cinema among the masses in the cities and, to an even greater extent, in the countryside (...) you must remember that of all the arts for us the most important is cinema’.<sup>4</sup>

### **Background Theory on the Concept of Influence in Soviet-bloc-Cuban Relations**

The present study is not a thesis about Fidel Castro or the Sovietisation of the Cuban Revolution. However, it is necessary to clarify at this point our position on the question: who influences whom in Soviet-Cuban relations? According to Raymond Duncan, there are three interpretations, perspectives that help to explain this: ‘at first glance it appears that Cuba is little other than a Soviet pawn, created by Havana’s enormous economic and military dependence on the Soviet Union’.<sup>5</sup> This first interpretation was the predominant characterisation in U.S. policy toward Cuba between 1961 and 91 and was defended by the anti-communist Cuban groups in Miami, who used the term Sovietisation in order to condemn the Revolution. In general, it meant the imposition of its models of rule and organisation in an entire country and as a result a total dependency on the Kremlin. The term had a clear political meaning. It was applied to the entire intellectual life, including politics, economics, society and the arts. In Cuba, accounts hitherto by official publication houses do not acknowledge the adoption and adaptation of Soviet initiatives as facts of Sovietisation. For them, the Cuban Revolution was not subsidised by the Soviet Union, but

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<sup>4</sup> Quoted in Anatoli Lunacharsky, ‘Conversation with Lenin I. Of All the Arts...’ in *The Film Factory: Russian and Soviet Cinema in Documents 1896–1939*, edited by Richard Taylor and Ian Christie (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 57.

<sup>5</sup> In W. Raymond Duncan, *The Soviet Union and Cuba: Interest and Influence* (New York: Praeger Publisher, 1985), p. 2. See also Frank T. Fitzgerald, ‘The Sovietization of Cuba Thesis revisited’, *Science & Society*, vol. 51, No. 4 (Winter, 1987/1988), pp. 439-57.

they established, between a poor and a rich country, for the first time in history, a new kind of international relations. Cuban official analysts agree that there was a closed and extensive cultural exchange, but not in terms of Sovietisation. We should remember that the embargo/blockade against the island was justified at a meeting of the consultative organ of the Organization of American States (OAS) at Punta del Este in January 1962. It was agreed that the adherence of any member of the OAS to the Soviet system was incompatible with the inter-American system and that the alignment of such of government with the communist bloc was a threat to the military security and the established economic relations of the Hemisphere. Thus, Cuba was suspended from the OAS and Mexico alone maintained its links with the island. After the declaration of the socialist character of the Revolution, the whole nation was isolated in the Americas. Certainly, the Cuban Revolution was in need of the Iron Curtain, which included the idea of being accepted by the countries of the Soviet-bloc in their geopolitical map.

In Cuba after 1961, the most available material culture: technology, consumer goods, public transport, almost everything came from the countries of the Soviet-bloc.<sup>6</sup> However, it is not accurate, in the Cuban context, to define Sovietisation in the same way as it is explained in the case of Eastern Europe. The Soviet influence over Cuba was by no means of a coercive or assertive type as in Eastern Europe. In Cuba, socialist rule grew from within, not as in Eastern Europe, where it was imposed from outside. One point to take into consideration is the fact that the Soviet-bloc disappeared and the Cuban Revolution has survived until the present day, which expresses its reality as a new and unique cultural identity.

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<sup>6</sup> On Soviet material culture, see *Made in Russia: Unsung Icons of Soviet Design*, edited by Michael Idov (New York: Rizzoli International Pub., 2011).

A second interpretation argues that instead of the Soviets influencing the Cubans, influence flowed in precisely the opposite direction. The facts are well explained by Raymond Duncan himself: ‘the Soviets were blessed by Castro’s unexpected shift to Marxism-Leninism in December 1961 following his assumption of power in January 1959. Subsequent Soviet links with Cuba opened the way for Moscow to project its power into the Caribbean Basin and Latin America; because the Soviets had enjoyed little success in these areas prior to the Cuban Revolution, at a time when their ties were expanding in other Third World countries’.<sup>7</sup> Cuba, with its strategic position as an ideological and military base for socialism in Latin America, became ‘the key’ to the New World for the Soviet Union, as it had been for the Spanish crown in colonial times. Soviet leaders’ recognition of the socialist character of the Cuban Revolution was slow to come, so, too, was its economic and military commitment. In the Americas, which was until that moment the most reliable circle of influence for the White House, the sympathetic view of the U.S. as the key nation for the future of the world began to be questioned. It was some time before the Politburo understood that with the Cuban Revolution, the Soviet principle of class struggle against ‘imperialism’ could finally be achieved. This fact was recognised by Nikita Khrushchev at the 22nd CPSU Congress: ‘the 1960s are destined to enter history as the years of the total collapse of the imperialist colonial system’.<sup>8</sup>

A third interpretation of the Soviet-Cuban relationship, which is supported by the present study, argues that it was a more complex interaction, one of mutual interests, costs and

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid. p. 2.

<sup>8</sup> Nikita Khrushchev, *Otchet tsentral'nogo Komiteta Kommunisticheskoi Partii Sovetskogo Soiuza XXII, s'ezdu Partii* (Report of the Central Committee of the CPSU to the 22nd Party Congress, Moscow 1961), p. 22.

benefits for both sides; or to put in a transculturative way, it was a system of give and take. As a result of the Cuban Revolution, the Soviet Union created the largest, and one of the most prolific, research centres devoted exclusively to Latin American studies, when in 1961 an institute in the field was established in Moscow.<sup>9</sup> On the other hand, the Caribbean island became the main distribution centre of Soviet cultural materials in the so-called Third World, and cinema played a key role in this context. Regarding the support to the Soviet cultural project, it was necessary to gain the Cuban people's confidence and their popular vote. Series of visits and events were taking place to celebrate Soviet achievements in every possible area of human activity, from sports to arts and to science. This intensive Soviet cultural offensive on the island even saw the visits of Iurii Gagarin and Valentina Tereshkova.<sup>10</sup>

What did the Cuban moving image do for Soviet-bloc cinematic discourses? *KinoCuban* sets out to explain why Cuba and its Revolution became part of the cinematic discourses of the countries of the bloc in the Thaw period as part of the relaunch of the Soviet project in the 1960s.<sup>11</sup> The present study recognises that the moving image of the time was essentially political because it responded to a socio-political agenda. Thus, the study also recognises the main role played by Fidel Castro, *el Comandante*, in shaping the cinematic discourse of the Revolution.

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<sup>9</sup> See Cole Blasier, 'The Soviet Latin Americanists', *Latin American Research Review*, vol. 16, no. 1 (1981), pp. 107–123.

<sup>10</sup> See 'Los primeros pasos', in *Cincuenta años juntos*, edited by Blas Nabel Pérez and others (Ciudad de La Habana: Embajada de la Federación de Rusia en Cuba, 2010), pp. 4-5.

<sup>11</sup> The Thaw as a term was coined after Il'ia Erenburg's novel *Ottepel'* (The Thaw, 1954). After the death of Joseph Stalin in March 1953, Khrushchev denounced his regime in The Secret Speech at the 20th Congress of the Communist Party. In 1961, it can be argued that with the declaration of its socialist character the Cuban Revolution became part of the new relaunch of the Soviet project. For this historical period see 'The Relaunch of the Soviet Project, 1945-64', P. Jones, S. Morrissey, (eds), *Slavonic and East European Review*, 86 (1), 2008.

The works dedicated to the study of the historical links between the Cuba and the Soviet-bloc are mainly written by historians or political scholars and reflect the highly politicised environment of Cuban studies during the Cold War. They have focussed on the former Soviet Union, and the predominant topics of these studies have been economics, politics and the military; little has been said in the field of arts and audiovisual culture. Studies by Max Azicri, D. Bruce Jackson, Peter Shearman, Carmelo Mesa-Lago, Nicola Miller, Yuri Pavlov and Mervyn J. Bain, for example, have downplayed the significant impact that, along with Soviet-bloc technology, economic planning, oil and weapons, Cuba received from these countries audiovisual culture, art, cultural policies and aesthetics, even before the declaration of the socialist character of the Revolution.<sup>12</sup>

Since 1991, short films, videos, publications, articles have appeared, which reflect new approaches to the Soviet-Cuban subject. They have brought a better understanding of the case of the Cuban Revolution and its Soviet experience. They distanced themselves from the traditional political-economic perspective, focusing more on the arts. In these studies, the former Soviet Union and Russia remain the main topic of interest. Among these academic studies are those published by Jacqueline Loss, who is correct to affirm that, even after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the Soviet legacy is still present in Cuban intellectual life. Certainly, many intellectuals have blamed negative practices such as the UMAP (the so-called Cuban Gulag) and the bad memories

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<sup>12</sup> Max Azicri, *Cuba Today and Tomorrow: Reinventing Socialism* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2000); Peter Shearman, *The Soviet Union and Cuba* (London: Routledge, 1987); Carmelo Mesa-Lago, *Breve historia económica de la Cuba socialista: Políticas, resultados y perspectivas* (Madrid: Alianza, 1994); Nicola Miller, *In the Shadow of the State: Intellectuals and the Quest for National Identity in Twentieth-Century Spanish America* (London: Verso, 1999); Yuri Pavlov, *Soviet-Cuban Alliance (1959-1991)* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1994); Mervyn Bain, *Soviet-Cuban Relations, 1985-1991: Changing Perceptions in Moscow and Havana* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2006). See also the conference 'Cuba-USSR and the post-Soviet Experience Conference' (2007, University of Connecticut) <http://languages.uconn.edu/conferences/archived/cubaussr/english/profile.php?id=36>

of *P.M* and the Padilla affairs on Soviet influence. Unfortunately, as a result many Cubans have refused to accept or acknowledge any kind of influence from the countries of the Soviet-bloc.<sup>13</sup>

### **Theoretical Framework: From Transculturation to Postcolonial Film Studies**

Before 1959, in terms of intellectual life, names such as the Russian traveller Fedor Vasilevich Karzhavin (1745–1812); the German Alexander von Humboldt (1769 – 1859); the Slav ‘mambises’, such as the Polish Carlos Roloff (1842-1907), who were volunteers in the Cuban wars of independence; the Russian chess world champion Mikhail Chigorin (1850–1908) and the painter Vasilii Vasilevich Vereshchagin (1842–1904); the Polish pianist Jan Paderewski (1860–1941); and the ballerina Anna Pavlova (1881–1931) figure among the various Russian and Eastern European personalities who established the first cultural contacts with Cuba.<sup>14</sup> However, none of these names has the same significance for the study of culture in Cuba as the Polish anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski (1884–1942).

One example of Malinowski’s seminal contribution to postcolonial studies in the Cuban context is the publication in 1940 of Fernando Ortiz’s (1881–1969) *Contrapunteo cubano*

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<sup>13</sup> See Ariana Hernandez-Reguant, *Cuba in the Special Period: Culture and Ideology in the 1990s* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), this collection examines Cuban cultural production, following the collapse of the Soviet Bloc. See also by Jacqueline Loss, ‘Despojos de lo soviético en Cuba: La estética del adios’ in <http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:http://www.otrolunes.com/hemeroteca-ol/numero-08/html/este-lunes/este-lunes-n08-a11-p01-2009.html> [accessed in July 2010]. There is an expanding body of works in different disciplines on the Soviet experience as a collective memory. An anthology edited by Loss about cases in literature, the visual arts and architecture that reflect the Soviet effect on Cuban culture will be published under the title: *Caviar with Rum: Cuba-USSR and the post-Soviet Experience* (New York: Palgrave, 2011).

<sup>14</sup> See Angel García and Piotr Mironchuk, *Raíces de las relaciones cubano-soviéticas* (La Habana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1988) and Leonardo Depestre Catony, *100 famosos en la Habana* (La Habana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1999). See also Mikhail A. Rossiiskii, *Russkoe zarubezh'e na Kube: Stranitsy istorii* (Moskva: Veche, 2002); Alexander Moiseev and Olga Egórova *Los rusos en Cuba: Crónicas históricas, juicios y testimonios* (La Habana: Casa Editora Abril, 2010).



*del tabaco y el azúcar*, which has an introduction by the Polish anthropologist.<sup>15</sup> In this book, Ortiz discussed the exchanges between cultures and the impact of civilisations on one another. Through this publication Ortiz introduced the term *transculturation*. It would later become a key concept for postcolonial theory, in opposition to the Anglo-American sociological term *acculturation* which, at the time, was the predominant term used in studies about the contestation of colonial domination and the legacies of colonialism.<sup>16</sup> Ortiz considered the term *acculturation* inadequate. In his defense, Malinowski suggested that:

Every change of culture, or, as I shall say from now on, every transculturation, is a process in which something is always given in return for what one receives, a *system of give and take*. It is a process in which both parts of the equation are modified, a process from which a new reality emerges, transformed and complex, a reality that is not a mechanical agglomeration of traits, nor even a mosaic, but a new phenomenon, original and independent.<sup>17</sup>

In postcolonial theory the concept of transculturation – in the sense of the interplay and exchange which occurs between cultures when they come into contact with each other –

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<sup>15</sup> Fernando Ortiz remains to this day relatively unknown outside specialised Latin-Americanist circles. He was called by Juan Marinello the ‘third discoverer’ of Cuba (after Columbus and Alexander von Humboldt) because his works managed to define the essence of *cubanía*. See Juan Marinello, ‘Don Fernando Ortiz, notas sobre nuestro tercer descubridor’, *Bohemia* (18 April 1969), pp. 53-55.

<sup>16</sup> In their ‘General Introduction’, Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin point out that European imperialism ‘took various forms in different times and places and proceeded both through conscious planning and contingent occurrences’, and, furthermore, that: ‘As a result of this complex development something occurred for which the plan of imperial expansion had not bargained: the immensely prestigious and powerful imperial culture found itself appropriated in projects of counter-colonial resistance which drew upon the many different indigenous local and hybrid processes of self-determination to defy, erode and sometimes supplant the prodigious power of imperial cultural knowledge’. See *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, edited by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 1-4 (p. 1).

<sup>17</sup> Quoted from Fernando Ortiz, *Cuban Counterpoint* (North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1995), pp. lviii–lix.

was a foundational concept within the now much broader field of postcolonial theory.<sup>18</sup> *KinoCuban* takes the concept of transculturation to be the most appropriate starting point for the analysis not only because it describes a Cuban-Slavonic (Ortiz-Malinowski) interpretation of cultural change, but also because the term implies a mutual exchange between two cultures rather than the forceful subjugation of one culture by another. Indeed, it might even be argued that transculturation was a foundational moment in the theory of postcolonialism, creating space for the subaltern and marginalised groups to speak and produce alternatives to the dominant discourse. Postcolonial theory emerged in connection with leftist discourses and thereby sought to destabilise dominant discourses in the West.<sup>19</sup>

The notion of transculturation has proved to be very helpful to researchers working in the field of postcolonial film theory. In her essay ‘South American Cinema’, for example, Julianne Burton-Carvajal argues that ‘applying this notion of Latin American cultural production as transculturative to the evolution of cinema in Latin America offers a way of breaking out of national versus foreign, autonomous versus imposed, authentic versus inauthentic dichotomies and their impossible either/or mandates’.<sup>20</sup> Following on from the making of *La hora de los hornos* (The Hour of the Furnaces, 1968), two members of the *Grupo Cine Liberación*, Octavio Getino and Fernando Solanas, wrote a manifesto on their experience of making the film *Hacia un tercer cine* (Towards a Third Cinema, 1969), in

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<sup>18</sup> See Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *Key Concepts in Post-Colonial Studies* (London: Routledge, 1998); Néstor García Canclini, *Hybrid Cultures: Strategies for Entering and Leaving Modernity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995); and Robert Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2001).

<sup>19</sup> Scholars in postcolonial studies like Robert Young, Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin also agree that Lenin’s *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism* (1916) was essential for the conceptualisation of the term ‘neocolonialism’, which originated with Kwame Nkrumah, Ghana’s first post-independence president. See Kwame Nkrumah, *Neo-Colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1965).

<sup>20</sup> Julianne Burton-Carvajal, ‘South American Cinema’, in *Film Studies: Critical Approaches*, edited by John Hill and Pamela Church Gibson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 194-202 (p. 194).

which the authors called for ‘a decolonisation of culture’; the text refers to both a theory and practice committed to social and cultural emancipation, and the term Third Cinema was used to distinguish it from Hollywood and European art cinema.<sup>21</sup> According to Mike Wayne, Third Cinema is a persistent topic of debate concerning contemporary film practices and cultures. Wayne is also correct to identify Sergei Eisenstein, Dziga Vertov, Gyorgi Lukács and Bertold Brecht among the precursors of Third Cinema.<sup>22</sup>

*El Nuevo Cine Latinoamericano*, and particularly the ICAIC’s film production, formed an intrinsic part of Third Cinema in the Americas.<sup>23</sup> *KinoCuban* attempts to provide a new interpretation of the Cuban moving image in the light of postcolonial film theory; it focuses in particular on the dilemmas faced by a group of innovative film directors in their search to develop a new identity. As we shall see, intellectuals, artists and film directors sought to articulate and celebrate a Cuban cinematic identity by creating a decolonisation of their moving image. The present study attempts to demonstrate how important the audiovisual culture of the Soviet-bloc was in that process of decolonisation.

### **Background Theory Regarding the Topic of ‘Influences’ on the Cuban Moving Image: The Case of Neo-realism**

Michael Chanan’s *The Cuban Image: Cinema and Cultural Politics in Cuba* is an indispensable work, one of the first book-length studies of Cuban cinema in the context of Revolution. Regarding the topic of influences on Cuban cinema, Chanan emphasises the

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<sup>21</sup> See Octavio Getino, *A diez años de ‘Hacia un tercer cine’* (México, D.F.: Filmoteca UNAM, 1982).

<sup>22</sup> Mike Wayne, *Political Film: The Dialectics of Third Cinema* (London: Pluto Press, 2001), p. 5. See also, ‘Precursors’, *ibid.*, pp. 25–46.

<sup>23</sup> For an excellent discussion of *El Nuevo Cine Latinoamericano*, see Fernando Birri, *Soñar con los ojos abiertos* (Buenos Aires: Aguilar, 2007), pp. 149–258.

importance of neo-realism over and above all film styles and cinematic experiences.<sup>24</sup> Indeed, Chanan's introduction to the collection of essays, *Latin American Cinema Twenty-Five Years On*, is seminal in this regard since the essays collectively give a sense of the new Latin American Cinema and the ICAIC as being a socially and politically committed art. There is one significant omission, however: the influence of the cinematic discourses produced by the countries of the Soviet-bloc. Chanan's work is not the only one to downplay the influence of Soviet and East European cinemas in the development of filmic discourse in Cuba. Other scholars, most notably Peter B. Schumann in *Kino in Cuba*, and Alberto Elena and Marina Díaz López in *The Cinema of Latin America*, also refer to Italian neo-realism, the French 'nouvelle vague' and 'cinéma vérité', and US independent cinema as the main influences on Latin American cinema, again with no mention of possible Soviet-bloc influence.<sup>25</sup> In Zuzana M. Pick's *The New Latin American Cinema: A Continental Project*, and in *Mediating Two Worlds: Cinematic Encounters in the Americas* (1993), a collection of essays edited by John King, Ana M. López and Manuel Alvarado, the analysis of the political dimension of the films is imprecise and, despite many references to Cuba, there are no references to Soviet-bloc co-productions or Soviet-bloc influences.<sup>26</sup> The emphasis in the work of Chanan, Pick and King is on the ways in which Western cinemas influenced the creation of a new filmic tradition in Latin America.

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<sup>24</sup> The second edition of *The Cuban Image* (London: BFI, 1985) was published as *Cuban Cinema* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2004).

<sup>25</sup> *Latin American Cinema Twenty-Five Years On*, edited by Michael Chanan (London: BFI & Channel 4, 1983). Peter B. Schumann, *Kino in Cuba, 1959-1978: Herausgegeben von den Westdeutschen Kurtzfilmtagen Oberhausen 1980* (Frankfurt: Vervuert, 1980), Alberto Elena & Marina Diaz Lopez (eds), *The Cinema of Latin America* (London: Wallflower, 2003).

<sup>26</sup> Zuzana M. Pick, *The New Latin American Cinema: A Continental Project* (Austin: University of Texas, 1993); and *Mediating Two Worlds: Cinematic Encounters in the Americas*, edited by John King, Ana M. López and Manuel Alvarado (London: BFI, 1993).

The question inevitably arises: why did Tomás Gutiérrez Alea (Titón) and Julio García Espinosa feel the need to attend the Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia in Rome? What attracted them to Italy? At that time, Italian cinema led the post-World War II European film industry with its development of the neorealist movement. Titón explained that: ‘entre nosotros, los jóvenes cinéfilos de la época, el prestigio del neorrealismo era muy grande’.<sup>27</sup> However, the Cuban moving image in times of Revolution was, as we shall see, completely different to the times of Italian Neo-realism. In *Un largo camino hacia la luz*, for example, García Espinosa recalls that:

*Juan Quinquin* se alejaba de Zavattini y del Neorealismo, como lo hacían *Memorias*, *Lucía*, *La primera carga al machete*; es decir aquellas películas de finales de los años sesenta que habían significado paradójicamente el despegue del cine cubano. Era como si estuviéramos destinados a desarrollarnos sobre cimientos de negaciones. Primero, negando la herencia del cine latinoamericano de los años treinta y cuarenta; ahora negando la del neorrealismo italiano.<sup>28</sup>

From García Espinosa’s account, it can be argued that ICAIC's neo-realist phase was a short-lived one.<sup>29</sup> One scholar who concurs on this point is Minna Jaskari; in his article ‘Tomás Gutiérrez Alea and the Post-Revolutionary Cuba’, Jaskari refers to the neo-realist influence on ICAIC and explains that it was an insufficient cinematic tool for depicting the

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<sup>27</sup> Titón, *Tomás Gutiérrez-Gutiérrez Alea: volver sobre mis pasos*, edited by Mirta Ibarra (Ciudad de la Habana: Ediciones Unión, 2008), pp. 271–72.

<sup>28</sup> Julio García Espinosa, *Un largo camino hacia la luz* (La Habana: UNEAC, 2000), p. 197. See also by the same author, ‘El neorealismo y el cine cubano’, in *Algo de mí* (Havana: Ediciones ICAIC, 2009), pp 163–73.

<sup>29</sup> García Espinosa paid an old debt to Italian neo-realism with his last feature film *Reina y Rey* (Queen and King, 1994). See García Espinosa’s *Reina y Rey* (Mérida: FNCL, 1995).

depth and speed of the revolutionary changes which were occurring: ‘it was the rapid pace of the Revolution which eventually moved Cuba beyond neo-realism’.<sup>30</sup>

### **On Soviet-bloc cinematic influence on the Cuban Moving Image**

Given this wealth of evidence pointing towards the West, it is little wonder that any proof of Soviet-bloc influence has seemed, if not non-existent, then at least minimal. One question needs to be asked: is it really the case that so many of the leading film directors associated with the Cuban Revolution — Titón, Espinosa and Santiago Álvarez, among many others — had nothing to do with its filmic discourse, namely, the filmic discourse that had been explored in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe? When we begin to dig a little deeper, we find a number of views which contradict this idea.

Cuban filmmakers praise the Soviets for their help. A pioneering figure in the ICAIC, Pastor Vega (1940–2005), for example, suggested in an article published in a special edition of *Cine Cubano* dedicated to ‘el cine de Octubre’, that: ‘todo el que buscaba y luchaba por descubrir en América Latina la verdad sobre un cine nuevo y revolucionario, que respondiera a las burdas falsificaciones y deformaciones de un cine supuestamente industrial y nacional, encontraba en las teorías y filmes soviéticos de la revolución bolchevique un arma de combate y un instrumento de reflexión’.<sup>31</sup> On Vega’s article, John

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<sup>30</sup> Minna Jaskari, ‘Tomás Gutiérrez Alea and the Post-Revolutionary Cuba’, in *Artikkelit Marraskuu 11/97*, available at: [http://www.helsinki.fi/hum/ibero/xaman/articulos/9711/9711\\_mj.html](http://www.helsinki.fi/hum/ibero/xaman/articulos/9711/9711_mj.html) [consulted on 1 August 2010].

<sup>31</sup> See Pastor Vega, ‘El cine de octubre y el nuevo cine latinoamericano’, *Cine Cubano*, no. 93 (1977), p. 42; see also ‘Encuesta a cineastas latinoamericanos sobre influencia del cine silente soviético’, *Cine Cubano*, no. 93 (1977): 44–65. This was a special edition dedicated to the 60th anniversary of the October Revolution. See also in the same edition ‘Encuesta a cineastas latinoamericanos sobre la influencia del cine silente soviético’, and Ousmane Sembene, ‘La influencia del cine mudo soviético en los cineastas africanos’. See also FIAF, *The Influence of Silent Soviet Cinema on World Cinema: Symposium, Varna, 29/5–2/6 1977* (Brussels: FIAF, 1979).

Mraz rightly points out that: ‘he (Vega) asserts insistently that his interest in the influence of October's cinema is not a question of cultural mimesis, or of “searching for the tracks of an artificially imposed style “or “an expressive model”’.<sup>32</sup> Not only for Pastor Vega but for many Cuban filmmakers ‘lo exacto es hablar de continuidad’; it is accurate to speak of continuity in order to fully understand the significance and the magnitude of the contribution of the cinemas of ‘the other’ Europe. The Cuban filmmaker was referring to: ‘las verdaderas influencias, las que facilitan ampliar, profundizar y desarrollar el pensamiento y la acción humanas’.<sup>33</sup>

From 1961 onwards, socialism appeared before the Cuban film-makers as a completely new social reality. As we shall see, in a socialist society there was no longer any obstacle to the birth of a socialist cinema. The moving image calls attention to specific aspects of the Cuban Revolution’s socio-political project, and for the purpose of the present study offers a unique framework for the analysis of the Soviet (and East European) dimension of that project. In this sense, audiovisual materials can be used as cultural documents of a period in which a national cinematic discourse became firmly established, when Cuban intellectual life was in close interaction with the – at first sight – alien and distant cultures of Soviet Europe; this was a unique artistic experience in the Western hemisphere, which, this study argues, has been inadequately studied to date. Cinema and the moving image in general provide significant testimonies to that process of cultural exchange.

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<sup>32</sup> John Mraz, ‘October’s Offspring: Soviet Cinema and the Cuban Film Institute’, in *Film Historia*, vol XI, In. 3, 2002 online <http://www.publicacions.ub.es/bibliotecaDigital/cinema/filmhistoria/2002/octobercd.htm>. This essay is only focused on the influence of Soviet cinema during the first fifteen years of the Cuban film Institute (ICAIC).

<sup>33</sup> Vega, ‘El cine de octubre y el nuevo cine latinoamericano’, p. 38. Vega explained his views on the influence at a continental level but not much detail about the particular case of Cuba.

Chanan has argued that ‘the temptation to draw comparisons between Cuban cinema of the 1960s and Soviet cinema of the 1920s arises not only because these are first decades of two communist revolutions which both placed great store by cinema, but also because the cinemas they produced were in both cases radical and experimental, in the vanguard of both politics and aesthetics, and precisely on that account, major movements in the history of world cinema’.<sup>34</sup> He points out that ‘when (Santiago) Alvarez’s films began to circulate abroad, film critics began to compare them to the work of Vertov in 1920s Soviet Russia. Then it turned out that Álvarez had never seen any Vertov.’<sup>35</sup> In this way Chanan dismisses any possible influence: for him, the explanation lies in the similarity of the revolutionary situations in both countries, i.e. ‘the discovery of cinema in both countries in and through the revolutionary process.’<sup>36</sup> However, as we shall see, there is a significant body of evidence which points to the verifiable and significant impact of Soviet and East European film on opinion-formers as well as film directors in Cuba during the 1960s and beyond. It would seem that Chanan has overlooked the fact that Santiago Álvarez was the administrator of the Sociedad Cultural ‘Nuestro Tiempo’ and that this cultural group organised private screenings of Soviet silent films. Álvarez was also linked to those who attended Manuel Valdés Rodríguez’s film courses at Havana University, where Vertov’s films were screened for the first time in Cuba.<sup>37</sup> There is another important fact. In a symposium organised in the 1970s by the International Federation of Film Archives (FIAF) about the influence of Soviet silent cinema on world cinema, the ICAIC’s contribution was a paper about the case of the New Latin American Cinema Movement and Santiago Álvarez’s

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<sup>34</sup> See Michael Chanan, ‘Cinemas in Revolution: 1920s Russia, 1960s Cuba’, in *Understanding Film: Marxist Perspectives*, edited by Mike Wayne (London: Pluto Press, 2005), p. 232.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 237.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> For further discussion of the work developed by Valdés Rodríguez in favour of Soviet bloc cinemas and his connection with Eisenstein, see chapter 1.



film work is cited as an example of Vertov's influence on documentary filmmaking.<sup>38</sup>

According to Alfredo Guevara, first president of the ICAIC, this FIAF symposium was suggested by Saúl Yelín, who was at that time a member of the executive committee of the FIAF and Head of International Relations at the ICAIC. For the first time in film history, the influence of Soviet cinema in world cinema was acknowledged at an international conference.

Guevara explains the reasons for this Cuban initiative:

creo muy importante participar y que ese día podamos esclarecer para toda la FIAF nuestros puntos de vista sobre el surgimiento, desarrollo, influencias, significación y objetivos del Nuevo Cine Latinoamericano y de los antecedentes que puede reconocer como fuentes (en mi opinión esas fuentes, influencias y inspiraciones no son siempre cinematográficas). Pero abordar estos temas es doblemente importante dada la desinformación y confusiones sembradas por una cierta crítica, especialmente en Europa occidental y a veces en USA alrededor del llamado "tercer cine" y su retórica demagógica.<sup>39</sup>

Cinema was seen as a key tool in the reconstruction of national identities in the postcolonial period, in part because film art was granted educational value as a tool of mobilisation among the masses, most of whom were illiterate. Thus, films and videos were considered innovative and revolutionary audiovisual devices. However, the 'exceptional' case of the

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<sup>38</sup> See Pastor Vega, 'El cine de Octubre y el Nuevo Cine Latinoamericano', published in International Federation of Film Archives, *The Influence of Silent Soviet Cinema on World Cinema: Symposium, Varna, 29/5-2/6 1977* (Brussels: FIAF, 1979), no pagination given.

<sup>39</sup> Quoted from a letter to the Bolivian filmmaker Jorge Sanjinés (29 February 1977), published in Alfredo Guevara *¿Y si fuera una huella?: Epistolario* (Madrid: Ediciones Autor, 2008), p. 347.

ICAIC deserves a separate chapter from the rest of the Third Cinema and New Latin American Cinema Movement because the ICAIC was never a clandestine or semi-clandestine organisation in Cuba, as were the rest of the Latin American film-makers who were part of this movement and had always to operate carefully when circumstances and repression required it in their countries.<sup>40</sup> The ICAIC was always the filmic voice of the Revolution and the cinematic front of the socio-political project of the Cuban Communist Party under the formula: the Cuban Revolution = ICAIC = Cuban cinema.

Another important example of Soviet influence on Cuban cinema is the work of Tomás Gutiérrez Alea (Titón). His reputation as Cuba's leading director is inseparable from the ICAIC. Regarding Eisenstein, Titón once said: 'recuerdo que aún no había cumplido veinte años cuando descubrí el libro de Sergei Eisenstein: *El sentido del cine*. Gracias a él — a ese hallazgo inolvidable — cobré conciencia del papel de la reflexión en el proceso creador y del cine mismo en la posible formación de un público más exigente y lúcido.'<sup>41</sup> Alfredo Guevara has made a number of statements which point in the same direction: 'No se puede hacer cine sin estudiar la cinematografía soviética, sin conocer y reflexionar ante las imágenes de *Octubre* o *La Huelga*, sin conocer *Potemkin* o *La Madre*, *Tempestad sobre Asia*, *El fin de San Petersburgo*, *Alejandro Nevsky*, *Tchapaiev* o *Arsenal*. Estos filmes y otros muchos, y con ellos todo el movimiento teórico que se abrió con sus directores y maestros, forman parte de la mejor tradición cinematográfica.'<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> See Chanan (ed.), *Twenty-five Years of the New Latin American Cinema*, p. 2.

<sup>41</sup> See 'Otro cine, otro mundo, otra sociedad' (7 October 1993), in Titón, *Tomás Gutiérrez-Gutiérrez Alea: volver sobre mis pasos*, edited by Mirta Ibarra (Ciudad de la Habana: Ediciones Unión, 2008), p. 287.

<sup>42</sup> Alfredo Guevara, 'Realidades y perspectivas de un nuevo cine', *Cine cubano*, no 1(1) (July 1960), pp. 1–10 (p. 8).

The importance of the work developed by Manuel Valdés Rodríguez and Mario Rodríguez Alemán has been acknowledged in a series of articles in *Cine Cubano*. By contrast, their involvement in and contribution to film criticism, and in particular to the Spanish-language reception and understanding of Soviet and East European cinemas, has been conspicuously ignored by Western scholars, particularly in those studies published in English. This omission is surprising, given that Manuel Valdés Rodríguez was acknowledged — both during his lifetime and thereafter — as the ‘father’ of Cuban film criticism, in particular as a pioneer in bringing Soviet-bloc cinemas to Havana. This is the case of the recent publication *Screening Cuba: Film Criticism as Political Performance during the Cold War* by Hector Amaya.<sup>43</sup> Another example underplayed by Chanan is the fact that Valdés Rodríguez was inspired by Eisenstein’s film teaching methods at the Moscow All-Union State Institute of Cinematography (VGIK). Soviet silent avant-garde films had been shown as part of Valdés Rodríguez’s film course at Havana University from 1946, and were studied by generations of Cuban students.<sup>44</sup> Without doubt, that experience itself represents a foundational moment in the history of film studies in Cuba.

Not only has the work of Rodríguez Alemán, who adopted practices developed in the countries of the Soviet-bloc in his conceptualisation of the role of television within the cinematic discourse of the Revolution, been underplayed in a number of canonical studies on the Cuban moving image. The very real contribution made by women to the development of an innovative and revolutionary cinematic discourse and film criticism in particular has also

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<sup>43</sup> See Hector Amaya, *Screening Cuba: Film Criticism as Political Performance during the Cold War* (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 2010).

<sup>44</sup> Julio García Espinosa, for example, has pointed to the crucial influence of José Manuel Valdés Rodríguez on his decision to become a film director. García Espinosa attended Valdés Rodríguez’s lectures on film at the University of Havana in the 1940s and found them inspirational: see Víctor Fowler Calzada, *Conversaciones con un cineasta incómodo: Julio García-Espinosa* (La Habana: ICAIC, 2004), p. 27.

been marginalized. Western scholars have paid scant attention to Mirta Aguirre, a pioneer of film criticism in the Americas who published a great number of film reviews in the 1940s presenting the Soviet understanding of film art, in particular the ‘woman question’ in film. There is one other factor which needs to be underlined when assessing the ways in which canonical readings of the Cuban moving image have been created, and this is the pivotal role played by the International Film School (EICTV), the ICAIC itself, in the creation and dissemination of what might be called an ‘official view’ of the cinematic discourse of the Revolution. In this context, the Cuban film historian, Juan Antonio García Borrero, has referred to what he calls *ICAICentrismo*, which he defines as follows: ‘como término, quiere remitir la queja a un método historiográfico que en su afán de legitimar ese gran proyecto fílmico, dejó a un lado todo lo que no se pareciera al postulado estético refrendado desde el centro. Aún hoy, nuestros estudios siguen priorizando la revisión y legitimidad de las obras según el canon refrendado por el ICAIC, acusando aquello que Foucault llamaría alguna vez “el uso ideológico de la historia”.’<sup>45</sup>

*ICAICentrismo* is, quite clearly, an issue of fundamental importance in this context. It is important to note that García Borrero does not place the blame for *ICAICentrismo* only at the door of the institution itself. Instead, rather curiously, he argues that part of the blame lies with those studies published abroad which focussed on the ICAIC to the exclusion of all else. As Omar González, who is currently the President of the ICAIC, explains: ‘hablo de cine cubano – un concepto muy superior al de cine producido por el ICAIC – una noción cultural que abarca, propicia y unifica el papel de la institución en la representación de los

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<sup>45</sup> From the essay by Juan Antonio García Borrero’s ‘Cine Cubano: Historia, historiografía y postmodernidad’ which won the Prize of the magazine *Temas* in 2004. It has been published in book form by the author as *Otras maneras de pensar el cine cubano* (Santiago de Cuba: Editorial Oriente, 2009), p. 23.

creadores, como espacio orgánico para contribuir a su legitimación dentro de la sociedad'.<sup>46</sup>

This thesis recognises the fact that we need to understand the Cuban moving image as a concept, which goes beyond the ICAIC's film production.

The video movement's place in Cuban audiovisual culture and film studies, particularly its role in providing a testimony to glasnost on the island and as a nonconformist alternative to the centralised film production of Cuba has also been completely overlooked. Finally, the contribution made by the Cuban diaspora to the international debate on the cinematic discourse of the Revolution has essentially been examined negatively, and in the process it has been underestimated. *KinoCuban* attempts to produce a balanced view of the evolution of cinematic discourse in Cuba by taking on board, and evaluating, the many different approaches to the complex phenomenon of Cuban cinema in the modern era.

### **Film Co-production with the Countries of the Soviet-bloc**

As we shall see, film co-production played a crucial role in the development and evolution of Cuban film, and yet, in this respect as well, Chanan's book *Cuban Cinema* also undervalues the relevance of the films co-produced and directed by Soviet and East European film-makers. Thus the names of Mikhail Kalatozov, Vladimir Čech and Kurt Maetzig are only mentioned once in his study; even Sergei Urusevskii's camera work in the film *Soy Cuba*, and consequently its influence on the future film production of ICAIC, does not receive a single citation in the best known English publication dedicated to analysing the film production of the ICAIC.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> See Omar González, 'Los destinos posible', *Cine Cubano*, no. 173-174 (July-December 2009), p. 11.

<sup>47</sup> Chanan, *Cuban Cinema*, p. 166.

The present thesis will look at how those films conceptualised political and artistic matters, and how they managed to identify the main topics of Cuban intellectual life, such as tolerance, political opposition, gender issues, homosexuality, and religion, which are still significant issues for the Cuban moving image. For the purposes of the present study, the analysis of film co-production is an ideal way to introduce the topic of *confluence and interfluence* between audiovisual cultures. These films offered the possibility to identify the main players and future development of this exchange, which was established during the foundational years; in particular these co-produced films helped to pave the way for the Cuban moving image to develop its own agenda and style. Any examination of film co-production as the fusion of cultural diversity and national specificity is a complex task. Tim Bergfelder has argued that ‘in order to establish a national identity for a particular film culture, features which transcend or contradict these identity formations have been either neglected or marginalised, but also viewed as threatening’, and this notion will be explored in the pages that follow.<sup>48</sup>

There are very few studies dedicated to the topic of film co-production within the Cuban context. Before 1959 film co-productions had been made with Mexico, Argentina and Spain. These films were adaptations of *radio-novelas*, the result of the boom in melodramas on the continent.<sup>49</sup> With the explosion of world cinema in the 1960s, many of the films co-produced in Cuba during that period have remained virtually unstudied to this day. For Soviet and Eastern European film criticism, these were experiments beyond their cultural

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<sup>48</sup> See Tim Bergfelder, ‘The Nation Vanishes: European Co-productions and Popular Genre Formula in the 1950s and 1960s’, in *Cinema and Nation*, edited by Mette Hjort and Scott MacKenzie (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 139.

<sup>49</sup> Sara Bega and Ivo Sarria, ‘Coproducciones 1945–1960’, in *Coordenadas del cine cubano-2*, coordinador Mario Naito López (Santiago de Cuba: Editorial Oriente, 2005), pp. 131–48.

borders of interest and were therefore ignored. Film historians and critics misunderstood this corpus of co-produced films. Indeed, one might ask whether is it not the case that Soviet-bloc cinemas had any influence upon the shaping of the moving image of the Cuban Revolution, if one takes into consideration the very few films co-produced in 30 years? It should be stressed that almost everything one can mention about the 'exceptional case' of the ICAIC applies in this case. Cuban cinematography and audiovisual culture was the direct or indirect effect of the different waves that arrived in Cuba from 'the other' Europe, particularly as the first films which were co-produced in the 1960s.

As Dina Iordanova points out, 'the Cold War between the East and West expanded beyond economy and warfare and well into a cultural realm'.<sup>50</sup> Certainly, that 'other Europe' established its own theoretical discourses around audiovisual culture, the moving image and particularly about film art. As part of the Soviet cultural offensive on the world, cinema played a leading role, and politics would be placed at the centre of cinematic discourse. In the struggle for cultural supremacy during the Cold War, the USSR and the Eastern Bloc countries understandably supported the cinematic independence movements within the colonised 'Third World' nations because this undermined the power of the enemy: the West. To the question of what the Cuban moving image did for the cinemas of the Soviet-bloc? for reasons of time and space, this thesis does not analyse in detail this direction of the exchange. However, it is important to make a suggestion on this matter: in cinematic terms, the film *Soy Cuba* is a masterpiece that identifies one of the finest moments of Soviet cinematography. It is also true that the ICAIC and Cuban film specialists such as Mario

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<sup>50</sup> Dina Iordanova, *Cinema of the Other Europe: The Industry and Artistry of East Central European Film* (London: Wallflower, 2003), p. 16.

Rodríguez Alemán became among the most important sources of information for the relaunch of the Soviet cultural project with regard to Third World cinema.

## **Purpose**

The present study will demonstrate that the greatest significance of the Soviet-bloc cinemas for Cuba was precisely the shaping of the *socialist* cinematic discourse of the Cuban Revolution. In order to identify what was ‘new’ about the Cuban moving image in connection to the Soviet-bloc, this thesis focuses on what Cuban intellectuals, cultural mentors, politicians and artists understood by, and how they promoted, Soviet cinematic and television practices. This unique experience provided the opportunity to refer not only to the phenomenon of (inter)influence, the process of give and take between audiovisual cultures, but also the possibility to explain how the confluence of ideas was favourable for that relationship. There is, indeed, a wealth of evidence to suggest far more knowledge of and interest in Soviet and East European cinemas among Cuba’s intellectuals, cultural mentors and creators of the moving image than has been previously acknowledged. This research aims to encourage a more inclusive and comprehensive understanding of the Cuban moving image. *KinoCuban* stands against the fragmentation of knowledge, which is ‘one of the signs of underdevelopment: the inability to connect things, to accumulate experience and to develop’.<sup>51</sup>

One of the tasks of this thesis is to delimit, determine and clearly mark the boundaries of what was influential from what was just coincidental. For example, it would be incorrect to

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<sup>51</sup> This is a quote from a film character, Sergio, in Titón’s best known film. See the published script of *Memories of Underdevelopment* (London: Rutgers University Press, 1990), p. 65.



claim that the central role of the vampire character in Cuban animation is a result of the influence of the Eastern European cinema. As we know, the vampire has been an eye-catching cinematic personality in world cinema since Tod Browning decided to make a film adaptation of Bram Stoker's literary work *Dracula*, in which the Hungarian actor Béla Lugosi brought this character to life on the big screen in 1931. However, what is important to recognise is that the stop motion puppet animation work developed by the Czech film director, Jiří Trnka, was particularly well known by Cubans, and the development of the animation film, marionettes, puppetry and cartoon departments of the ICAIC and Cuban television was influenced by the great theoretical and technical support they received from Czechoslovakian artists and technical film staff.<sup>52</sup> Nevertheless, many Cubans dislike Soviet-bloc animation, one of the 'classic' Cuban jokes of the period is about it: "if you do not behave well, I will make you watch Russian animation".

*KinoCuban* will present a substantial body of evidence derived from the work of opinion-formers who conceptualised the cinematic discourse of the Cuban Revolution. It will seek to explain their interest in, and interpretation of, classic Soviet and East European films and thus demonstrate that, in addition to the experiments of the Russian avant-garde in the early 1920s and Soviet silent cinema, Soviet and East European films have consistently functioned as a source of inspiration and influence in the development of film art in Cuba. I will seek to demonstrate that this influence continued during the period of the so-called Soviet Thaw, Stagnation and Glasnost. My thesis will also demonstrate that cinematic influence came not only from the USSR but also from other countries of the Soviet-bloc.

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<sup>52</sup> For articles on this topic see, *Indice de la revista Cine cubano 1960–1974*, edited by Gloria Esqueu (La Habana: Editorial Orbe, 1979), pp. 33 and 123-24.

### **Primary Sources: Films, Videos, DVDs, Scripts, Personal Correspondence, Memos**

This study draws on various types of data, such as published and unpublished printed texts, archival materials, Internet web pages and personal communications with colleagues, scholars, film specialists, film-makers and artists. The main provider of data is the ICAIC, its film archive and information centre, specialists and film-makers; much also comes from Cuban television (ICRT) and its archive and information centre. In these two main Cuban film archives, I had the opportunity to study materials such as production accounts, memos and exhibition records. No pagination is provided for some film reviews, since in the ICAIC film archive many of them are cuttings and are kept in folders organised in alphabetical order by film title. For film reviews in Russian, I have used the Spanish translations by Zoia Barash, which are at the film archive; ICAIC credits her as ‘la más valiosa y sofisticada fuente de información que tuvimos sobre el cine soviético y sus creadores’.<sup>53</sup>

The private archives of Mario Rodríguez Alemán, those of Cuban Television historian Vicente González Castro and Titón’s manuscripts were also extremely useful. Other primary sources of great importance included the personal correspondence of Cuban intellectuals and artists such as Fernando Ortiz (LSE Archive) and Alejo Carpentier (Museo de la Ciudad de la Habana and Biblioteca Nacional). Oral-history interviews with film-makers such as Kurt Maetzig, Pastor Vega, Julio García Espinosa, Octavio Cortázar, Enrique Pineda Barnet, Aaron Yelin, Manuel Herrera, Jana Bokova, Vicente Ferraz; and actors such as Sergio Corrieri, Eslinda Nuñez, Raquel Revuelta, Adolfo Llauradó, Vicente Revueltas, Julio Matas and Mirta Ibarra, among many others, were of great importance for this research.

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<sup>53</sup> Alfredo Guevara made the statement in the introduction to the book by Zoia Barash. See Barash, *El cine soviético del principio al fin* (La Habana: Ediciones ICAIC, 2008), p. 7.

*KinoCuban* will analyse a number of films which serve as test-cases. These include Vladimir Čech's *¿Para quién baila la Habana?* (For Whom Does Havana Dance?, 1963), Kurt Maetzig's *Preludio 11* (Prelude 11, 1963), Mikhail Kalatozov's *Soy Cuba* (I am Cuba, 1964), Peter Timar's *Dejen en paz a Robinson Crusoe* (Leave Robinson Crusoe Alone, 1989), and Jana Bokova's *Havana*, as well as films directed by those Cubans who were involved in the production of the first co-produced films, such as Octavio Cortázar's *El brigadista* (The Literacy Teacher, 1977), Julio García Espinosa's *La sexta parte del mundo* (The Sixth Part of the World, 1977), Pastor Vega's *Retrato de Teresa* (Portrait of Teresa, 1979), Jesús Díaz's *Polvo Rojo* (Red Dust, 1981), Manuel Herrera's *Capablanca* (1986) and Enrique Pineda Barnet's *La bella de la Alhambra* (1989), as well as Aaron Yelin's *Muy bien* (Very Good, 1989) which illustrate both the *manifest* and the *absent* from previous studies of the Cuban moving image and the cinematic discourse of the Revolution in relation to the Soviets.

This thesis will analyse ICAIC video and DVD copies of the most significant feature film co-productions which were directed by East European film-makers. Most of the audiovisual material used in the present study was provided by the ICAIC itself. Jana Bokova facilitated a video copy of her documentary *Havana* and the EICTV film school provided me with a video copy of Aaron Yelin's *Muy bien*. I could not obtain any copy from the ICAIC or the East European film archives of other films directed by Eastern European film-makers such as *Alba de Cuba* (1961) by Roman Karmen; *Playa Girón*, *La Habana*, *Santiago de Cuba*, *Varadero* and *La exposición checoslovaca en La Habana* by the Czech Bruno Sefranka; *Hawana '61* (Havana'61, 1961), *Patria o Muerte* (Motherland or Death, 1962) and *Spotkali sie w Hawanie* (They Met in Havana, 1962) by the Polish film-makers Jerzy Hoffman and Edward Skórzewski. The film archive was not able to provide a copy of

the film works directed in 1962 by the Bulgarian film-makers Numa and Christo Montcartz, which were filmed in Havana with the collaboration of the Cubans Urbano Gutiérrez and Roberto Fernández. Nor could I find a copy of the German TV film directed by Kurt Jung-Alsen's *Ballade vom roten Mohn* (Four Soldiers, 1965) or Vladimir Vainshtok's *Vsadnik bez golovy* (The Headless Horseman, 1972), a film co-produced with the USSR, which is part of the 'Red Western' Soviet-bloc film production.<sup>54</sup> In the search for materials to be included in this research, an interesting fact that came to light is that films from Albania, Yugoslavia and Romania were virtually ignored by the ICAIC. The explanation behind this can only be political: those countries were not as clearly identified with the Soviet-bloc as others such as Czechoslovakia and Poland.

The feature films analysed are mainly ICAIC productions, most of them co-productions. This thesis does not seek to provide an exhaustive analysis of every film or video mentioned, but rather selects aspects of these works in order to identify and distinguish those elements that are relevant to the present study. In this sense, it is analytical and historical, and deals with the films more or less in chronological order. The present case study covers both the investigation of a small number of films and supporting information that is gathered and analysed (both implicit and explicit). The quantification of data was not a priority for the purpose of this thesis. Indeed, qualitative data may be treated as superior. The added value of the present study lies in the structure of the thesis and its interrogation of previous studies about the Cuban moving image.

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<sup>54</sup> See Arturo Agramonte, *Cronología del cine cubano* (Havana: ICAIC, 1966) pp. 113–40.

There are also a number of documentaries about some aspects of the Soviet experience in Cuba which deserve to be mentioned here. For example, Vicente Ferraz's documentary *O Mamute Siberiano* (The Siberian Mammoth, 2005), which looks at the history of the making of Kalatozov's film and Gustavo Pérez Fernández's *Todas iban a ser reinas* (They Were all Going to be Queens, 2006), which captured the isolation of women from seven countries of the former Soviet-bloc living in Cuba.<sup>55</sup> In 2009, a series of documentaries were produced to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the ICAIC: *50 sueños* (Fifty Dreams) by Miguel Fernández Martínez; *Dentro de 50 años* (In Fifty Years) by Jorge Luis Sánchez González, Wilbert Noguel Morales, Javier Castro Rivera and Adrián R. Hartill Montalvo; *Nunca será fácil la herejía* (Heresy Will Never be Easy) by Jorge Luis Sánchez and Enrique Colina's *Los rusos en Cuba* (Russians in Cuba).

### **Secondary Sources: Books, Indexes, Catalogues, Journals and Electronic Sources**

According to the catalogues of film production in Cuba from 1961 to 1967, the ICAIC produced 35 feature films; between 1968 and 1985 it produced 73 feature films; and during the period 1986–1991 it produced 52 feature films.<sup>56</sup> The films recorded in these catalogues

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<sup>55</sup> I personally had the opportunity to collaborate with the Brazilian film-maker Ferraz's *O Mamute Siberiano*, a documentary dedicated to the history of Kalatozov's film. Pineda Barnet introduced me to Ferraz. During my research in the ICAIC archives, I found the stills of *Soy Cuba*. I advised Ferraz about this 'discovery'. Ferraz stopped the editing of his documentary to integrate the stills into the narrative of his film story. He wrote to me: 'tenías toda la razón. Encontramos todo el still de *Soy Cuba*. Son fotos verdaderamente increíbles, maravillosas. Ahora estoy replanteando todo el documental, tal vez me demore mas un poco, mas con certeza el será más rico; gracias por tu preciosa información'; email correspondence [10 February 2003]. I suggested the idea of a premiere in London of Ferraz's documentary to be screened together with Kalatozov's film to the organisers of the 'Discovering Latin American Film Festival'. Professor Stephen Hart introduced those films at the Tate Modern on 24 November 2005.

<sup>56</sup> On ICAIC film production, see Arturo Agramonte, *Guía temática del cine cubano producción ICAIC 1959–1980* (Habana: Cinemateca de Cuba, 1983) and *Catálogo del cine cubano 1897–1960* (Habana: Ediciones ICAIC, 2008), both edited by Maria Eulalia Douglas; Maria Eulalia Douglas, *La tienda negra: El cine en Cuba 1897–1990* (Ciudad de la Habana: Cinemateca de Cuba, 1996); Juan García Borrero, *Guía crítica del cine cubano de ficción* (Ciudad de la Habana: Editorial Arte y Literatura, 2001); and *Producciones del Instituto Cubano del Arte e Industria Cinematográficos ICAIC 1959–2004*, edited by Maria Eulalia Douglas, Sara Vega and Ivo Sarría (Madrid: Cinemateca de Cuba, ICAIC, 2004).

include co-productions, short films, experimental films and even works that could not accurately be described as feature films: for example, the listings include films that were merely recordings of theatrical performances. If one compares this output to the hundreds of films produced in Hollywood or made in the Soviet Union, Mexico, Argentina, India or Japan, it is clear that between 1961 and 1991 the ICAIC produced very few feature films. This fact helped my decision to focus primarily on feature films, since their number is manageable for a single thesis. Also, it was in the production of the ‘expensive business of feature film production’ that the influence of Soviet-bloc countries was focussed, since Cubans were able to make documentaries and short films since 1959, but it was only after the declaration of the socialist character of the Revolution and the arrival of substantial technical and financial support from the countries of the Soviet-bloc that the Cuban Film Institute managed to produce more feature films.

In recent years, a number of new publications have appeared on Cuban cinema, among them William Luis’s *Lunes de Revolución* (2003); García Borrero’s *Cine cubano de los sesenta* (2007); Ambrosio Fornet’s *Las trampas del oficio* (2007); Mirta Ibarra’s compilation of Titón’s personal letters, *Volver sobre mis pasos* (2008); Alfredo Guevara’s *¿Y si fuera una huella?* (2008) and García Espinosa’s *Algo de mí* (2009). As mentioned above, the main works on post-colonial, Cuban cultural and film studies offer important sign-posts for the mapping of the field of contemporary Cuban film studies and have been very helpful in drawing together the main ideas of the present study. In the same way,

academic websites on film and DVD collections such as those of UCL-SSEES (School of Slavonic and East European Studies) were also extremely helpful.<sup>57</sup>

The film journal *Cine Cubano* is a main source of reference and constitutes crucial evidence of the significance of Soviet-bloc theoretical and cinematic practices. This publication sheds light on the production side of cinematography in Cuba, as well as on the theoretical and practical concepts developed by the period's leading directors and critics. It also highlights the role of film, the moving image and audiovisual culture in Cuban intellectual life. *Cine Cubano* also devoted plentiful room to articles dedicated to the cinema of the 'other Europe', or by leading Soviet and East European directors, as well as well-known authors, film critics from these countries. One revealing trait of these articles is the emphasis on Soviet silent cinema. *Cine Cubano* is absent from the majority of book collections and academic libraries of the United Kingdom.

The task of demonstrating the significance of the cinema from 'the other' Europe for the Cuban moving image is a complex question. We should also analyse the source of this impact. Thus, we need to know about the different stages in the development of cinema in the Soviet-bloc countries. It requires the researcher to make the shift from knowledge to understanding of the film art history of these countries, its main proponents, film theories and practices. In this sense, the pioneering work developed by the film-makers themselves was of great help. Secondly, the studies published about Soviet-bloc cinemas and

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<sup>57</sup> On the history of the EICTV see on the twentieth anniversary of its foundation, Fernando Birri's documentary *ZA05: lo Viejo y lo Nuevo* (ZA05: The Old and the New, 2006), which was shown as part of the 2007 UCL FMI. See also *Escuela de todos los mundos* (La Habana–Alcalá de Henares: EICTV, 2001), *Un lugar en la Memoria: Fundación del Nuevo Cine Latinoamericano 1985–2005* (La Habana: FNCL, 2005) and Alberto García Ferrer, *Ojos que no ven* (Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI de Argentina editores, 2004). Also, general websites such as the Internet Movie Database have been of some help.

intellectual life by Sheila Fitzpatrick, Mira Liehm and Antonín J. Liehm, Martin Brady, Seán Allan and John Sandford (DEFA); on Russian and Soviet cinema by Jay Leyda, Yuri Tsivian, Lynne Attwood, Denise J. Youngblood, Richard Taylor, Peter Kenez, Birgit Beumers, Anna Lawton, Amy Sargeant, David W. Paul, Josephine Woll, David Bordwell, Tatiana K. Egorova (Film Music), Nina Baburina (Russian/Soviet film posters); István Nemeskürty, Graham Petrie and Bryan Burns (Hungarian cinema); Peter Hames (Czech and Slovak cinema); on Polish cinema: Jerzy Toeplitz, Marek Haltof, Frank Bren, Jan Lenica (Polish film posters), Dina Iordanova (East European cinema); among many others, were pivotal reference points for the theoretical foundations of the present study.

### **Methodological Approach**

The Polish film scholar Jerzy Toeplitz, when summarising a FIAF symposium about the influence of silent Soviet cinema on world cinema, accurately suggested a practical method for the study of interinfluences between audiovisual cultures, cinematographies and film styles.<sup>58</sup> Toeplitz's structure of analysis proved to be invaluable in establishing the methodology for the present study. In this analysis of the significance of Soviet and East European audiovisual culture in the shaping of the Cuban moving image, I shall be alluding to four main areas:

- Film theory and criticism, from the early film reviews of Soviet silent cinema published by Mella, Carpentier and film critics such as Manuel Valdés Rodríguez and Mirta Aguirre before 1959 to the work developed by

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<sup>58</sup> Jerzy Toeplitz, 'Summation of the Symposium', in International Federation of Film Archives, *The Influence of Silent Soviet Cinema on World Cinema*, no pagination given.



historians and scholars such as Mario Rodríguez Alemán on Cuban television in times of Revolution and the theoretical works by film-makers.

- Film administration and industry development, which includes the mode of production, thematic plan, film distribution and censorship.
- Makers of moving images and the result of their work (films, videos, television practices), which is without doubt the field which offers the most scope for in-depth analysis.
- The spectator.

As Toeplitz recognised, cinematic influences work simultaneously or with some kind of time distance between them, but they are never unconnected. This study will demonstrate that those influences played different roles at different times. The main body of *KinoCuban* takes as its point of departure 1961, rather than 1959, because intellectual life, and cinema in particular, was radically affected by the proclamation of the socialist character of the Revolution on 16 April 1961: ‘...socialista y democrática de los humildes, por los humildes y para los humildes’.<sup>59</sup>

### **Outline of the Research**

Taking the chronological approach and inter-disciplinary nature of postcolonial studies, the thesis is organised in four chapters which identify four historical periods: the pre-revolutionary period (before 1959), the 1960s, the 1970s and the 1980s. These periods, as we shall see, coincide with the different waves that arrived in Cuba from the other Europe: Russian avant-garde and silent Soviet cinema, the Thaw cinema, the cinema of the

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<sup>59</sup> Cited in *Revolución cubana: 45 grandes momentos*, edited by Julio García Luis (Melbourne: Ocean Press, 2005), pp. 74–78.

Stagnation period and Glasnost. Each film or video work was selected because they were created to fill a specific need within the thematic plan of the ICAIC.<sup>60</sup> One task of this research is to determine that need, what question was the film-maker trying to answer, what problem were Cubans trying to reveal or solve? Sometimes the moving image itself and/or the film-maker will tell us explicitly, but this is not always the case.

In **Chapter I: Pre-Revolutionary Cinematic Discourse**, I shall examine the arrival of Soviet cinema, which together with the political ideas that it presented became very attractive to intellectual groups in Havana. I will also outline the first cultural exchanges between Cuban and Soviet artists, those Cubans who were interested in Soviet cinema such as Julio Antonio Mella; those who met Sergei Eisenstein such as Alejo Carpentier, who conducted the first Latin American interview with the Soviet film-maker and José Manuel Valdés Rodríguez, the main promoter of Soviet cinema in Havana University. This chapter will offer proof of the fundamental changes in Cuban film criticism thanks to the icons of the October cinema. Central to this section of the thesis is the work developed by the *Instituto de Intercambio Cultural Cubano Soviético* and its publication series, both presided over by Fernando Ortiz.

Other aspects which will be covered in the first chapter include the Cuban reception and interpretation of Socialist Realism and its adaptation in Soviet cinema. After the term was coined in 1932 and declared the ‘method’ for Soviet literature, it became a tradition not only for the countries of the Soviet-bloc but also beyond.<sup>61</sup> In this, Mirta Aguirre, who can be considered the pioneer of feminist film criticism in the Americas, offers a tremendous

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<sup>60</sup> See Agramonte, *Guía temática del cine cubano producción ICAIC 1959–1980*.

<sup>61</sup> See Thomas Lahusen and Evgeny Dobrenko (eds), *Socialist Realism Without Shores* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1997).

testimony to the work developed by Cuban orthodox Marxists in the dissemination of Soviet cinema and Socialist Realism.

## **Chapter II: 1960s The Emergence of the Socialist Cinema of the Cuban Revolution,**

### **Committed Films: Socialist in Content and National in Form.**<sup>62</sup> 1961 is a turning point

in the history of the Cuban Revolution and its cinematic discourse. The declaration of the socialist character of the Revolution gave birth to the socialist cinema; consequently, it demanded a change of attitude towards the moving image. This phenomenon will be examined in the question: revolutionary film art or a film art for the Revolution (the State)? The prohibition of the short film, *P.M.*, gave rise to a far-reaching debate which subsequently defined the cultural policy of the Cuban Revolution and provided the foundations of the counter-cinema of the Diaspora. After the '*P.M.* affair', in terms of film administration, the ICAIC acquired a key attribute of a socialist-state film industry; censorship was thenceforth under the control and supervision of the Communist Party.<sup>63</sup> This chapter will also examine the reasons why the ICAIC adopted the Polish model of 'zespoly filmowe' (film groups) as a film mode of production, a clear example of influence that has been ignored until today. It appeared in Cuba in the early 1960s, was consolidated over the following two decades, and was re-defined in the 1990s as 'grupos de creación'.

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<sup>62</sup> At the Sixteenth Party Congress of 1930, Joseph Stalin gave the following memorable definition of socialist culture as 'socialist in content and national in form'; it became a proletarian slogan since then. See Joseph Stalin's *Works*, vol. 12 (Moscow: Foreign Languages Pub. House, 1953- ), p. 379 [Political Report of C.C. to the XVI Congress of the C.P.S.U. (B.)].

<sup>63</sup> In order to understand the main features of the socialist state film industry regarding film administration, censorship, thematic planning, film unions, film education and training, see Jamie Miller, *Soviet Cinema: Politics and Persuasion Under Stalin* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2010).

Another crucial moment in the history of the Cuban moving image was an international round table about cinema and the role of the artist that posed the question: ‘¿qué es lo moderno en el arte?’ Among those present were the Soviet and East European film-makers who would direct the first co-produced films. Round tables of this sort would become a regular cinematic practice in Cuba, for debate on the moving image not only among film-makers, but also with the general public at a local, national and international level. The films analysed in this chapter are the first feature films co-produced with the countries of the Soviet-bloc: *¿Para quién baila la Habana?* (1962), *Preludio 11* (1963) and *Soy Cuba* (1964) made with Czechoslovakia, East Germany and the Soviet Union, respectively. I look at their relevance for the future development of the cinematic discourse of the Revolution and the Cuban moving image in general. Until now, film historians have underplayed the impact of these films on the future development of Cuban cinema as art and industry. When the topic has been mentioned, it has only led to brief analysis, and, in some cases, the information presented has proved to be erroneous. Such is the case with Josephine Woll in her book *Real Images: Soviet Cinema and the Thaw*, in which she describes *Soy Cuba* (script by Evgenii Evtushenko and cinematography by Sergei Urusevskii) as ‘a wildly melodramatic exaltation of Castro’s Cuba’.<sup>64</sup> It would appear that the author has not actually seen the film because the film is set in the pre-revolutionary period. At the same time, Woll ignores, or perhaps never knew, that the co-scriptwriter of Kalatozov’s film was the Cuban poet Enrique Pineda Barnet, who would later become a significant figure in the ICAIC.

**Chapter III: 1970s The Socialist Institutionalisation of the Moving Image:** The third chapter sets out to introduce and analyse the notion of the confluence of Soviet ideology

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<sup>64</sup> See Josephine Woll, *Real Images: Soviet Cinema and the Thaw* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2000), p. 184.

(Marxism-Leninism) and Cuban nationalism, film theory and cinematic practice and the attempt to apply Marxism-Leninism to the realm of the Cuban audiovisual, in order to address the notion of the ‘education of the spectator’. Article 5 of the newly-adopted Cuban Constitution (24 February 1976) proclaims that: ‘the Communist Party of Cuba, a follower of Martí’s ideas and of Marxism-Leninism and the organised vanguard of the Cuban nation, is the highest leading force of society and of the state’. We should remember that for the cultural mentors of the Revolution: ‘el marxismo de nuestros días es marxismo-leninismo o no es’.<sup>65</sup> This chapter will also analyse Cuban film theory and criticism in relation to Soviet dialectical materialism; for some Cuban intellectuals this was viewed as the only legitimate mode of philosophical thought. In this respect, an important testimony is provided by the work of Rodríguez Alemán, the Soviet voice of Cuban film criticism and his conceptualisation of the role of television within the cinematic discourse of the Revolution, signalling the need for a kind of information, which would contribute, along with national film production, to the intellectual and cinematic development of Cuban people, thus stresses the importance of decolonizing the screens. Key essays of Cuban film criticism, such as Julio García Espinosa’s *Por un cine imperfecto* and Tomás Gutiérrez Alea’s *La dialéctica del espectador*, will be also examined in relation to ‘the soul of Marxism-Leninism’: dialectical materialism.<sup>66</sup>

Titón’s film *Las doce sillas* (The Twelve Chairs, 1962), a film adaptation of a Soviet classic novel, represents a transitional moment in both Gutiérrez Alea’s own film career and in the history of the cinematic discourse of the Cuban Revolution. It marks the birth of

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<sup>65</sup> See Carlos Rafael Rodríguez, *Cuba en el tránsito al socialismo (1959–1963)* (La Habana: Siglo XXI editores, 1978), p. 7.

<sup>66</sup> See Julio García Espinosa, ‘Por un cine imperfecto’, published for the first time in *Cine cubano*, 11.66–67 (January–March 1971), pp. 46–53. See also Tomás Gutiérrez Alea’s *Dialéctica del espectador* (La Habana: UNEAC, 1982).

its socialist cinema; connecting cinema with socialism, the new ideology was fused with the Cuban moving image. Subsequently, I will examine key works in this trend, including the first feature films of Octavio Cortázar, Pastor Vega and Jesús Díaz, the first two directors having also been involved in the first Soviet-bloc film co-productions of the 1960s. The films to be analysed include Cortázar's *El Brigadista*, about the 'new' Cuban teacher. One should bear in mind that one of the most important tasks in the first years of the Revolution was the creation of the new teacher in order 'to build the society of the future'. *El brigadista* helps us to visualise how the idea of 'the new man' was interpreted. This concept was defined by Che Guevara in his well-known text *El socialismo y el hombre en Cuba* (1965), a historical document that also represented the first official statement on the aesthetics of the Revolution: the creation of the new man. The analysis of the film will also suggest implicit (sub) themes from the Cuban educational experience in connection with the father of Soviet education, Anton Makarenko, thus recalling the creation of the Makarenko Pedagogical Institute as part of the educational project of the Revolution.

Pastor Vega's film *Retrato de Teresa* presents portraits of socialist life in Cuba; in particular it focusses on the birth of the 'new' Cuban woman, labour relationships and trade union organisation in a socialist system. This film serves to connect the ICAIC with Soviet and DEFA cinematic representations of women during the same period as evidence of the thematic planning among the socialist film industries of the Soviet-bloc and Cuba.<sup>67</sup> An analysis of *Polvo Rojo* and the professional life of its director Jesús Díaz (founder of *Caimán Barbudo*, according to Cabrera Infante it was 'the Cuban bearded version of the

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<sup>67</sup> See Andrea Rinke, *Images of Women in East German Cinema, 1972–1982: Socialist Models, Private Dreamers and Rebels* (Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen Press, 2006).

Soviet *Krokodil*, including the work of Díaz as the first Secretary of the Communist Party within ICAIC will introduce the topic of Socialist Realism in Cuban cinema, the ‘*kollektiv*’, the individual and the responsibility of the artist, while ‘el caso Padilla’ offers an example of Soviet-style censorship in Cuba, which could help to answer the question of whether Jesús Díaz, the ‘ideológico de una generación’, was a victim of the system.

**Chapter IV: The 1980s KinoGlasnost and the Return of the Cuban Vernacular**, will examine the last feature films to be co-produced with the countries of the Soviet-bloc: *Capablanca*, directed by the Cuban Manuel Herrera, and *Dejen en paz a Robinson Crusoe* by the Hungarian film director, Peter Timar. Herrera’s film is a good example of the moment when Glasnost ended the Soviet cinematic exchange with Cuba. This film not only illuminates important aspects of Hungarian filmmaking during this decade, but also, significantly, captures a sense of the Eastern European intellect in flux during the waning years of socialism, as well as the larger context within which Glasnost influenced the film production and culture of the time. Timar’s film will also help to elucidate the question of how *Robinson Crusoe*’s colonialist distinctiveness is to be viewed in postcolonial times; as we shall see, *Dejen en paz a Robinson Crusoe* addresses the issue of the ways in which colonialism has been justified via images of the colonised as inferior people. Pineda Barnet’s *La Bella del Alhambra*, arguably the best of ICAIC’s musical films, is a fine example of the return to the vernacular. This last decade merits special analysis because of the convergence of multiple elements that impacted on filmmaking during that time, from the economic crisis that affected all the areas of the country, and obviously, the film industry, to the creation of the international film school (EICTV). The video works by Aaron Yelin and Jana Bokova also offer key testimonies to ‘el período especial en tiempo de

paz'.<sup>68</sup> Consideration of a short film by Yelin, *Muy Bien*, will introduce the question of the Cuban anti-Utopia as the 'other' image of the Cuban Revolution so well developed by the video movement. The last film to be analysed is Bokova's *Havana*, a portrait of the Cuban nation as a 'lost city'. The analysis of *Havana* will bring together the Cuban diaspora, the socialist experience as a collective memory, and the international debate around the moving image of the Revolution.

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<sup>68</sup> The so-called 'Special Period in Time of Peace' in Cuba started when the economic relationships with Eastern Europe, in particular with the former USSR, were drastically reduced at the end of the 1980s; 1992 was declared 'año uno del período especial'. For a complete study in English of this period, see *Cuban Communism 1959–1995*, edited by Irving Louis Horowitz (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1989), pp. 187–337; *Cuba at a Crossroads: Politics and Economics after the Fourth Party Congress*, edited by Jorge F. Pérez-López (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1994); and *Cuba in the Special Period: Culture and Ideology in the 1990s*, edited by Ariana Hernandez-Reguant (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).



## Chapter I

### Pre-Revolutionary Cinematic Discourse

One important study on the emergence of cinema in Cuba is Raúl Rodríguez's *El cine silente en Cuba* (1992). As Rodríguez points out, there was a close link between the beginning of cinema and the ideology of marketing in Cuba. Commercial companies sponsored the very few early Cuban films for which records remain. Manuel Martínez's *Cine y azúcar* (Cinema and Sugar, 1906) is a good example of this phenomenon. Cinema arrived in Havana while Cuba was in the throes of a war to end Spanish domination of the island. Gabriel Veyre, who represented the Lumière brothers, arrived on 15 January 1897. Veyre brought moving pictures from Mexico, and the first public demonstration of the *Cinématographe Lumière* occurred on 24 January 1897 in Havana at Prado 126. Included in this show was the first moving image that Cuban viewers encountered from the 'other' Europe: the arrival of the Russian Tsar in Paris. On 7 February of the same year, Veyre filmed the first images of the Cuban capital city under the title *Simulacro de incendio* (A Fire Drill). The first 'national film production', *El brujo desapareciendo* (The Disappearing Magician), was directed by José Casasús and appeared in 1898, the same year that marked the beginning of the end of Spanish control of the island.<sup>1</sup>

In a brief campaign, US forces captured Cuba, the Philippines and Puerto Rico. The Treaty of Paris, signed by the United States and Spain in December 1898, marked the end of Spanish colonial rule in Cuba. On 20 May 1902, Cuba was granted formal independence

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<sup>1</sup> See Raúl Rodríguez, *El cine silente en Cuba* (La Habana: Editorial Letras Cubanas, 1992). See also Emilio Roig de Leuchsenring, 'La primera exhibición y producción cinematográfica en la Habana', first published in *Carteles* on 17 August 1947, pp. 42-43, and Maria Eulalia Douglas, *Catálogo del cine cubano 1897-1960* (La Habana: Ediciones ICAIC, 2008).

after just over three years of occupation. However, as a result of the 1901 Platt Amendment, by virtue of which the US government reserved the right to intervene in Cuba and to maintain a military installation in Guantánamo Bay, with independence, Cuba passed from Spanish to US control, political and economic reliance having compromised the Republic.<sup>2</sup> The most relevant issue for the present thesis is to emphasise the colonial status of Cuba when cinema reached the island, unlike the rest of Latin America, which had won independence from Spain almost a century earlier.

To talk about the arrival of Soviet cinema in Cuba is to talk about the October Revolution and its repercussions on the island, which requires a brief introduction to the arrival of socialist ideas, Marxism, and in particular how Cubans knew about Leninism. At that time in Havana the most radical political groups, workers and particularly artists and intellectuals, were looking for a perspective that could free Cuban society from political corruption and US dependency. A difficult internal social situation during Mario García Menocal's administration that was aggravated during this period provided an environment that was conducive to the dissemination on the island of radical ideas such as Marxism.

### **The October Revolution and its Repercussions in Cuba**

In 1917 news arrived of a Revolution in a distant and unfamiliar country: Russia. The October Revolution marked the end of the Romanov dynasty that had ruled the country for almost three hundred years. The Russian Revolution and its leader, Vladimir Illich Lenin (1870–1924), captured the imaginations of many people around the world, who believed that they would bring a real end to inequality. For many Cubans at that time, the Soviet

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<sup>2</sup> Julio Le Riverend, *Breve historia de Cuba* (La Habana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1999), pp. 71–75.

experiment was not a utopia, but an illusion, though not necessarily an unrealisable one. Illusion, as Freud explains, is a form of wish fulfilment: ‘illusions need not necessarily be false — that is to say, unrealisable or in contradiction to reality’.<sup>3</sup>

In Cuba, the communist movement came into being after the October Revolution. The earliest Marxist-Communist organisations were organised in the city, where labour and the urban workers’ movement were strong. A crucial study on the subject is Erasmo Dumpierre’s *La Revolución de Octubre y su repercusión en Cuba* (1977), which argues that ‘en 1918 comienza a sentirse, plenamente, el eco de la Revolución, hecho que se refleja en el aumento de huelgas y protestas obreras que surgen en el país desde esa fecha’.<sup>4</sup> The book includes articles from the Cuban press of the time and an essay by Carlos Baliño, recognised by Cuban historians as the first Cuban Marxist thinker. Baliño is associated with the foundation of the first Communist Party on the island (which occurred in 1925), yet the question of how Baliño became a communist himself is still uncertain.<sup>5</sup> Prior to 1959, Baliño was unknown in Cuba: his name never appeared in history books or literature in general but, in the aftermath of the Revolution, Baliño was revered as a key

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<sup>3</sup> See ‘The Future of an Illusion’ in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 21, general editorship of James Strachey (London: Vintage, 2001), p. 31.

<sup>4</sup> See *La Revolución de Octubre y su repercusión en Cuba*, edited by Erasmo Dumpierre (La Habana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1977), p. 8. See also Felipe Pérez Cruz, *Mella y la Revolución de Octubre* (Ciudad de La Habana: Editorial Gente Nueva, 1980). See also Angel Augier, ‘Lenin en las letras cubanas’, in *Anuario L/L* Número 1(1970) pp. 220–59, Mirta Aguirre, *El leninismo en ‘La historia me absolverá’* (La Habana: Ciencias Sociales, 1980), and Olivia Miranda, ‘Lenin y la Revolución de Octubre en la Cuba Colonial’, in *Marx Ahora*, no 24/2007 pp. 160-80. See also Mirta Aguirre, *Cuba y la Revolución de Octubre* (Ciudad de La Habana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1980).

<sup>5</sup> In November 1903, Baliño created the Club de Propaganda Socialista, which has been considered the first Marxist organisation on the island. For the members of this group, ‘abolishing exploitation of man by man’ was synonymous with Cuban nationalism. Some scholars have suggested that Baliño’s ‘conversion’ to communism occurred when, as a ‘tabacalero’ in Tampa, he experienced the life of the American labour movement. *Verdades del socialismo* is regarded as his most important work. For a study of Baliño, see Carmen Gómez García, *Carlos Baliño: Primer pensador marxista cubano, un estudio de su pensamiento filosófico y social* (La Habana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1985).

personality linking two generations in the history of ideas in Cuba: nationalist ‘patriotismo’ and Marxism. Along with José Martí, Baliño founded the Partido Revolucionario Cubano in 1892. In contrast to Baliño, Martí’s legacy has never been in doubt in Cuba, where his views have for many years now been taken as central to Cuban nationalism. Judging by the number of articles concerning the history and arts of the countries of the ‘other’ Europe, Martí’s reviews were essential for the understanding of Russian and Eastern European cultural and artistic topics among Cuban intellectuals.<sup>6</sup> But it should be noted that Martí was genuinely concerned about the negative implications of socialism: ‘Dos peligros tiene la idea socialista, como tantas otras: el de las lecturas extranjerizas confusas e incompletas, y el de la soberbia y rabia disimulada de los ambiciosos, que para ir levantándose en el mundo empiezan por fingirse, para tener hombros en que alzarse, frenéticos defensores de los desamparados’.<sup>7</sup>

The English historian G.D.H. Cole in his *A History of Socialist Thought* argues that ‘the Cuban Revolutionaries were not socialists; nor did their principal theorist, José Martí, put forward any specifically socialist doctrine. He was a revolutionary nationalist rather than a socialist; but his nationalism was very radical and rested on a conception of racial equality linking him to the later developments of socialism and communism in Latin America’.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> See Luis Álvarez Álvarez, *La cultura rusa en Martí* (Camagüey: Editorial Ácana, 2010).

<sup>7</sup> Cited from Martí’s letter to Fermín Valdés Domínguez (New York, May 1894) in *José Martí Obras completas* [electronic resource] (Ciudad de la Habana: Centro de Estudios Martianos: Fundación Karisma, 2001), vol. 3, p. 168.

<sup>8</sup> See G.D.H Cole, *A History of Socialist Thought*, vol. 3, part. 2 (London: Macmillan, 1970), p. 838. See also José Cantón Navarro, *Algunas ideas de José Martí en relación con la clase obrera y el socialismo* (La Habana: Editora Política, 1981), Juan Marinello, ‘José Martí y nuestra revolución socialista’, in *Cuba socialista*, 2.5 (January 1962), pp. 16–37, and Dumpierre (ed.), *La Revolución de Octubre y su repercusión en Cuba*.

### **The Arrival of Soviet cinema in Havana: Sergei Eisenstein**

In the 1920s cinema, more than any other media, played a very significant diplomatic and political role in Cuba. Communists organised in the Partido Socialista Popular, for example, promoted the cinema of the Soviet Union, ‘the most important art’, in small groups or cine-clubs. The capital city was the focus of such activities, and the centre of artistic and intellectual movements, particularly those started by the radical generation of young people who were interested in film as art and as an alternative to the presence of a hegemonic US cultural discourse on the island. The film production of the USSR was virtually unknown to the Cuban viewer in the 1920s and 1930s, other than in certain cine-clubs, but by the Second World War the screening of Soviet films had become more common due to increased popular interest. Antonio Pedriñan and Delio González, who were communists and members of the Partido Socialista (PSP), played a key role in the distribution of Soviet films. During this period, Pedriñan had a contract with the Amkino Company in New York to acquire Soviet films.<sup>9</sup>

From articles dedicated to Soviet theoretical works and films published in the Soviet press in the 1920s and translated into Spanish in Cuba, the names of Eisenstein, Dovzhenko, Vertov and Pudovkin achieved the status of classics and were the first and most important points of reference for those in Cuba interested in cinema as an artistic manifestation free from commercialism.<sup>10</sup> Throughout the period leading up to 1959, the main promoter and disseminator in Cuba of Soviet culture was the Partido Socialista (PSP). From the very

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<sup>9</sup> From 1941 to 1946 Cuban communists also funded the company Blue Ribbon films for the distribution of Soviet cinema. See Maria Eulalia Douglas, *La tienda negra: El cine en Cuba 1897–1990* (La Habana: Cinemateca de Cuba, 1996), p. 85.

<sup>10</sup> See Maria Eulalia Douglas, ‘El cine soviético en Cuba’, *Cine cubano*, no.119 (1987), pp. 35–43.

beginning the communists understood films to be the main weapons of Soviet ideological dissemination in Cuban intellectual life. Although films from the ‘other’ Europe, particularly Soviet productions, began to arrive in Latin America from 1923 onwards, they did not reach Cuba until as late as September 1927.<sup>11</sup>

In the period before 1959, Cuban film history can be divided into two main periods: before and after the exhibition of Sergei Eisenstein’s *Bronenosets Potemkin* (Battleship Potemkin, 1925). With the presentation of this film in the National Theatre (now the García Lorca Theatre), a definitive precedent was set. Without doubt this was the best introduction that Soviet cinema could have had for a Cuban audience. An article in one of the leading newspapers of the epoch, *Diario de la Marina* (1 September 1927), declared:

NACIONAL. HOY GRAN ESTRENO. EN TODAS LAS TANDAS

La Select Pictures presenta el espeluznante fotodrama de la Rusia de los Zares: Potemkin, que ha sido reconocida por Douglas Fairbanks, Emil Jannings, Max Reinhart y otras celebridades como lo más grandioso que el cinema ha producido hasta la fecha.<sup>12</sup>

Before *Bronenosets Potemkin*, cinematic discourse and cinema itself in Cuba was simply one more consumer item: it was largely seen as passive entertainment; with Eisenstein’s film the political nature of cinema acquired a dimension that it never had before: ‘una

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 37.

<sup>12</sup> See *Diario de la Marina*, 1 September 1927, p. 9.

película que puede dar motivos a la exacerbación de las pasiones siempre peligrosas'.<sup>13</sup> *Bronenosets Potemkin* was immediately banned and was only exhibited privately in the very few film clubs that existed in Havana. The above article is an example of the new kind of film review that was published after its release. It synthesised the political connotations of Soviet films, which went against the international political system of the time. This was a different kind of cinematic debate: an ideological dialogue inspired by the Soviet moving picture.<sup>14</sup> The Cuban film historian, Maria Eulalia Douglas, has argued that American films were the staple diet for the average film-goer in Havana at that time and that, when reviewing a Soviet film, it was often compared to an American equivalent. Everything worth saying about a film was related to an earlier US review, and this demonstrates the consumer dependency on the United States at that time. This dependent condition of Cuban film criticism was recognised by Néstor Almendros in his book *A Man with a Camera*, when he commented: 'Havana was paradise for a film buff, but a paradise with no critical perspective'.<sup>15</sup>

### **Mella and Eisenstein's *Oktiabr*'**

Julio Antonio Mella was 'probably the most prominent Communist in the Caribbean region in the late 1920s'.<sup>16</sup> He was a leading political figure, co-founder of the first Communist Party in Cuba and leader of the Havana University student union and also an enthusiast of

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., pp. 1 & 14.

<sup>14</sup> Concerning those films shown in Cuba, see Eulalia Douglas, *La tienda negra*, pp. 293–317. It is important to note that Vertov's films were exhibited in Havana as part of Valdés Rodríguez's university film course. As Hicks has pointed out, Vertov was virtually unknown in the West, given the acclaim of Eisenstein and Pudovkin internationally. See Jeremy Hicks, *Dziga Vertov: Defining Documentary Film* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2007), p.123.

<sup>15</sup> Néstor Almendros, *A Man with a Camera* (London: Faber and Faber, 1984), p. 27.

<sup>16</sup> See Gary Tennant, 'Julio Antonio Mella and the Roots of Dissension in the Partido Comunista de Cuba', in *The Hidden Pearl of the Caribbean: Trotskyism in Cuba*, edited by Al Richardson (London: Porcupine Press: Socialist Platform, 2000), p. 40.

the October Revolution and Soviet cinema.<sup>17</sup> In Mexico, while in exile, Mella wrote one of the first Cuban reviews dedicated to the analysis of a Soviet film. It was published in a Trotskyite newspaper, *Tren blindado*, in 1928, which hints at a possible ‘dangerous’ interest in, and contact with, Trotsky’s groups. One should bear in mind that Mella visited the Soviet Union and was exiled in Mexico during Machado’s dictatorship. He was supposedly on the point of expulsion from the communist movement at the time of his assassination in 1929, allegedly by Machado’s agents. In Mexico City, he met the photographer Tina Modotti, who was accused of working as a Soviet agent.<sup>18</sup> The issue of Mella’s Trotskyism has been posed in *The Hidden Pearl of the Caribbean: Trotskyism in Cuba*. Its author, Gary Tennant explains that post-1959 Cuban accounts have rejected any notion of Mella’s dissidence. Tennant argues that: ‘the label of Trotskyism was more a device to use to attack and discredit him (Mella)’.<sup>19</sup> The fact is that Mella, like many left-wing Latin American intellectuals, had a special interest in Soviet cinema.

Mella’s review of Eisenstein’s *Oktiabr’* (October, 1927) contains the following statement: ‘*Octubre* es el film de la revolución. No hay la ingenuidad estúpida del “boy”. Tampoco el tonto y romántico desenlace de amor con el beso final de varios metros. La película no tiene héroes. Es la vida, es la multitud.’<sup>20</sup> Mella emphasises the differences between this Soviet film and a Hollywood production, explaining Eisenstein’s perception of the multitude as the real hero, in opposition to the ‘cine yanqui’ of individuals and isolated

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<sup>17</sup> See Felipe Pérez Cruz, *Mella y la Revolución de Octubre* (La Habana: Editorial Gente Nueva, 1980).

<sup>18</sup> Concerning Mella’s Mexican period, see Raquel Tibol, *Julio Antonio Mella en el Machete* (La Habana: Editorial Abril, 2007). On the Modotti-Mella relationship, see Adys Cupull and Froilán González, *Julio Antonio Mella y Tina Modotti* (La Habana: Casa Editora Abril, 2005).

<sup>19</sup> *The Hidden Pearl*, p. 41.

<sup>20</sup> See Julio Antonio Mella, ‘Octubre’, *Cine cubano*, no.9 (1969), pp. 111–12; first published in *Tren blindado* (1928).



characters. For Mella, there was no doubt that what was important in Eisenstein's film — and the Soviet silent cinema — was the very fact that it was the cinema of the October Revolution. It was a revolutionary cinema, a great change in the art of spectacle. Mella recognises that Eisenstein's film introduced the revolutionary masses as the hero of the spectacle. On the ideological aspects of the film Mella made some important observations. He argued, for example, that the Soviet film sought not to please exclusively but rather to persuade its audience, an important quality of Soviet cinema.

In his review Mella also referred to the potential reception that this kind of film might have among Cuban spectators: 'el público, acostumbrado al estilo burgués de la película yanqui podrá no apreciar en todo su justo valor este esfuerzo de la "Sovkino"'.<sup>21</sup> In this way, Mella identifies *spectatorship* as a key question to be resolved in the context of Cuban intellectual life. According to Mella, the cultural level of the Cuban audience and cinema was very low. We should remember that the intention of changing the spectator's attitude became almost an obsession, and was one of the main features of the film tradition established in the countries of the Soviet-bloc. Clearly this review is an example of the interest in this kind of film as represented by Eisenstein's work among the most radical group of young Cuban intellectuals. For Mella, in *Oktiabr*' 'las vanguardias ideológicas tienen aquí oportunidad de gozar uno de los más intensos placeres que la época actual puede brindar en el terreno del arte por medio del más joven y expresivo de las artes modernas: la fotografía en movimiento'.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 112.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

Mella's concerns bring to mind Soviet theories of spectatorship, which are among the most controversial. Soviet film-makers believed in the need to change the spectator's mind, and thereby influence how the viewer should understand the functioning of filmic discourse. For them, the traditional view, based on what the audience wants or demands, was a fundamental question of freedom. In his article *The Audience as Creator* (1946/7) Eisenstein stated that: 'By "serving the audience", bourgeois film-makers mean colluding wholesale with the crudest and most basic instincts, and philistine tastes. Through this collusion, bourgeois film-makers try simultaneously to inculcate in the viewer's consciousness the same reactionary ideas that the masters of these countries, and those working in their film industry, preach through their hundreds of films.'<sup>23</sup> As a result of the theoretical sophistication of his views, coupled with the technical quality of his films, Eisenstein soon became the main point of reference for Cuban film-makers and theoreticians of the time.

### **Carpentier: the First Latin American Interview with Eisenstein**

Alejo Carpentier is widely regarded as one of the greatest modern Latin American writers. The Grupo Minorista, of which Carpentier was a member, was formed in 1923 by young left intellectuals who sought an artistic, literary and social renovation in Cuba.<sup>24</sup> The young Carpentier met Eisenstein in Paris in 1930. His memories of the meeting were first recorded in a letter he sent to his old friend Emilio Roig de Leuchsenring, who was also a Minorista and

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<sup>23</sup> Eisenstein, 'The Audience as Creator', in S. M. Eisenstein, *Selected Works*, edited by Richard Taylor, 3 vols (London: BFI, 1986), vol. 3 (*Writings 1934-47*), pp. 339-40 (p. 339).

<sup>24</sup> See 'Declaración del Grupo Minorista', first published in *Carteles*, no. 21, 22 May 22 1927, pp. 16 and 25, [http://www.cubaliteraria.com/monografia/grupo\\_minorista/declaracion.html](http://www.cubaliteraria.com/monografia/grupo_minorista/declaracion.html). See also Ana Cairo Ballester, *El Grupo Minorista y su tiempo* (La Habana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1978). While Jorge Mañach might have coined the term Grupo Minorista, referring to the group's minority position, Juan Ramón Jiménez, the Spanish poet, referred to the group as the 'inmensa minoría' because of its impact on Cuban political and intellectual life. Carpentier was also important as a theorist of the region's literature and historian of its music.

was working in Havana as editor of *Social*, a popular magazine of the time and later in an article that was published in 1930 under the title ‘Con el creador de El Acorazado Potemkin’. This was possibly the first interview with the film-maker published in Latin America.<sup>25</sup>

Carpentier describes Eisenstein as: ‘un hombre pequeño, chato fuerte como un nibelungos, con el rostro a la vez voluntarioso y guasón’.<sup>26</sup> In his article, he explains how the 22-year-old Eisenstein was interested in the revolutionary theatre developed by Meierkhol’d, when he wrote ‘comedias extrañas’, which were performed in a theatre-circus; and how Griffith’s *Intolerance* revealed to him the new possibilities of silent cinema. According to Carpentier, this film presents the formula of the mass movements that Eisenstein later developed in his film career. On *Bronenosets Potemkin*, Carpentier explained that for the first time a film had dispensed with ‘stars’, using only the masses’ reactions as the emotional element. He also referred to *Stachka* (Strike, 1925), which established a definitive place for the Soviet film-maker. Carpentier also made reference to *Oktiabr’* and *General’naia liniia/Staroe i novoe* (The General Line/The Old and the New, 1929). As we know, a distinctive feature of Eisenstein’s films, one that had a profound influence on world cinema, was a directional method that worked with non-professional actors. They were the real ‘stars’ of the Soviet cinematic discourse. Carpentier also made reference to montage. He was familiar with the idea that for Eisenstein montage was the basis of cinema. The suggestion of ‘attractions’ gave way to that of ‘stimulants’, which would provoke a complex series of associations in the audience, setting them thinking along a line that was predetermined by the director.

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<sup>25</sup> Alejo Carpentier, ‘Con el creador de “El Acorazado Potemkin”’, in *Cine cubano*, no.9 (1969), pp. 92–95. The original letter is part of the Emilo Roig de Leuchsenring manuscript collection at the Archivo Histórico del Museo de la Ciudad de la Habana.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 92.

According to Carpentier, Eisenstein called this ‘intellectual cinema’; and *Oktiabr*’ represented his first experiment in that direction.

During this meeting, the Soviet film-maker spoke to Carpentier about his new projects. He referred to the cinematographic transposition of Karl Marx’s *Das Kapital* as an ‘intellectual film’. The film, in Carpentier’s words, sought to be ‘un análisis detenidísimo del texto fundamental, para establecer un equivalente en imágenes del método dialéctico’.<sup>27</sup> The film adaptation of Marx’s *Das Kapital*, not surprisingly, never materialised. When Eisenstein was asked about the possibility of using sound on his next film project, he replied that he considered it of great importance in Russia as an educational agent for the masses who could not read. In the 1920s the progress of cinematic technology made it possible to include the spoken word in films.<sup>28</sup>

In his conversation with Carpentier, Eisenstein also mentioned some new friends, such as Diego Rivera. In December 1930, Eisenstein, his cameraman Eduard Tisse and his assistant Grigorii Aleksandrov arrived in Mexico. Rivera and his wife Frida Kahlo were among Eisenstein’s hosts. Concerning these days, Inga Karetnikova has suggested that: ‘Eisenstein, however, was, for a while, in an exceptional position (...) but in 1927-28, the Party critics began their attack on his works, the film-maker left the Soviet Union for a working tour of West Europe and the Americas’.<sup>29</sup> The film-maker shared with many a

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 94.

<sup>28</sup> See ‘Sergei Eisenstein, Vsevolod Pudovkin and Grigori Alexandrov: Statement on Sound’, in *The Film Factory: Russian and Soviet Cinema in Documents 1896–1939*, pp. 234–35. On the silent era of Soviet cinema in general and the difficulties of sound as a technological innovation in Soviet cinema, see Philip Cavendish, *Soviet Mainstream Cinematography: The Silent Era* (London: University College London, 2010).

<sup>29</sup> Inga Karetnikova in collaboration with Leon Steinmetz, *Mexico According to Eisenstein* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1991), pp. 7-8.

deep interest in Mexico, a country that has always been attractive for artists and intellectuals from around the world. Books, essays and studies have been dedicated to analysing that relationship, and Mexico's significance for Eisenstein's works. Cinematic evidence of this is contained in the footage that today is recognised under the title *Que viva México!* Eisenstein's unfinished film about Mexico is certainly an innovative film, and one that is difficult to classify. Is it, for example, a documentary or a feature film? Is it a cinematic poem? One possible reading of the film, according to Eisenstein, seems to be close to what Carpentier defined as 'lo real-maravilloso': 'patrimonio de la América entera, donde todavía no se ha terminado de establecer, por ejemplo, un recuento de cosmogonías'.<sup>30</sup>

*Que Viva Mexico!*, one of an impressive number of 'foreign' productions dedicated to Mexico, was to have a lasting influence on the future development of its film industry. Emilio García Riera, in his book *México visto por el cine extranjero*, explains: 'la influencia Eisensteiniana pesaría tanto en el cine mexicano, y muy notablemente en el director Emilio Fernández y el fotógrafo Gabriel Figueroa, como en el extranjero referido a México.'<sup>31</sup> When Eisenstein was asked if his films had propagandistic intent, the film-maker responded that: 'esa cuestión no me interesa!' According to Carpentier, Eisenstein, who was not a member of the Communist Party, claimed that his role as an artist was to bring onto the big screen all the vitality and achievements of the Russian Revolution. A historical photographic testimony of that meeting was recorded by Man Ray, who was asked by Carpentier to take some pictures of the 'cineasta' in order to illustrate the first Cuban interview with the creator of *Bronenosets Potemkin* published in Havana. However, Carpentier was not the only Cuban who met the

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<sup>30</sup> Alejo Carpentier, *El reino de este mundo* (Madrid: Alianza editorial, 2002), p. 12.

<sup>31</sup> Emilio García Riera, *México visto por el cine extranjero* (México: Ediciones Era, 1987), p. 195.

Soviet film-maker. Another Cuban intellectual who met Eisenstein was José Manuel Valdés Rodríguez, the ‘father’ of Cuban film criticism.

### **José Manuel Valdés Rodríguez, ‘Father’ of Cuban Film Criticism and the Main Promoter of the Soviet-bloc Cinemas before 1961**

Valdés Rodríguez’s contribution to Cuban film criticism and his role in the dissemination and study of Soviet and Eastern European films was highly significant. Valdés Rodríguez founded the country’s first film club in 1928. In 1934, he visited Moscow and met Eisenstein, after which he published several articles in *La Palabra* and *Ahora* on his encounter with the Soviet film-maker.<sup>32</sup> Subsequently, Valdés Rodríguez became deeply interested in developing a course dedicated to film studies at Havana University. Under his leadership, a group of lecturers at the university introduced the study of cinema as an integral part of history in the academic curriculum. An essential point of reference and inspiration for Valdés Rodríguez’s academic course was the programme of film study developed by Eisenstein at the All Union State Institute of Cinematography in Moscow. The Cuban film critic stated that the foundation of the Escuela Libre de la Habana and the Academia de Artes Dramáticas: ‘nos permitió llevar a la práctica el proyecto madurado en esos años y plasmado en un plan de trabajo que impartía conocimientos esquemáticos del cine como arte y como fenómeno social’.<sup>33</sup> In 1939, the ADABEL project was created by this group of Cuban academics, and for the first time in Hispanic America a course was offered on the aesthetics and social meaning of cinema under the title: ‘El Cine: Industria y Arte de Nuestro Tiempo’. Thus, Havana University became the centre of aesthetic debate

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<sup>32</sup> See Douglas, *La tienda negra*, p. 51.

<sup>33</sup> Cited by Mirta Aguirre, ‘Cine en la Universidad’ in *Crónicas de cine*, vol. 1, edited by Olivia Miranda and Marcia Castillo (La Habana: Editorial Letras Cubanas, 1988), pp. 248-51 (p. 249).

in Cuba — in particular on film aesthetics. From 1948, Havana University had its own screening room and film archive, which were impressive achievements at that time for Latin America.

The first film acquired by the Cuban scholar was a copy of Eisenstein's *Aleksandr Nevskii* (1938). Manuel Valdés Rodríguez's book, *El cine en la Universidad de la Habana*, is a historical document that shows the great work developed between 1942 and 1965 towards the improved knowledge and understanding of cinema as an art, covering a diverse range of cinematic styles and with, for the period, the unusual inclusion of film production from the Soviet Union.<sup>34</sup> From that time on, the group of intellectuals around Valdés Rodríguez understood the importance of including film studies in higher education programmes, not only in order to improve the programmes of studies already in existence, but also to create and develop new disciplines. Among his students were Mario Rodríguez Alemán, Alfredo Guevara, Titón, Santiago Álvarez and García Espinosa, among many others.<sup>35</sup>

### **Fernando Ortiz, Transculturation, the Instituto de Intercambio Cultural Cubano-Soviético and its Journal *Cuba y la URSS***

Many studies dedicated to the analysis of the history of the Soviets in Latin America have been carried out by means of an analysis of the history of the communist parties in these countries. Doubtless, the role played by communists is an essential point of reference, but not the only one to be taken into consideration. An interesting testimony is offered in the

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<sup>34</sup> See José Manuel Váldes Rodríguez, *El cine en la Universidad de la Habana* (La Habana: Empresa de Publicaciones MINED, 1966), p. xvii. For the titles of the films, see *ibid.*, pp. vii–xii.

<sup>35</sup> In Calzada, *Conversaciones con un cineasta incómodo*, p. 27.

works of those intellectuals, like Fernando Ortiz, who were not members of the Communist Party, but who were attracted by, and became disseminators of, Soviet cultural initiatives.

The alliance of Roosevelt, Stalin and Churchill during the Second World War and the victory over Hitler's fascism marked a fertile period for developing cultural projects that disseminated the arts and audiovisual culture from the Soviet Union in Havana. Later, the appearance of the 'socialist camp' in Eastern Europe gave enough confidence to Cuban communists to continue their support of the Soviet project. Without doubt, one important chapter in the cultural links between Cuba and the Soviet Union was the publication of *Cuba y la URSS* (1945–52), the journal of the Instituto de Intercambio Cultural Cubano Soviético, which became an important disseminator of Soviet intellectual thought in the Hispanic world, and was created by key figures in Cuban intellectual life at that time.

In 1945, Fernando Ortiz became the president of the Instituto de Intercambio Cultural Cubano Soviético. Migdalia Pérez Cabrera's 'Un símbolo de amistad: la revista Cuba y la URSS' is an important essay which underlines the valuable work developed by the Instituto de Intercambio Cultural Cubano Soviético and its journal, strengthening the cultural bonds between Cuban and Soviet intellectuals and artists, and disseminating the most significant Soviet works in the field of science, culture and politics in Cuba.<sup>36</sup> Among the many activities of the Institute were the study of Russian as a foreign language, art exhibitions, and the screening of

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<sup>36</sup> On the history of the Institute and its journal, see Migdalia Pérez Cabrera, 'Un símbolo de amistad: la revista Cuba y la URSS', *Anuario Literatura y Lingüística* (La Habana), 303–05 (1976–77), pp. 7–8, & 241.



Soviet films. Pérez Cabrera also notes that the members of the society included, among others, José M. Valdés Rodríguez, Emilio Roig de Leuchsenring, and Nicolás Guillén.<sup>37</sup>

At the time, and it seems to remain the case to this day, many misunderstood or underplayed Fernando Ortiz's association with the communists. For Ortiz, the Institute and its journal were just another way to animate the necessary exchange between cultures, including the alien and distant culture of the Soviet Union. His conceptualisation of culture proved to be an alternative to the concept of society dominant in Marxist theory. While, according to Marxism, society is divided into classes and parties, each fighting for supremacy, for Ortiz culture has a unifying function because it has the potential to bring people together and transcend social, political, ethnic, national and ideological boundaries. Certainly, this was a distinctive approach in the history of the Soviet cultural offensive in the West. In an article entitled 'Más contacto de las culturas', which appeared in the first edition of the *Revista Cuba y la URSS*, Ortiz explained the reasons for the creation of the institute: '¡Venga a Cuba la afluencia de esa joven cultura con sus positivos valores de experiencia y de esperanzas! A la conciencia nacional cubana corresponde aceptarla o desoírla y en todo caso decidir por su propio juicio, premeditado y libre, sin ignorancias ya inexcusables ni presiones ajenas que, vengan de donde fuere, siempre son repulsivas.'<sup>38</sup> In analysing his statement, there are two main points to take into account: first, the description of Soviet culture as 'young' rather than 'new', as the communists would prefer to have called it. The Cuban anthropologist celebrated the youth of Soviet culture, and he understood that cultural change occurs as a continuous process. Second, as a humanist,

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., pp. 242-43.

<sup>38</sup> Fernando Ortiz, 'Más contacto de las culturas', *Revista Cuba y la URSS* (August 1945), Año 1, n. 1, p. 27.

Ortiz believed that the best knowledge of the arts and cultures in general is the ideal medium of civilisation and the only effective way to achieve freedom. Ortiz acknowledged this principle and the need to be in contact with the most varied cultural discourses in order not only to understand others but also to be understood by others. In this endeavour, Ortiz accepted that films played a key role, becoming a member of the first film club in Cuba. In order to understand how and why cinema became a major disseminator of Soviet ideals in Cuba, it is necessary to look at the work developed by the members of the first communist party in Cuba.

### **Socialist Realist Cinema and its Reception in Cuba**

In 1941 the Minister of Government in Cuba, through the National Censor Commission, issued a decree prohibiting Soviet films, particularly Socialist Realist films. The following explanation appeared in the tabloid *Exhibidor*: ‘Se ordena la suspensión de todas las películas de carácter comunista, tomando en consideración el reciente decreto que prohíbe toda propaganda de carácter totalitario’. Among the films prohibited were key representatives of Socialist Realist cinema such as Vasil'ev “brothers” *Chapaev* (1934) and Aleksandr Zarkhi and Iosif Kheifits’s *Deputat Baltiki* (Baltic Deputy, 1937).<sup>39</sup>

The first formulation of Socialist Realism was made by Andrei Zhdanov in August 1934 at the first All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers. It ‘demands of the artist a truthful, historically concrete representation of reality its revolutionary development’. Although his speech was aimed primarily at writers, it was also applicable to the other branches of the arts. In cinema, Socialist Realism helped to develop the cult of personality, show typical Soviet ideals, ordinary people in heroic roles, with idealism and optimism. According to

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<sup>39</sup> See *Excelsior*, 6 April 1941, p. 8. See also Douglas, *La tienda negra*, p. 84.

Kenez, we may divide Socialist Realist feature films into three categories: 'historical spectacles, revolutionary stories and contemporary dramas'.<sup>40</sup> Cuban responses to Socialist Realist cinema appeared in the late 1940s and Mirta Aguirre is a good example of this fact.

One field of study which offers rich potential for a more profound analysis is the work of a number of left-wing female cultural commentators. A number of enthusiastic supporters of Socialist Realist films and Soviet cinema in general were to be found among communist women in contemporary Cuba who participated in the dissemination of film art. One should bear in mind that from the early twentieth century, a women's movement had been developing in Cuba which was focussed primarily on legal reform. After women gained the right to vote in 1934, and the Constitution of 1940 recognised some feminist claims, the movement dissipated in some measure. Nonetheless, some women's organisations continued to be active. The communists organised La Federación Democrática de Mujeres, with Mirta Aguirre as its vice-president. In 1948, a delegation was sent to the II International Congress of the International Federation of Democratic Women, which took place in Hungary. The Cuban delegates were Edith García Buchaca, Nila Ortega and María Arguelles. For Cuban communist women organised feminism, as it existed in Russia before 1917 and elsewhere in Europe, only represented the personal needs of privileged, educated and wealthy women.

From the very beginning, pro-Soviet Cuban female activists focussed more on questioning the performance of the state and on the struggle for political rights.<sup>41</sup> Sexual liberation as it

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<sup>40</sup> See Peter Kenez, *Cinema and Soviet Society, 1917–1953* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 161. See also *An Anthology of the Classics of Socialist Realism*, edited by Nicholas Luker (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1988); *European Socialist Realism*, edited by Michael Scriven and Dennis Tate (New York: Berg Publishers Limited, 1988) and K. Andrea Rusnock, *Socialist Realist Painting During the Stalinist Era (1934–1941): The High Art of Mass Art* (Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen Press, 2010).

was understood in Western Europe was seen as a frivolous demand rather than a political statement. According to pro-Soviet women in Latin America, this was strictly a personal matter, as the life of Frida Kahlo and Tina Modotti demonstrated. For these women artists, whether at a political demonstration or art exhibition, their place was beside the man of her class and political belief, not necessarily beside the women of other classes. Many historical pictures expose this attitude. Feminism was understood as the 'woman question'. The gender question did not take the form of a separate suffragette movement, as occurred in the West. For the Soviets, western feminism was negative because it meant the separation of women from the historical role of the larger working class, in rejection of men and in recognition of bonds only among women.<sup>42</sup> We will see that Mirta Aguirre's film reviews assumed pretty much the same Soviet view.

*In Feminism and Film*, Ann Kaplan states that: 'Feminist perspectives on film developed in the context of the various women's liberation movements that emerged in the United States in the late 1960s and early 1970s'.<sup>43</sup> In effect, her comment renders invisible the work of Aguirre, who is mainly recognised in Latin American intellectual circles for her social poetry and literary work calling for the recognition of women's place, along with men, in the struggle for social, economic and political equality (an illustrative example of her work

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<sup>41</sup> See K. Lynn Stoner, *From the House to the Streets, the Cuban Woman's Movement for Legal Reform, 1898–1940* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991).

<sup>42</sup> At this point, one should mention Aleksandra Kollontai (1872–1952), who was one of the best-known Bolshevik leaders. Her writings are testimony to the Soviet initiatives and contradictions on the 'woman question', women's liberation and sexual freedom. Kollontai was also a Soviet ambassador to Mexico, where she developed strong links with Mexicans and other Latin American artists and intellectuals living in exile for their communist activities.

<sup>43</sup> Quoted in E. Ann Kaplan, *Feminism and Film* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 1.

in this dimension is her essay *Influencia de la mujer en Iberoamérica* (1947). As a journalist, Aguirre became a pioneer of film criticism written by women in the Americas.<sup>44</sup>

*Crónicas de cine* is a compilation of Aguirre's film reviews published between 1944 and 1961 in *Hoy*, the organ of the Partido Socialista Popular (PSP). Aguirre was in charge of the music, theatre and film sections of the newspaper. If we judge Aguirre by the standards of contemporary film criticism, then her work may well seem old-fashioned. After all, Aguirre was writing for a nascent Cuban film spectator at a time when cinema was still a 'new' medium and considered essentially a form of commercial entertainment. Her film reviews are clear testimonies to communist perceptions concerning the political and social functions of cinema as a film art, particularly regarding the image and work of women in this audiovisual medium; and everything was in keeping with Soviet perceptions on these topics. Aguirre did not specifically address the female reader on explicitly 'feminist' issues; the 'women question', in the context of cinema, was implicit within broader topics such as ethnic minorities, racial discrimination, old age and pacifism. The importance of her work rests on her eloquent appeal to young Cuban intellectuals on behalf of the cinema from 'the other' Europe at a time when taste was still mainly ruled by Hollywood and its commercial entertainment film production.<sup>45</sup>

Aguirre's reviews had a particular sense of humour. She was clearly not keen on some female actors, such as Dorothy Lamour, who, according to Aguirre, 'es siempre la misma, mala actriz y persona pesada' (7 January 1948); or Maria Félix, who always 'llora con un solo ojo' in the film

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<sup>44</sup> A key figure in this regard is Emma Pérez, a journalist and director of the magazine *Gente*, who was the first Cuban film critic to publish her own anthology of film reviews under the title 'Películas que no se olvidan'. See Alicia García, 'Cuba: el cine en libros y folletos', in *Coordenadas del cine cubano 2*, coordinator Mario Naito Lopez (Santiago de Cuba: Editorial Oriente, 2005), p. 213.

<sup>45</sup> Concerning studies by or about Mirta Aguirre, see Marcia Castillo Vega, *Bibliografía de Mirta Aguirre* (La Habana: Editorial de Letras Cubanas, 1988).

*Río Escondido* (10 September 1948).<sup>46</sup> Nevertheless, Aguirre's film reviews can be described as feminist because in them the search for fair and egalitarian gender relations in the cinematic field is implicit. Her language was direct, simple and humorous, introducing to Spanish America the perspective and interests of a female audience. Her film reviews are key documents of feminist work, in its Soviet variant; they were concerned with the analysis of images of women and female stereotypes. Mirta Aguirre promoted films based on literary works written by women and where women were the leading characters. This is the case with a review dedicated to an analysis of a film adaptation of Wanda Wasilewska's novel *Raduga* (The Rainbow, 1943). As a war correspondent, Wasilewska headed the Union of Polish Patriots, and her literary work about a Ukrainian village under German occupation won the Stalin Prize for 1943. Aguirre wrote on 18 May 1945 that in Mark Donskoi's *Raduga* (1944) the rich human characters of Wasilewska's novel are present: 'que precisa en sus espectadores una atención desnuda de prejuicios estéticos y de convencionalismos apreciadores. Postura que olvidan con frecuencia quienes acuden a ver las cintas soviéticas con los hábitos mentales y visuales creados por el cine norteamericano.'<sup>47</sup>

Aguirre not only attached the idea of progress to the Soviet cultural project, but also disseminated the idea that Hollywood epitomised the commercialism of cinema and that Soviet cinema was the ideal, progressive option for anyone interested in cinema as a genuine film art. Aguirre's distinction between Hollywood (the West) and Soviet cinema was codified through the proliferation of sanctioned negative stereotypes of Western culture. In particular, Western 'decadence', 'imperialism', aggression' and 'reaction' became fixed as

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<sup>46</sup> Mirta Aguirre. *Crónicas de cine*, vol. 1, pp. 190 and 273, respectively.

<sup>47</sup> Mirta Aguirre. *Crónicas de cine*, vol. 2, p. 109.

essential components of her film reviews. Aguirre's negative comments were mainly reserved for those films with an explicitly anti-communist rhetoric. Of Darryl F. Zanuck's *The Iron Curtain* (1948), for example, Aguirre wrote: 'y bueno es recordar a nuestro público que la cinta es mala como realización artística y deleznable como "paquete" antisoviético'.<sup>48</sup>

Aguirre defended every Soviet film production and highlighted the film's relevance to the politics of her party. In her review (7 June 1944) of Mark Donskoi's *Kak zakalialas' stal'* (How the Steel was Tempered, 1942), which brought to the screen a classic Socialist Realist novel by Nikolai Ostrovskii, Aguirre wrote: '*Así se forjó el acero* es, en primer lugar, una película preciosa para exaltar el sentimiento antifascista y para reafirmar nuestro respeto y nuestro afecto hacia el ejemplar pueblo soviético'.<sup>49</sup> In 26 August 1951, Aguirre wrote that in her film reviews: 'se tratará de que el puro rigor estético corra parejo con el análisis ideológico de la cuestión a tratar'.<sup>50</sup> Of Aleksandr Ptushko's *Kamennyi tsvetok* (Stone Flower, 1946), which was one of the first Soviet colour features, Aguirre wrote (21 July 1948): 'el cine socialista, por serlo, gusta de los temas épicos, epopéyicos, los que siempre han requerido aún en los metros poéticos, cierta imponente calma. Pero *Flor de piedra* es una leyenda, un cuento de hadas, un poema lírico, una estampa bucólica'.<sup>51</sup>

In relation to the Cuban response to Socialist Realism, there were also some cultural commentators who saw the Soviet influence in minimalist terms, Guillermo Cabrera Infante, for example, referred to 'the academicism, the silliness and the ordinariness of the

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<sup>48</sup> The review is dated 1 October 1948. See *ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 281. On this topic, see also by Aguirre, 'Hollywood y el entretenimiento cinematográfico', *Ayer de Hoy* (La Habana, Bolsilibros Unión, 1980), p. 129 (reprinted in *Cine Cubano*, no. 98, 1980).

<sup>49</sup> *Mirta Aguirre. Crónicas de cine*, vol. 1, p. 19.

<sup>50</sup> *Mirta Aguirre. Crónicas de cine*, vol. 2, p. 107.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 258.

cinema under the man who invented socialist realism: Josef Vissarionovich Djugashvilli, the supreme beacon or deacon of the Soviet cinema between 1929 and 1953. He at times used the more familiar alias of Stalin. Everyone knows what the Soviet cinema was transformed into under Stalin'. He continues: 'the Soviet cinema created — by deed and decree of Stalin — a sphinx without secrets which would devour all: *Chapaev*, the champion of socialist realism — that has the primitive freshness of a Western. If one reviews the history of the Soviet cinema, one will see that from 1932 to date [this review was written in 1959 - VMS) the themes have been steadily less militant, that the style has been increasingly less revolutionary and that the cinema has become little more than mere scholasticism. Is there anyone who has seen more than two or three movies who thinks, leaving aside the addicts and the adepts, that *Glinka*, that *The Fall of Berlin*, that *Sadko*, that *The Stone Flower* have something to do with cinema? I would extend this list as far as *Alexander Nevskii*, which seems to me a failed attempt at creating a hybrid: the film opera.'<sup>52</sup> Cabrera Infante's views were, as we shall see, though aesthetically sound, a little too dismissive of anything which did not mesh with his own political bias.

### **Cuban Marxist-Leninists and 'Nuestro Tiempo' (the Young Generation of Cuban Film-makers)**

One important fact to highlight is that before 1959, and during the bloodiest years of Cuba's dictatorships, thousands of pamphlets, books and manifestos were published and distributed. Conferences and workshops were organised by Cuban communists in order to disseminate information about the Soviet cultural experiment. In the book, *Cuba en el*

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<sup>52</sup> 'The Soviet cinema rides again (I): Potemkin versus Chapaev', in Guillermo Cabrera Infante, *A Twentieth Century Job* (London: Faber and Faber, 1991), p. 295.



*tránsito al socialismo 1959–1963*, Carlos Rafael Rodríguez has presented the numbers: Lenin’s political works, such as *El estado y la revolución*, were published in a print-run of 16,000 copies; *La religión* ran to 30,000 copies; and a book released under the title *La historia del Partido Comunista de la Unión Soviética* had a distribution of 30,000 copies. Pamphlets about Lenin, Rosa Luxemburg, Liebknecht, Mella, Martínez Villena and Baliño had runs of 50,000 copies each. According to Rodríguez in just one year the publication of political pamphlets ran to over two million copies. Hewlett Johnson’s book *El poder soviético* had 75,000 copies circulating in the country, and 75,000 copies of Blas Roca’s *Los fundamentos del socialismo en Cuba* were published in different editions.<sup>53</sup>

Another concrete example of the role played by Cuban Communists, members of the Partido Socialista Popular (PSP), within cultural institutions and organisations at the time, and in particular Aguirre’s work in the dissemination of Soviet cinema, was their sponsorship of the cultural society *Nuestro Tiempo* (Our Time) in 1950.<sup>54</sup> That experience established a very strong professional relationship between Aguirre and the young generation of amateur film-makers. Aguirre helped to save a copy of García Espinosa’s *El Mégano*, which later came to be considered one of the precedents of the New Latin American cinema movement. Espinosa was part of the film section of the society; other members were Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, Alfredo Guevara, Santiago Álvarez, Pepe Massip, Jorge Haydú and Jorge Herrera. Certainly, Mirta Aguirre was also an essential source of information and support for ‘amateur’ film-makers in Cuba. It is important to remember

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<sup>53</sup> See ‘El socialismo influye sobre la pequeña burguesía’, in Carlos Rafael Rodríguez, *Cuba en el tránsito al socialismo 1959–1963*, pp. 86–87.

<sup>54</sup> See Carlos Rafael Rodríguez, ‘Las instituciones culturales cubanas y la situación cubana’, in *Sociedad Cultural Nuestro Tiempo: Resistencia y acción*, edited by Ricardo Luis Hernández Otero (La Habana: Editorial Letras Cubanas, 2002), pp. 271–80.

that the communists commissioned their first films. Aguirre in effect brought an awareness of Soviet film to a whole generation of Cuban cineastes. Indeed, it could be argued that Aguirre's review (25 October 1944) of *The Film Sense* by Eisenstein was a reference from which Gutiérrez Alea and many others found out about the book's existence. Aguirre explained that: '*El sentido del cine*, libro que precisa una lectura meditada y profunda de los problemas artísticos que el cinematógrafo está planteando a quienes no lo cultivan como instrumento comercial sino como preciosa herramienta estética de la cultura contemporánea.'<sup>55</sup> A younger generation of Cuban amateur film-makers were inspired by Aguirre's example; ostracised by the small film companies or the local media unions of the day, they had to concentrate their efforts on independent filmmaking. One later product of this independent spirit was García Espinosa's *El Mégano*.<sup>56</sup>

In the study entitled *Sociedad cultural Nuestro Tiempo: Resistencia y acción*, Ricardo Luis Hernández Otero has argued that the work of this group of artists, writers and intellectuals was orientated 'desde las filas del Partido Socialista Popular — actuando casi siempre de modo clandestino — orientaban el rumbo de la sociedad'.<sup>57</sup> As part of the work developed by the Comisión Nacional para el Trabajo Intelectual of the PSP, of which Carlos Rafael Rodríguez, Juan Marinello and Mirta Aguirre were the main patrons, in order to disseminate Soviet cultural experiences the Party financially supported the cultural society and the works of its members.<sup>58</sup> They would one day become key names in the cinema of

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<sup>55</sup> Mirta Aguirre. *Crónicas de cine*, vol. 1, p. 55.

<sup>56</sup> For discussion of how *El Mégano* came into being, see Fowler Calzada, *Conversaciones con un cineasta incómodo*, pp. 41-43.

<sup>57</sup> *Sociedad cultural Nuestro Tiempo: Resistencia y acción*, p. 12.

<sup>58</sup> See Ricardo Luis Hernández Otero and Enrique Serpa, 'Proyecciones e iniciativas culturales de los comunistas cubanos (1936-58)', *TEMAS*, num. extraordinario, 22-23 (July-December 2000), pp. 88-100; Enrique Crespo, *Frutos Episodio de la Liga Juvenil Comunista y la hermandad de los jóvenes cubanos* (La

the Cuban Revolution. 'Nuestro Tiempo' worked under the slogan 'Traer el pueblo al arte' (Bring the people to art). They argued that art should be made accessible to everyone and not merely to an elite group.<sup>59</sup>

'Nuestro Tiempo' was, in effect, an important promoter of Soviet values, and one theme which emerged in the discussions among the membership was that Cuban film should not necessarily accept the Hollywood formula as the only viable solution for the future. In 1954, as a member of the film section of the society, for example, Gutiérrez Alea wrote an article under the title 'Realidades del cine en Cuba' which rejected national film productions such as Manuel Alonso's *Casta de robles* (Hearts of Oak, 1953) and Juan J. Ortega's *Hotel tropical* (Tropical Hotel, 1953). According to Gutiérrez Alea, this kind of film 'se adapta perfectamente a las viejas fórmulas, sin la menor intención de cooperar en la creación de una industria estable'.<sup>60</sup> As Gutiérrez Alea points out, in the 1950s there were no opportunities available to make films apart from commercial ones; Cuba did not have an established film industry as in Argentina and other Latin American countries. Film producers from the USA and Mexico came to film the same kind of stories about Cuba: rumba, mulatas and the world of casinos. These were the only attractive topics for film productions. Even though the circumstances were hostile to a professional career in cinema, Gutiérrez Alea and Néstor Almendros were determined to become film-makers. They shot their first film together, *Una confusión cotidiana* (An Everyday Confusion, 1950) in 8 mm, silent, based on a Franz Kafka's short story, which was a literary work suitable for a low-

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Habana: Editora Política, 1985); Carlos Rafael Rodríguez, 'Nuestro Tiempo', *Cine cubano*, no. 102 (no date), pp. 87–91. See also Mayra Cardoso and Tania Parson, 'Nuestro Tiempo en la cultura cubana', *TEMAS*, 1 (1983), p. 86.

<sup>59</sup> See 'Documentos de Nuestro Tiempo' in *Sociedad cultural Nuestro Tiempo: resistencia y acción*, edited by Hernández Otero, p. 19.

<sup>60</sup> See Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, 'Realidades del cine en Cuba', *ibid*, p. 122.

budget film adaptation. As amateur film-makers, they did not have access to sound equipment, yet the literary story lends itself naturally to the genre of a silent film. The story is based purely on a visual narrative, without dialogue, about two people who look for but never find each other. Professional actors Julio Matas and Vicente Revueltas played the main roles.

Gutiérrez Alea recalled that Kafka's story represented a real challenge, testing his ability to tell a story in motion pictures 'en el que se jugaba con el absurdo cotidiano'.<sup>61</sup> Gutiérrez Alea found in Kafka a main reference for his films: the absurd. This was a recurrent intention, a way to observe and portray everyday life in Cuba. As the poet Virgilio Piñera has pointed out: 'si Kafka hubiese nacido en Cuba, en vez de haber sido un escritor del absurdo habría sido un escritor costumbrista'.<sup>62</sup> For Kafka, according to Piñera, Cuba could have been a natural place for his writings of the absurd. For Néstor Almendros, the film adaptation of Kafka's story 'was a very good way of learning how to edit, since the film was made up of a series of entrances and exits from the frame, with parallel action (...) unfortunately the only copy has been lost'. Almendros explains that 'instead of telling simple stories about the life around us, the daily reality of a tropical island like Cuba, we were grasping at a distant, pale reflection of the artistic world of Europe. We were intellectually colonialised. Luckily, we eventually realised it was a fruitless struggle'.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Cited in Silvia Oroz, *Tomás Gutiérrez Alea: Los filmes que no filmé* (La Habana: UNEAC, 1989), p. 22. See also Ambrosio Fornet, *Gutiérrez Alea: Una retrospectiva crítica* (La Habana: Editorial Letras Cubanas, 1998), p. 17.

<sup>62</sup> Cited in José Antonio Évora, *Tomás Gutiérrez Alea* (Madrid: Cátedra: Filmoteca Española, 1996), p. 61.

<sup>63</sup> Almendros, *A Man with a Camera*, p. 29.

García Espinosa would appear to agree with Almendros' idea of telling stories about Cuban reality when he filmed *El Mégano* (1955). However, contrary to Almendros' contemplative attitude towards Cuban social reality at that time, Espinosa was more interested in portraying the unbearable social conditions of the Cuban rural environment. In this sense it had more in common with the 'social mission' of a Soviet than a Hollywood film. The Servicio de Inteligencia Militar of Batista's government confiscated the film at the time, as it was considered subversive. The film was defined by the Cuban as *cine urgente*, which was born from the urgent need to respond to the long and deep social injustice and inequality of our society through film, allowing the viewer to identify and understand the social reality of the carbon workers of Batabanó, and find ways to transform their environment.<sup>64</sup>

### **The Entry of 'los barbudos' in Havana**

On 8 January 1959, 'los barbudos' entered Havana. For many this signalled the demise of a corrupt political system; for film-makers in particular this was seen as a real possibility to develop a proper film industry. On 20 March 1959, the Cuban Institute of Cinematographic Art and Industry (ICAIC) was created. The first legislation of the Cuban Revolution concerning the arts was the promulgation of the Cinema Law, according to which cinema was to keep its condition as art, as well as contribute to the improvement of the human condition. For the cultural mentors of the Revolution, cinema was the most powerful and suggestive mass medium and an efficient tool for education.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> García Espinosa, *Un largo camino hacia la luz*, pp. 189–190.

<sup>65</sup> See Ley 169 (20 March 1959), published in the *Gaceta Oficial de la República de Cuba* on 24 March 1959 (no pagination).

The Sociedad Nuestro Tiempo provided the principal names for the ICAIC. From that moment there was a radical change in the way that the film industry was conceived. In terms of film production, ICAIC films between 1959 and 1961 are in correspondence with the nationalist political agenda of the time stated by the *Movimiento 26 de Julio*. If one understands that the main objective of the Cuban Revolution was to create a society free from the negative experiences of the past and at the same time disseminate the ideas of a revolution through the Third World, education had to be their first cultural project and cinema its preferred medium. Certainly, Soviet and Cuban political leaders, along with their cultural mentors and film-makers, shared the idea of ‘remaking the nation’. In order to achieve this, the cinematic discourse of the Cuban Revolution had to be different from that of previous years.<sup>66</sup> There was a great diversity of views on the proper content — and form — of the moving image and the cinematic discourse of the Revolution. The main ideological counterpoint was between the old and the new, pro and against the socialist option. In that context, the filmic experience of the countries of the former Soviet-bloc was an indispensable reference point for the mentors of the ICAIC.

By 1960, while the Cuba-US relationship was deteriorating, Cuban-USSR economic, political and artistic exchanges were increasing. On 12 December 1960, the first ‘Semana de Cine Soviético’ was presented in ‘La Rampa’ cinema. From that time onwards, every year in Havana there were film retrospectives from the countries of the Soviet-bloc; before each screening a representative of the cultural delegation or embassy responsible for providing the reels gave a short introduction, in their native tongue, to the background to the films. These introductions helped viewers to place the films they were about to see within their relevant contexts. Most of

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<sup>66</sup> See Alfredo Guevara, ‘Realidades y perspectivas de un nuevo cine’, *Cine cubano*, no.1 (1960), p. 3.

the films shown to Cuban audiences are now seen as masterpieces of Soviet and Eastern European cinemas. Any screening of the films became a unique cultural event of growing significance largely because of their pioneering status for a western audience. From then on every year, on festive national dates, at least seven days were set aside for representatives of the film industries of the socialist countries of Eastern Europe to screen their films, to give talks and exhibit film posters around Cuba. The film production of the countries of the Soviet-bloc became the most wide-ranging and systematically available to the Cuban viewer, and the available statistics provide further evidence of this unique film experience in the western hemisphere.<sup>67</sup> During the days of celebration of Soviet-bloc cinemas, a compilation of films representative of the silent era, so-called Socialist Realism and the Thaw were exhibited in Havana. However, this does not mean that the Cubans sought integration solely with the film industry of the Soviet-bloc.

As a result of the international interest in the Cuban Revolution, many artists, writers and film-makers from the most controversial centres of artistic debate in the world — from Paris to Mexico and Prague — arrived in Havana, thereby participating in the shaping of the cinematic discourse of the Cuban Revolution. It captured the attention of intellectuals, artists and film-makers from all over the world. Gerard Philippe, George Sadoul, Pablo Neruda, Simone de Beauvoir, Jean-Paul Sartre, Cesar Zavattini, Joris Ivens, Chris Marker, Agnès Varda, Jean-Luc Godard, Mario Gallo, Roman Karmen, Jerzy Kawalerowicz, Tony Richardson, Vanessa Redgrave, among many others, arrived in Havana to witness, participate in and film those historical days as the Cubans sought to establish a film industry. It became

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<sup>67</sup> See the statistics in Douglas, *La tienda negra*; pp. 318–23.

clear that this period was formative for the aesthetic and cultural policy of the Cuban Revolution.

For Alfredo Guevara, the president of the ICAIC: ‘el hecho más importante de este período lo constituye sin duda el encuentro de nuestro público con las cinematografías socialistas. La mitad del mundo, y la más avanzada, permanecía oculta a nuestro pueblo y su cultura nos era desconocida. En estos dos años se han estrenado y presentado en toda la isla las principales obras cinematográficas de la Unión Soviética y Checoslovaquia, la República Democrática Alemana y Polonia, de Bulgaria, la República Popular China, Rumanía y Hungría’.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Alfredo Guevara, ‘Informe y saludo ante el Primer Congreso Nacional de Cultura’, *Cine cubano*, no.3.9 (1963), pp. 1–8 (p. 5).



## Chapter II

### The 1960s

#### The Emergence of the Socialist Cinema of the Cuban Revolution (Committed Films: Socialist in Content and National in Form)

##### Revolutionary Art or Art for the Revolution (the State)?

The relationship between the state and the intellectual has always been a complex topic. According to Pogolotti: 'los escritores y artistas cubanos procedían, en el momento inaugural de la Revolución, de diversas familias estéticas e ideológicas, constituidas como reductos de resistencia ante una sociedad hostil'.<sup>1</sup> Different cultural groups were at work during those first years of the Revolution, which, it could be claimed, were not only behind the most creative period, but also the beginning of the 'generational polemic'. In the context of the aesthetic debate around the Cuban moving image, those groups fought for control of the cultural policy of the Revolution.

An important early group was organised around the newspaper *Revolución* and its literary supplement *Lunes de Revolución* (taking in the Cabrera Infante brothers, Pablo Armando Fernández and Néstor Almendros, among others), which was edited by Carlos Franqui, who questioned the approach of previous generations in the form of the Catholic group *Orígenes*, which included José Lezama Lima and Virgilio Piñera. Guillermo Cabrera Infante, who was in charge of the aforementioned supplement, explained in his book *Mea Cuba* that: 'mi primer error como director de "Lunes" fue intentar limpiar los establos de

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<sup>1</sup> See Graziella Pogolotti, *Polémicas culturales de los 60* (La Habana: Editorial Letras Cubanas, 2006), p. viii.

auge literario cubano, recurriendo a la escoba política para asear la casa de las letras; esto se llama también inquisición y puede ocasionar que muchos escritores se paralicen por el terror'.<sup>2</sup> At that time, *Lunes* was the literary voice of the Revolution itself; it could count on the support of the government and on the Movimiento 26 de Julio, which became 'un huracán que literalmente arrasó con muchos escritores enraizados y los arrojó al olvido'.<sup>3</sup> This was Cabrera Infante's first mistake: to create 'the Inquisition of Cuban literature' in the first years, with this subsequently becoming cultural policy. Caín, as Cabrera Infante was well known at that time, explained that:

Teníamos el credo surrealista por catecismo y en cuanta estética, el trotskismo, mezclados, con malas metáforas o como cóctel embriagador. Desde esta posición de fuerza máxima nos dedicamos a la tarea de aniquilar a respetados escritores del pasado. Como Lezama Lima, tal vez porque tuvo la audacia de combinar en sus poemas las ideologías anacrónicas de Góngora y Mallarmé, articuladas en La Habana de entonces para producir violentos versos de un catolicismo magnífico y oscuro — y reaccionario. Pero lo que hicimos en realidad fue tratar de asesinar la reputación de Lezama.<sup>4</sup>

One of the main questions facing the emergent intellectuals and artists in Cuba was whether they should think in terms of revolutionary art or art for the Revolution, that is, the state. Were artists and intellectuals subordinate to the interests of the Revolution (the state), or,

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<sup>2</sup> See Guillermo Cabrera Infante, *Mea Cuba* (Madrid: Alfaguara, 1999), p. 93. For a study of this literary supplement, see William Luis, *Lunes de Revolución: Literatura y cultura en los primeros años de la Revolución Cubana* (Madrid: Editorial Verbum, 2003).

<sup>3</sup> Cabrera Infante, *Mea Cuba*, p. 93.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 93–94.

conversely, did the Revolution serve the interests of intellectuals? The answer to this question emerged as a yes to both ideas. They needed each other. ICAIC's film-makers were not 'at the service' of the Revolution; they 'belonged' to it, acquiring their true ideological definition. In this way, opposition did not necessarily mean hostility. They believed that they had found the path to play an active role in society. However, they were not *rebels* anymore. They wanted to be considered *revolutionaries*. José Antonio Portuondo argued in his study *Orden del día* of the cultural policy of the Revolution that:

El rebelde es, por lo general, un tipo individualista que se proyecta contra esto y aquello, un francotirador que no se apoya en una firme concepción del mundo y, sobre todo, que no responde a un movimiento de masas. En tanto que el revolucionario, sí se inserta en las clases revolucionarias organizadas, parte de una firme concepción del mundo, absolutamente científica, y se encamina hacia la transformación radical de todo un sistema de vida, el contraste es bastante grande.<sup>5</sup>

### **The Great Debate on the Short Film *P.M.*: The Rebels versus the Revolutionaries**

A crucial debate took place in Havana in May 1961, when the mentors of the nascent film industry prohibited the distribution to cinemas of *P.M.*, a 15-minute documentary produced by Saba Cabrera Infante (the brother of novelist Guillermo) and Orlando Jiménez Leal (a cameraman who had worked for the newsreel production company Cineperiódico). Saba and Orlando were part of a group affiliated to the cultural magazine *Lunes de Revolución*.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> José Antonio Portuondo, *Orden del día* (La Habana: Ediciones Unión, 1979), p. 139.

<sup>6</sup> For reproductions of official documents about the '*P.M.* Affair', see Luis, *Lunes de Revolución*, pp. 221-225. See also García Borrego's *Cine cubano de los sesenta: Mito y realidad* (Madrid: Ocho y Medio, 2007), pp. 68-80.

They produced *P.M.* for the magazine's weekly television program *LUNES de TV*. The film was aired and received a favourable review from Néstor Almendros, who was at the time a critic for the influential mass-circulation weekly *Bohemia* and also a member of Franqui's *Lunes* group. However, when the film-makers applied to the ICAIC for a theatrical exhibition license for the film, it was denied.

The official document released by 'La comisión de Estudio y Clasificación de Películas del ICAIC' explained the reasons for the prohibition of *P.M.*, stating that the film was 'técnicamente dotada de valores dignos de consideración, ofrecía una pintura parcial de la vida nocturna habanera que, lejos de dar al espectador una correcta visión de la existencia del pueblo cubano en esta etapa revolucionaria, la empobrecía, desfiguraba y desvirtuaba'.<sup>7</sup> From the statement, it is clear that the political content of the film was the most significant criterion to be taken into consideration in the decision to ban the exhibition of the film. Also implicit were the aesthetic differences between the two antagonistic forces behind the debate: on one side were Alfredo Guevara and the ICAIC, and on the other were the directors of *P.M.*, Néstor Almendros and the *Lunes* group. In order to understand the profound significance of this short film in the history of the Cuban moving image and intellectual life on the island, the analysis needs to consider both the political and the cinematic contexts.

### ***P.M.*: The Political Context**

The film *P.M.* was not about the 'new' ideological character of the Revolution. Instead, it was dedicated to Havana's night-life, full of drunks and lazy people, not at all in keeping

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<sup>7</sup> Cited in Luis, *Lunes de Revolución*, p. 224.

with the socialist and revolutionary image that it was considered necessary to disseminate. *P.M.* purported to show ‘sólo negros bailando’ and was certainly thought to be out of step with the political moment.<sup>8</sup> At the time, with the ICAIC having organised a private showing of the film in the Casa de las Américas, the debate between the ICAIC and the group that revolved around *Lunes de Revolución* was extremely tense. No agreement was reached. *HOY*, the communist organ, published an article claiming that at the meeting it had been unanimously agreed to prohibit the film. This brought an energetic reaction from the *Lunes* group. Fidel Castro called for a meeting of intellectuals and artists in the Biblioteca Nacional José Martí. The debate raged on for three Fridays. The outcome of these meetings was a resolution in support of the ICAIC’s decision, and *el Comandante* gave his famous speech, *Palabras a los intelectuales* (Words to the Intellectuals) on 30 June 1961. This speech included the phrase ‘Dentro de la Revolución todo; contra la revolución, nada’ (Within the Revolution, everything, against the Revolution nothing).

*Palabras a los intelectuales* was the official recognition of the new status of the Cuban Revolution as a ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’, which meant that the action of opposing or of being in conflict with the government was considered to be the action of the enemy, representing US imperial interests. According to José Antonio Portuondo, *Palabras a los intelectuales* was the first formulation of the cultural policy of the Cuban Revolution, the acknowledgment of new regulations regarding freedom of the press, freedom of speech and freedom of association, all matters of deep concern in connection with the issue of dictatorship. Thus, the cultural policy became socialist in content and national in form, and it fused Cuban

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<sup>8</sup> Armando Hart, at that time Minister of Education, is alleged to have used the expression: ‘sólo negros bailando’. See Cabrera Infante, *Mea Cuba*, p. 75.

national identity with Marxist-Leninist ideological postulates, which meant that everything in regard to cultural policy would be overseen by the Communist Party.<sup>9</sup> The cultural mentors mobilised all forms of the arts for the creation of images in correspondence with the new ideological status of the Revolution: a fusion of Cuban nationalism and Marxism-Leninism, or to put it in Fidel Castro's own words: 'creo que mi contribución a la Revolución Cubana consiste en haber realizado una síntesis de las ideas de Martí y del marxismo-leninismo, y haberla aplicado consecuentemenete a nuestra lucha'.<sup>10</sup>

According to Alfredo Guevara, the banning of *P.M.* was a difficult decision that came about in the context of dangerous political conditions. For the first president of the ICAIC, this short film did not deserve all the attention that it received at that time. For him, *P.M.* reflected the political beliefs of those working for the newspaper *Lunes de Revolución* who were against the socialist option, which included Carlos Franqui and Guillermo Cabrera Infante. As a result of that association the publication was merged with another. Key members of *Lunes* were left with no future among the elite of the cultural project. Feeling excluded, they emigrated. The film was not archived by the ICAIC; instead the film-makers left the country with a copy of the film.<sup>11</sup> Almendros, Franqui, Guillermo Cabrera Infante, his brother Saba and Orlando Jiménez Leal all 'fled' the Cuban Revolution and became leading voices among its enemies abroad. In cinematic terms, Almendros, Jiménez Leal and

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<sup>9</sup> Portuondo, *Orden del día*, pp.139–43. 'Palabras a los intelectuales' was first published in *La Gaceta de Cuba* 'Siglo pasado: 1961' (July–August 4, 2001), pp. 47–56. The former Minister of Culture, Armando Hart, has pointed out that the main documents on the cultural policy of the Revolution are: Fidel's addresses to intellectuals in 1961, the main conclusions of the Congress of Education in 1971, the chapter dedicated to culture in the Socialist Constitution of 1976, and the Theses and Resolutions of the 1975 and 1991 Party Congresses. This is cited in Luis Báez, *Changing the Rules of the Game* (La Habana: Letras Cubanas, 1983), p. 8.

<sup>10</sup> *Fidel y la religión: conversaciones con Frei Betto* (La Habana: Oficina de Publicaciones del Consejo de Estado, 1985), pp. 163-164.

<sup>11</sup> Alfredo Guevara, *Revolución es lucidez* (La Habana: Ediciones ICAIC, 1998), pp. 88–90.

the Cabrera Infante brothers developed a counter-cinema to the Cuban Revolution.<sup>12</sup> For Jiménez Leal: ‘después de 47 años, creo que *P.M.* es como un baile de fantasmas: tiene una atmósfera onírica, el aire de otros tiempos, es una fiesta sin luces’.<sup>13</sup>

### ***P.M.*: The Cinematic Context**

The title of *P.M.* means Post Meridian because it explores the nightlife in the bars and cafes around the Havana waterfront. It was filmed with an old 16mm camera and lasts only fifteen minutes, with no apparent storyline. At the end of the film Vicentico Valdés sings his famous ‘Una canción por la mañana’ (A song in the morning). Somehow this audiovisual sequence achieves a real feeling of nostalgia and solitude. According to Jiménez Leal: ‘*PM* es un poema a la noche, el submundo de *P.M.* era curiosamente elegante; estamos hablando de esa otra Habana, secreta y ligeramente acanallada, paralela a La Habana luminosa y de leyenda que todos conocen. Ese mundo de personajes de los muelles, de lumpen con sombreros, trajes y corbatas, representa también el final de una época’.<sup>14</sup>

In *P.M.*, as in Almendros’s documentary *58-59* and Robert Dreand’s and Al Maysles’ film *Primary*, through the use of mobile cameras and lighter sound equipment, the film-makers were able to follow the people as they found their way through crowds. This resulted in a greater intimacy than was possible with the older, more classical techniques of documentary

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<sup>12</sup> Films such as *El Súper* (1979), *8-A/Ochoa* (1992), *Conducta impropia — Mauvaise conduite* (Improper Conduct, 1984), and *Nadie escuchaba* (Nobody Listened, 1984) among others, were directed or inspired by them. See Ana M. López, ‘Cuban cinema in exile: The “other” island’, *Jump Cut*, 38 (June 1993), pp. 51–59.

<sup>13</sup> See <http://www.cubaencuentro.com/revista/revista-encuentro/archivo/50-otono-2008/entrevista-a-orlando-jimenez-leal-127024> [accessed on 1 May 2010].

<sup>14</sup> Cited in Manuel Zayas, ‘Entrevista a Orlando Jiménez Leal’, available on the *Revista Encuentro de la Cultura Cubana* website <http://www.cubaencuentro.com/revista/revista-encuentro/archivo/50-otono-2008/entrevista-a-orlando-jimenez-leal-127024>. The ‘*PM* affair’ is a compulsory reference in every single study, article, or review on Cuban cinema. On its creators, see Cabrera Infante, *Mea Cuba*, pp. 68–73 and Luis, *Lunes de Revolución*.

filmmaking, and it established what has since become the standard style of video reporting. At that time, what was not so obvious was which cinematic style would be most suited to define the cinematic discourse of the Cuban Revolution. Italian Neo-realism, British or French New Wave cinemas were all attractive options for Cuban film-makers. Although they had roots in Soviet expressive realism, they were decidedly national in focus, taking as their subject day-to-day reality. These European styles of cinematography, like Soviet cinema before them, sought to achieve a documentary-like objectivity by using non-actors in leading roles.<sup>15</sup>

The *P.M.* affair shows the options proposed by the two leading groups: free cinema (represented by Almendros and the *Lunes* group) and a sort of socialist Neorealism that was supported by Alfredo Guevara and the ICAIC. It is now clear that both of these two cinematic styles were associated with progressive ideas, a humanist commitment, and a sense of artistic responsibility. They also both advocated realism and encouraged a kind of filmmaking ‘free’ of commercial pressure. Thus, in economic terms, it can be argued that both film styles were the right choices for a nascent film industry located in a poor country. One should remember that Cuban film-makers were making the films that it was possible for them to make, and that their experimental ‘philosophical’ approach was a direct result of a dire lack of funding. However, it should be underlined that there were differences between the two cinematic styles; they exhibited some key differences with regard to the way film art was perceived.

A way of understanding the debate over aesthetics and film style between Almendros and Gutiérrez Alea is to refer to the cinematic counterpoint: ‘Vertov Versus Eisenstein’, ‘*Kino-*

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<sup>15</sup> See FIAF, *The Influence of Silent Soviet Cinema on World Cinema: Symposium, Varna, 29/5–2/6 1977*.



*Eye versus Strike*'. While Vertov considered Eisenstein's film *Strike* 'to be an attempt to graft certain methods of construction from Kino-Pravda and Kino-Eye onto feature filmmaking', Eisenstein believed that Kino-Eye was also a symbol of contemplation. He claims: 'but we need not contemplation, but action'.<sup>16</sup> At that time, Almendros and Titón also had a similar professional relationship. Like the Soviet film-makers, they started to develop their art in different film genres, one in documentary filmmaking, and the other in fiction films. The so-called free cinema, which was greatly influenced by Dziga Vertov's ideas, sought a new approach to filmmaking; it prioritised the production of documentaries over feature films.<sup>17</sup> Such films claimed to be 'free' in the sense that they appeared to offer an entirely personal, poetic and honest response to, and reflection on, contemporary life. In this sense, *P.M.* was a free cinema production, completely independent from the ICAIC. On the other hand, Titón and the ICAIC were more interested at the time in a sort of socialist Neorealism, a more socially committed cinema and not just 'cine espontáneo', namely a contemplative cinema. Gutiérrez Alea himself was a great opponent of the 'free cinema' style as an option for the cinematic discourse of the Cuban Revolution. In his very critical article 'El free cinema y la objetividad', he argued against accepting free cinema as the model for the cinematic discourse of the Cuban Revolution because of its 'passive' approach to reality. Gutiérrez Alea explains that free cinema 'se limita a reproducirla y a ofrecerla al juicio de los espectadores. Puede ser que algún artista se crea liberado por el free cinema de la responsabilidad de mostrar su posición frente a la realidad, frente a la

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<sup>16</sup> See 'Vertov versus Eisenstein', in *Lines of Resistance: Dziga Vertov and the Twenties*, edited by Yuri Tsivian (Gemonia, Udine: Le Giornate del cinema muto, 2004), pp. 125-56, (pp. 125&128).

<sup>17</sup> Vertov's work also paved the way for 'cinéma vérité', or 'cinema of truth', as a style of filmmaking, and nowhere is this more evident than in his experimental film *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929), which is considered by many to represent a breakthrough in documentary film style, a film with no plot and no actors, including extreme close ups and tracking shots. On Vertov and Kino-Eye, see Hicks, *Dziga Vertov: Defining Documentary Film*, pp. 22-38.

vida. Pero si analizamos someramente el mecanismo de realización de estas películas comprobamos que se trata de un sofisma más, si no de una gran hipocresía'.<sup>18</sup>

Master cinematographer Néstor Almendros paid tribute to Vertov by using the same title for his autobiography.<sup>19</sup> On the other hand, the ICAIC paid numerous tributes to Eisenstein in special numbers entirely dedicated to him and Soviet cinema in its journal *Cine cubano*. A Cuban edition of Eisenstein's filmic writings was published under the title *El sentido del cine* in 1967.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, Eisenstein's and Vertov's works were essential components in the cinematic conceptualisation of the Cuban Revolution, since their impact was particularly evident in Gutiérrez Alea's work for ICAIC.

Tomás Gutiérrez Alea's study *Dialéctica del espectador* is an extension of García Espinosa's *Por un cine imperfecto* and also an interpretation of Eisenstein's film theory, most specifically the essay 'Word and Image' in *The Film Sense*. The comparison offers an interesting example of how inappropriate the conception of the 'new' is in cultural matters. The most conclusive evidence of Gutiérrez Alea's positive perception of Eisenstein was given by the Gutiérrez Alea himself when he affirmed that:

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<sup>18</sup> See Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, 'El free cinema y la objetividad', first published in *Cine Cubano*, no. 1.4 (1961), pp. 35–39.

<sup>19</sup> From 1965 to 1967, Néstor Almendros was in France working with Klein, Godard and Rohmer; along with Chris Marker, Claude Chabrol, Barbet Schroeder and Jean Rouch, they had all worked collectively on film projects until Almendros went to work in Hollywood. See Almendros, *A Man with a Camera*. For an overview of Vertov's seminal work, see Graham Roberts, *The Man with the Movie Camera* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2000).

<sup>20</sup> Sergei Eisenstein's *El sentido del cine* (La Habana: Ediciones ICAIC, 1967). See also Pastor Pastor Vega, 'Eisenstein: el sentido del cine', *Cine Cubano*, no. 89/90 (1974), pp. 39-44.

Eisenstein fue no solamente un gran artista, sino también un revolucionario, y tanto en sus películas como en sus escritos se preocupó por comunicar inquietudes, por excitar la sensibilidad del espectador y activar su intelecto, de manera que no pudiera permanecer pasivo, complacido, drogado, sino activo, inquieto, lúcido y armado con una visión más profunda de la realidad en la que debe luchar. Ese es para mí el ideal de todo arte verdaderamente revolucionario, y donde primero tuve conciencia de ello fue en la obra ejemplar de Eisenstein y en las mejores realizaciones del cine soviético. Sin duda todo lo que he hecho después en el cine está marcado por esa primera toma de conciencia.<sup>21</sup>

Certainly, not only Titón but also many Cuban film critics and film-makers found in Eisenstein's *The Film Sense* a referential work in order to conceptualise many different matters: from the role of the artist to the subject of spectatorship, film art and its functions in society. As part of the programme of celebrations in Cuba for the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the October Revolution, Cuban filmmakers lauded the Soviets for their help and the ICAIC also rectified its 'poor treatment' of Vertov with the production of a collective documentary work dedicated to him under the title *La sexta parte del mundo* (1977).<sup>22</sup> This film will be analysed in the following chapter.

The analysis of *P.M.* has demonstrated that the ICAIC was created in order to develop a socialist cinematic discourse for the Revolution, and thereby shape its socialist moving

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<sup>21</sup> *Gutiérrez Alea: Una retrospectiva crítica*, pp. 309-10.

<sup>22</sup> It is important to mention that it was not only Cuban film specialists but also ordinary citizens who were able to be in contact with Soviet bloc cinema through the commercialisation and distribution in libraries and 'Casas de la Cultura (Houses of Culture)' of Spanish translations of Soviet-bloc books on cinema and film magazines. Also, the ICAIC published in 1967 its own edition of Eisenstein's book cited above and Kuleshov *Tratado de la realización cinematográfica* (La Habana: Ediciones ICAIC, 1964).

image. The ‘*P.M.* affair’ also revealed how political and administrative decision-making, censorship and purges were shaped by the new cultural mentors of the Revolution. It can be argued that every effort had to be addressed to the political aim of gaining the economic and military support of the USSR — this implied the inclusion of the Cuban Revolution within the Soviet ‘socialist commonwealth’.

### **Aftermath of the ‘*P.M.* Affair’: Cultural Polemics ‘within the Revolution’**

A highly significant study of cultural polemics in Cuba is Graziella Pogolotti’s *Polémicas culturales de los 60*. Pogolotti’s anthology provides a comprehensive documentary history of the intellectual life of the period, with material drawn from Party declarations, minutes of meetings, journal articles, and newspapers. It reveals the names of the main players and the key cultural concerns at that juncture among those intellectuals and artists who were working ‘within the Revolution’ at that time. For the purpose of the present study, this compilation is particularly useful because it provides selective evidence of five key debates that are essential in interpreting the formative years of the cultural policy of the Cuban Revolution. Pogolotti’s *Polémicas* also demonstrates the central role played by film-makers and by the moving image in those debates. It confirms that all those cultural polemics, around the role of the artist and that of art in a revolutionary process and in society as a whole, the formation of the narrative of the Revolution and the danger of dogmatism for the arts, taking into account the experience of Socialist Realism, were initiated by the experience of the audiovisual culture of the USSR.<sup>23</sup> It quickly became apparent that it was not an easy task to reflect on the concept of socialist culture in a country that was struggling

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<sup>23</sup> Pogolotti, *Polémicas culturales de los 60*.

with underdevelopment. Given the enormous changes that were taking place in Cuban society and the power structures at the time, it was not possible to avoid discussion of Socialist Realism, which was rejected by most of the younger generation of intellectuals, film-makers and artists. Only the orthodox Marxists praised Socialist Realism and attempted to impose it on Cuban artists. For example, for Mirta Aguirre, Socialist Realism was 'the best type of artwork if the goal of art is to transform individuals and society.'<sup>24</sup>

One very important declaration against Socialist Realism was written by Che Guevara in a letter to Carlos Quijano, director of the Uruguayan weekly publication, *Marcha*, entitled 'El socialismo y el hombre en Cuba' (Socialism and Man in Cuba).<sup>25</sup> It is, perhaps, Guevara's best known piece of writing. Drawing upon his own experience in Cuba, Guevara explained why the revolutionary transformation necessarily involves the transformation of the working people organising and leading that process. However, Che Guevara goes on to ask: 'pero, ¿por qué pretender buscar en las formas congeladas del realismo socialista la única receta válida? However, he affirmed that: 'no se puede oponer al realismo socialista "la libertad", porque ésta no existe todavía, no existirá hasta el completo desarrollo de la sociedad nueva'.<sup>26</sup> Che Guevara's letter is of the utmost importance, particularly in order to understand the aims and goals of the Cuban Revolution as seen by one of the main actors in that process. The thesis presented is intended to provoke debate and, at the same time, to give a new perspective on some of the foundations of socialist thought in the Americas.

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<sup>24</sup> Cited in Amaya, *Screening Cuba*, p. 45.

<sup>25</sup> This article was written in the form of a letter. On 12 March 1965, it was published for the first time in *Marcha*, a weekly journal (Montevideo, Uruguay).

<sup>26</sup> See Ernesto Che Guevara, *El socialismo y el hombre en Cuba* (La Habana: Editora Política, 1988), p. 21

According to Cuban literary critic José Antonio Portuondo, this historical document defines the aesthetic of the Cuban Revolution in search of the ‘new man’.<sup>27</sup>

Another significant piece of evidence of the period is *Titón, Tomás Gutiérrez-Gutiérrez Alea: Volver sobre mis pasos* (2008), a compilation of the film-maker’s correspondence edited by his widow Mirta Ibarra. Thanks to this publication we now know Titón’s aesthetic views on the film *P.M.* and his personal position in relation to the ICAIC’s official document regarding the prohibition of this short film. One letter dated 3 June 1961, for example, records how he decided to resign from his position as an advisor to the ICAIC, explaining that: ‘opino que los compañeros de la Directiva debieron haber contado conmigo a la hora de redactar el comunicado y de trazar la política que iba a seguir el ICAIC oficialmente’.<sup>28</sup> Although Titón was one of the individuals who saw the film, who was part of the Directive and who was particularly interested in the issues that the film raised, Titón was excluded from the final decision-making process regarding *P.M.* It is an interesting letter, and certainly a historical document that poses different questions, but what is surprising about this letter? What have we learned from this document that we did not know before? Certainly, previous studies and articles have offered a compelling interpretation of the *P.M.* event, but there is always more to learn. This letter tell us something about the time and place in which it was produced, and, conversely, that time and place can help us understand the document. Why was this letter is only published now and not before?

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<sup>27</sup> Portuondo, *Orden del día*, p. 148.

<sup>28</sup> *Titón, Tomás Gutiérrez-Gutiérrez Alea*, p. 59.

We should remember that it was the time of The Bay of Pigs Invasion (known as Playa Girón in Cuba), the unsuccessful attempt by a CIA-trained force of Cuban exiles to overthrow the socialist project. For those, who were ‘within the Revolution’, a public expression of disagreement and discontent was a very sensitive matter. In this sense, the letter is proof that there clearly were strong differences of opinion regarding decision-making within the ICAIC, and it also provides evidence of Titón’s position as a film-maker committed to the Revolution. Thanks to the publication of Titón’s letters, we are now aware of his main concerns regarding the balance of power within the ICAIC and the decisions taken as an immediate result of the ‘*P.M.* affair’. In his correspondence, Gutiérrez Alea also mentions the lack of technicians within the ICAIC, the lack of confidence in the new staff, and thus the excessive supervision of everyone’s work: from directors to scriptwriters and technical workers. He refers to: ‘centralización excesiva en manos de una sola persona de todos los problemas relativos al cine en nuestro país’.<sup>29</sup>

After reading an article about Polish cinema, Titón suggested that such problems might be avoided should ICAIC’s cultural mentors look to the Polish model of film production as ‘una experiencia interesante’ to take into consideration:

El resultado en el campo de la producción cinematográfica, fue una nueva política dirigida a estimular y ayudar la labor de pequeños grupos que actuaban con entera libertad en cuanto se refiere a la labor creativa. A partir de ese momento, el cine polaco empezó a tener importancia mundial. No sólo se produjeron muchas más películas, sino que algunas de estas alcanzaron la

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<sup>29</sup> See Titón’s memorandum addressed to Alfredo Guevara (dated 25 May 1961), *ibid.*, p. 71.

categoría de verdaderas obras de arte y fueron vistas con interés; eso es una experiencia que conviene estudiar a fondo.<sup>30</sup>

The training ground for the Polish New Wave was the Lodz School where such notable talents as Andrzej Munk, Andrzej Wajda and Roman Polanski studied. Dina Iordanova has pointed out that in the early 1960s most state film industries in the countries of the Soviet-bloc were structured following the Polish model of film units ('zespoly filmowe') that 'comprised of several other directors sharing an artistic vision, as well as scriptwriters, dramatists, cameramen, set and costume designers and actors. Film units functioned as the basic film production entity, they enjoyed some degree of creative autonomy, and were usually led by a well-established director'.<sup>31</sup>

The Polish 'zespoly filmowe' film production model became important as a means of maximising the resources available for the production of feature films in particular. Unquestionably, the ICAIC assumed that structure for film production for two main reasons: firstly, in order to avoid the centralisation of decision-making within the ICAIC, creating a positive, reliable, comfortable environment among the members of the team (actors and technical staff), who were already working in difficult conditions; and secondly because it was a more appropriate mode for the production of small, low-budget projects. With this mode of production the division of labour is more collaborative and requires fewer resources. One only needs to peruse the film credits of ICAIC productions between 1961 and 1991 to see a

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<sup>30</sup> The article in question was published in the French magazine *Europe*. According to Joris Ivens — and quoted by Gutiérrez Alea — Polish cinema was 'the most vital and powerful cinema of all socialist countries of the time'. The magazine was created by Romain Rolland and his associates; it began on 15 February 1923 and is still published by Éditions Rieder. See *Titón, Tomás Gutiérrez-Gutiérrez Alea*, pp. 66-67. See also Frank Bren, *World Cinema: Poland* (Trowbridge: Flicks, 1986).

<sup>31</sup> See Iordanova, *Cinema of the Other Europe*, p. 23.



pattern: a director working with the same cast of actors, small crew and technical team.<sup>32</sup> Another important feature of a socialist film mode of production adopted from 1961 was that of thematic planning. As Espinosa explains: ‘por ejemplo, si precisamos una línea tan importante como es la de los temas históricos, podemos analizarla también sobre la base de cómo aprovechar el vestuario, la utilería y la escenografía de manera que puedan servir para varias producciones dentro de esa temática’.<sup>33</sup> It can be argued that the Polish ‘zespoly filmowe’ mode of film production and the thematic planning are rooted in the socialist economy of shortage.

Pointing in a similar direction, ICAIC film-makers were concerned with issues of freedom and diversity of artistic expression within the cinematic discourse of the Revolution; an important facet of this was the freedom of the spectator. As we know, spectatorship was also considered to be of the highest importance for Soviet and East European film-makers. In the Cuban socialist cinematic discourse the issue of spectatorship addresses a key idea: to ‘descolonizar las pantallas’. In *Un largo camino hacia la luz*, García Espinosa suggests that ‘la libertad del creador nunca fue concebida si no se lograba, simultáneamente, la libertad del espectador. Esta libertad comenzó con la alfabetización, con la cual la Revolución eliminó prácticamente el 30% de analfabetismo que existía antes de 1959.’<sup>34</sup> In 1961, a national literacy campaign was initiated. Education was one of the most serious and longest-standing problems facing the Revolution. At that time a significant proportion of the population could neither read nor write. *El Comandante* would ask those who questioned the existence of freedom of speech under his government: ‘what is the freedom

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<sup>32</sup> After the collapse of the Soviet bloc, this practice was reformulated later in 1990s under the ‘grupos de creación’ (see chapter 4), when Cuban makers of moving images had to learn how to obtain funding from capitalist sources; they also had to focus on marketing their films for a free market economy.

<sup>33</sup> Julio García Espinosa, *Algo de mí* (La Habana: Ediciones ICAIC, 2009), p. 178.

<sup>34</sup> García Espinosa, *Un largo camino hacia la luz*, p. 212.

to write and to speak for a man who does not know how to write and who does not know how to read?’<sup>35</sup>

In that year, which was named the ‘Año de la Educación’ in Cuba as part of that educational project, the ICAIC created the ‘unidades móviles’ or ‘cine-móvil’ in order to take cinema to the most isolated parts of the island. ICAIC’s film-makers found that Soviet cinematic practices and the montage techniques of Russian avant-garde filmmaking of early Soviet cinema offered the best model to help understand how visual-dynamic film methods enhanced cinema’s natural velocity. From articles by key names from Cuban intellectual life at that time dedicated to Soviet theoretical works and films, it is clear that film-makers such as Eisenstein, Kuleshov, Vertov, Pudovkin, Dovzhenko, Kozintsev, Trauberg and Medvedkin achieved the status of classics and were the first and most important point of reference for the younger generation of film-makers in Cuba who were interested in promoting the social mission of the moving image.

The *cine-móvil* experience, like the *agitki* in Bolshevik times, provides important evidence of a cinematic practice within a political project that intended to abolish the social differences between the town and the country, popular and high art. Modelled on a similar experience, which occurred during the first years of the Russian Revolution, ICAIC film-makers agreed with the Bolsheviks that ‘the cinema is the only book that even the illiterate can read’ — a practical choice aimed at abolishing the social differences between town and

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<sup>35</sup> Cited in Frank Mankiewicz and Kirby Jones, *With Fidel: A Portrait of Castro and Cuba* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1975), p. 82.

country, popular and high art.<sup>36</sup> In this sense, one reference point was the work developed by Aleksandr Medvedkin and his experimental *kinopoezd* (film train). *Agitki* represented the first organised manifestation of an interest in using film as a propaganda device aimed at the masses. The trains used to distribute, advertise, promote and project the films were called agit-trains.<sup>37</sup>

*Películas didácticas* and *Enciclopedia Popular* were the Cuban *agitki* par excellence. This kind of documentary epitomised, indeed, the Cuban appropriation of the Soviet cinematic experience. This occurred not just because of the suggested similarities in the political processes between Russia and Cuba but because Cuban leaders and film-makers had a particular interest in, and knowledge of, the aforementioned cultural experiments in the Soviet Union. One should also remember the work developed by the communists in the cultural society *Nuestro Tiempo*. All these moments contradict Nicola Miller's suggestion that 'the great nationalist leaders of modern Latin American were reluctant to concede any ground to intellectuals in their nation-building project'.<sup>38</sup> Another piece of evidence that contradicts Miller's suggestion is the confrontation that took place between Alfredo Guevara and the orthodox Marxist Blas Roca over another film, Fellini's *La dolce vita*, which according to Roca was unacceptable for the 'new' Cuban viewer. Certainly, it was not only politicians but also intellectuals and artists, who were discussing the cultural policy of the Revolution. In December 1963, for example, the clashing of swords between

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<sup>36</sup> See Richard Taylor, *The Politics of the Soviet Cinema 1917–1929* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), p. 87.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 26–42. For Cuban articles dedicated to Medvedkin, see *Indice de la revista Cine cubano 1960–1974*, compiled by Gloria Esqueu (La Habana: Editorial Orbe, 1979), p. 75. Also on Medvedkin, see Chris Marker's documentary *Le Tombeau d'Alexandre* (The Last Bolshevik, 1993), and on the concept of the film-train, see Emma Widdis, *Alexander Medvedkin* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2004), pp. 22–34.

<sup>38</sup> Nicola Miller, *In the Shadow of the State: Intellectuals and the Quest for National Identity in Twentieth-Century Spanish America* (London: Verso, 1999), p. 245.

them – which surfaced in a series of inflammatory letters – was published in leading newspapers and magazines of the time such as *Hoy*, *Bohemia*, *El Mundo* and *Revolución*.<sup>39</sup>

### **The Film-makers of the Round Table: ‘¿qué es lo moderno en el arte?’**

In October 1962, after US intelligence experts detected the presence of Soviet nuclear warheads on the island, the tensions between the Cuban Revolution and the White House developed into the October Missile Crisis. On 22 October 1962, Fidel Castro stated: ‘nuestros derechos y nuestra soberanía no se discuten, ¡se pelean!’<sup>40</sup> As the United States established a naval blockade, the possibility of a superpower confrontation over Cuba seemed imminent. Meanwhile, in Havana, European and Cuban film-makers were debating the art of cinema and the role of the artist as an active member of society. The panellists were Armand Gatti (France), Tomás Gutiérrez Alea (Cuba), Kurt Maetzig (East Germany), Andrzej Wajda (Poland), Mikhail Kalatozov (USSR), Julio García Espinosa (Cuba), Vladimír Čech (Czechoslovakia) and Jorge Fraga (Cuba).

Like the legendary King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table, these film-makers were ‘fighting-men’ in search of an elusive object known as a magic stone or the Holy Grail. At that time, the Holy Grail focussed on the question: ‘¿qué es lo moderno en el arte? Referencia el cine’. Around the round table (it was round in order to signify the equality of its members), the young Cuban film-makers asked questions which were perhaps too difficult for Wajda, Kalatozov, Čech and Maetzig to answer in public, since they were

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<sup>39</sup> For an index of these letters, see Alfredo Guevara, *Revolución es lucidez*, pp. 201–02.

<sup>40</sup> See *Revolución cubana: 45 grandes momentos*, edited by Julio García Luis (Melbourne: Ocean Press, 2005), pp. 136–43.

related to the problems faced by an artist in a socialist society.<sup>41</sup> García Espinosa asked how it was possible that in those countries where Marxism was adopted that something like Socialist Realism could appear. His question, ultimately, was not answered by any of the East European film-makers. The debate offered a synthesis of the aesthetic ideas at the centre of debate, especially those concerning film-makers. It provided invaluable insights into the dynamics of Cuban and Soviet filmic and political cultures towards the end of the Thaw. In an article published under the title ‘Testimonios: prologando una discusión’ in *Cine cubano* in April 1963, Alfredo Guevara, the president of the ICAIC at the time, gave his opinion, which served to emphasise that Cuban film-makers supported the socialist option of the Revolution — just in case any other interpretation of what was said and published might be made by Cuban pro-Soviet cultural mentors. He further affirmed that: ‘Nada hay más moderno, más avanzado, nada más progresivo que la condición de revolucionario, que el pensamiento revolucionario, que la actividad revolucionaria, que el futuro que los revolucionarios construyen. Por eso el punto de partida es la Revolución, el socialismo, la creación de la sociedad comunista, el comunismo. El punto de partida, hemos dicho y queremos subrayarlo: el punto de partida.’<sup>42</sup>

From the perspective of young Cuban film-makers, there was no reluctance to raise any question, however difficult. The fruits of the debate were many. This kind of round table became a systematic practice in the ICAIC, and, indeed, throughout Cuba. On 18 July of the same year, a ‘manifesto’ of Cuban film-makers was published concerning the aesthetic of film art and its links with the cultural policy of the Cuban Revolution under socialism.

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<sup>41</sup> The transcription of the round table was published under the title, ‘¿Qué es lo moderno en el arte? Referencia el cine’, *Cine cubano*, no. 3.9 (January 1963), pp. 31–49.

<sup>42</sup> Alfredo Guevara, ‘Testimonios: prolongando una discusión’, *Cine cubano*, 3.10 (April 1963), pp. 50–51 (p. 50).

This document ran contrary to the opinions of Cuban orthodox Marxists and the mentors of the socialist cultural model. The film-makers stated the following: ‘Como expresión del principio de libertad formal: en la lucha de ideas y tendencias estéticas, la victoria posible de una tendencia sobre las otras no puede ser consecuencia de la supresión de las demás, atribuyendo carácter de clase a las formas artísticas, sino resultado de su superación teórica y, sobre todo, práctica’.<sup>43</sup> This was a synthesis of the main topics discussed concerning aesthetics in relation to cultural politics, and was signed by the best-known Cuban film-makers. This document contained affirmations such as ‘cultura sólo hay una or las categorías formales del arte no tienen carácter de clase’, which were in opposition to the central Soviet concept that postulated the class character of art. Once again, Alfredo Guevara subsequently had to ‘clarify’ the political position of those film-makers in order to safeguard their future within the cultural project of the Revolution. As Alfredo ‘the saviour’ explained: ‘La dirección de la revista *Cine cubano*, que no comparte en su conjunto la fundamentación teórica del documento, y que establece reservas respecto de algunas afirmaciones, suscribe en cambio sus conclusiones y declara su absoluto acuerdo con la intención moral de los que lo suscriben.’<sup>44</sup> Nevertheless, the dissolution of all previous artistic organisations and the establishment of the Unión Nacional de Escritores y Artistas de Cuba (UNEAC) as an umbrella institution were accompanied by the adoption of essential elements of Soviet-bloc socialist cultural policy in the Cuban Revolution’s cultural project. Between 1961 and 1991, UNEAC could send an artist, intellectual, exhibition or artistic delegation abroad at the state’s expense, which was a unique privilege

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<sup>43</sup> Gutiérrez Alea, García Espinosa, Sara Gómez, among many others, ‘Conclusiones de un debate entre cineastas cubanos’, *Cine cubano*, no. 3.13–14 (Oct–Nov 1963), pp. 17. For a list of articles about this particular cinematic debate, see Pogolotti, *Polémicas culturales de los 60*, pp. 17–126.

<sup>44</sup> See Alfredo Guevara, ‘Sobre un debate entre cineastas cubanos’, *Cine cubano*, no. 3.14–15 (October–November 1963), p. 14.

at that time. At the same time, during such trips, the bureaucrats and the artists, the representatives of Cuban culture, could buy goods that were not available at home. This was a common practice both in Cuba and the former Soviet-bloc in Eastern Europe.<sup>45</sup>

‘¿Qué es lo moderno en el Arte? Referencia el cine’ as experience established a tradition within the cinematic discourse of the Cuban Revolution. It was certainly a useful starting point and perhaps the most important antecedent for the creation of the Nuevo Cine Latinoamericano (New Latin American Cinema) movement, a cinematic project with a geopolitical agenda, which was inspired by the First ‘Encuentro de cineastas latinoamericanos’ during the fifth film festival in Viña del Mar (Chile), in 1967.<sup>46</sup> In *The New Latin American Cinema: A Continental Project*, Zuzana M. Pick points out that: ‘the round tables that followed the screenings produced the appellation *new cinema*. This term would slightly displace (but not supplant) the national orientation of former debates and articulate them into a continental project.’<sup>47</sup> The young generation of Cuban film-makers took the view that the best way to discuss an idea was to set up a debate ‘amongst revolutionaries’. They believed that the best way to explore the problem of modernity was to find spokespeople who expressed the most extreme and polarised views in order to present them as the range of choices of a particular time. This was understood at the same time as a cinematic platform which was ideal for internationalising the Cuban Revolution.

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<sup>45</sup> On the creation of the UNEAC, see Carlos Fernández’s documentary, *A 90 millas* (1962). Concerning the works of artistic organisations and cultural administration in the countries of the Soviet bloc, see *Culture in Central and Eastern Europe: Institutional and Value Changes* (Zagreb: Institute for International Relations, 1997).

<sup>46</sup> For a general overview of Nuevo Cine Latinoamericano, see Alberto Elena & Marina Díaz López, ‘Introduction’, *The Cinema of Latin America*, edited by Elena and Díaz López (London: Wallflower, 2003), pp. 1-12 (pp. 5-7).

<sup>47</sup> Pick, *The New Latin American Cinema: A Continental Project*, p. 19.

### **First Cuban Film Co-Productions with the Countries of the Soviet-bloc**

The European participants in that first round table went on to direct the most significant feature films to be co-produced in revolutionary Cuba. The analysis that follows is based on video copies of the films made for the Cuban viewer, versions of which are currently held in the ICAIC's film archive. My intention is to focus on the reception of these films in Cuba and their historical significance. Another important matter is to identify those facets of the films which introduced into the international arena key issues of the cultural discourse of the Revolution, and which of these became recurrent in Cuban film production over the years that followed. *¿Para quién baila la Habana?* (For Whom Does Havana Dance? 1963), *Preludio 11* (Prelude 11, 1963), and *Soy Cuba* (I am Cuba, 1964) confirmed that: '1950s and 1960s, European art cinema was often strongly associated with black-and-white film and contrasted with popular cinema's use of colour.<sup>48</sup> Čech, Maetzig and Kalatozov appeared to concur with Bertolt Brecht's idea that: 'colour film effects must not be allowed to endanger the character of a realistic and poetic chronicle'.<sup>49</sup>

### ***The Czechoslovak New Wave and its Reception in Cuba.***

In *The Czechoslovak New Wave*, Peter Hames explains that it is clear that this was a film movement marked by the socio-political changes that took place in Czechoslovakia during the 1960s:

What is less easy to explain are the hostile or apathetic attitudes adopted by many

Western 'Marxists' to the films produced? When Vlácil's important precursor of the

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<sup>48</sup> Quoted from *The Film Studies Dictionary*, p. 52.

<sup>49</sup> Bertolt Brecht, 'The Film Mother Courage' (typescript written in 1955), cited in *Bertolt Brecht on Film and Radio*, edited and translated by Marc Silberman (London: Methuen, 2001), p. 26.



new wave, *Holubice* (The White Dove, 1960), was shown at the Venice Film Festival, it was condemned as a 'nonpolitical fantasy'. Luc Moullet condemned Němec's *Démanty noci* (Diamonds of the Night, 1964) for its reactionary aesthetics. Jean Luc Godard, one of the foremost critics of Czech film, interviewed Věra Chytilová in his *Pravda* (1969), and came up with the equation 'Chytilová=Zanuck and Paramount'. He criticised her for her incorrect attitude, and commented that she spoke 'like Arthur Penn and Antonioni'.<sup>50</sup>

The Czechoslovak New Wave (also Czech New Wave) is a term applied to the early films of Miloš Forman, Věra Chytilová, Ivan Passer, Jaroslav Papoušek, Jiří Menzel, Jan Němec, Jaromil Jireš, Evald Schorm and others. How did the Cuban spectator and film critic receive Czechoslovak cinema? In Cuba, the film critics did not share Godard's opinion. In the mid-1960s a substantial number of Cuban articles praised their directors and the quality and openness of the films, and so the production of that country came to be called the Czech film miracle. Many articles were dedicated to an analysis of the life and works of the film-makers of the 'milagro checoslovaco'. Others recorded interviews with Jan Kadar, Elmar Klos, Ivan Passer and Jan Nemes, among many others. An article on Milos Forman made reference to important aspects of his life, the topics and scripts of his films and their place within the Czechoslovak cinematography of the time. According to Cuban film critics, Forman was 'un hombre joven en plenitud de facultades creadoras; una obra que refleja la preocupación constante, el conocimiento del cine como arte y como oficio, una

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<sup>50</sup> See Peter Hames, *The Czechoslovak New Wave* (London: Wallflower Press, 2005), p. 4. See also Robert Buchar (ed.) *Czech New Wave Film-makers in Interviews* (Liehm-Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 2004).

temática definida, jugosa, y que él maneja mejor que nadie'.<sup>51</sup> Mario Rodríguez Alemán, for his part, celebrated Věra Chytilová's aesthetic conceptions within the artistic proposals of this young generation of film-makers: 'el caso Chytilová no es, pues, un simple expediente en la cinematografía checoslovaca actual. Ella afirma valores específicos que, por su trascendencia, determinan una condición generacional. Este es el gran valor del cine de Věra Chytilová, o sea, que no es un hecho independiente aislado. Forman parte de una generación. Junto a ella pueden mencionarse otros nombres de cineastas jóvenes: Niemeč, Forman, Jires Uher, Askenazy, Hobl, entre otros'.<sup>52</sup> For Rodríguez Alemán those film-makers were not like the French New Wave: 'En este movimiento [the Czechoslovak] no se establecieron premisas estéticas comunes sino que, cada cual por su lado, intentó dar lo nuevo sin antes plantearse una ideología artística. El arte no es evasión, como mantienen los teóricos de la estética idealista sino que está estrechamente vinculado, como afirma Marx y Engels, a una fase del desarrollo social'.<sup>53</sup> Rodríguez Alemán's article sought to position the Czechoslovak New Wave firmly within the Soviet context.

Statements of the kind made by Rodríguez Alemán confirm the positive reception of these films in Cuba, mainly because it was politically important at that time to present a positive image to the Cuban people. Alemán's article sees this case linked to a particular historical moment or phase of social development in Czechoslovakia, but at the same time ignores the evasive, non-committal and ambiguous attitude of those film-makers and their films faced with the imposed Soviet illusion of Socialist Realism in the intellectual life, film industry,

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<sup>51</sup> See Oscar Valdés and Miguel Torres, 'El mundo de Milos Forman', *Cine cubano*, no. 6.38 (September 1966), pp. 53–57 (p. 57). For a list of articles about Czechoslovak cinema published in Cuba, see *Índice de la revista Cine cubano 1960–1974*, pp. 94–96.

<sup>52</sup> Mario Rodríguez Alemán, 'Chytilová en la nueva ola del cine checoslovaco', *Cine cubano*, no. 5.30 (September 1965), pp. 39–44 (p. 39).

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37.

and art of the time, which was the common issue for those films. It is also important to note that the same critics who once praised the Czechoslovak New Wave ignored the fate of many of those film-makers after the Soviet invasion of Prague.

### *¿Para quién baila La Habana?*

With regard to the director of the first feature film co-produced with a country of Soviet Europe, one question inevitably emerges: what was Vladimír Čech's status within the film history of Czechoslovakia? There is very little written in English on Čech's film career. His real name was Vladimír Prikryl and he initially studied medicine before becoming a publicist and training in stage direction with E.F. Burian's avant-garde theatre, *D-34*. Čech worked for the *Aktuality/ Current Events* newsreels (1938–39), and during World War II he was a film, theatre and radio critic and author of radio plays.<sup>54</sup>

The idea of making a film about the Cuban Revolution was born as a result of a film week dedicated to Czechoslovak cinema, when a group of film-makers visited Havana in 1961. Alfredo Guevara, at that time president of the ICAIC, visited Prague and in conversations with the director of Barrandov studios, Josef Vesely, they decided to co-produce a film dedicated to Havana and the Cuban Revolution. Čech was particularly impressed by the enthusiasm of the *habaneros* and decided to make a film that would reflect the radical and high-speed transformations taking place in Cuba's capital city and communicate Cuba's positive and revolutionary atmosphere to the Czechoslovak audience.

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<sup>54</sup> For Čech's biographical information, including a list of his short and feature films see *Directory of Eastern European Film-makers and Films 1945–1991*, compiled and edited by Grzegorz Balski (Trowbridge: Flicks Books, 1992), pp 43–48.

*¿Para quién baila La Habana?* (Komu tanci Havana, For Whom does Havana Dance, 1963) was the first Eastern European co-produced film made in post-revolutionary Cuba. For his film project, Čech had Jan Prochazka as scriptwriter and the collaboration of the Cuban writer Onelio Jorge Cardoso. Václav Hanus was his cameraman, and the music was written by Stepan Lucky. The shooting of the film took six months. According to the director, ‘en primer término tratamos de mostrar, yo así como el guionista Jan Prochzka, las discrepancias y relaciones internas en el transcurso de la revolución. En ello consiste lo nuevo de la elaboración nuestra a diferencia con todas las películas anteriores. *¿Para quién baila la Habana?* es una película puramente cubana, rodada — es verdad — por nuestros cineastas checoslovacos que se valieron de poco medios técnicos, mas con actores cubanos.’<sup>55</sup> Concerning the casting, Čech explained: ‘Escogimos a los actores del ambiente estudiantil, de los obreros de los ingenios, puertos y cooperativas agrícolas, así como de los actores televisivos. Casi todos los que actúan en la película estaban ante la cámara por primera vez. La mayoría de las tomas fueron rodadas para explicar, en Cuba, solamente la parte sonora y el retoque final se hicieron en los Estudios de Barrandov.’<sup>56</sup>

There is very little plot in this film. It tells the story of the re-encounter between two friends who fought against Batista, and the end of their friendship because of the political reorientation of the Revolution. One of them, Eduardo, ‘the positive hero’ (Miguel Gutiérrez), is returning from exile and does not understand the reasons why his friend, Luis, ‘the negative character’ (Fausto Mirabal), is becoming disaffected with the ideological reorientation of the Revolution and the nationalisation that has affected his father’s

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<sup>55</sup> This is cited from *Boletín ICAIC*, which is preserved in the ICAIC’s archives on the basis of a translation from an article published in the journal *Ceskoslovensky Film* dated 5 November 1963.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

shipping business. Their conflict is partly focussed on their mutual love for Laura, a role played by Odalys Fuentes. The opening sequence of *¿Para quién baila La Habana?* is set in Havana during the carnival, which leads us to ask: what is there about the carnival recorded in the Czechoslovak film that is so different from previous ones? The melody and the rhythm of the music sounds familiar, but the words were different. According to the song that can be heard in the background it was 'el primer carnaval socialista', testifying to a distinctive space and time in Cuban history after the formal declaration of the ideological conversion of the Revolution. Čech's film, thus recorded a historic Cuban carnival.<sup>57</sup> Carnival had a special subversive connotation in Soviet-bloc literary theory and culture because it describes and represents a subversive attitude in events.<sup>58</sup> Carnival in Čech's film follows the same pattern but instead legitimises and celebrates the socialist option engaged by the Revolution, the Cuban people have gained faith in socialism, with its promises of equality and justice, where white and Afro-Cubans dance together, men and women, everyone celebrating the arrival of a 'new life'. Also, Čech's film arguably represents perhaps the first appearance of a Western beauty contest before the Czechoslovak and Soviet-bloc audience, this time using carnival in support of socialism.

Laura, *la Reina* of the Cuban carnival, is not a traditional queen. Laura is a rebel who used to be a member of an underground group of young people fighting Batista's regime. Čech's film establishes Cuban carnival as a point of connection between cinematic transgression and socio-political transformation. One sequence in the film shows Laura riding to the airport; her former boyfriend is coming back from exile. Shots around the terminal show the public reaction to the

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<sup>57</sup> On the history of Cuban carnival, see Virtudes Feliú, *El carnaval cubano* (La Habana: Ediciones Extramuros, 2002). See also Helio Orovio, *El carnaval habanero* (La Habana: Ediciones Extramuros, 2005).

<sup>58</sup> See Craig Brandist, *Carnival Culture and the Soviet Modernist Novel* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996).

presence of *la reina del carnaval*, a sort of celebrity ‘artefact’ of the American dream, which suggests how fascination with celebrities was a tool used effectively in the ‘advertising’ of the Cuban Revolution. Another aspect to observe is the way in which cinema and television influence the perception of beauty, when its icons are film and television actresses and actors. Odalys Fuentes was at that time a successful TV actress in Cuba.

*¿Para quién baila La Habana?* is also a good reference-point for those interested in the cinematic representation of religion, in particular Catholicism and its relationship with the Cuban Revolution. One sequence shows two negative characters conspiring and planning a terrorist act: to blow up a ship during the carnival celebration (surely an oblique reference to the blowing-up of the French steamboat *La Coubre* on 4 March 1960, while it was being unloaded in Havana harbour).<sup>59</sup> This sequence reveals an important detail in its montage; this terrible plan is coordinated in the presence of the *Cristo de la Habana* (the statue of the Christ of Havana). It is clearly a cinematic image of ‘the enemy’ that corresponded to the condemnation of those Catholics in Cuba who were representative of the white, upper-class, economic and political rulers of the country before 1959. It can be argued that Čech was not intending to denounce religion but rather its Cuban *practitioners*, to show how the counterrevolutionaries ‘appropriated’ Christianity and its icons for their own political objectives. Čech’s montage seeks to make that social and political difference visual, emphasising the ideological divide between the classes. However, the idea of putting a symbol of Jesus Christ ‘on the side’ of the

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<sup>59</sup> This French steamboat was carrying tonnes of Belgian munitions from the port of Antwerp. The exact death toll from the *La Coubre* explosions remains uncertain. Cuban government spokesmen and some other sources have put forward the claim that this event was an act of sabotage. The Alberto Korda’s iconic photo of Che Guevara was taken at a memorial service for victims of the *La Coubre* explosion. See Aleksandr Fursenko and Timothy J. Naftali, *One Hell of a Gamble: Khrushchev, Castro, and Kennedy, 1958-1964* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1998), p. 40. See also Navil García Alfonso, ‘The Mysterious Explosion of La Coubre’, first published in *Granma International* and available on <http://www.granma.cu/ingles/2006/marzo/mierc15/12lacoubre.html>. [Accessed on 1 May 2010].

counter-revolutionaries might not have been seen in positive terms by the cultural mentors of the Cuban Revolution, who had always separated those two different matters, namely, religious belief in Catholicism as opposed to those practitioners and priests in the Catholic Church in Cuba who rejected the socialist political project.<sup>60</sup>

### **The Reception of *¿Para quién baila La Habana?***

In general, the reception of the film in Cuba was not positive. According to Luis M. López, Čech's film was the least important among the films screened in the second week dedicated to Czechoslovak films in Havana, despite the fact that it was the film that everyone wanted to see. López suggested that *¿Para quién baila La Habana?* was neither a good nor a bad film, but that it was simply not interesting for the Cuban viewer. According to López, the director of photography, Hanus, had not understood the great visual art of working in locations, thereby enhancing 'the realist' value of the film: 'por ahí es fácil de advertir que lo habitual en Hanus, cuando filma en blanco y negro, es el control de la luz y la definición dentro de los muros protectores del Estudio'.<sup>61</sup> For López, the sequences shot out of focus gave the spectator the sensation of watching a fake free-cinema style film. The critic concluded that this film should be the last co-production of its kind. According to López, the Cuban spectator has a natural cinematic instinct, knowing how to differentiate between an official ceremony and a cinematic work of art: 'así Čech, en la misma medida que fue aplaudido por sus palabras corteses fue criticado por su película mediocre'.<sup>62</sup> As a result the

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<sup>60</sup> Throughout the years, *el Comandante* has taken several opportunities to express the coherence that exists between Christian and Communist thought. On several occasions, Fidel Castro has used Christ's words 'it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God'. See *Fidel Castro y la religión: Conversaciones con Frei Betto* (México: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 1986), pp. 322-33.

<sup>61</sup> Luis M. López, 'Cine: ¿Para quién baila la Habana?', *Bohemia*, 13 (29 March 1963), p. 62. For a list of articles about this film, see García Borrero, *Guía crítica del cine cubano de ficción*, p. 254.

<sup>62</sup> López, 'Cine: ¿Para quién baila la Habana?', p. 63.

co-production planned for the following year was cancelled. The plan had been that Jiri Weiss would direct the film with a script by Ivan Bukovcan.

Čech's feature film does serve as a documentary on the material culture of Havana: Cadillacs, clothes, furniture, all the objects which were part of the Cuban middle-class lifestyle in the capital city. The Czech film-maker was, perhaps, overly impressed by the American style of life of Havana. *¿Para quién baila La Habana?* offered an excuse to film an attractive side of a city and all of its US material culture. The film, for example, has some overlong sequences depicting a tour of Havana by car, most of them in the modern area of Vedado, providing a wide range of information about the US material culture of the houses and modern urban areas of the city in the early 1960s.

Carnival in Čech's film was used to portray the transition from capitalism to socialism. Čech's film presented the Soviet audience with a portrayal of a typical Cuban carnival, though within the context of the declaration of the socialist character of the Revolution. With this film, Čech sought to re-interpret the 'radical laughter' of the Cuban carnival within the context of revolutionary culture, thereby raising the issue addressed by a number of theoreticians at the time of whether popular culture can be transformed into revolutionary culture or, as some have argued, it is inherently a conservative cultural form.<sup>63</sup> Indeed, the most important feature of Čech's film is its title, which is still a pertinent question today: *for whom does Havana dance?* The film appears to leave unresolved the dilemma as to whether Havana dances to the tune of revolutionary culture or

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<sup>63</sup> Julio García Espinosa, for example, has drawn a sharp distinction between revolutionary art and populism. See 'Intelectuales y artistas del mundo entero, ¡desuníos!', in his *La doble moral del cine* (Madrid: Ollero & Ramos, 1996), pp. 35-46.



to an imported US-style populism. Čech's Cuban assistants, Octavio Cortázar and Manuel Pérez, went on to become film-makers themselves. Cortázar studied at the Prague Film School (FAMU) and his first feature film *El brigadista* (1977) will be analysed in chapter 3. Pérez's film *Capablanca* (1986) was the last film to be co-produced with the former Soviet Union and will also be analysed in chapter 4.

### **East German Cinema (DEFA), Maetzig and the Cuban Revolution**

The DEFA (Deutsche Film-Aktiengesellschaft) was born from the rubble of World War II. It became the motivating force behind East Germany's film-making. As a state-owned, Soviet-style film institution, DEFA reflected the cultural imperatives of the country. It also responded to the demands for entertainment. Its immense film production covered numerous genres from Socialist Realism to expressionism, modernism, neo-realism, and film noir.<sup>64</sup> Kurt Maetzig was part of the delegation that visited Cuba in 1962. The newspaper *Sierra Maestra* published a declaration by the German visitors supporting the Revolution: 'los enemigos de Cuba son nuestros enemigos. De ahí que los triunfos logrados en Cuba sean éxitos alcanzados por el pueblo de la República Democrática Alemana.'<sup>65</sup> Maetzig, a co-founder of DEFA, was a survivor of fascism, the Second World War and the Cold War. His films range from historical dramas and two epic biographies of Ernst Thälmann, through the forbidden films of the 1960s, such as *Das Kaninchen bin ich* (I Am the Rabbit, 1965), to DEFA's first science-fiction and co-produced film *Der schweigende Stern* (The Silent Star, 1960). However, very few people know about his Cuban filmic

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<sup>64</sup> See Daniela Berghahn, *Hollywood behind the Wall: The Cinema of East Germany* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005); *DEFA: East German Cinema, 1946–1992*, edited by Seán Allan and John Sandford (New York; Oxford: Berghahn Books, 1999). For DEFA film productions see 'DEFA Film Library' (UMass Amherst, Massachusetts) that offers a wide range of titles on English-subtitled DEFA movies.

<sup>65</sup> See 'Cineastas alemanes con Cuba', *Sierra Maestra* (Santiago de Cuba, 9 November 1962). The copy in the ICAIC archives has no pagination.

experience, although, as we shall see, Maetzig's Cuban film is a significant testimony to his persistent interest in portraying female heroines.<sup>66</sup>

### ***Preludio 11***

*Preludio 11* (1964) is, above all, an action movie. Wolfgang Schreyer wrote the script with the assistance of José Soler Puig, a Cuban writer. The interiors for the films were filmed in Germany in the space of two months. The exteriors were filmed in Cuba in Regla, Viñales and el Puente de Bacunayagua. On the Cuban side, all but one of the cast were young amateur actors, the exception being Roberto Blanco (Miguel), who was already established as one of the leading theatre directors in the country. Aurora Depestre, the Cuban actress who played Daniela, recalled that Maetzig 'es un excelente director y una gran persona, que me ayudó muchísimo con mi trabajo: su paciencia para conmigo fue titánica'.<sup>67</sup> Well-known East German actors such as Günter Simon (Palomino), the protagonist of Maetzig's *Ernst Thälmann*, and Armin Mueller-Stahl (Quintana), among many others, played the main characters of the film. Why were German actors selected to represent Cubans? Was Maetzig focusing primarily on the German reception of the film?

In *German National Cinema*, Sabine Hake has pointed out that 'DEFA actors and actresses were identified with a distinct physiognomy of class that found expression in particular body types, facial features, gestures, codes and individual mannerisms. Significantly, many actors looked unmistakably German and, with the elusive quality, resembled either the

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<sup>66</sup> Regarding other DEFA newsreels, documentaries and other film materials about Cuba and Latin America, see [http://www.umass.edu/defa/conference/solidarity\\_film\\_institute.shtml](http://www.umass.edu/defa/conference/solidarity_film_institute.shtml) (accessed November 2010).

<sup>67</sup> See Raúl Palazuelos, 'El Preludio de Aurora', *Revolución*, 16 May 1963, the copy in the ICAIC archives has no pagination.

UFA stars of the Third Reich or the anti-stars of the New German Cinema.’<sup>68</sup> Whatever the motive, the decision was not a fortunate one. The main reason for this is not because of the distinctive ethnic looks of the German actors. The mistake lies in the use and abuse of dubbing, which was the main failing of this film. Jorge Luis Borges once said: ‘those who defend dubbing will (conceivably) reason that the objections which can be brought against it can also be raised against any other kind of translation. This argument ignores, or evades, dubbing’s main fault: the arbitrary insertion of another voice and another language (...)voices are not accidental; rather, they are to the world one of its defining attributes, worse than dubbing, worse than the substitution that dubbing implies, it is the awareness of a substitution, of a deception.’<sup>69</sup> It is surely the case that the insertion of a Cuban voice-over for a German actor, who has his own particular gestures, gave the effect of something false and imposed. The decision to combine languages and bodies could, however, have another explanation. If we recognise Maetzig as one of the most innovative and transgressive filmmakers in DEFA, one might ask whether he intended to question the ‘distinctive’ look of DEFA actors. According to Hake, ‘the more contemporary ideal of sensitive masculinity found expression in the comparable screen personas of East German Armin Mueller-Stahl and West German Bruno Ganz’.<sup>70</sup> The image created by the juxtaposition of the more reserved and quiet character of Mueller-Stahl together with ‘la miliciana’ Aurora Depestre, who combined female independence with sensuality, was a real prelude to what would happen in future cinematic discourses not only in German cinema but internationally: a noticeable change in the look of ideal-typical masculinity and femininity.

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<sup>68</sup> Sabine Hake, *German National Cinema* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 130.

<sup>69</sup> See Jorge Luis Borges, ‘On Dubbing’, in *Subtitles: On the Foreignness of Film*, edited by Atom Egoyan and Ian Balfour (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT, 2004), pp.118-19 (p. 118).

<sup>70</sup> Hake, *German National Cinema*, p. 130.

## **The *miliciana* of the Cuban Revolution: Maetzig's Contribution to the Tradition of Heroines in Socialist Films**

The central narrative is a love story between a white army officer, Quintana (German Armin Mueller-Stahl) and the mixed race (mulata) 'miliciana' Daniela (Cuban Aurora Depestre), set in the context of the military preparations for a counter-revolutionary invasion. Daniela is a primary school teacher. She is also a single mother, who leaves her young son with his grandmother most of the time in order to fulfil her many duties both as a school teacher and as a *miliciana*. Daniela's husband Miguel (Cuban Roberto Blanco) has left the country because of the political reorientation of the Revolution and has returned as part of a military brigade financed by the USA to overthrow the communist project in Cuba. The story of *Preludio II* takes as its main point of reference the historical moment of the Bay of Pigs. However, it could be argued that this is just a pretext. Maetzig's film is a gala dedicated to Cuban women, a German celebration of Cuban beauty, particularly 'la miliciana' (the Cuban militia woman), a figure that was completely unknown to the German viewer.

It is useful to recall in this context that the cinematic principle of portraying women soldiers in Soviet-bloc cinemas was established during the Stalin period. In *Russian War Films: On the Cinema Front, 1914–2005*, Denise J. Youngblood has pointed out that 'particularly notable was the return of the word motherland (*rodina*) to public discourse, frequently replacing fatherland (*otechestvo*) (...). The new cinematic focus on heroines can, therefore, be considered part of the "mother's call".'<sup>71</sup> Certainly, a woman in combat was a reality of the Civil War and World War II. In cinema that figure was portrayed through

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<sup>71</sup> Denise J. Youngblood, *Russian War Films: On the Cinema Front, 1914–2005* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2007), p. 60.

characters such as *Chapaev's* Anka. Among the most significant Soviet heroines in films one should mention Pasha in Fridrikh Ermler's *Ona zashchishchaet rodinu* (She Defends the Motherland, 1943), Olena Kostiukh in Mark Donskoi's *Raduga* (The Rainbow, 1943) and the partisan sharpshooter Mariutka in Grigorii Chukhrai's *Sorok pervyi* (The Forty-First, 1956), among many others. These women became iconic and, as such, re-focussed the purview of Soviet-block cinema. Oksana Bulgakova's essay in *Red Women on the Silver Screen* explores the development of the images of the Soviet heroine in films: 'one of the conscious pre-requisites for the creation of heroes or heroines of the screen is the notion of the social stereotype. The alteration of these stereotypes is caused by the arrival of a new epoch; which puts forward a new person as the ideal.'<sup>72</sup>

Maetzig's Daniela represents the *miliciana* of the Cuban Revolution and Maetzig's personal contribution to the long list of heroines in socialist cinema. The Cuban *miliciana* is portrayed with an attractive combination of female strength and vulnerability in the persona of Aurora Depestre. Maetzig thereby made a 'feminist' statement out of his representation of the 'new' Cuban woman, who was essentially a city girl with dark short hair, of mixed race, dressed in military uniform, a single mother, unmarried, erotic, and a rebel woman with a cause. Daniela also embodies the DEFA representation of women; its films tended to portray working mothers as heroines, more often single than married. It is undoubtedly true that this image was in opposition to the generic cinematic representation of women, for example in Hollywood's female stereotypes at that time, with their long blonde hair, long dresses, married, domesticated and faithful housewives or glamorous sex-symbols.

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<sup>72</sup> See Oksana Bulgakova, 'The Hydra of the Soviet Cinema: the Metamorphoses of the Soviet Film Heroine, in *Red Women on the Silver Screen: Soviet Women and Cinema from the Beginning to the End of the Communist Era*, edited by Lynne Attwood (London: Pandora, 1993), p. 149.

## ***Preludio 11* and the Cinematic Conceptualisation of the Enemy of the Cuban Revolution**

In *Preludio 11*, according to the Cuban film critic, Guillermo Rodríguez Rivera, ‘dos realidades son planteadas paralelamente por la cinta: la realidad revolucionaria en Cuba y la labor de los mercenarios contrarrevolucionarios adiestrados y armados por Estados Unidos’.<sup>73</sup> Rodríguez Rivera argued that Maetzig managed to present those cultural realities in terms of their innate contradictions: ‘las diferencias entre los contrarrevolucionarios que se unen en el intento común son de especial interés. Maetzig ha sabido captar verazmente este aspecto de la realidad, librándose de todo esquematismo.’<sup>74</sup> Mario Rodríguez Alemán seems to concur with this view: ‘no falta a esta trama un cura contrarrevolucionario y la captura de “gusanos” lanzados a nuestras costas por la CIA. En este bando, por igual *Preludio 11* muestra la ensalada mixta de bitongos y batistianos comiendo en un mismo plato.’<sup>75</sup> One striking feature of Maetzig’s film is its portrayal of *el Comandante*’s political opponents: the businessman, the corrupt politician, and the torturer as cinematic ‘social types’. All of them are painted in over-melodramatic colours and, as such, lack credibility. In *Preludio 11*, *el Comandante*’s political opponents are portrayed stereotypically, and have little to do with the empiric reality of Fidel Castro’s political opponents at the time. Certainly, the cinematic use of social types seems to be one of the main features of Maetzig’s films.

### **The Reception of *Preludio 11***

Despite its expression of ideological support for the Revolution, Maetzig’s film was not well received in Cuba. Alejo Beltrán pointed out that ‘los diálogos por lo general son bastantes buenos,

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<sup>73</sup> See Guillermo Rodríguez Rivera, ‘Otra vez Preludio Once’, *Mella*, 17 February 1964 (no pagination). ICAIC Archives.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>75</sup> Mario Rodríguez Alemán, ‘Preludio’, *Diario de la Tarde*, 2 January 1964 (no pagination). ICAIC Archives.

apropiados a la acción y con frecuencia permeados de cierta ironía'.<sup>76</sup> Despite its positive features, though, *Preludio 11* was not a good film in Beltrán's view. He argued, for example, that the film looked like it was made by someone who had never been in contact with Cuban reality: 'llegando en ocasiones a ingenuas visiones de nuestro país. Maetzig parece deslumbrado por la rica y compleja realidad cubana de ese entonces y trata de introducir, una tras otro, todos los elementos de la misma.'<sup>77</sup> *Preludio 11* was screened not only in East Germany but also in Poland as part of a week dedicated to Cuban cinema. The film was dubbed into Polish, and a film-poster was created for the Polish release of the film. For the purposes of the present study, the most relevant feature of this film is that Maetzig introduced for the first time the hybrid combination of eroticism and political commitment of young Cuban girls dressed in olive green military uniforms, a new character within the East German DEFA filmic discourse and, as a consequence, within Soviet cinema and perhaps world cinema: the Cuban heroine, *la miliciana* (the militia-woman). *Preludio 11* is, indeed, a testimony to the spirit of experimentation in cinema. It not only served to shape the image of Cuban Revolutionary women within the socialist cinematic tradition but also within the cinema of the Cuban Revolution. *Preludio 11*, Kurt Maetzig's cinematic observations in times of revolution follows the example of the *Ensayo político de la isla de Cuba* (1826) by Baron Alexander von Humboldt (1769-1859).<sup>78</sup> Both texts contain German elements grafted onto the trunk of a distinctive Caribbean cultural identity. Maetzig's work is significant in the Cuban context because of his innovatory work in the hybrid cinematic field of

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<sup>76</sup> See Alejo Beltrán 'Preludio 11', *Hoy*, 6 February 1964, second edition, no pagination. ICAIC Archives.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>78</sup> Cubans celebrate Humboldt as the second 'discoverer' of the island, after Columbus. Humboldt's study remains one of the most important sources for the study of 19th-century Cuba and particularly of slavery in the Caribbean.

documentary-style feature film for which Cuban cinema, and particularly the work of Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, is renowned.<sup>79</sup>

Maetzig's *Der Rat der Götter* (The Council of the Gods, 1950) is based on the 1947 book I.G. Farben, by American author Richard Sasuly, and records from the Nuremberg Trial of the chemical giant I.G. Farben. The film is a story about the collaboration between international corporations and Nazi scientists, whose research contributed to the death of millions. Maetzig has claimed that *Der Rat der Götter* introduced a new genre in film-making: the documentary feature film, 'this means that the story surrounding the family of the chemist Dr Scholz in the film is purely invention, but that everything concerning the relations between the German chemical industry and American industry is based on official sources.'<sup>80</sup> Certainly, the most striking thing about Maetzig's 1950 film was the use of documentary material and archive footage. Maetzig saw that adding documentary material in the film *Der Rat der Götter* served to strengthen the revelations and realism of the fictional film narrative, creating a synthesis of documentary and fiction, something that, as a procedure, Maetzig did not repeat in *Preludio II*. ICAIC film-makers would find in Maetzig's *Der Rat der Götter* an important point of reference when producing Cuban

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<sup>79</sup> Gutiérrez Alea has argued that 'in Cuba, we have extensively developed a type of feature-length documentary in which real-life events are recreated or shown exactly as they are captured by the camera at the moment of their occurrence. (...) In addition, news reportage can be turned into a feature-length film'. See Gutiérrez Alea, *The Viewer's Dialectic*, translated by Julia Lesage (Havana: José Martí Publishing House, 1988), p. 27. On the topic of German's cultural representation of Cuba see Jennifer Ruth Hosek's study *Sun, Sex, and Socialism: Cuba in the German Imaginary* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011), to be published in 2012.

<sup>80</sup> This film had its Cuban premiere on 23 December 1963. See 'Codificador de Estrenos del Departamento de Programación de la Distribuidora Nacional de Películas del ICAIC'. This information was facilitated by Mayuya at the ICAIC (email 26 April 2010). Pastor Vega has explained to me that *Der Rat der Götter* (1950) was shown as part of the 'semana de cine de la RDA' in Cuba, which was followed by a debate between German and Cuban film-makers and the general public about this film. It would be interesting to learn more about this debate but all recordings are lost or damaged. See Martin Brady, 'Discussion with Kurt Maetzig', in *DEFA: East German Cinema, 1946-1992*, pp. 77-92 (p. 77). On the discussion around the Cuban documentary feature film see the next chapter of this thesis.



documentary feature films later on. We will observe this formula in two of Cuba's classic films: Titón's *Memorias del subdesarrollo* the film that for the first time, introduced this practice in Cuban cinema, and Octavio Cortázar's *El brigadista*. Pastor Vega worked as an assistant director for Maetzig, and the film he went on to direct in 1979 (see the analysis below in chapter 3), clearly bears the hallmark of Maetzig's influence.<sup>81</sup>

### *Soy Cuba*

In 1961, at the II Moscow International Film Festival, the idea of making a film in Cuba was born. At the same event, for the first time, an ICAIC delegation was present. According to Belka Fridman, Sergei Urusevskii's widow, the Cuban Saúl Yelín was the heart and soul of the Cuban delegation: the latter spoke several European languages, but not Russian, so at that time they communicated in French. Urusevskii was very enthusiastic about the project: 'Desde los primeros días de la revolución cubana él (Urusevskii) seguía con emoción todos los acontecimientos, leía todo lo que se publicaba en la prensa y escuchaba la radio.'<sup>82</sup> Fridman also remembered that at that time they were involved in another film project that was almost ready to film, but everything was postponed when, in October 1961, Evtushenko, Kalatozov and Urusevskii left for Cuba (which they had already visited twice before for one year and eight months, respectively). These individuals were to be involved in a major project under the title *Soy Cuba*. Kalatozov wanted to film a poem about Cuba as Vladimir Maiakovskii had portrayed Havana before in his poetry. In the last eight years of his life, Maiakovskii travelled abroad almost annually. From France, the

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<sup>81</sup> On the German side, Armin Mueller-Stahl starred in several Hollywood productions: from Costa Gravas's *Music Box* (1989) to Ron Howard's *Angels & Demons* (2009). Without doubt, Mueller-Stahl turned his German otherness into an internationally recognisable cinematic brand name.

<sup>82</sup> See Sergei Urusevskii, 'Cartas desde Cuba (1961–1962)', introduction by Belka Urusevskaia, *Cine cubano*, no. 104 (1983), pp. 71–87 (p. 71).

Soviet poet sailed across the Atlantic for his own discovery of the Americas in 1925. Maiakovskii, ‘the red poet’, landed first in Havana, where his fine poem *Black And White* (original title in English) was written, a poem about social inequality and racial discrimination in Cuba. This poem seems to work not in lines but in filmic shots: it is like a filmic poem. In effect, it is a Soviet poem on the Afro-Cuban question:

In Havana  
Everything’s marked off clearly:  
Whites have dollars,  
Blacks\_nil per head...<sup>83</sup>

Perhaps this poem about Havana was well-known by Kalatozov and he was determined to make a poetic film dedicated to Cuba.

### **Mikhail Kalatozov, Eisenstein and *Que Viva Mexico!***

Mikhail Kalatozov (1903–1973) was a Soviet film-maker originally from Georgia. His film *Letiat zhuravli* (The Cranes Are Flying, 1958) is one of the landmarks of Soviet film and, in Josephine Woll’s words, ‘the first indisputable masterpiece of post-Stalin cinema’.<sup>84</sup> The film was welcomed as a revelation in the Soviet Union. It also became an international success, winning the Palme d’Or at Cannes. However, despite all the awards and positive reviews heaped on the film, at the time the ‘angry young man’ Cabrera Infante had a different opinion: ‘I think it is a good film and nothing more. Everything that has been said

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<sup>83</sup> Vladimir Mayakovsky, *Selected Works in Three Volumes* translated by Dorian Rottenberg (Moscow: Raduga, 1985), vol. 1 (*Selected Verses*), p. 138. See also the animation *Chernoie i Beloe* (Black And White, 1933) by Ivan Ivanov-Vano and L. Amalrik; produced by Mezhrabpomfilm; see <http://www.memocast.com/media.aspx?id=88948> (accessed November 2010)

<sup>84</sup> On Kalatozov and this particular film, see Josephine Woll, *The Cranes are Flying* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2003). On this period of Soviet cinema in general, see by the same author *Real Images: Soviet Cinema and the Thaw* (London: I.B. Tauris; 2000). See also *Film o Mikhaile Kalatozove* (A Film about Mikhail Kalatozov), made in 2006 by the director’s grandson, Mikhail Kalatozishvili; this documentary is part of *I Am Cuba – the Ultimate Edition* a 3-DVD set.

about it has been either very well-staged propaganda or eagerness to witness a resurrection devoutly to be wished: the hope that the Soviet cinema will once again be what it was thirty years ago.’ In the same review, Infante identifies ‘the camera that flies like a crane’ and he continues ‘and Urusevskii, the cinematographer, turns into the Gabriel Figueroa of the Soviets’.<sup>85</sup> Perhaps what Cabrera Infante liked most about the film was ‘the extraordinary beauty of Tat’iana Samoilova, who carries the movie all by herself, with her slanted eyes, her straight black hair and her passive resistance to adversity: if there is something memorable in the film, it is her without any doubts.’<sup>86</sup> Certainly, Kalatozov makes her character completely sympathetic to everyone. For her involuntary infidelity to her husband Veronika, the character played by Samoilova, is also far from the moralistic, traditional Soviet war film heroine.

Kalatozov decided that Evgenii Evtushenko and Enrique Pineda Barnet should be the scriptwriters for his Cuban film. Pineda Barnet recalls the pre-production of the film, in which Kalatozov was interested in the formulation of Cuba as a filmic poem. He remembers the film-maker’s instructions for the film: ‘Quiso que Evtuchenko y yo viéramos algunas películas. Y así tuvimos la oportunidad de ver *México* de Eisenstein, con un guión de Alexandrov, hecho después de la muerte del genial director pero con un pésimo montaje. Vimos, pues la extraordinaria toma de Eisenstein de incalculable expresividad plástica, en una incesante búsqueda fascinante de lo mexicano, pasando de la piedra de la milenaria pirámide hasta el perfil del hombre, penetrando desde la vieja tradición hasta el

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<sup>85</sup> ‘Many claim that Figueroa was the one who directed the films of El Indio Fernández. Figueroa was Tisse’s assistant on Eisenstein’s Mexican film’, see Cabrera Infante, *A Twentieth Century Job*, pp. 323.; see Laura Podalsky, ‘Patterns of the Primitive: Sergei Eisenstein’s *Que viva México!*’, in *Mediating Two Worlds: Cinematic Encounters in the Americas*, edited by John King, Ana M. López and Manuel Alvarado (London: BFI, 1993), pp. 25-39.

<sup>86</sup> *A Twentieth Century Job*, pp. 323 & 326.

presente de un pueblo en lucha por su independencia.’<sup>87</sup> For Kalatozov, Eisenstein’s Mexican film was the main source of inspiration for his own work dedicated to Cuba. However, Cuba does not have the monumental architecture of Teotihuacán or Chichen Itza; instead the island had its light, the diversity of its people, a singular music and a unique Revolution.

Alexander Prokhorov identifies ‘anti-monumentalism’ to be ‘the most important visual manifestation of de-Stalinization’.<sup>88</sup> This detail suggests that *Soy Cuba* should be considered an important point of reference for the so-called Thaw cinema. Pineda Barnet remembers: ‘trabajaríamos con símbolos que representaran una condensación de la realidad. A veces, más de un hecho histórico fundido en otro, varios héroes integrados en un solo personaje. También allí nos habló Kalatozov de la idea de que el guión no necesitara traducción de títulos para los diálogos. Es decir, procurar la menor cantidad de diálogos posibles, y que éstos fueran los estrictamente necesarios, al mismo tiempo que expresivos por sí mismos, en imágenes, sin necesidad de traducirlos.’<sup>89</sup> Evtushenko, the co-scriptwriter of the film, became a major figure in Soviet intellectual life during Khrushchev’s Thaw. In *A Precocious Autobiography*, with regard to his childhood, Evtushenko explains: ‘my education was left to the street. The street taught me to swear, smoke, spit elegantly through my teeth, and to keep my fists at the ready — a habit which I have to this day (...) I realised that what mattered in the struggle for life was to overcome my fear of those who were stronger.’<sup>90</sup> The struggle for life made him a pragmatic poet, too

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<sup>87</sup> See Enrique Pineda Barnet, ‘Después de pasar el charco’, *Cine cubano*, no. 3.9 (January 1963), pp. 56–66 (p. 57).

<sup>88</sup> Cited in Alexander Prokhorov, ‘The adolescent and the child in the cinema of the Thaw’, in *Studies in Russian and Soviet Cinema*, vol. 1 issue 2 (March 2007), pp. 115–29, (p. 120).

<sup>89</sup> Pineda Barnet, ‘Después de pasar el charco’, *Cine cubano*, no. 3.9 (January 1963), pp. 56–66 (p. 58).

<sup>90</sup> Evgenii Evtushenko, *A Precocious Autobiography*, translated by Andrew R. MacAndrew (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965), p. 26.

pragmatic perhaps, the kind of poet who writes for a profitable result. In this way his poetry has become emblematic of the time and misunderstood by many as anti-Soviet.<sup>91</sup> Kalatozov was counting on two different poets, two different styles of poetry that could provide words that would be comprehensible for both Cuban and Soviet spectators. Now those words had to become film images. For this he had a great partner: Sergei Urusevskii (1908–1974).

### **Sergei Urusevskii**

As a cinematographer, Urusevskii had worked with different Soviet film-makers such as Mark Donskoi on *Sel'skaia uchitel'nitsa* (The Village Teacher, 1947), with Pudovkin on *Vozvrashchenie Vasiliia Bortnikova* (The Return of Vasilii Bortnikov, 1953), and with Grigorii Chukhrai on *Sorok pervyi* (The Forty-First, 1956). With Kalatozov, he had worked on *Pervyi eshelon* (The First Echelon, 1955); *Letiat zhuravli*, and *Neotpravlennoe pis'mo*, (The Unsent Letter, 1960). Urusevskii became internationally known for his outstanding use of the movie camera.

The correspondence between this artist and his wife offers a first-hand account of those Cuban days. Within those letters the transformation in Urusevskii's creative process can be observed; as the artist discovered Cuba, its culture and Revolution, these letters describe in detail his experiences, which were transferred to the film.<sup>92</sup> In his correspondence it is possible to identify an artist with a great sense for detail, a highly significant observer of Cuban history. *Soy Cuba* is clearly a film created mainly from Urusevskii's impressions of Cuba; they stayed there with the film crew for twenty months in total.

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid., p. 135.

<sup>92</sup> Urusevskii, 'Cartas desde Cuba (1961–1962), p. 75.

## A Poetic Film

Urusevskii suggested that, for the Soviet team, the most urgent thing was not what to film, but how. For him the artistic solution for the film was to write a script like a poem dedicated to Cuba. According to Urusevskii, a poem does not require those little psychological details that novels need: ‘el poema requiere unas imágenes muy claras, muy definidas que penetren rápidamente en la imaginación. Por eso quisimos que la película fuera como un poema romántico.’<sup>93</sup> The significance of the film’s opening sequence has not been sufficiently explored in the criticism on *Soy Cuba* to date. Crucial to an understanding of the film are the following four audiovisual details: Pineda Barnet’s poem, Urusevskii’s cinematography, and his particular use of natural light, the music by Carlos Fariñas (1934-2004) – namely the sound of the drums and the guitar – and the use of actors as models. In the Cuban version of the film the first visual image of *Soy Cuba* is the words: ‘Instituto Cubano del Arte y la Industria Cinematográfica presenta’. These words themselves constitute a cinematic message. Kalatozov recognised his film first and foremost as a creation of the nascent Cuban film industry, as part of a cinematic discourse from the New Cinema World: the *Third Cinema*. This is accompanied by the ‘sound effect’ of the Cuban bongos, whereby Kalatozov ‘made the drums speak’, introducing the Afro element of Cuba and Carlos Fariñas’s prelude. According to Pineda Barnet, Kalatozov was a music fanatic — as he writes, ‘en realidad, a mí (Kalatozov) no me sale bien el día si no escucho música. Oigo la música que le da un tono a la vida. A la persona le hace falta la música como el oxígeno.’<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid., p. 75.

<sup>94</sup> Enrique Pineda Barnet, ‘Después de pasar un charco’, p. 61.

In a film dedicated to Cuba, music must play a principal role, like oxygen for the body. In order to achieve this, we can understand that Kalatozov wanted a film liberated from those previous clichés of soundtrack as ‘música de fondo’. The Soviet film-maker decided that Fariñas would be the composer for the film while the musician was studying between 1961 and 1963 at the Tchaikovsky Conservatory in Moscow. Fariñas wrote music for almost all genres and formats, ranging from traditional acoustic (duos, trios, chamber and symphonic orchestras) to the electroacoustic and computer music of which he was a notable creator and teacher, having created the Estudio de Música Electroacústica y por Computadora del Instituto Superior de Arte (ISA) in 1989. According to Radamés Giro in his study *Visión panorámica de la guitarra en Cuba*, Fariñas’s guitar composition ‘presenta la característica de un estilo diáfano y sugerente’.<sup>95</sup> *The Preludio* was performed first by Jesús Ortega for the sound-track of the film and is in the repertoire of almost every Cuban guitarist. *Soy Cuba*’s soundtrack, composed by Fariñas, confirms Kalatozov as assuming an auteur’s cinematic perception, *Je suis Cuba*, in that this is not film music in a traditional sense. Kalatozov, indeed, appears to adopt an approach to musicality which is similar to that taken by Carpentier, for whom ‘unfortunately, a scientific work of notation, compilation, comparison, rhythmic and modal study, with its ensuing classifications, still has not been undertaken, because the task, admittedly so, is beyond the scope of one individual’.<sup>96</sup> Kalatozov’s art of suggestion was intended to resolve the problem.

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<sup>95</sup> See Radamés Giro, *Visión panorámica de la guitarra en Cuba* (La Habana: Editorial Letras Cubanas, 1997), p. 45. In 1969, Fariñas won a prize at the Fourth Paris Biennale for his Tiento II, an example of avantgarde work of the time. He was involved in the establishment of the Orquesta Sinfonica Nacional and served as director of the Conservatorio Alejandro García Caturla. From 1966 to 1976 he was director of the music section of the Biblioteca Nacional José Martí, and held the chair of composition at the Instituto Superior de Arte. In 1989, he set up the Estudio de Música Electroacústica y por Computadora (EMEC), a reflection of the later direction his music took. He died in 2002. See also Keith Anderson’s ‘Cuban Guitar Music’ (Adapted from a note by Marco Tamayo) in <http://www.naxosdirect.com/title/8.555887> (accessed in December 2010). See also Fariñas’s interview on the making of Kalatozov’s film in Vicente Ferraz’s documentary, *O Mamute Siberiano* (The Siberian Mammoth, 2005).

<sup>96</sup> Alejo Carpentier, *Music in Cuba* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), p. 261.

Why, we may well ask, was the guitar used in this film? The guitar, of course, is a versatile instrument that provides a range of historical and social references, reflecting those aspects of Cuba's cultural diversity. Fariñas's prelude, as a genre of music for a solo instrument, the guitar, gave the impression of an improvisatory style for the film, like jazz, like the Cuban Revolution itself. Fariñas's prelude does not recall the joyful strains of traditional Cuban folk guitar. This is a sad guitar, expressing the sorrow of the island, reinforced by the words of the poem, and Urusevskii's cinematography. It is not only an introduction to what is to come, but it is the essence of a cinematic poem of cruel romanticism: *Ia Kuba*. In the opening scene, Kalatozov sets out the key features of the whole film and of his concept of the island. It expresses simplicity and emotion, offering a brief filmic definition of Cuba and its music. The Georgian director did not want the opening, a crucial scene for the film, to become a 'tourist view' by car, as was employed by Maetzig. Instead he chose an aerial view. We should remember that Kalatozov, as Emma Widdis has explained, contributed to 'the consolidation of the myth of the pilot in Soviet cinematography during the 1930s, and the emergent aesthetic of the aerial shot'.<sup>97</sup>

The image seems to suggest the Soviet arrival to a new land, an aestheticising of Soviet foreign politics, a cinematic integration of Cuba within the so-called 'socialist camp', the Soviet realm. Kalatozov's film may be seen as the Soviet cinematic conquest of Cuban reality. Yet the question inevitably emerges: to what extent could Cuban elements such as its music, with its Afro-Hispanic elements, US material culture, its tempo, 'calor' and Caribbean eroticism be accepted within the Soviet format? At least, in cinematic terms,

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<sup>97</sup> Emma Widdis, *Visions of the New Land: Soviet Film from the Revolution to the Second War World* (New Haven: Yale University, 2003), p. 135.



this was the first attempt at fusion between these identities within the same ideological space, and it created a Soviet illusion. Another important element of this opening image is the appearance of a female voice reading a poem, which identifies itself as Cuba. In a review of *Soy Cuba* published by *Sight and Sound*, Paul Julian Smith commented: ‘a voiceover repeats Russian poet Evtushenko’s portentously poetic script in both Spanish and Russian’. This is a mistake, however; this ‘texto maldito’ was written by Enrique Pineda Barnet, not by Evtushenko, and was inspired by José Martí’s poem ‘Yugo y Estrella’.<sup>98</sup>

The poem’s conclusion is simple: Cuba is no longer the happy paradise that it was before Columbus, but merely a small, dependent land of beggars. The island has been betrayed and reduced to a state of pauperism. Was the film an example of magical or socialist realism? Many were offended by this stark poetic depiction of the island. Pineda Barnet has explained that the film has a narrative flaw because the Soviets wanted to emphasise the evilness of Cuba’s past in order to legitimise the Revolution. He also suggested that it is possible that Socialist Realism was still in the ‘subconscious’ of everyone; it was present like a ghost and too difficult to be ignored. This poem was in correspondence with the Soviet perception of the artist as an ‘engineer of the human soul’, where everything can be defined, understood and simplified within an affirmative sentence or formula, like a mathematical equation. Kalatozov and Urusevskii, therefore, would seem to agree with Russian formalist film theory concerning the problem of film syntagmatics, or the

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<sup>98</sup> This detail was provided by Enrique Pineda Barnet during one of our several conversations and exchanges of emails about the film. Those conversations took place in November 2005 in London. See Paul Julian Smith, ‘I Am Cuba’, *Sight & Sound*, no. 8, August 1999; <http://www.bfi.org.uk/sightandsound/review/171> (accessed November 2010).

combination of shots into larger units of meaning, in particular with those who considered poetry to be a more appropriate model for the syntagmatics of film.

In *Russian Formalist Film Theory*, Herbert Eagle has demonstrated that Russian Formalists based their analyses on the analogy between shots in a film and lines in a poem: ‘Tynianov had argued that verse breaks language into rhythmic units and that within each unit or verse the semantics of the words “infect” one another, “deforming” one another to create new meaning. The compact verses then create, dynamically, a tendency to compare and correlate each verse with the previous ones as formal equivalent units. Thus, a process of continual semantic comparison is engendered by verse form.’<sup>99</sup> We find a similar sense of dynamic connection between the sequences of Kalatozov’s film. There are also similarities between *Soy Cuba* and Fernando Ortiz’s *Contrapunteo cubano del tabaco y el azúcar*. As Ortiz argues ‘toda la escala cultural que Europa experimentó en más de cuatro milenios, en Cuba se pasó en menos de cuatro siglos. Lo que allí fue subido por rampa y escalones, aquí ha sido progreso a *saltos y sobresaltos* [...] Se saltó en un instante de las soñolientas edades de piedra a la edad muy despertada del Renacimiento. En un día se pasaron en Cuba varias edades; se diría que miles de “años-cultura” si fuera admisible una tal métrica para la cronología de los pueblos.’<sup>100</sup> This portrayal of Cuban history resonates with Kalatozov’s stochastic editing.

*Soy Cuba* is divided into four stories or ‘saltos’. The first episode is the most beautiful cinematic painting of them all. From the opening prelude, where everything seems to be

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<sup>99</sup> Herbert Eagle, *Russian Formalist Film Theory* (Michigan: Michigan Slavic Publications, 1981), p. 14.

<sup>100</sup> Ortiz, *Contrapunteo*, pp. 256–57.

indigenous and primitive, a sudden 'jump' is made into a modern period with the sound of rock-and-roll, martinis, a swimming pool, half-naked people and sunglasses in the environment of a beauty contest in the Hotel Capri, audiovisual images that remember the Mafia days in Havana with the glamorous casinos.<sup>101</sup> In this sequence we observe the abuse of young Cuban women at the hands of foreigners and the use of the cinematic close-up, which emphasises dramatic elements that might otherwise be overlooked, such as the sadness and beauty of the girl, or the ugliness and Machiavellian expression of Jim (Jean Bousie) the tourist. The close-up, like the still-life painting, is powerful in the art of suggestion. Cinema is essentially a visual art, thus the use of painterly techniques can be useful in film. As a painter, Urusevskii knew their expressiveness. In these sequences it is relevant to note the use of the light as in a painting. Those present during the making of the film affirm that the light is a key protagonist of the film. In the first story, Urusevskii achieved an image that contrives a composition of the light against the actors (the girl and the tourist), the Cadillac and the putrid water without upsetting the harmony of it all.

One might argue that Kalatozov achieved, through the environment and the habitat of this girl, a powerful vision of Havana that was not so much an industrial as a post-industrial city, suggesting a state of decay and ruin that brings to mind that classic of post-modern cinema, *Blade Runner*. In the next episode, an old farmer, Pedro (José Gallardo), faces the sad reality of losing everything when the owner of the land he works on sells that land to a

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<sup>101</sup> The Hotel Capri was one of the largest hotel/casinos in Havana during its heyday and was one of first to be built by the Mafia in Cuba, Meyer Lansky and his "associates". Hotel Capri's swimming pool on the roof can be also seen in the opening scenes of Carol Reed's film *Our Man in Havana* (1959). Regarding the life of Cuban capital city before 1959 see Enrique Cirules, *La vida secreta de Meyer Lansky en La Habana: la Mafia en Cuba* (La Habana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 2004), Antoni Kapcia, *Havana: the Making of Cuban Culture* (Oxford; New York: Berg, 2005) and Peter Moruzzi, *Havana before Castro: When Cuba was a Tropical Playground* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Gibbs Smith, 2008).

US corporation. This episode contains stunning images of the old man cutting what appears to be luminous sugar cane against a black sky. As one of the Cuban assistant cameramen recalls, during shooting, once they were waiting almost three days for clouds.<sup>102</sup> For a shot in which the sky has a strong presence or a very luminous shot, for example, Urusevskii walked away and blindfolded himself to try to enlarge his pupils as much as possible, which allowed him to have a much brighter view of the picture when looking through the camera's viewfinder. Urusevskii wanted a glitter that would match that of the sugar crystals. To obtain those tones in black and white he found a special negative to turn the green of coconut-trees and sugar cane into an almost silver tone. He chose infrared film because it 'comunica luminosidad y penetración a la forma'.<sup>103</sup>

In the third episode, a young student, Enrique (Raúl García), in Havana University fights against Batista. Despite his struggle, however, he dies. The last sequences of the film take place in the Sierra Maestra, where a farmer (Salvador Wood) rejects the call to battle by a rebel (Sergio Corrieri). However, he finally joins the 'barbudos' after a bombing raid destroys his home. The farmer becomes a rebel. The triumph of the Revolution becomes inevitable. *Soy Cuba* is a didactic film in the best tradition of Socialist Realism. However, this film seems also to belong to different genres of cinema. As we have seen, the segmentation of *Soy Cuba* achieves the 'saltos' of a Formalist perception. Each story in the film 'infects' the others in order to define Cuba, creating a new meaning for the audience. To paraphrase Tynianov, 'cinema (*Soy Cuba*) jumps from shot to shot, just as a verse does

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<sup>102</sup> See Aleksandr Kal'tsatyi's interview in Vicente Ferraz's documentary *Soy Cuba: O Mamute Siberiano*.

<sup>103</sup> Eduardo Manet, '80 Minutos con Sergei Urusevskii', *Cine cubano*, no. 4.20 (May 1964), 1–8 (p. 5). In Ferraz's documentary, Kal'tsatyi explains that Urusevskii used film from the same military factory in which the Soviets made film to shoot the other side of the Moon — the infrared film caused a very strong visual effect. This was part of the magic of *Soy Cuba*'s visual poetry, which was achieved long before the days of Steadicams.

from line to line'.<sup>104</sup> Belka Urusevskaia played an important role in the casting. Many actors for the film were found by accident. The girl for the first story was 'discovered' by Belka in the National Hotel. In an elevator in the same hotel Kalatozov came across the French actor Jean Boise, whom they invited to act as 'the tourist'. They had difficulties finding the young university student for the third story, before eventually selecting the young boy (Raúl García) who had been working as the sound technician.

In Ferraz's documentary, Pineda Barnet recalls how Kalatozov met an old Afro-Cuban man in the street and decided that he would be a great 'model' for the film, and so that man who did not know how to sing or play the guitar became a *trovador* in the film, 'singing' *Canción triste* by Carlos Fariñas, which is now a Cuban guitar classic. This 'improvised' and meticulous conception of casting revealed that Kalatozov shared with Eisenstein and the Russian Formalists the view of people as signs, of actors as 'models'. As Herbert Eagle explains in the case of Eisenstein and the Formalists: 'the actor's poses, facial expressions and part of the bodies isolated in close-up are signs whose potential meanings can be brought out through montage. Eisenstein's "typage" and the painstaking process of selecting for major roles non-actors with the desired physical attributes are entirely consistent with this view. The shape of body and face were more important sign considerations than was professional acting experience since in any case the human figure was to be fragmented in montage, turned into a chain of signs.'<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> See Eagle, *Russian Formalist Film Theory*, p. 15.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

For Cuban professional actors such as, for example, Sergio Corrieri and Salvador Wood, *Soy Cuba* gave them their first major roles in cinema. After Kalatozov's film, Corrieri had an outstanding career as an actor in Cuban cinema, TV and theatre. Internationally, he is recognised for his leading role in Titón's *Memorias del subdesarrollo* (Memories of Underdevelopment, 1968). However, Corrieri's more profitable role in the Cuban moving image was the one that Kalatozov had offered him four years previous: the Cuban Revolutionary. Corrieri played many versions of that intrinsically Cuban role: as a university student leader, as a member of the underground movement against Batista, a rebel in Sierra Maestra and finally as an agent of espionage in times of socialism, in leading roles such as Pineda Barnet's *Mella* (1976), Manuel Pérez's *El hombre de Maisinicú* (The Man from Maisinicú, 1973), and the Cuban TV series *En silencio ha tenido que ser* (In silence had to be).<sup>106</sup> Salvador Wood also became a much admired actor of the Cuban moving image.

### **The Reception of *Soy Cuba***

The reception of the film must be examined in two different periods: when it was first shown in the 1960s and the time of its rediscovery in the 1990s. The premier was in Santiago de Cuba, during the carnival that formed part of the festivities for the 26th of July. Even though *Soy Cuba*, of all these first co-productions, is clearly of a superior quality to the rest, Havana in the epoch of 'imperialist decay', the film was not well received by Cuban film-makers, nor by the leaders of the Revolution. According to Luis M. López, the film '*Soy Cuba empieza donde acaba El otro Cristóbal*, de Gatti, con palmares melancólicos de los que ya habló Heredia suficientemente. Después, allí donde se presume

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<sup>106</sup> Previously, Corrieri had only a cameo role in the episode directed by José Miguel García Ascot 'Los novios' in the film *Cuba'58* (1962).

que desembarcó el primer Cristóbal, los indígenas reman, cargan bultos en la testa, muestran el pellejo tostado por el sol tropical y para completar la cargada visión semi-bucólica, falta tan sólo el punto guajiro; pero en su lugar, agradecemos la voz sobria de Raquel Revuelta, obligada a leer un texto maldito que incide en el azúcar y el dolor y el sudor.<sup>107</sup> In the Soviet Union the viewers ranked it among the worst dozen films of the year. Josephine Woll explains that many: ‘acknowledged the failure of *I am Cuba*, but stressed the importance of its artistic experimentation.<sup>108</sup>

Certainly, for the Soviet critic M. Bleiman, Kalatozov’s film was a ‘povod dlia sereznykh razdumii’ (A cause for serious reflection): ‘no podemos calificar a esta película como un acierto. Aún más, hasta cierto punto es un fracaso, y un fracaso de carácter de principio que tiene sus orígenes, sus raíces, en ciertas inclinaciones de creación [...] la idea literaria ha sido solo un pretexto para esos ensayos de director y camarógrafo que no logran una unidad aunque nos admiren por su perfección.’<sup>109</sup> On this point, moreover, Bleiman claimed that the use of the long sequence affected the pace of the storyline in the film. Comparing two sequences from *Letiat zhuravli* and *Soy Cuba*, Bleiman suggested that ‘una muchacha corre escaleras arriba en una casa destruida por la aviación. En el apartamento se quedaron sus padres. Un tramo, otro más. El movimiento se acelera. Por fin abre la puerta. Sobre el fondo del cielo se balancea un paraban: la habitación ha sido volada. Ese movimiento en “Cuando vuelan las cigüeñas” no está filmado con

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<sup>107</sup> Luis M. López, ‘No soy Cuba’, *Bohemia*, 34 (21 August 1964), pp. 24–25 (p. 24).

<sup>108</sup> See Woll, *Real Images: Soviet Cinema and the Thaw*, p. 184. For Soviet articles about *Soy Cuba*, see *Sovetskie khudozhestvennye fil'my: Annotirovannyi katalog: Tom V (1964–1965)* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Iskusstvo, 1979), p. 154.

<sup>109</sup> See M. Bleiman’s article ‘Povod dlia sereznykh razdumii’ published in the newspaper *Sovetskaia kul'tura*, 29 April 1965, p. 3, translated into Spanish by Zoia Barash as ‘Motivo de serias reflexiones’, ICAIC Documentation Centre Archives; no pagination.

la minucia y el virtuosismo del de *Soy Cuba*”, ni es tan prolongadamente largo, pero en cambio, además de ser por sí mismo expresivo, llega a crear una imagen.’<sup>110</sup>

In a grim portrait of Havana’s decadence, Kalatozov identifies an Afro-Cuban girl María (Luz María Collazo) as an expression of the whole nation. It is useful to remember that from the very beginning Kalatozov was not interested in dialogue but in the visual effects. On the Cuban side at that time only Mario Rodríguez Alemán and Manuel Valdés Rodríguez came to the rescue of the film. The latter acknowledged that the film was notable for its photography and sound, ‘excelente la música de todas las historias, obra de Carlos Fariñas’.<sup>111</sup> In the newspaper *La tarde*, Rodríguez Alemán published an article entitled ‘Soy Cuba en el Cine cubano’ on 3 August 1964. In this article, the film critic pointed out: ‘la significación de *Soy Cuba* podrá medirse al cabo del tiempo, cuando la película pase por el tamiz del público. Sin embargo, de la historia del film, de su realización y compenetración del equipo soviético con el cubano, pueden obtenerse hoy factores favorables; por vez primera el paisaje cubano visto por la mirada plástica de Urusevsky, ha alcanzado en el cine una dimensión distinta. De igual modo se ha utilizado un lente (el 9.8) que nunca antes se utilizó en el mundo. (...) el análisis crítico del film requerirá otros trabajos, meditaciones más largas, pero ahora nos interesa destacar de *Soy Cuba* un punto visible: es un filme histórico en nuestro cine.’<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> See Manuel Valdés Rodríguez, ‘Soy Cuba: Film notable por la fotografía y sonido’, *Cinema*, 30 August 1964, no pagination. See folder of film reviews cuttings about *Soy Cuba* in ICAIC’s film archives.

<sup>112</sup> Mario Rodríguez Alemán, ‘Soy Cuba en el cine cubano’, *La tarde*, 3 August 1964, p. 4.



Michael Chanan believes that, 'while it made sense for the ICAIC to undertake these co-productions for both artistic and material reasons, the foreign visitors did not do their homework'. Chanan even argues that Evtushenko, who was especially enthusiastic, 'was unable to get beneath the skin and go beyond the traveller's image of the island, which Soviet revolutionary poetry inherited from Maiakovskii's visit in the 20s'.<sup>113</sup> Nevertheless, it is possible to assert that these film-makers clearly did do their job properly. The original title of the film in Russian, *Ia Kuba*, is a very fascinating aspect to take into consideration. Since spoken Russian has no verb 'to be' in the present tense and no articles at all (definite or indefinite), we have to insert a verb to make its translation into English, Spanish or French grammatical in order for the expression to make sense for us. Certainly, the verb is perhaps the most important part of the sentence. A verb or compound verb asserts something about the subject of the sentence and expresses actions, events, or states of being. The verb or compound verb is the critical element of the predicate of a sentence.

How does one conceptualise a cinematic understanding of 'the soul of Cuba' in relation to socialism? The title *Ia Kuba* is more about a political position that the Soviet artist assumed in relation to Cuba; it can be argued that the title could be also Yo (I) - Cuba, a position taken by the Soviet film-maker in relation to the 'new' meaning of Cuba, which is essentially a form of political definition. How might one define Cuba audiovisually? Part of the problem of Cuban identity, perhaps, is the somewhat indefinable or indistinct nature of Cubanness. Kalatozov and Urusevskii 'drew' a cinematic definition of Cuba considering symbols (the light and the darkness that it implies, music — guitar and drums — a verse, actors as 'models') as a filmic, poetic representation of the island.

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<sup>113</sup> Chanan, *Cuban Cinema*, p. 130.

In the first few minutes of the film, Kalatozov synthesises a filmic representation of the transculturation process on the island, suggesting the different ‘saltos’ in Cuban history: 400 years of Spanish colonial rule, the syncretism of African elements and the impact of sixty years of a US presence. Kalatozov added a new cultural element within this ‘cinematic identity’, the voiceover in Russian, which was used for the film copy produced for a Soviet audience and for the DVD version. What is interesting here is the deliberate sensuality of the Russian female voice when it reads the word *sakhar* (sugar), an example of how the Cuban experience altered the Soviet form. As Bleiman has stated: ‘Urusevskii me convertía de espectador en participante, en presente a toda la acción; me arrastraba a la vorágine de la danza; al ritmo de la manifestación; al ardor del combate callejero.’<sup>114</sup>

This Soviet film review is one of the most interesting about the film because it refers to a very different way of showing the masses, which was of great importance in terms of the ideological implications of Kalatozov’s film, something that the film achieves, thanks to Urusevskii’s cinematographic work. In several sequences, the camera shows the masses ‘from inside’, where the spectator looking at the screen feels that that they are becoming a member of those Cuban masses; the spectator is marching with them, participating in what is going on the screen. The camera persuades the spectator to join the Cuban Revolutionary masses, to get involved, and to take an active position by the side of the Revolution: *Ia Kuba*.

The aftermath of *Soy Cuba* confirms that the Kalatozov-Urusevskii team achieved a cinematic work of art. Two scenes in particular are now seen as classics. First, the scene on the roof of a high-rise building, a rock-and-roll trio blares out as the camera strolls with

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<sup>114</sup> See Bleiman, ‘Motivo de serias reflexiones’.

contestants in a bikini beauty contest through a crowd of mostly tourists. The camera moves to the edge of the roof and glides down the side of the building to a swimming pool swarming with sunbathers drinking cocktails. The camera swerves to glance down from a terrace onto the beach, and then turns its attention to a brunette as she rises from a chaise longue and steps into the swimming pool. The camera follows, plunging beneath the surface to show a diversity of swimming bodies. The sound also goes underwater, yielding a distorted version of the revelries above. A second great scene is that of the demonstration during the funeral of the student who was killed by the military.

One of the main technical achievements of the film was the devising by the Soviet crew of a closed camera video system using Urusevskii's personal television set, which permitted Kalatozov to view the scenes during shooting. This was probably the first use of what has only in recent years become common practice for everyone in the media. In Vicente Ferraz's documentary *O Mamute Siberiano* (The Siberian Mammoth, 2005), Kal'tsatyi explains that when he came back to Russia he was so Cubanised that he would not even leave his home. He believes that *Soy Cuba* changed his life and was a major influence in his decision to emigrate to the West seven years later. The last film experience that Kalatozov and Urusevskii shared was *Ia Kuba*. Kalatozov's last feature film, *Krasnaia palatka* (The Red Tent, 1970) was an Italo-Soviet co-production that was shot by another cameraman. Urusevskii became a director himself on two films *Beg inokhodtsa* (The Ambler's Race, 1969) and *Poi pesniu, poet!* (Sing Your Song, Poet!, 1971).<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> See Neia Zorkaia, *The Illustrated History of the Soviet Cinema* (New York: Hippocrene, 1989), pp. 214-215.

Certainly, *Soy Cuba* represents a defining moment in the re-formulation of the cinematic discourse of the Cuban Revolution. It certainly was a sort of initiation. The most relevant contribution to Cuban cinema in terms of camera style has been Sergei Urusevskii cinematographic skill with his 'unchained' camera. In his Cuban experience, Urusevskii demonstrated once again his attempt at lyricism, as he did on his previous Soviet films. For ICAIC filmmakers, Urusevskii's influence is a fact, which was acknowledged only recently. According to Pineda Barnet, 'Cuban and Latin American cinemas owe big scenes of tribute, or memory reminiscence of influence to Sergei Urusevskii's camera.'<sup>116</sup> During the period of the 1960s and 1970s, ICAIC films now regarded as classics were produced and they presented Urusevskii 'delirium for the camera'. Cubans worked a lot more with the hand-held camera; for example Jorge Herrera's cinematography for *Lucía* (especially the first part of the film) and *La primera carga al machete* (The First Machete Charge, 1969), and Mario Joya's camera work for *Una Pelea Cubana Contra Los Demonios* (A Cuban Fight Against Demons, 1972) are good illustrations and very considerable achievements in the matter of camera movement of handheld close-ups. García Espinosa agrees with Pineda Barnet. He remembers that: 'Urusevskii fue algo importante en nuestras vidas, nunca había visto un camarógrafo de la magnitud y de la desmesura de Urusevskii, realmente era un tipo fabuloso, fabuloso como fotógrafo y como ser humano; era una gente que recordaré toda la vida'.<sup>117</sup>

In the technical aspect the transport and equipment used on these films, particularly those for Kalatozov's film stayed in Cuba. This technical 'detail' helped in the materialisation of

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<sup>116</sup> Pineda Barnet's testimony in Ferraz's documentary.

<sup>117</sup> See Victor Fowler Calzada and Julio García Espinosa, *Conversaciones con un cineasta incomodo: Julio García Espinosa* (Providence, R.I.: Pukara-Fortitude Art & Cultural Organization, 1997), p. 131.

ICAIC's classic films such as *Lucia* and *Memorias del subdesarrollo* in the later film production of ICAIC. One important legacy of Kalatozov's film is the contribution made by a master of Cuban art, René Portocarrero (1912–85), who designed the film poster for *Soy Cuba* and others used to promote the film production of the countries of the Soviet-bloc. Portocarrero's film posters are also evidence of the collaboration between painters and film-makers in order to create a new kind of poster design for the nascent film industry of the Cuban Revolution which testify to the work of the Departamento de Carteles, part of the Centro de Información Cinematográfica, organised under Mario Rodríguez Alemán's leadership. Of international reputation, the *carteles del ICAIC*, film posters created by Eduardo Muñoz Bachs, Olivio Martínez, Julioeloy, Rafael Morante and Holbein López, among many others, echo the revolutionary designs of film posters from Bolshevik times. Gerardo Mosquera explains that the examples of A.M. Cassandre, Victor Deni, Vladimir Lebedev, Rodchenko, Lissitski, Dmitrii Moor and the Stenberg brothers were significant references for Cuban artists: 'la edad de oro, en los que creadores cultos fueron capaces de dar respuesta a un contenido de "masas" (...) es importantísimo porque constituye uno de los ejemplos mejor logrados del empeño de la vanguardia rusa por refuncionalizar el arte'.<sup>118</sup>

*I Am Cuba* was rediscovered at the Telluride Film Festival in 1992. Cuban novelist Guillermo Cabrera Infante, the guest co-director of the festival that year, screened to a

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<sup>118</sup> Gerardo Mosquera, *El diseño se definió en Octubre* (La Habana: Editorial Arte y Literatura, 1989), p. 210. On Cuban film posters, see *El cartel cubano de cine*, edited by Jesús Vega (La Habana: Editorial Letras Cubanas, 1996). See also Mildred Constantine and Alan Fern, *Revolutionary Soviet Film Posters* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974); Sara Vega, *La otra imagen del cine cubano* (La Habana: Cinemateca de Cuba, 1997) and *The Cuban Film Poster 1961–2004*, edited by Antonio García-Rayó (Madrid: El Gran Caíd, 2004). See also Carole Goodman and Claudio Sotolongo, *Soy Cuba: el cartel de cine en Cuba después de la revolución* (Mexico City: Trilce, 2011).

standing ovation a print of the film as part of a retrospective on Kalatazov.<sup>119</sup> The film was then restored, released in the United States as a presentation of Martin Scorsese and Francis Coppola, and enjoyed enthusiastic reviews and acclaim on the arthouse circuit. The film was presented, commercialised in a VHS and DVD version and put into circulation by Coppola and Scorsese. It was the first time that they had worked together in this way. Paradoxically, US federal law currently protects a film that was created in order to denounce politically the system of ‘imperialismo yanqui’. The film copy on the DVD that is internationally available is the version made for the Soviet audience.

In Ferraz’s documentary the suggestion is made that it was Urusevskii who actually directed the film. This is a perception that can only be explained by a lack of knowledge of Kalatazov’s professional and personal life. As we have observed, Kalatazov oversaw every single aspect of the film: he was in charge of the ‘postanovka’ (production), as well as the formulation of the filmic question/problem. Nowadays many consider Kalatazov’s Cuban illusion as a cult movie for film-makers and film specialists. Even a brief analysis of the film brings many new questions: is this film a celebration of kitsch, decadent and post-modern ideas or simply a splicing of different filmic genres? Kalatazov’s film, one might argue, is ‘all mixed as one’ (todo mezclado), like the ICAIC’s film productions, or like Cuban identity itself. *Soy Cuba, Ia Kuba, I am Cuba, Je suis Cuba* are some of the many titles that currently identify a masterpiece of filmmaking.

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<sup>119</sup> On the 19<sup>th</sup> Telluride Film Festival in 1992, see <http://www.telluridefilmfestival.org/photoscroller.html> (accessed November 2010).

It is important to note that during this period new departments were created within the ICAIC: the Cinemateca de Cuba, *Cine Cubano* was published for the first time and the Departamento de dibujos animados. In January 1960, the ICAIC Department of Cartoons and Animation was formed by a union of designers and artists who had some experience of advertising or graphic design. In this period, several Cuban editions of key Marxist film texts were published by Ediciones ICAIC, such as *Tratado de la realización cinematográfica* (1964), *El cine en la batalla de ideas* (1964), and *El sentido del cine* (1967) by Lev Kuleshov, John Howard Lawson and Sergei Eisenstein respectively, among many others. The ICAIC was looking for financial and technical support in Japan and all over the world. The reality was that the only support, though, came from the Soviet side and it was that support which finally allowed the film production of the Cuban Revolution to flourish.

## Chapter III

### The 1970s

#### The Socialist Institutionalisation of the Moving Image

The first five years of the 1970s have been described by the film critic Ambrosio Fornet as ‘el quinquenio gris’ (the grey five-year period), ‘which began in 1971 and during which mediocrity and dogmatism aspired to build a world in their own twisted likeness, absconding with Cuba’s cultural might. Vital art and literature were to be passed over in favour of a mass produced culture whose parts, recently imported and lacquered with local colour, were to be hastily assembled in the rusting factory of socialist realism’.<sup>1</sup> Certainly, the years that followed the 1971 Congress on Education were difficult ones and the consequences have been slow to be erased. Nevertheless, as far as cinema is concerned, it is not accurate to describe this period as dull or gloomy. This was also an epoch of films dedicated to the topics of race, genre, slavery, slave rebellion and the persistence of racism in modern times.

More than two decades before Hollywood ‘discovered’ slavery in such films as Steven Spielberg’s *Amistad* (1997) and Robert Demme’s *Beloved* (1998), the ICAIC produced a series of films about the role of slavery in colonial society and its legacy in Cuban history and society. For the first time Afro-Cuban film-makers directed films, for example Sergio Giral in three remarkable films, *El otro Francisco* (The Other Francisco, 1973), *Rancheador* (Slave Hunter, 1975) and *Maluala* (1979); and Sara Gómez, with *De cierta manera* (One Way or Another, 1974) (Gómez’s piece is still recognised as a pioneering work by an Afro-

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<sup>1</sup> See Ambrosio Fornet, ‘Epilogue’, in Jesús Díaz, *The Initials of the Earth*, translated by Kathleen Ross, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), p. 373.



Cuban woman). Those films resonated with *el Comandante's* political discourse and the impact of Cuba's military actions in Africa. During this period Cuban feature films had a clear didactic purpose. Those feature films and documentaries were, in effect, an intrinsic part of a self-conscious post-colonial cinematic experiment.

In the 1970s the Western hemisphere was inundated with hippy ideas and fashions. The West wore blue jeans, long hair and flares, which elsewhere were becoming part of mainstream culture, but not in Cuba. For Cubans, these years defined the period of socialist institutionalisation. According to 'La Constitución Socialista', adopted on 24 February 1976, Marxism-Leninism became the *only* true theory and practice of Marxism in the twentieth century.<sup>2</sup> That assertion was partly based on one of the foundations of dialectical materialist thinking: that practice is the criterion of truth. According to this, it comprises three laws: the law of transition of quantitative to qualitative changes and vice versa; the law of the negation of negation; and the law of unity and struggle of opposites.<sup>3</sup> How was this applied to the moving image and the cinematic discourse in particular? It can be argued that the works developed by Mario Rodríguez Alemán in Cuban television (Law of Transition), Julio García Espinosa's film theory, *Por cine imperfecto*, versus his documentary *La sexta parte del mundo* (Law of Negation) and Tomás Gutiérrez Alea's *Dialéctica del espectador* (Law of Opposites) conform to the three laws and the main trends 'within' the cinematic discourse of the Cuban Revolution. First, in order to understand how the role of television was conceived within the cinematic discourse of the Cuban Revolution, it is necessary to present a brief review of its content before 1959.

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<sup>2</sup> See *Revolución cubana: 45 grandes momentos*, pp. 210–28.

<sup>3</sup> Vladimir Buzuev and Vladimir Gorodnov, *What is Marxism-Leninism?* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1987), pp. 69–74.

## **Cuban Television before 1959**

Very little research has been devoted to TV broadcasting in Cuba. The very few published studies that mention Cuban TV have focussed on the entrepreneurs who pioneered radio and television production on the island. As Michael B. Salwen has pointed out, the state of the Cuban media before 1959 was as follows:

When Fidel Castro came to power, Cuba had 156 radio stations (including repeater stations of national networks) heard from over 1,000,000 radio sets. The island had 27 television stations and an estimated 400,000 television sets. Havana alone had six television stations, including Latin American's only color station.<sup>4</sup>

With regard to how he became interested in this topic in particular, the author explains that it was after he had met many of the Cuban exile broadcasters in Miami and obviously his location in this city influenced his decision. Salwen adds: 'I did not go to Cuba. While this may be regarded as a weakness of this book, it is not as serious as it might seem because almost all the major broadcast owners whom I wished to interview had fled Cuba'.<sup>5</sup> Salwen's book is not a scholarly study. He preferred to ignore the testimonies of those individuals still living in Cuba: technicians, programme directors and artists who stayed in Cuba and played an essential part in the broadcasting of those days. This makes his study incomplete. The author opted for only one side of the story: the version of the owners. However, for the purposes of this thesis Salwen's study confirms two important facts: first,

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<sup>4</sup> Michael B. Salwen, *Radio and Television in Cuba: The Pre-Castro Era* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1994), p. xv. See also *Televisión cubana: cuarenta años de una señal*, edited by ICRT (La Habana: Dirección de Divulgación y Relaciones Públicas Televisión Cubana, 1990). It can only be consulted in the ICRT's archives.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

the role played by television in the Americanisation of Cuban intellectual life; and second, that *el Comandante* inherited a very well established media network in Cuba.

### **Nationalisation of the Cuban Media**

García Espinosa has pointed out that in the battle of film-makers to gain hegemony and control over film distribution, and following the decision by the owners of the main cinemas in the country to release only US film productions, on 13 October 1960 the nationalisation of domestic and foreign companies was declared by virtue of Law 890. That nationalisation was also followed by other measures modelled on emergent socialist conditions and practices, namely the closing of even the smallest privately owned services and retail outlets as well.

The ICAIC took control of all professional activities related to cinema at the levels of production, distribution and promotion. In this way, the Cuban Revolution challenged the cultural authority of the old establishment in order to create its own. If they wanted to build a different film industry, to shape a distinct moving image and cinematic discourse, they had to take the place of the old elite. In the book entitled *Así de simple I*, García Espinosa recalls that moment: ‘Pensamos que si en nuestro país no podíamos pasar nuestra producción y si queríamos iniciar, de verdad, un cine nacional, teníamos que nacionalizar las salas de cine; (...) ésa fue la alternativa, la única opción para garantizar que en nuestro país, se pudieran pasar las películas cubanas.’<sup>6</sup> There is a contradiction in this statement.

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<sup>6</sup> See Julio García Espinosa, ‘Breve historia del desarrollo del cine cubano y su relación con el cine internacional’ (lecture at EICTV, 27 February 1987), published in *Así de simple I: Encuentros sobre cine Robert Redford, István Szabó, García Espinosa,...* [et al], edited by Victor Fowler Calzada (Madrid: Ollero y Ramos, 1996), pp. 177-197 (pp. 180-81).

When García Espinosa refers to the film productions of the ICAIC or even Cuban films, it is important to recall that there were very few Cuban films made at that time. Why did they decide to nationalise, to move so fast in that direction, when there were no Cuban films to screen? The ICAIC, like the Soviets before, believed that if private property were abolished, all wealth would be held in common. As an immediate result, the films screened in Cuban cinemas were from the countries of the Soviet-bloc.

García Espinosa explains: 'Las películas vinieron en cantidades exorbitantes, segundo la mayoría era bastante mala y tercero aquel era un cine al cual la gente no estaba acostumbrada. El público estaba acostumbrado al ritmo de las películas americanas; así que hubo un rechazo. Ese fue el costo de mantener abierto las salas de cine, fue el precio que se pagó por abrirle un espacio a la producción del naciente Cine cubano.'<sup>7</sup> As a result of this improvised decision the film production of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union became the most widely available to the Cuban viewer. Clearly, though, its subsequently negative reception created the need to find an alternative source of film production to the Soviet one.

Alfredo Guevara, the first president of the ICAIC, asked Ernesto Che Guevara during his planned trip to Japan to sound out the possibilities for technical aid during his visit to the East.<sup>8</sup> ICAIC refused to accept the American cowboy as a hero; however, the icon of the Soviet soldier did not convince the Cuban spectator either. The Samurais represented an alternative to both Hollywood and Soviet cinema. At the same time, they were action movies in which, despite their difficulties, the hero or the heroine always triumphed; they

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 181.

<sup>8</sup> See Che Guevara, letter to Alfredo Guevara dated 26 of July 1959, published in *Cine cubano*, no.140 (1998), p. 17.

did not die as they did in many socialist realist films. On the other hand, the Samurai films managed to change the ethnicity of the hero, who did not have blonde hair and blue eyes like those portrayed in the Hollywood films of the time. On this matter García Espinosa said that these films: ‘contribuían a descolonizar las mentes pues el héroe era Amarillo, no blanco y eso era ya algo’.<sup>9</sup> The deal did go through, thus, Cuban cinemas did actually show these Japanese films.

With the nationalisation of the media, both cinema and television became state institutions; thus, there was no need for commercial competition between them. Television received the right to broadcast all the film imports in the country and also received the right to televise all the plays and ballets performed in the theatres. The state television also commissioned a good number of adaptations of literary works, fiction and documentary films. The relationship between film and television was, and still is, governed by one criterion alone: the unity of the whole nation according to the interests of the Communist Party. From the very beginning, the cultural mentors of the Revolution understood the enormous potential of television. According to García Espinosa, ‘Los cuatro medios de comunicación son tres: cine y TV’.<sup>10</sup> After the failure of Soviet and Eastern European films in the cinema network, those pro-Soviet cultural mentors within the Cuban Revolution such as Rodríguez Alemán decided to screen them through the different medium of television.

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<sup>9</sup> García Espinosa, ‘Breve historia del desarrollo del cine cubano y su relación con el cine internacional’, p. 191. The Samurai film is still very popular in Cuba and it is another topic that merits further study. On this type of Japanese film, stars and directors, see Roland Thorne, *Samurai Films* (Harpenden: Kamera Books, 2008), pp. 23-31.

<sup>10</sup> See Julio García Espinosa, *Una imagen recorre el mundo* (México D.F.: Filmoteca UNAM, 1982), pp. 96-97(p. 96).

### **Mario Rodríguez Alemán: Television in the Cinematic Discourse**

Rodríguez Alemán introduced the first programme on Cuban television dedicated to film criticism: *Cine en TV* (1959–1977) with *Bronenosets Potemkin*, on 5 November 1959.<sup>11</sup>

This was the first expression of a radical movement. The island changed channels: no more American commercial TV, but instead Soviet TV, no more the American dream, but rather the Soviet illusion. From that time onwards, television became an essential part of the cinematic discourse on the Revolution. Cuban television assumed the role that the ICAIC could not put into practice as the main disseminator of Soviet films.

An important task for the present thesis is to identify the place of television within the cinematic discourse of the Cuban Revolution and to connect this and ‘the soul of Marxism-Leninism’: dialectical materialism. In this respect the work developed by Mario Rodríguez Alemán was outstanding. His name calls to mind the early years of the ICAIC, when the Departamento de Información y Propaganda was created under his direction in 1961.<sup>12</sup> His work was essentially an ideological Communist analysis of the moving image and the film industry, an approach which reduced art to its ideological and political values, based on party commitment. For Rodríguez Alemán there were no technical differences between cinema and television screens. Therefore, the apparently different modes of reception assumed to follow from ‘viewing a film’ and ‘watching television’ simply disappeared. The film’s continuity on TV was not disrupted by commercial breaks, but only for political reasons: for example, a special intervention by *el Comandante*. The television viewer became a cinema spectator of a small

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<sup>11</sup> See Rolando Pérez Betancourt, ‘Mario en los 60’, *Granma* (12 June 1986), p. 4.

<sup>12</sup> The creation of film posters was organised within that department, with the Soviet, Czech and Polish experiences in that area acting as key points of reference.

screen. The problems affecting the broadcasting of films on television, such as poor sound quality, did not really affect the decision to screen a film on television.

### **The Role of the Film Critic**

Mario Rodríguez Alemán analysed films in the same way that an (Orthodox Marxist) literary critic analyses literature.<sup>13</sup> He looked at films as a written text, emphasising their ideological values. Films were for him an important visual art, from which people learned more efficiently. Rodríguez Alemán's book, *La sala oscura*, is a collection of film reviews published in newspapers and journals from 1945 onwards which concern themselves with the relationship between cinema and capitalism. In its inception, the book was intended to be the first volume in a series dedicated to film criticism. In its prologue, the author writes: 'el cine educa y denuncia, pero el imperialismo y las fuerzas negativas de la humanidad lo han utilizado también como droga para envenenar y confundir'.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, for Mario Rodríguez Alemán: 'El crítico debe partir de una posición partidista si realmente es un revolucionario y un educador y su propósito es ejercer la crítica constructiva y orientar a las masas que lo leen'.<sup>15</sup> *La sala oscura* can be considered a classic of film criticism written in the Soviet style because of its explicitly partisan nature, its didacticism and its rhetoric. According to this book, Rodríguez Alemán intended to publish similar books as a series, referring to other topics such as the relationship between cinema and socialism, the so-called Third Cinema and to the film production of ICAIC. An extensive number of reviews written by Rodríguez Alemán dedicated to the analysis of films produced by the countries

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<sup>13</sup> See Margery Fee, 'Who Can Write as Other?', in *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, edited by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths & Helen Tiffin (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 242-45.

<sup>14</sup> Mario Rodríguez Alemán, *La sala oscura*, 2 vols (La Habana: UNEAC, 1982), vol. 1, p. 10.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

of Eastern Europe have not yet been published. Rodríguez Alemán did not manage to finish this project before his death from a heart attack.

Another important account on his work is found in the documentary series *Hasta el último aliento* (Until the Last Breath), produced in 1995 and directed by Vicente González Castro, Cuba's most significant scholar in media studies on the island and in particular broadcasting. This series is made up of forty-three 27-minute programmes covering different moments in the history of TV in Cuba as part of the celebration of 45 years of TV in Latin America. 'El hombre que nos enseñó ver cine' (The man who taught us how to see movies) was the title of a programme in this TV series dedicated to Mario Rodríguez Alemán. For the present study *Hasta el último aliento* also suggests a major point of reference in order to understand how Cuban television changed radically from 1959 onwards and the work developed by Rodríguez Alemán in this direction.

Concerning the role of the film critic and the art of watching movies on TV, Rodríguez Alemán wrote that a film review is based on three conditions. First, the film critic needs to play the role of a teacher. Second, it is essential to identify the good and bad elements in the content of a film, particularly those which are negative or which are not explicit: he defined these as 'veneno ideológico' (ideological poison). Third, Rodríguez Alemán believed that the film critic's main role is to teach the spectator how to 'read' a film in order to identify the film's sense: its artistic, political and scientific values. This was at the core of an idea he had for a book entitled *Como leer el cine*, which was never published.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> See Ezequiel Pérez Martín, 'Ese hombre que enseña a ver cine: Mario Rodríguez Alemán ayer y hoy', *Bohemia* (11 January 1985), pp. 16–20.



Rodríguez Alemán saw cinema and broadcast TV as interdependent cultural forms and both were also assigned the role of what he called ‘cultural educator’. According to him, his ‘method’ of watching movies on TV could revolutionise the traditional American-style viewing patterns already established in Cuba; his programmes on film criticism call to mind the model previously used in Soviet and Eastern European TV broadcasting. Certainly, Rodríguez Alemán had some important precedents to draw upon in film appreciation programmes such as *Istoriia iskusstva mirovogo kino* (History of the World Film Art), *Kino i zritel’* (Film and the Spectator) and *Panorama kino* (Film Panorama), among many others.<sup>17</sup> Unquestionably, Cuban Television and Rodríguez Alemán followed the Soviet pattern.

### **Soviet-bloc Audiovisual Culture on Cuban TV**

The most important evidence to emerge from Mario Rodríguez Alemán’s reviews as the Soviet voice of Cuban film criticism may be found in his work for television. As a film critic he was the great promoter of film production from the ‘other’ Europe, and in particular Soviet cinema. Rodríguez Alemán devised the first TV programmes on film analysis, such as *Cine en Television* (1959–77), *Cine debate* (1960), *Noche de cine* (1969), *Cine vivo* (1973) and *Tanda del domingo* (1976), fundamentally in order to disseminate and celebrate the cinema from the countries of the former Soviet-bloc. Rodríguez Alemán effectively rescued those works from oblivion by broadcasting them on television, thereby allowing them to reach a wider audience than would have been achieved through the cinemas. He had a good sense of the social and cultural advantages offered by TV. His decision had, in

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<sup>17</sup> See ‘Art of television’, in *Great Soviet Encyclopedia*, editor-in-chief A.M. Prokhorov (New York: Macmillan, 1973–1983), vol. 25, pp. 486–88.

effect, increased the total audience for these films. Those people who stopped going to the cinema could still watch more Soviet and East European films on television than they did before, which would lead not to a decline, but rather an increase in the role of Soviet cinema in Cuban intellectual life. Rodríguez Alemán knew that Cubans were already becoming accustomed to television and that they could not stop watching TV programmes. There was no choice for the spectator. The majority of the films had subtitles. The ordinary Cuban spectator discovered the diversity of languages from the countries of the Soviet-bloc.

In the Western hemisphere, the big new technological breakthrough for many people in the 1970s was colour television. Nearly all programmes in the 1970s were broadcast in colour and more people were able to stretch their budgets to afford a colour set, but not in Cuba. For Cuban television the 1970s was the golden era of Soviet-bloc broadcast programmes. The Cuban television day at that time was short due to a lack of funds and materials, and with the limited schedule offered by just two channels Cuban TV was mainly broadcasting films and programmes from the countries of the Soviet-bloc. When Mario Rodríguez Alemán decided to incorporate television — the ‘vulgar and popularised’ medium — into the cinematic discourse of the Cuban Revolution, his intention was to improve it with the addition of the artistic and educational goals of ‘the other’ Europe.

Rodríguez Alemán, thus, intended to make a pragmatic and innovative application of ‘the law of transition of quantitative to qualitative changes and vice versa’ in Cuban TV. He understood that changes in quantity and quality were interconnected; a change in quality also involves quantitative change. This was generally expressed in the fact that as the frequency of programmes concerning film matters rose, the rate of TV development and

consequently the transference of knowledge increased. In this way, it was hoped to accelerate a change in moral values. As part of this process, Soviet historical films, particularly those on the Second World War and film adaptations of literature from the countries of the Soviet-bloc, were broadcast on Cuban channels every day.<sup>18</sup> In addition, many theatrical and ballet performances from the Soviet-bloc countries were shown on Cuban TV, as well as Soviet-bloc cartoons for children and documentaries.<sup>19</sup> Thanks to broadcast television the Cuban spectator knew about the ‘Red stars’, the most popular singers in the countries of the Soviet-bloc such as Alla Pugacheva (USSR), Karel Gott (Czechoslovakia), Klári Katona, the pop groups Neoton Família (Hungary), Iordanka Hristova (Bulgaria) and rock bands like The Puhdys and Karat (East Germany). If one examines the schedule for a typical day’s programmes, particularly in the 1970s, the level of the Soviet and East European television experiment in Cuba is evident.

The Cuban spectator also knew a great deal about the Soviet-bloc film productions known as ‘Red Westerns’, among them, the East German ‘Indianerfilms’, as they were called in distinction to US Westerns. This DEFA production was made up of twelve epic films based on the works of popular German author Karl May. Gerd Gemünden, in his excellent essay about the East German western, explains that these films contain many of the ingredients that make a good Hollywood Western, but there were some differences: ‘the Black Hills are

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<sup>18</sup> On the importance of film adaptations of literature and historical films in Soviet Russian and East European cinemas, see Stephen Hutchings, *Russian Literary Culture in the Camera Age: The Word as Image* (London: Routledge, 2004); and *Russian and Soviet Film Adaptations of Literature 1900-2001: Screening the Word*, edited by Stephen Hutchings and Anat Vernitski (London: Routledge, 2005). See also ‘Film and History, Ethics and Society’, in Iordanova, *Cinema of the Other Europe: The Industry and Artistry of East Central European Film*, pp. 43-86.

<sup>19</sup> See <http://munequitosrusos.blogspot.com>, a website created by the Cuban Aurora Jacome that compiles a great deal of information about Soviet and East European cartoons and TV programmes for children broadcasted in Cuba from 1970–91 particularly. [accessed on 1 May 2010].

in Yugoslavia, the cowboys are German, the horses are Russian and the day is saved by Gojko Mitic, who is not a cowboy but an Indian'.<sup>20</sup> Despite the predictable plots and awkward acting in this DEFA film series, they were very well articulated with the Cuban cinematic discourse of 'decolonisation of the screens'. The films were always sympathetic to the heroic Indians in their struggle against the evil colonialist white European settlers. This series of westerns were very well inserted in the Cuban anticolonialist denunciation of the extermination of Native American populations as part of the westward expansion of the United States.

Other popular television series from the countries of the Soviet-bloc broadcast in Cuba included Romanian historical movies and thrillers by Sergiu Nicolaescu, particularly his *Un comisar acuză* (A Police Inspector Calls, 1973); *Cztery pancerni i pies* (Four Tankmen and a Dog, 1966–1970) from Poland; *30 případů majora Zemana* (30 Cases of Major Zeman, 1976–1980) from Czechoslovakia; and *Semnadtsat' mgnovenii vesny* (Seventeen Moments of Spring, 1973) from the USSR. The latter, a Soviet television series about the life of a Soviet spy Maksim Isaev operating in Nazi Germany under the name Max Otto von Stirlitz (played by the actor Viacheslav Tikhonov), was very popular in Cuba. Without doubt, *Semnadtsat' mgnovenii vesny* was very influential, a real inspiration in the further development of Cuban TV productions dedicated to celebrating the 20th anniversary of MININT and its 'agents of state security', the G-2, who helped to stop plans against the Cuban Revolution thanks to their work within the CIA and in the anti-Castro groups in Miami. One such TV series was *En silencio ha tenido que ser* (In Silence it has had to be), in which Sergio Corrieri, who was

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<sup>20</sup> According to Gerd Gemünden, those films 'brought German cinema back to life after the Second World War'. See Gemünden, 'Between Karl May and Karl Marx: the DEFA Indianerfilms (1965–1983)', *Film History*, X.3 (1998), pp. 399–407. On the 'Red Western', see Sergei Lavrent'ev, *Krasnyi vestern* (Moscow: Algoritm, 2009). See also David MacFadyen's *Red Stars: Personality and the Soviet Popular Song, 1955–1991* (Montreal, Ithaca: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001).

discovered by Kalatozov for his *Soy Cuba*, played the role of David. Among the most popular Cuban TV series in the '80s about 'Cuban agents of state security', one should mention *Julito el pescador* (The Fisherman) and *Para empezar a vivir* (To Start Living).

Mario Rodríguez Alemán's work on Cuban television gave him the reputation of 'the man who teaches cinema on TV'. His kind of programme sought to reveal more profoundly the ideological, political, social and aesthetic meaning of films. The Cuban film critic had a great interest in the classics of Soviet cinema. Rodríguez Alemán chose to present film-makers and films from Eastern Europe to the Cuban public. Some western films were also shown on his programmes, for example films co-produced with the countries of the Soviet-bloc, film adaptations of Russian literary classics, and those which 'denounced' the imperialist system and reflected the 'decadence' of capitalist societies. Other films that could have 'problems of ideology' had their 'message' clarified by the film critic in charge. His programmes were designed as follows: before the start of the chosen movie Rodríguez Alemán talked about its subject matter, avoiding excessively technical terminology, and offered a critical analysis of the film, drawing attention to details of content, style and technique. After the film screening, he answered questions from the public in the studio and phone calls from the TV audience. This format made the programme seem a more spontaneous act of communication, thereby establishing a dialogue between specialist and audience. Without the distraction of commercial breaks, this kind of broadcast drew greater attention to the film itself. Not only were most of the TV programmes broadcast on Cuban TV from the countries of the former Soviet-bloc, but so were the television sets.

The work of Rodríguez Alemán which gave a central place to television within the cinematic discourse was continued by the ICAIC, which created its own programmes, such as *24xSegundo* (1970) and *Historia del cine* (1973), presented by Enrique Colina and José Antonio González, respectively.<sup>21</sup> The programmes included cycles of broadcasts featuring motion pictures and appearances by film-makers, film specialists, sociologists and psychologists. Can it be affirmed that those efforts over more than twenty years produced any substantial change in the behaviour, interests and demands of Cuban audiences? It is a very difficult task to put a value on this experience. Rodríguez Alemán linked television with cinema, and each, as a result, became primarily an educational cultural medium controlled by the state. On the whole, in quantitative terms, Cuban television established a unique standard for cultural activity in the Western hemisphere; this was a celebration of the arts from the 'other' Europe. It was certainly a fascinating, complex and controversial experiment in innovation. Perhaps the most important achievement for that particular Cuban generation, bombarded for more than two decades by Soviet-bloc film production, was the primary information that later became knowledge about the existence of that kind of film and the culture of those countries.

The most important issue here is to acknowledge Rodríguez Alemán as the Soviet voice of Cuban film criticism. His remarkable work to further the knowledge and understanding of Soviet cinema in Cuba was recognised by the ideological department of the Soviet film industry as part of the celebrations for the 60th anniversary of the creation of the Soviet Union. On 30 December 1982, Mario Rodríguez Alemán received a diploma for his work

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<sup>21</sup> On these programmes, see Romualdo Santos, 'Cine por TV: el experimento cubano', in *Cine, literatura y sociedad*, edited by Ambrosio Fornet (La Habana: Editorial Letras Cubanas, 1982), pp. 197–206.

in publicising Soviet film, presented by Vladimir Karaganov, president of the Union of Cinematographers of the USSR. According to the Cuban press, Rodríguez Alemán was identified as the best foreign critic of Soviet cinema: ‘al crítico extranjero que mejor estudia, comenta y divulga la cinematografía soviética’.<sup>22</sup> The story of Mario Rodríguez Alemán, a man who taught cinema on TV, is a great testimony to Cuban intellectual life at that time, and typifies the kind of film criticism developed by a Soviet orthodox Marxist in Cuba. Rodríguez Alemán was also deeply involved in a major case of film censorship under ICAIC: the ‘*PM* affair’.

### **The Negation of Negation: *El cine imperfecto* versus *La sexta parte del mundo***

In *Understanding Film: Marxist Perspectives*, Michael Chanan affirms that ‘if the names of Eisenstein, Vertov, Pudovkin, Dovzhenko etc., are inseparable from the creation of a modernist political cinema in the 1920s, then those of Gutiérrez Alea, Álvarez, Solás and others are inseparable from the new mode of radical political film, which one of them, Julio García Espinosa, in a manifesto dating from 1969, called “imperfect cinema”’.<sup>23</sup>

*Por un cine imperfecto* (For an Imperfect Cinema, 1969) was an aesthetic idea developed by the Cuban film-maker and theorist Julio García Espinosa. This essay, together with that of the Argentinean Fernando Birri’s *Cine y subdesarrollo* (Cinema and Underdevelopment, 1962), Fernando Solanas and Orlando Gettino’s *Hacia un Tercer Cine* (Towards a Third Cinema, 1969); *Estética da Violência* (Aesthetics of Violence, 1971), by the Brazilian Glauber Rocha, and the Bolivian Jorge Sanjinés’s *Problemas de la forma y el contenido en el cine*

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<sup>22</sup> See Mercedes Santos Moray, ‘Abanderado de la cultura socialista’, *Bohemia*, 32 (8 July 1986), pp. 24–26.

<sup>23</sup> Michael Chanan, ‘Cinemas in Revolution: 1920s Russia, 1960s Cuba’, in *Understanding Film: Marxist Perspectives*, edited by Mike Wayne (London: Pluto Press, 2005), pp. 232–246 (p. 233).

*revolucionario* (Problems of Form and Content in Revolutionary Cinema, 1978) formed the theoretical foundations of the New Latin American Cinema movement.<sup>24</sup>

*Por un cine imperfecto* gives the impression of being a rapidly written first draft which was never revised. It appears spontaneous, innovative, original and credible, despite a total absence of bibliographical references. García Espinosa refers to Karl Marx and Campbell's soups, Glauber Rocha and Marguerite Gautier. The perspective adopted appears profoundly local and universal at the same time. *Por un cine imperfecto* advocated the need for a form of filmmaking in the developing countries that diverged from dominant Western cinema, but this manifesto can also be considered to be the ICAIC's response to Socialist Realism. García Espinosa asserted that 'el cine imperfecto entendemos que exige, sobre todo, mostrar el proceso de los problemas. Es decir, lo contrario a un cine que se dedique fundamentalmente a celebrar los resultados. Lo contrario a un cine autosuficiente y contemplativo. Lo contrario a un cine que "ilustre bellamente" las ideas y conceptos que ya poseemos (la actitud narcisista no tiene nada que ver con los que luchan).'<sup>25</sup> The Cuban film-maker stated that perfect cinema is almost always reactionary cinema. His essay suggests that perfection is a way to protect oneself because one can hide the problems and defects behind a cinema that only celebrates success. Perfection, the state of being perfect, seems to be an illusion, even in cinema. Thus, the question emerges, how can we understand *Por un cine imperfecto* as a manifesto and *La sexta parte del mundo* as a film text within the same 'new mode of radical political film'?

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<sup>24</sup> Those works are key examples of the concurrence in perspective with the Soviet theoretical approach in cinema. For a translation in English of these theoretical works, see *Twenty-five Years of the New Latin American Cinema*, edited by Michael Chanan (London: BFI and Channel Four, 1983).

<sup>25</sup> García Espinosa, *Un largo camino hacia la luz*, p. 24. See also *A cuarenta años de Por un cine imperfecto*, edited by Mario Naito López (Havana: Ediciones ICAIC, 2009).



During the 1970s, the ICAIC produced a number documentaries about the Soviet Union, including Santiago Alvarez's *...Y el cielo fue tomado por asalto* (...And Heaven was Taken by Storm, 1973); Jorge Fraga's *Amistad* (Friendship, 1975); Humberto Solás's *Nacer en Leningrado* ((To Be Born in Leningrad, 1976); Victor Casaús's *Con Maiacovsky en Moscú* (With Maiakovskii in Moscow, 1976); Jesús Díaz's *A orillas del Ángara* (On the Banks of the Angara River, 1977); Enrique Pineda Barnet's *Rostros del Báltico* (Faces of the Baltic, 1977); Juan Carlos Tabío's *Un breve reportaje sobre Siberia* (A Brief Reportage on Siberia, 1978) and Jorge Sotolongo's *La estepa de la abundancia* (The Steppe of Plenty, 1980), among many others. In 1977, the same year that the Western hemisphere was grieving the loss of Elvis Presley, Cuba was 'en fiestas' for the sixtieth anniversary of the October Revolution, celebrating Vladimir Ilich Lenin and Soviet cinema. A host of different events were held on the island in order to celebrate that date: special editions of Soviet literary works were published, and art exhibitions and theatrical performances were held.<sup>26</sup> As part of this, the film-makers from the ICAIC (Gutiérrez Alea, Humberto Solás, Enrique Pineda Barnet, Fernando Pérez, and many others), led by García Espinosa, produced a collective work under the title *La sexta parte del mundo*, using the same title as a documentary by Dziga Vertov, his last work for Goskino/Sovkino *Shestaia chast' mira* (The Sixth Part of the World, 1926). Doubtless the ICAIC's film-makers were motivated by feelings of gratitude toward the Soviet Union's decisive help in the creation of a film industry in Cuba. The film was dedicated to Vertov and to the sixtieth anniversary of the Russian Revolution.

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<sup>26</sup> See *Bibliografía de autores soviéticos: Libros y folletos publicados en Cuba (1959–1977)*, edited by Ernestina Grimardi Pérez (La Habana: Biblioteca Nacional José Martí, 1977); see also Angel Augier, 'Lenin en las letras cubanas', *Anuario L/L* 1(1970), pp. 220–59.

García Espinosa has explained that the choice of Vertov and this particular film work demonstrate that the ICAIC was treating the creator of a *Man with a Movie Camera* as the main inspirational force in their approach to documentary filmmaking, as shown by their desire to apply Vertov's attitudes to art and politics and his sense of film as a collective project.<sup>27</sup> Eisenstein was very well known by everyone, from the film specialist to the ordinary spectator, but Vertov and his works were barely known by the Cuban public. Paradoxically, as Jeremy Hicks has pointed out 'the very attributes of reflexiveness, rigour in recording and explicit politics that made Vertov so antipathetic to documentary filmmakers of the 1930s and 1940s made him relevant to a new generation in the 1960s and 1970s'.<sup>28</sup> Vertov represented the Soviet Union as breaking with the past in order to bring the world into a new age. *Shestaia chast' mira* offers a clear example of how the Soviet illusion of allegory worked with ideas, which portrayed the Soviet republics as existing in a social order of equality and interdependence: the greatest 'achievement' of the Soviet experiment. This film was a celebration of the USSR as a multinational state.<sup>29</sup> The documentary sought to explain how the Soviet system worked. The film used cinematic allegory, such as the ice in a harbour being broken up as a representation of the Soviets breaking up the past to bring the port and the countries of the former Soviet Union into a new age. Vertov's film can be understood as offering a new perspective, representing all of the republics as a social order of equality and interdependence in order to celebrate that important achievement of the Soviet experiment.

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<sup>27</sup> In a conversation about Soviet cinema, Espinosa explained to me in detail about the making of a documentary dedicated to Vertov's cinema [February 2005, during his visit to London].

<sup>28</sup> Hicks, *Dziga Vertov: Defining Documentary Film*, p. 132.

<sup>29</sup> For a collection of writings by and about Vertov, see *Lines of Resistance. Dziga Vertov and the Twenties*, edited by Yuri Tsivian (Gemonia: Le Giornate del Cinema Muto, 2004); concerning Vertov's documentary *Shestaia chast' mira*, see pp. 182–250. For a study on Soviet documentaries and Vertov's films in particular, see Graham Roberts, *Forward Soviet! History and Non-fiction Film in the USSR* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1999).

The Cuban documentary is a good example of intertextuality in cinema and the ways in which films gain sense by references to other films. Like Vertov's film, *La sexta parte del mundo* required a large amount of 'raw material', a large amount of work by several cameramen, and a large quantity of documentary footage. The Cuban film starts with a Russian adaptation of Pinocchio that suggests that what is to follow is the story of how one Pinocchio (the Soviet Union) succeeded, after much trouble and tribulation, in becoming a real boy (ideal society). But it could also be seen as a parody, for there is no plot to the film. *La sexta parte del mundo* is also a cinematic attempt to merge the film with its spectators, without the aid of actors or sets. Vertov's titling technique is substituted in the Cuban film by a dialogue between two Cubans, which explains every image that appears on the screen. There is also a lot of hidden camera work and interviews. As Hicks explains, they were both techniques employed by Vertov as a way of bringing into the film narrative the film-maker himself and thus introducing an element of spontaneity and of improvisation: 'Vertov was the key figure to whom film-makers could turn as a trailbreaker in the art of synchronous recording and the conversation with the protagonist or interview'.<sup>30</sup>

The spectator sees the Soviet Union as a specific concept, from the town to the village, from the Baltic countries to Siberia; everything is connected only by *the Soviet*. In the Cuban documentary, the multinational character of the country is also emphasised: *Soviet but Not Russian*, an idea that also explained about the 'other' peoples, suggesting that there were more than one hundred nationalities in the Soviet Union, which also suggested that the USSR did not destroy the notion of nationality, according to which all people have the right to state their nationality. In the Cuban documentary the land of Soviets is represented

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<sup>30</sup> Hicks, *Dziga Vertov: Defining Documentary*, p. 131.

as the worker-peasant power, where the country's wealth belongs to the people, and the democratic rights and freedom of Soviet citizens were secured by the socialist state; the film also showed some facts and figures about state expenditure on social and cultural needs, and its concern for public health and job provision. If all of this was accurate, one might wonder how the Soviet Union was destined to collapse in 1991.

One aspect of García Espinosa's work as a film document is its audio-visual mixture of cultural values. One of the most distinctive features of his film is the combination of Cuban music with images of Moscow in winter, which offers a bizarre audio-visual juxtaposition of cultural values and identities. Image and sound are interconnected at different tempos. These representative elements of two distant identities gave the impression of something that has not achieved fusion at all. The Cuban documentary, following Vertov's footsteps, claims that every shot is a piece of reality, where people and things are portrayed in their natural environment, in real life relations. Yet the film lacks the stunning angles of Vertov's camerawork. The Vertov and García Espinosa documentaries are the cinematic representations of the beginning and the happy end of the Soviet project. These films defend the consolidation of the Soviets through an ethnographic perspective, a celebration of multinational, ethnic diversity and integration within the new identity of the Soviet Union. Was *La sexta parte del mundo*, made five decades later, a late contribution to so-called Socialist Realism, or a parody of the Soviet system?

It is fair to conclude that García Espinosa's *La sexta parte del mundo* is, in essence, a Socialist Realist film as a result of its ideological aims, the selection of 'factual' materials and the method of construction of the film. It is a 'documental de encargo', as García

Espinosa explains: ‘este obedece a la necesidad de establecer a priori un determinado tratamiento, digamos didáctico, al tema en el cual se va a trabajar’.<sup>31</sup> The documentary’s didactic intention is obvious and the role of cinema as an interpreter is explicit. The film confirmed to the Cuban audience that the Soviet project, the ideal society, had been achieved, and according to which this was a multinational state without any kind of contradiction, where ‘new’ men and women had come into being. The documentary reinforced the confidence of those who believed that the Soviet Union was successfully building socialism and provided a model that Cuba should follow. The intention of the film was to increase empathy towards the Soviet Union. Its purpose was to interpret, in a positive light, the history, past and present, of the USSR.

However, there is more to this than initially meets the eye in that the documentary betrays García Espinosa’s own cinematic conception of ‘an imperfect cinema’. Film text, we might say, negates literary text. *La sexta parte del mundo* praises the life in the countries of the Soviet Union, but ignores the deep social and ethnic contradictions, tensions and conflicts that have always existed in the Soviet Union. Not surprisingly, the work was later omitted from García Espinosa’s filmography, as it was seen as a ‘texto maldito’ that does not deserve to be remembered.<sup>32</sup> *La sexta parte del mundo* is the antithesis, the negation of *Por un cine imperfecto*, which is itself also a negation of Socialist Realism. Negation is the unavoidable stage in any development. *La sexta parte del mundo* was thus a Socialist-Realist film work, a *ritmo de conga*, a cinematic statement that needs to be read together

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<sup>31</sup> Julio García Espinosa, ‘El cine documental cubano’, in Santiago Álvarez ... [et al.], *Cine y Revolución en Cuba* (Barcelona: Editorial Fontamara, 1975), pp. 115-122 (p. 117).

<sup>32</sup> It does not, for example, appear in the filmography prepared by Fowler Calzada; see *Conversaciones con un cineasta incómodo*, pp. 136-46.

with its counter-statement for its best understanding, a film text that applied Marxism-Leninism in the search for truth through contradictions, manifestos and counter-manifestos.

### **Titón's *Dialéctica del espectador* or the 'Law of Unity and Struggle of Opposites'**

As Michael Chanan has argued, 'Tomás Gutiérrez Alea's reputation as Cuba's leading director is inseparable from the story of the Cuban Revolution and the revolutionary cinema organisation, ICAIC.'<sup>33</sup> Thus, it is essential to examine his theoretical and film practices in relation to two of Titón's major references: Sergei Eisenstein and Bertolt Brecht. While the present study will refer to the most well-known Cuban film-maker and his reception of Eisenstein's works, it also offers an examination of Eisenstein and the way in which he marked the works of Gutiérrez Alea and, consequently, Cuban cinema. In order to understand Gutiérrez Alea's films, we should approach the intermediary space defined as existing between Eisenstein and Brecht. One key moment in Titón's development as a film-maker was his discovery of Eisenstein's film theory: 'uno de los momentos inolvidables en los que se va determinando la propia vocación fue para mí el primer encuentro con *El sentido del cine*, de S.M. Eisenstein, hecho que tuvo lugar allá por 1948 o 1949'.<sup>34</sup> Certainly, it was a key work for Titón's theoretical foundations when he affirmed that: 'Fue para mí un libro decisivo, aun cuando el primer resultado de aquella lectura y de las discusiones que provocó entre mis amigos fue sólo que contraí una seria indigestión de confusas teorías sobre el montaje, el contrapunto audiovisual, el cine y la dialéctica, etcétera. Se hizo necesario un período de maduración y asentamiento para que fueran

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<sup>33</sup> Michael Chanan, 'New Cinemas in Latin America', in *The Oxford History of World Cinema*, ed. Geoffrey Nowell-Smith (New York: Oxford U P, 1996), pp. 740-49 (p. 744).

<sup>34</sup> See 'Rueda de prensa (1964-1981)' in *Gutiérrez Alea: Una retrospectiva crítica*, p. 308.

asimiladas en su justa medida y fructificaran en la práctica.’<sup>35</sup> As a result of his period of ‘maturing and settlement’ he published in 1982 *Dialéctica del espectador* (The Viewer’s Dialectic). In philosophy, the word dialectic has different meanings. For Gutiérrez Alea to talk about dialectics was a way of explaining his actions and position as a film-maker, rooted in the notion of the unity (interpenetration) of opposites: Eisenstein and Brecht, identification and distancing, the individual and the *kollektiv* (‘active’ and ‘passive’ spectator), documentary and fiction, or to put it in Engels’ words ‘the two poles of an antithesis, positive and negative, e.g., are as inseparable as they are opposed, and despite all their opposition, they mutually interpenetrate.’<sup>36</sup>

Even in recent studies, such as *Tomás Gutiérrez Alea: The Dialectics of a Filmmaker* (2002) by Paul A. Schroeder, the presence of these European thinkers in Gutiérrez Alea’s theoretical principles has been poorly analysed. In his analysis of *Dialéctica del espectador*, Schroeder rightly identifies chapter 6, ‘Enajenación y desenajenación: Eisenstein y Brecht’, as the most important one. However, Schroeder simply describes its organisation, and basically his analysis is merely a translation into English of what the Cuban film-maker had stated in the chapter.<sup>37</sup> He fails to weigh up the importance of those two European authors in Gutiérrez Alea’s cinematic foundations. Gutiérrez Alea, like Eisenstein and Brecht, took Karl Marx’s thought as an indispensable point of reference. *Dialéctica del espectador* starts with a quotation by Marx in ‘Critique of Political Economy’, Appendix I: ‘La obra de arte - y paralelamente cualquier otro producto - crea un público sensible al arte y capaz de

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 309.

<sup>36</sup> See Frederick Engels, *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1932), p. 33.

<sup>37</sup> Paul A. Schroeder, *Tomás Gutiérrez Alea: The Dialectics of a Filmmaker* (New York; London: Routledge, 2002), p. 54.

gozar la belleza. La producción no elabora, pues, sólo un objeto para el sujeto, sino también un sujeto para el objeto.’<sup>38</sup>

### **Identification and Distancing**

The chapter, ‘Enajenación y desenajenación Eisenstein y Brecht’, is Gutiérrez Alea’s interpretation of the ideas of those two artists, using biographical details about both men in order to explain why, despite their sharing the same Marxist philosophical bases and the same view of art as social practice, they defended two different approaches in the conceptualisation of spectatorship. According to Gutiérrez Alea: ‘mientras uno (Eisenstein) exalta la pasión, el otro (Brecht) elige el camino de la razón; mientras uno quiere un espectador entregado emocionalmente al espectáculo, el otro lo quiere separado, distante, analítico, racional’.<sup>39</sup> One of the reasons for this, Gutiérrez Alea acknowledged, lay in the peculiarities of the personalities of each artist and the fact that they had developed their perspectives in two different mediums: theatre and cinema. The main reason, however, according to Titón, was the social context in which they developed their respective art. Gutiérrez Alea continues: ‘Brecht rechaza radicalmente el estado de éxtasis en el espectador y Eisenstein propugna el éxtasis. La divergencia entre ambos sólo puede superarse lógicamente si consideramos el *pathos* de Eisenstein y el distanciamiento de Brecht como dos momentos de un mismo proceso dialéctico (enajenación-desenajenación) del cual cada uno de ellos aisló y enfatizó una fase diversa.’<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Gutiérrez Alea, *Dialéctica del espectador*, p. 1.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 46.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 56.



What distanced Gutiérrez Alea from Eisenstein is what brought him towards Brecht, and vice versa. The alternative process of distancing followed by identification was to become the creative conflict in Gutiérrez Alea's work. Gutiérrez Alea merged both perspectives in order to build his own. His dichotomy is a unit, a mutual interpenetration of opposites defined via Eisenstein and Brecht. Titón, like Eisenstein, had shared the experience of filmmaking during a social revolution. They considered themselves not in the service of the Revolution, but fully integrated within it. They became the cinematic voice of their respective revolutions. Thus, Titón's sympathies for Eisenstein's theoretical proposals are evident because both encapsulate their ideas within cinematic practice in the context of a radical revolution. Evidently, Gutiérrez Alea's film theory should also be explained in terms of his film practice. In this sense, I will refer to some of his main film works, *Las doce sillas* (1962), *Memorias del subdesarrollo* (1968) and *Fresa y Chocolate*, (1991), which are key documents of Cuban cinema and intellectual life for the period that the present study covers, offering insightful reflections on 'the Soviet connection.

### ***Las doce sillas: the Soviet Novel and the Birth of Socialist Cinema in Cuba***

Before analysing Gutiérrez Alea's *Las doce sillas*, it is important to investigate its sources which, as we shall see, are grounded within Soviet culture, and particularly the Soviet novel. In this context, indeed, there is one literary work in particular that must be analysed, that is, the classic satirical Soviet novel *Dvenadtsat' stul'ev* (The Twelve Chairs, 1928) by the authors I'lf and Petrov. The literary works that came from the partnership of I'lf and Petrov helped to identify the art of humour and satire in Soviet literature. Their works were popular in the former Soviet Union, but in the West they only attracted the attention of those intellectuals who were sympathetic to the Soviets. I'lf and Petrov's works reflected

life within Soviet society from a humorous perspective. According to Lesley Milne, ‘Ilf and Petrov were writers who believed in socialism and felt themselves part of the great “experiment” of the Russian Revolution; they exemplify an apparent oxymoron, in that they are both “true satirists” and “true believers” in the Soviet dream.’<sup>41</sup>

Ilf and Petrov’s observations on aspects of Soviet everyday life are comic and perceptive in the story of *Dvenadtsat’ stul’ev*. The plot is as follows: a former member of the nobility, Ippolit Vorobianinov, works as a desk clerk until his mother-in-law reveals on her deathbed that her jewellery had been hidden from the Bolsheviks in one of the twelve chairs from the family’s dining room set. Those chairs, along with all other personal property, had been expropriated by the government after the Russian Revolution. Ippolit becomes a treasure hunter in the company of a con-man, Ostap Bender. At the very beginning, the two find out that the chair set has been split up and sold individually, but they are not alone in this quest. Father Fedor took advantage of the deathbed confession and has also set off to recover the fortune; the priest becomes their main rival. Through the process of elimination, the two finally discover the location of the last, twelfth chair, the one containing the treasure. In order to avoid splitting the loot, Vorobianinov murders Ostap. Then he discovers that the jewels have already been found, and that they have been spent on the construction of a new public building.<sup>42</sup>

In 1962, Tomás Gutiérrez Alea made a Cuban version entitled *Las Doce Sillas* in the context of the Cuban Revolution and openly similar to the Soviet novel. Gutiérrez Alea’s

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<sup>41</sup> Lesley Milne, *Zoshchenko and the Ilf-Petrov Partnership: How They Laughed* (Birmingham: Dept. of Russian, University of Birmingham, 2003), p. xii.

<sup>42</sup> For a study of *Dvenadtsat’ stul’ev* see Rima Greenhill, *Stylistic and Lexical Devices in the Language of Ilf and E. Petrov’s Novels, Twelve Chairs and the Golden Calf* (London: SSEES Unpublished PhD thesis, 1990). The book inspired many film adaptations from 1936 to Mel Brook’s film in 1970. Shortly afterwards, two adaptations were made in the USSR: a film in 1971 by Leonid Gaidai, and a mini-series in 1976 by Mark Zakharov.

film is another example of his interest in, and knowledge of, Soviet culture and literature. Ugo Ulive, the Uruguayan co-scriptwriter of the film with Gutiérrez Alea, explains that he knew about the original novel thanks to a Spanish edition published by 'La Rosa de los vientos' in Argentina in the 1940s. For them, the story of the chairs was just a pretext to reveal the socio-political changes of the period.<sup>43</sup> The Cuban film is a comedy that takes place in the aftermath of the declaration of the socialist character of the Revolution. In the Cuban film adaptation, Ippolit is Hipólito (Enrique Santiesteban), Ostap Bender becomes Oscar (Reynaldo Miravalles), and Fedor the priest is a Spanish cleric. The film keeps some key episodes of the novel, such as the scene in the bathroom and the parallel and unsuccessful search by the priest. There are minor changes like the location of a group of chairs that the Soviet author put in a theatre; in the Cuban film they are located in a circus.

The Cuban film, like the Soviet novel, satirises not only its central characters, but also the people and institutions they encounter along the way. Hipólito keeps all the negative features of Ippolit's selfish, uncompassionate and dishonest personality. Bender also represents values of the old order: egoism and individualism. He knows 'four hundred comparatively honest ways of taking money away from the population', and he has no future in the post-revolutionary society. But in the film, the character of the servant is portrayed in a more sympathetic way. In some sequences of the film, we observe in Oscar certain positive and natural attitudes. For example, in one sequence, Oscar offers his hand to Hipólito, who is unable to run fast enough in order to reach the truck when the circus is

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<sup>43</sup> For Cuban literary criticism of this Soviet novel, the production of the Cuban film adaptation and the script of the film itself, see Tomás Gutiérrez Alea and Ugo Ulive, *Las doce sillas* (La Habana: Ediciones ICAIC, 1963), pp. 11 and 15. For a list of articles about this film, see García Borrero, *Guía crítica del cine cubano de ficción*, p. 123.

leaving the town; in the sequence when they are cutting sugar cane with the workers Oscar appears happy in a natural working environment, not at all like Hipólito. Thus, as a representative of the working class, the servant's death in the novel makes no sense for the Cubans. He has to be rescued in this, the first socialist film of the ICAIC. At the end, the slow-burn, consciousness-raiser Oscar realises that in the Revolution there is more than personal gain. In the last sequence of the film, Oscar joins in the game played by the Cuban workers, while Hipólito runs away.

Gutiérrez Alea employs a variety of techniques, including documentary inserts and intertitles that call to mind the Soviet *agitki* that were used to denounce the enemies of the Revolution, the bourgeoisie and private property. This can be seen in a sequence in a cinema, when Oscar is watching a film from *Noticieros ICAIC* entitled *Aparecen más tesoros* (More Treasures Appear) that shows 'revolutionaries finding treasures behind the walls of aristocratic mansions', and the short film entitled *Egoismo y vanidad al descubierto* (Dubious Interests of the Past). Gutiérrez Alea considered *Las doce sillas* his first real feature film: 'solo cuando se logra un clima de libertad y de audacia se puede encontrar placer en lo que se hace; eso marca *Las doce sillas* y hace que la considere realmente mi primer filme. *Historias de la Revolución* fue un problema que tuve que resolver, no una película que pude disfrutar haciéndola.'<sup>44</sup>

*Las doce sillas* is a satire, the first comedy of the cinema of the Revolution that marks the birth of the Cuban socialist feature film, not only because it was inspired by a Soviet literary work but also because the film deals with the creation of a socialist society, a completely new social reality; the film reveals both the inner contradictions of socialism

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<sup>44</sup> See Silvia Oroz, *Tomás Gutiérrez Alea: Los filmes que no filmé*, p. 57.

and the conflict that it created in the Cuban context. *Las doce sillas* was a film adaptation that Gutiérrez Alea had always wanted to make, even before the triumph of the Revolution, but he understood that it could only be achieved when Cuba became a socialist country. As he pointed out: ‘¿cómo íbamos a ofrecer una imagen de la “nueva sociedad después del triunfo de la Revolución socialista” en nuestro país, en tiempos del capitalismo? Por suerte, a los pocos años tuvimos nosotros también nuestra Revolución, con todo lo que viene después (...) y, naturalmente, la posibilidad de hacer películas.’<sup>45</sup> For Ugo Ulive, the co-scriptwriter, this film is important because: ‘saliendo de la temática de la resistencia, de la clandestinidad, del duro pasado, muestra desde un punto de vista humorístico, los problemas de adaptación que una nueva vida crea en seres de muy diferentes orígenes y porque con limitaciones, con la misma despreocupada elegancia del original soviético pero con un hondo sentido nacional, enseña al mundo la Cuba post-revolucionaria.’<sup>46</sup> Certainly, *Las doce sillas* is a committed film (in the sense of being socialist in content and national in form) yet it is also solid entertainment combined with a clear political import. Ugo Ulive’s evaluation indicates the historical significance of this film within the ICAIC’s overall film production; before 1961 the cinematic discourse of the Revolution was focussed on such topics as the rebels in Sierra Maestra and the urgent matters arising over property of the land and housing. *Las doce sillas* is relevant to the present study because it marks the emergence of the socialist cinema of the Revolution, which reflects the introduction of socialist changes and their immediate impact on the life of Cubans. Ulive’s statement also calls attention to one element of the socialist cultural project that had particular significance for its export outside the Soviet Union, which was its attitude towards the question of national

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<sup>45</sup> Gutiérrez Alea and Ulive, *Las doce sillas*, p. 5.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p.16.

identity and style, summarised in the idea socialist in content and national in form. At the same time, *Las doce sillas* can be seen as Gutiérrez Alea's cinematic testimony to his opposition to Socialist Realism as an aesthetic proposal. On this and the reception of the film in Cuba, Gutiérrez Alea stated: 'fue un éxito de público y de crítica. La colocación de ese pintor "realista socialista" puede haber ofendido a alguien, pero creo que la mayor parte de la gente se siente muy agradecida con ese tipo de críticas que permiten tomar conciencia de muchas cosas'.<sup>47</sup>

### ***Memorias del subdesarrollo: Eisenstein, the Individual and Socialism***

*Memorias* was Gutiérrez Alea's first great international success. It is a film adaptation of a Cuban novel of the same title by Edmundo Desnoes. According to Ambrosio Fornet, Desnoes' novel is an existentialist literary work and the main difference between the novel and its film adaptation lies in the fact that Titón conceptualised the story in the context of the Cuban Revolution.<sup>48</sup> The film tells the story of Sergio, a middle-class, non-committed Cuban intellectual who contemplates his past, present and future in the context of the radicalisation of the Revolution. If we read Gutiérrez Alea's essay, 'Memorias de *Memorias...*' (1980) carefully, it can be shown to reveal some important information about the influence Eisenstein's film theory and praxis had on the creation of his cinematic masterpiece *Memorias del subdesarrollo*.<sup>49</sup> In this essay Gutiérrez Alea argues that the image of reality found in *Memorias del subdesarrollo* 'is a multifaceted one... like an

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<sup>47</sup> See Silvia Oroz *Tomás Gutiérrez Alea: los filmes que no filmé* (La Habana: UNEAC, 1989), p. 73. See also, Tomás Gutiérrez Alea and Ugo Ulive's *Las doce sillas* (La Habana: Ediciones ICAIC, 1963) and Ugo Ulive, 'Historia de las 12 sillas', in *Cine cubano*, no. 6 (1962), pp. 15–23.

<sup>48</sup> Edmundo Desnoes was a special guest at the 2009 UCL FMI. He mentioned that originally he called the work *Inconsolable Memories* in the first English edition. It was first published in Spanish in Havana by Ediciones Union in 1965. On Fornet's and Espinosa's testimonies, see the documentary *Este es Titón* (2006), which was shown as part of the film retrospective of the 2008 UCL FMI dedicated to Titón.

<sup>49</sup> Full reference is to 'Memorias de *Memorias...*', *Casa de las Américas*, 21:122 (Sept-Oct 1980), 67-76.

object contemplated from different viewpoints'.<sup>50</sup> He then proceeds to explain how this multifaceted image operates in the film. The first example he gives involves the comparison between the ways in which the carnival dance is perceived by the spectator at the beginning of the film compared with towards the end of the film.

In the first sequence of the film we see a young man murdered by gun-fire and then carried away while, in the second version of the same sequence, 'Now Sergio is in the middle of the dancing crowd' (p. 74). Gutiérrez Alea argues that seeing the sequence for a second time from a new perspective stretches the scene 'beyond its original, direct and contingent meaning, and it opens up and leads to considerations about the reality within which the protagonist is trapped and which he is incapable of understanding profoundly' (p. 75). This creation of a double perspective on film sequences – although Gutiérrez Alea does not explicitly say this in the essay 'Memories of *Memories...*' – is, as we shall see, derived from and inspired by Eisenstein's theory of montage. This is clear if we consider some of the important points made in his essay *La dialéctica del espectador* (1980). In the latter work, Gutiérrez Alea compares the theory and praxis of Brecht and Eisenstein, and it is clear that -- despite the great respect he had for the German dramatist's work -- he found the Russian film director more germane to his work and useful for his cinematic pursuits. In *La dialéctica del espectador* Gutiérrez Alea quotes extensively from Eisenstein's *Film Form – The Film Sense* (1957), in particular the section in which Eisenstein discusses the use of pathos in his work, the point at which, in Eisenstein's words, the spectator 'is forced "to go out of himself"', and is therefore 'departing from his ordinary condition'.

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<sup>50</sup> 'Appendix: Memories of *Memories...*', in *The Viewer's Dialectic*, edited by Iraidá Sánchez Oliva, translated by Julia Lesage (Havana: José Martí Publishing House, 1988), pp. 67-85 (p. 74).

Gutiérrez Alea subsequently makes the following comment: ‘This “departing from his ordinary condition” also implies a separation from one’s self. If, on the one hand that establishes a “different” way of looking at things -- at daily reality -- it also means an upheaval, an alienation from oneself.’<sup>51</sup> Gutiérrez Alea is, as we can see, using a very similar type of language here to that, which he employed when referring to the cinematography in his own film, in which reality is ‘contemplated from different viewpoints’ (see quotation above). There is clearly, thus, a close connection between Eisenstein’s use of pathos and the cinematography used by Gutiérrez Alea, according to his own admission, in *Memorias del subdesarrollo*.

There are other sections of *Memorias del subdesarrollo* where Eisensteinian influence may be detected. In *La dialéctica del espectador* Gutiérrez Alea quotes from Eisenstein’s perhaps most famous essay, ‘Film Structure’:

With what methods and means must the filmically portrayed fact be handled so that it simultaneously shows not only what the fact is, and the character’s attitude towards it, but also how the author relates to it, and how the author wishes the spectator to receive, sense, and react to the portrayed fact.<sup>52</sup>

Gutiérrez Alea subsequently makes the following observation:

Therefore, when we are dealing with a representation where the author’s stance is opposed to the apparent meaning of the represented event, that is, when the author’s attitude is distanced and critical, then the

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<sup>51</sup> *The Viewer’s Dialectic*, p. 53.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.* p. 60



compositional scheme will respond structurally to the emotional state generated in the author, based on the author's relation to the represented fact.<sup>53</sup>

It is precisely this meditation on the difference between the way the character views the 'filmically portrayed fact' and the way the film director – and by implication, the viewer – views the same fact which is at the centre of *Memorias del subdesarrollo*. In *Memorias del subdesarrollo* it is the difference between the way in which Sergio views the 'filmically portrayed fact' (to use Eisenstein's term), and the alternative view of that same fact which gradually emerges which is at the core of the film. (Here the 'filmically portrayed fact' is understood to be the Cuban Revolution.) In this sense it might even be argued that *Memorias del subdesarrollo* is an explicit implementation of Eisensteinian theory. There are, indeed, many points in *Memorias del subdesarrollo* when the disjunction between the two perspectives is brought into focus.

We have already noted that Gutiérrez Alea refers to the dual perspective with regard to the opening sequence of the film, and here it should be underlined that there are three other examples given in his essay 'Memories on *Memories...*' which evoke the same cinematic technique. The second example he gives occurs when Sergio, early on in the film, returns to Havana, on the bus, and recollects a number of the scenes at the airport. As Gutiérrez Alea writes: 'the same sequences are repeated, but now from Sergio's perspective. (...) We might say that we first observe this sequence of departure "objectively" upon Sergio and later "subjectively" from Sergio' (p. 75). Gutiérrez Alea's third example of the dual portrayal of the 'filmically portrayed fact' occurs when Sergio recalls the argument he has had with his

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

wife and which he had recorded. As Gutiérrez Alea notes: ‘Once again the film presents first an evocation of an action, related to Sergio’s frame of mind, and later presents it again, but this time as a reproduction of that action as information given “objectively”’.<sup>54</sup> It is perfectly legitimate to question whether the second representation is, indeed, an ‘objective’ portrayal, as Gutiérrez Alea suggests (why is one version more objective than the other? we might argue), but for our purposes it is important to highlight that Gutiérrez Alea is integrating a technique he identified within Eisenstein’s film writings and exploring its potential for a film about the Cuban Revolution in a variety of ways.

The fourth and final example Gutiérrez Alea provides in *Memorias del subdesarrollo* is perhaps the most crucial. It occurs when the spectator views a sequence focussing on the sad faces of Havana’s population, once more via Sergio’s POV and subsequently in an ‘objective’ sense. Gutiérrez Alea makes the following point about this sequence: ‘The truth does not lie in the first sequence of faces nor in the second, nor in the sum of both, but rather in the confrontation between both and the main character and what that suggests to the spectator within the general context of the film’.<sup>55</sup> This point is crucial because it demonstrates how Gutiérrez Alea regarded his film as interrogative – it reverses the camera angle so that it focusses on the viewer’s political stance on what is being portrayed. It is also clear, since Gutiérrez Alea provides four examples of the use of this technique in his film, that he regards it as crucial for an understanding of *Memorias del subdesarrollo*. This dual portrayal of a ‘filmically portrayed fact’ is, as we have seen, a technique that can be traced directly back to Eisensteinian theory. There is, thus, clearly a sense in which

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<sup>54</sup> *The Viewer’s Dialectic*, p. 80.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 81.

*Memorias del subdesarrollo* provides a mise-en-scène of a cinematic technique that Gutiérrez Alea learned from Eisenstein.

It can be argued that Sergio is an observer of the society brought forth by the declaration of the socialist character of the Cuban Revolution. For Gutiérrez Alea, Sergio is an intellectual unable to confront himself. In one sequence of the film, in a dialogue between two of the main characters, Sergio (Sergio Corrieri) asks Elena (Daisy Granados) her opinion of him and she responds: ‘tú, tú eres nada’. This dialogue exposes the essence of Sergio’s personality, which can be perceived as philosophical in character, a Cuban Hamlet. In this sense, Sergio can be described as relativist, existentialist and sceptic, like Hamlet himself.<sup>56</sup> Sergio is also the ultimate incarnation of the superfluous Cuban man who does not fit into society. Sergio’s *oblomovshchina* (backwardness, inertia) and unheroic behaviour also recalls Oblomov, the eponymous hero of Ivan Goncharov’s Russian literary classic. Like Oblomov, Sergio spends long hours in his room in his flat alone. He decides to stay despite the fact that all of his family leaves the country after Fidel Castro and his ‘barbudos’ enter Havana. While being alone, Sergio will try to find some sense to his life by writing memories. However, the Revolution, Havana, and its people will become real challenges for him. Sergio tries to understand all this and the new political reality of the revolution. Sergio states: ‘Cubans waste their talent adapting themselves to every moment. People aren’t consistent and they always need someone to think for them...’ This is perhaps the key sentence of Gutiérrez Alea’s film and Desnoes’s novel.

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<sup>56</sup> This is the view of the film expressed by Edmundo Desnoes at the roundtable on the film held at the Festival of the Moving Image in November 2009.

Sergio expresses one of his incredulous ideas in a sequence of the film, while attending a round table of left-wing, Marxist and Soviet intellectuals; Sergio cannot find any clear objective. Sergio comments: ‘las palabras devoran las palabras y te dejan en las nubes’. He tries to understand the new social reality. Sergio recognises that his previous life was a failure, but he is incapable of getting involved in the new socio-political process because he is also a passive spectator. In *Memorias*, Sergio is a representation of what Brecht termed alienation, although this was misunderstood by several film critics who identified the film character Sergio with Gutiérrez Alea himself. The film-maker pointed out that *Sight & Sound* published ‘an absolutely sinister article’ that compared *Memories* with Buñuel’s *Viridiana* — made under Franco’s dictatorship in Spain — and even with the famous Russian dissident Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn.<sup>57</sup> For Gutiérrez Alea, his film has nothing to do with those works or personalities: ‘this film is an example of militant cinema (...) within the Revolution’.<sup>58</sup>

If we compare *Memorias* and *Bronenosets Potemkin*, there is a clear difference in terms of the focus in each film. Unlike Eisenstein, who used the *kollektiv*, or the masses, as his major character, the Cuban film-maker was interested, as was Brecht, in individual narratives. Spectatorship is the key concept in which Gutiérrez Alea’s and Eisenstein’s perspectives coincide. When Gutiérrez Alea refers to ‘active’ spectators as those who generate a process of critical understanding of reality, and a practical, transforming action, these points are reminiscent of Eisenstein’s views on cinematic representation in order to create a new relationship between the viewer and the world. This was of particular importance to many Soviet film-makers, particularly for the creator of *Oktiabr*, and this

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<sup>57</sup> Gutiérrez Alea, *La dialéctica del espectador*, p. 204.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

was also an important point of reference for Gutiérrez Alea. In another chapter of Gutiérrez Alea's theoretical film essay, 'El espectador contemplativo y el espectador activo', the Cuban film-maker draws a distinction between 'the passive' and 'the active' spectator:

Así cuando hablamos de espectador 'contemplativo' nos referimos a aquél que no rebase el nivel pasivo — contemplativo; en tanto que el espectador 'activo' sería aquél que, tomando como punto de partida el momento de la contemplación viva, genera un proceso de comprensión crítica de la realidad (que incluye el espectáculo, por supuesto) y consecuentemente una acción práctica transformadora.<sup>59</sup>

Titón's definition recalls what Eisenstein defined as *the audience as creator*.<sup>60</sup> Brecht's theory of the teaching of drama seemed wrong to Gutiérrez Alea, because it makes a false separation between intellectual and historical processes, even though the Cuban film-maker maintained enormous admiration for Brecht as a playwright.

### **Documentary and Fiction**

One practice that Gutiérrez Alea uses in order to offer a dialectical view of Cuban history is a process whereby the film narrative becomes a witness to actual historical events, in some cases through introducing live footage of real events. In *Dialéctica del espectador*, for example, Gutiérrez Alea pointed out that 'film has always moved between these two poles: documentary and fiction'.<sup>61</sup> According to Julio García Espinosa, films that show the indissoluble

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<sup>59</sup> Gutiérrez Alea, *Dialéctica del espectador*, p. 30. For a list of articles about *Memorias del subdesarrollo* see García Borrero, *Guía crítica del cine cubano de ficción*, pp. 221–22.

<sup>60</sup> See Eisenstein, 'The Audience as Creator', in S. M. Eisenstein, *Selected Works*, vol. 3 (*Writings 1934–47*), pp. 339–40.

<sup>61</sup> See Gutiérrez Alea's *Dialéctica del espectador*, p. 111.

relationship between documentary and fiction are typical of the ICAIC. Its first documentary feature film was, indeed, *Memorias del subdesarrollo*.<sup>62</sup> In *Memorias* there is footage of people who are leaving Cuba at the airport, ‘round table’ discussions about culture between intellectuals, Fidel Castro, Nikita Khrushchev and Kennedy, and much more. García Espinosa considers that *Memorias* established for the first time in Cuban cinema the feature documentary film.<sup>63</sup> However, what has never been acknowledged before is the fact that the idea of adding documentary footage to the fictional narrative came from the time when Maetzig introduced his films as part of the DEFA film retrospective in Cuba in the 1960s.

### *Fresa y Chocolate*

Another much-celebrated film by the Cuban film-maker is *Fresa y Chocolate* (1993). The storyline is about the relationship that is established between Diego, a homosexual, and David, a communist student. Gutiérrez Alea’s film continues a trend in the ICAIC in the 1990s that led film-makers to examine their society in an increasingly critical fashion, which might be seen also as a critical observation of the consequences of socialism in Cuban society.<sup>64</sup> A serious treatment of homosexuality and gay characters during the Revolutionary period would have been almost unthinkable in the ICAIC before *Fresa y Chocolate*.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Cited in Sergio Núñez’s ‘Muchos Titón’ in *Cine cubano*, no.166 (October–December 2007), p. 102. See also Sergio Núñez’s documentary about Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, *Este es Titón*. Included in the previous chapter (p.121) was Kurt Maetzig’s definition of the documentary feature film. For a discussion of Gutiérrez Alea’s film, see Stephen M. Hart, *A Companion to Latin American Film* (Woodbridge: Tamesis, 2004), pp. 47–53.

<sup>63</sup> On Espinosa’s testimony, see the documentary *Este es Titón* (2006).

<sup>64</sup> In this respect, two feature films that deserve to be mentioned are Daniel Díaz Torres’s *Alicia en el pueblo de las maravillas* (Alice in Wondertown, 1991), which was such a far-reaching critique of Cuban society that the authorities prematurely cancelled it from the normal exhibition period in the capital’s cinema network and thus created a major scandal; and Gerardo Chijona’s *Adorables mentiras* (Adorable Lies, 1991), about a corrupt official who uses the funds of the Revolution for personal gain.

<sup>65</sup> *Conducta impropia — Mauvaise conduite* (Improper Conduct, 1984) by Néstor Almendros and Orlando Jiménez Leal was the first film to take a critical approach to the topic of homosexuality in Cuba and the particular case of UMAP, this documentary was produced in France. On the same topic, Almendros and Jorge

Gutiérrez Alea's film particularly refers to the negative side of Soviet influence in Cuba. In one sequence of the film, for example, David asks Diego to read his short stories, which he claims are some of the first things he has written, just drafts. When David comes back to discuss them, Diego welcomes him in Russian:

Diego: *Pozhaluista, tovarishch, pozhaluista* (Please, comrade, please). ¿Como andan las cosas por el *kolkhoz* (collective farm)?

David: ¿Por qué dices eso, no sirve?

Diego: El problema es que eso no es literatura, allí no hay vida, sólo consignas. Lo único que te faltó es poner *mukhik* (peasant) en vez de *guajiro*.

In this sequence, Diego explains his concerns about what is being taught in David's school. He is shocked by the large number of spelling mistakes and typos in the texts and the lack of accuracy with reference to historical events. Above all, Diego expresses his deep rejection of a kind of literature which is based on slogans and not on real life. In another sequence of *Fresa y Chocolate*, Diego and David argue about the UMAP. This moment refers to those dark days of the Military Units to Aid Production (UMAP), forced labour camps created in the province of Camagüey in 1965 as a way to rehabilitate alleged antisocial elements such as fans of the Beatles, the religious, homosexuals and others. They were sent to the UMAP, known initially by their managers as the 'Plan Fidel' or by the interns as the Cuban Gulag. In the UMAP were not only people disaffected with the Revolution but also intellectuals, today illustrious figures of Cuban

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Ulla directed *Nadie escuchaba* (Nobody Listened, 1987). In ICAIC film production, only in Pineda Barnet's *La Bella de la Alhambra* is there a gay character. On this topic, see John Hess, 'Gay Cuba', *Jump Cut*, 41 (May 1997), pp. 122–24. See also the 1995 documentary of the same title by Sonja de Vries; Michelle Citron and others, 'Critical Dialogue: Homosexuality in Cuba', *Jump Cut*, 19 (December 1978), pp. 38–39. As part of the 2007 UCL FMI, I presented Lisette Vila's documentaries on Cuban gender/gay/transsexual issues ([http://www.proyectopalomas.com/festival\\_inglaterra.htm](http://www.proyectopalomas.com/festival_inglaterra.htm)).

intellectual life such as the Cardinal of Havana Jaime Ortega Alamino, the diplomat Raúl Roa Kouri and the songwriter Pablo Milanés.<sup>66</sup>

The argument between Diego and David about the UMAP does not necessarily ‘delegitimise Marxism-Leninism’, as Schroeder has suggested in his analysis of the film.<sup>67</sup> On the contrary, the negative experiences such as UMAP are identified by David, who is undeniably a positive character in the film, as mistakes which are not part of the Revolution, or to put it in his own words: ‘los errores no son la Revolución, son la parte de la Revolución que no es la Revolución’. He understands the Cuban Revolution through its achievements because for him that is what really matters. David is convinced that a socialist system can offer a better life to poor families. The example given by him is that of the people from the countryside like him and his family, who never before had the benefit of free healthcare and education. Certainly, the Cuban Revolution entailed all of this and also the negative experiences such as the Soviet UMAP, which was a brief interlude and yet, unquestionably, part of the cultural experiment. *Fresa y Chocolate* provides the viewer with the opportunity to understand Gutiérrez Alea’s audiovisual montage of music, specifically in a scene where the two men, David and Diego, are listening to two musical pieces by Ignacio Cervantes’s *Adiós a Cuba* (Goodbye to Cuba) and *Ilusiones perdidas* (Lost Illusions). Their titles make them very well suited to the dramatic conflict of the film narrative. As they are talking about the music, Diego says to David: ‘That’s called lost illusions.’ In other words, the lost illusions refer to Diego’s lost illusions regarding the Revolution itself, thus he decided to leave the country.

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<sup>66</sup> See Enrique Ros, *La UMAP: El Gulag Castrista* (Miami: Ediciones Universal, 2004). See also Luis Baez, ‘Unidades militares de ayuda a la producción (UMAP)’, *Granma* (Thursday, 14 April 1966), p. 2.

<sup>67</sup> Schroeder, *Tomás Gutiérrez Alea: the Dialectics of a Filmmaker*, p. 119. For a list of film reviews about *Fresa y Chocolate*, see García Borrero, *Guía crítica del cine cubano de ficción*, pp. 153–54.



In her book *Cuba: The Shaping of Revolutionary Consciousness*, Tzvi Medin argues that ‘Cuban Revolutionary leaders introduced Marxism-Leninism into the Cuban Revolutionary message by grafting it onto the images, symbols, values and concepts of Cuban nationalism’.<sup>68</sup> This kind of ‘montage’ but also of music, image and sound in cinema, is clearly shown in another sequence of *Fresa y Chocolate*. One wall in Diego’s flat is covered with portraits of Cuban poets (José Martí, Dulce Maria Loynaz and Lezama Lima) and the Virgen de la Caridad del Cobre (Patron Saint of Cuba). Particularly, the figure of Lezama acquires a symbolic status not only because of his stature in Cuban literary history, but particularly for the fact that both the man and his novel, *Paradiso* had been censured at one time by the Revolution. These visual images together with the music of Ernesto Lecuona Cervantes are representations of Cuban cultural identity. Onto the same wall David, the young communist, puts Alberto Korda’s famous photograph of Che Guevara. David also puts images and symbols of the literacy campaign, all of which he believes are new signs, crucial socialist additions to the Cuban identity, iconic images associated with the Revolution. Such explicit filmic metaphors involve ready-made cultural symbols, creating a strong visual image about the political meaning of the current Cuba as a nation. Gutiérrez Alea used the close-up as an independent connotative sign in order to create paradigms, classes and clashes of and between objects (images and sounds) in conflict and linked by association and disassociation, ultimately leading to the abstraction of a unifying idea of how contemporary Cuba should be recognised. In this sequence of *Fresa y chocolate*, these cultural elements relate to one another and their collision creates ‘the film sense’ of the Revolution within the concept of Cuba. One way, indeed, to understand Gutiérrez Alea’s intention in this scene is to turn to Eisenstein’s concept of montage.

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<sup>68</sup> Tzvi Medin, *Cuba: The Shaping of Revolutionary Consciousness* (Boulder, CL: Rienner, 1990), p. 530.

In principle, montage defined the process of editing: ‘in such a case, each montage piece exists no longer as something unrelated, but as a given *particular representation* of the general theme that in equal measure penetrates *all* the shot pieces. The juxtaposition of these partial details in a given montage construction calls to life and forces into the light that *general* quality in which each details into a *whole*, namely, into that generalised *image*, where in the creator, followed by the spectator, experiences the theme’.<sup>69</sup> The main idea of montage is to create conflict and this goes beyond the editing of images. According to Robert Robertson, audiovisual cinema is ‘Eisenstein’s concept of how the sound film should work in terms of an interaction of music, sound and film as a unified form’.<sup>70</sup> In the same way, when Gutiérrez Alea combines pictures and symbols, including music, in the same frame, he creates conflict. For Gutiérrez Alea, as for Eisenstein, this is also dialectical materialism as film practice. Gutiérrez Alea’s conflict of sound, image and music is what Eisenstein termed in early theatrical work a ‘montage of attractions’.

### ***El Brigadista*, Anton Makarenko and the Foundations of the Educational System of the Cuban Revolution**

My intention here is to identify those films that sought to imprint ‘a Marxist-Leninist’ consciousness within the Cuban spectator. One should remember that Lenin argued that socialist consciousness had to be brought to the working class by professional revolutionaries: ‘revolutionary experience and organisational skill are things that can be acquired. There only has to be zeal to develop the necessary qualities.’<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Sergei Eisenstein, *The Film Sense*, translated and edited by Jay Leyda (London: Faber and Faber, 1986), p. 19.

<sup>70</sup> See Robert Robertson, *Eisenstein on the Audiovisual: The Montage of Music, Image and Sound in Cinema* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2009), p. 13.

<sup>71</sup> Vladimir Illich Lenin’s *What Is To Be Done?* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1988), p. 100.

Octavio Cortázar Jiménez had been involved with the ICAIC since 1959. He began work as a co-ordinator of the *Enciclopedia Popular*, a special department created in order to support the Literacy Campaign. Cortázar was an assistant director on Vladimir Čech's film *¿Para quién baila la Habana?*. The following year, Cortázar travelled to Czechoslovakia to study film direction at the Prague film school FAMU. In 1967, he returned to Cuba and became a director of feature films for the ICAIC. Cortázar's *Por primera vez* (For the First Time) is considered a classic of film art documentary. He is better known in this film style, with works such as *Acerca de un personaje que unos llaman San Lázaro y otros llaman Babalú* (About a Personage Whom Some Call Saint Lazarus and Some Call Babalú, 1969) among many others. Cortázar's first feature film, *El brigadista* — literally meaning the brigade member — is inspired by an historical event: La Campaña Nacional of Alfabetización, which included the assassination of two of the teachers involved in the campaign, teenagers Conrado Benitez and Manuel Ascunce Domenech, as well as the peasant Pedro Lantigua. The film squeezes down the double murder of the teachers into one, telling the story of a young volunteer named Mario.

### **The Representation of the Adolescent as the Teacher of the Revolution**

In the same location that García Espinosa's *El Mégano* had been made 22 years earlier, the first images of Cortázar's film emphasise the community's enthusiasm over the arrival of 'el maestro' in the village of Maniadero Chiquito. This would be the first time the very poor area had a teacher and, thus everyone is eagerly awaiting the arrival of 'el maestro'. In the first sequence of the film, Gonzalo (played by Salvador Wood), leader of the peasant community, demands that the place be kept as tidy as possible for the arrival of such an important person: *el maestro*. The young people of the community are wondering if 'el

maestro' will be 'calvo, feo y barrigón' (bald, ugly and fat). When the committee arrives to collect him, they are late. 'El maestro' turns out to be a young boy called Mario (played by Patricio Wood, who is in real life Salvador Wood's son). Gonzalo is upset, he screams: 'yo vine a buscar un maestro, una persona instruida y una persona de respeto'. Back in the *pueblo*, everyone is still asking and waiting for the arrival of 'el maestro'. The film cuts to an image of a very young boy sleeping in the back of the truck. 'Pero si es un niño', someone exclaims. One should remember that the actor Salvador Wood previously had been played the role of the farmer in the fourth story of Kalatozov's *Soy Cuba*. The use of the same actor as the village leader in Cortázar's film offered a special case of intertextuality. The opening sequence summarises the whole idea of the film in explaining not only the shocking experience of 'la alfabetización' entailed, but also how stereotypical images of teachers were transgressed. The Cuban *brigadistas* were mostly teenagers from the cities, students as young as sixth graders, who embarked on a campaign to eradicate illiteracy; a political-educational project that brought into being a new kind of teacher.

### **'Lo primero: el maestro'**

As Fidel Castro said: 'para una revolución que aspira a cambiar radicalmente la vida de un país y a construir una sociedad nueva ¿qué es lo más importante? el maestro.'<sup>72</sup> It can be argued that in order to build the teaching system, the Cuban Revolution had as its main referential source the Soviet educational practices developed by Anton Makarenko. The Cuban cultural mentors created the *escuelas Makarenko* (Makarenko schools), which aimed to create the 'new' teachers, who would, in turn, create the 'new' man. *Las Makarenkos*, who were mainly women, were trained to teach absolute loyalty, obedience and

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<sup>72</sup> See Fidel Castro, *La educación en Revolución* (La Habana: Instituto cubano del libro, 1974), p. 64.

responsibility to the political formula: ‘*Cuba = the Revolution = el Comandante*’. The Cuban Makarenko schools offer concrete evidence of Cuba’s creative interpretation of previous Soviet educational practices. However, until now, in different workshops, conferences, congresses and studies on Cuban education, the experience of *las escuelas Makarenko* has been deliberately ignored. For example, in *Schooling the Revolution: An Analysis of Developments in Cuban Education since 1959*, MacDonald does not mention the impact of Soviet practices as part of the whole educational experiment of the Cuban Revolution.<sup>73</sup> How can this Soviet educational influence be observed in *El brigadista*?

### **Estudio y trabajo**

In the film, Gonzalo, the old peasant and leader of the community does not believe that Mario is a reliable teacher because of his youth. Little by little, however, Mario gains Gonzalo’s respect and support. One of the first things that Mario, the teacher, does is to go out early every morning to work with the *campesinos*. Mario explains that he was told to do this. The teacher needs to learn. Mario, a city boy, while working with the *campesinos*, is educating himself, familiarising himself with the hard work of life in the countryside. This sequence is perhaps the most important of the whole film, because it summarises the main goals of the ‘*Campana de Alfabetización*’, in order to understand the new kind of relationship established between the individual and socialism. As Che Guevara has argued: ‘el proceso es doble, por un lado actúa la sociedad con su educación directa e indirecta, por otro, el individuo se somete a un proceso consciente de autoeducación.’<sup>74</sup> Che Guevara refers to the ‘conscious process of self-education’ in this statement which not only defines

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<sup>73</sup> Théodore H. MacDonald, *Schooling the Revolution: An Analysis of Developments in Cuban Education Since 1959* (London: Praxis Press, 1996).

<sup>74</sup> Che Guevara, *El socialismo y el hombre en Cuba*, p. 8.

the aesthetic of the Cuban Revolution, but also helps us to understand the aesthetic of Octavio Cortázar's film itself.

Pointing in the direction indicated by Che Guevara's words, *El brigadista* emphasises that the goal of the campaign was always greater than simply to teach the country people how to read and write. Fidel Castro once said: 'no solamente enseñar a leer y a escribir: enseñar a trabajar y a servir a los demás'.<sup>75</sup> Octavio Cortázar's *El brigadista* confirms that the first definitive movement to integrate school and work actually took place during the literacy campaign. The Soviet connection is defined in the practical experience, the imposed practice the idea of combining study and work; which is another example of fusion of nationalist ideas with Marxist-Leninist educational practice. Firstly, it is timely to mention José Martí's educational thought as encapsulated in his celebrated phrase 'ser culto para ser libre' (to be educated is the only way to be free), which springs to mind. However, the method along with the practical experience came from the Makarenko system. Indeed, the Soviets implemented the idea in an educational experiment, which links education with productive labour as a means of creating 'the new man' and 'the new woman' of the future, a practice that emphasised not only a much closer connection between schooling and work but also focussed on collective rather than individual work, which was one of the main features of Anton Makarenko's educational theory. According to him, every pupil was to be educated in order to feel responsible to the collective and contribute something to the group. In that way, the student could acquire and develop a sense of belonging, and at the same time a sense of loyalty. His

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<sup>75</sup> Fidel Castro, *La educación en Revolución*, p. 69.

ambition was to establish a universal educational system based on Marxism-Leninism and applicable to every citizen of the socialist society without exception.<sup>76</sup>

After this, it was also established as part of the Cuban educational system that young peasants should travel to Havana for special courses. They were housed in some of Havana's most luxurious hotels and houses in the exclusive areas of Vedado, Miramar and Playa. The destruction of these places and everything that was inside them, including furniture and other important material cultural objects, was inevitably due to the ignorance of the new tenants, together with the view that all those 'artefacts' represented the 'old and corrupt' system of the past. At the same time, employees and students from schools located in the city were sent to work in the countryside for 45 days each year. In Cuba during the 1960s another kind of school was created, called the 'escuela en el campo'. These secondary schools were located in the countryside, catering primarily to urban students and teachers. Students lived there for the whole school term, travelling back home every Friday and returning to the schools each Sunday. This kind of school combined productive work with study. Thousands of Cuban families were practically broken down as the teenagers spent more time outside the traditional family environment, with the *kollektiv* becoming their new family, leading to new challenges and fears. Much of this is faithfully reflected in Cortázar's *El brigadista*.

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<sup>76</sup> See James Bowen, *Soviet Education: Anton Makarenko and the Years of Experiment* (Madison and Milwaukee: University of Wisconsin Press, 1962). In *Anton Makarenko: His Life and His Work in Education*, edited by Valentin Kumarin (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1976), one can learn a great deal about this Soviet educator. Originally from the Ukraine, Makarenko was one of the first to put the idea of collective spirit and collective process into practice.

### **The Cinematic Conceptualisation of the Cuban ‘New Man’**

In another sequence of the film, we see Mario running away from mice and spiders. ‘El maestro’ wants to defeat his own fears and doubts. He turns to the leader of the farm for help. Gonzalo asks the teacher to assist him with the paperwork in order to receive the documentation naming him the owner of the land on which he works. The sequence alludes to a great moment of Cuban history, ‘la ley de reforma agraria’, by means of which thousands of peasants became landowners. However, this great day for Gonzalo becomes a very sad one since he is shown to be unable to sign his own name; instead he stamps his finger prints with ink. Mario has a proposal that will teach him to write and read more rapidly. Mario, meanwhile, learns how to hunt crocodiles. At last, Gonzalo becomes one of his students. The phrases that the ‘brigadista’ uses to teach to read and write are as new to him as they are to his students. The film is alert to the goals of the socialist education introduced to the Cuban people, and the new language and terminology that had to be learned, which bear some correspondence to Marxist-Leninist ideology and socialist reality: e.g. ‘fighting spirit’, ‘collective farm’, ‘Party’, among many others.

In one sequence of the film, Mario teaches peasants phrases such as *la Revolución lo puede todo*, an idea that encapsulates a celebration and respect for the new political authority and optimism about the socialist future. This film suggests that the slogan *alfabetizar* (let’s make [Cuba] literate) literally meant persuasion. The Revolution depended largely on the influence of the word to establish its power. Here again there were clear parallels with the Soviets. In the study *Interpreting the Russian Revolution: The Language and Symbols of 1917*, the authors explain that ‘language was the key to this cultural integration of the peasantry. The dissemination of the revolution’s rhetoric to the countryside — the



development of a national discourses of civic rights and duties — would create the new political nation dreamed of'.<sup>77</sup>

In another sequence of the film, when the workers are on their break, an interesting topic emerges in their conversation: that of 'los alzados'. A violent argument breaks out between two farmers when one of them, a negative character, defends the former owner of the land; Gonzalo intervenes and recalls the terrible working conditions that they suffered under the former owner. The sequence is important in order to understand the growing domination of class discourse in the political language of Cuban cinema and society, fostering consensus and national unity. By emphasising the wrongs of the old and the goodness of the new, the Cubans followed a pattern very widely used in early Soviet cinematic experiments. With the language of a class-based understanding of 'the enemy' as the former owner of the land, patriotism was understood as the necessity of class struggle against the enemies of the Revolution, which was conceived as the answer to social inequality because the Revolution represents the common people, and the particular case of this film, the peasants.

*El brigadista* also alludes to the historical events of the Bay of Pigs. The 'alzados' were the people who supported the invasion. In the film, the event takes place near to Maniadero Chiquito, the location where Mario is teaching. Mario's parents arrive to take him back to Havana, but he decides to stay, thereby showing solidarity. In another scene, one of Mario's friends, another young teacher and a farmer are captured by the counter-revolutionaries and brutally lynched using barbed wire. The sequence recreates the real life assassination of the

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<sup>77</sup> Orlando Figes and Boris Kolonitskii, *Interpreting the Russian Revolution: The Language and Symbols of 1917* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), p. 127.

teacher, Manuel Ascunce Domenech, and his student, Pedro Lantigua, who were killed in Escambray in 1961. The local residents create their own people's militia and together with the army search for the counter-revolutionaries, the *gusanos* (literally 'worms'), who turn out to be the nastiest characters in the film. These scenes are dramatic and effective in the film, eliciting a raw emotional response from the viewer.

In spite of his youth, Mario takes part as a member of this people's militia. In another sequence, the killing of the evil landowner is shown. Mario finally leaves and promises to return after finishing medical school. In the final sequence, Cortázar introduces live footage of a real event: the arrival of the 'Brigadas Conrado Benítez' in Havana when Cuba was declared 'territorio libre de analfabetismo' (22 December 1961). All the documentary footage Cortázar used comes from Manuel Octavio Gómez's film *Historia de una batalla* (Story of a Battle, 1961), though Cortázar changes the order of some scenes. For example, Cortázar alters the sequence so that the final scene is of the homecoming of a male volunteer, because this is more in keeping with his film, whereas the final scene in Gómez's film was the homecoming of a young woman. Certainly, *El brigadista* is another example that illustrates effectively Maetzig's definition of a feature-documentary film, as discussed in chapter 2.

The cinematography of *El Brigadista* is not innovative. It can be argued that the simplicity of its script, in which every outcome is predictable, is one of its weakest points, but the ideals embodied by the fictional characters seem to be natural, and this 'saves' the film. According to Cortázar, 'en *El brigadista* traté de realizar una película convencional con respecto a su lenguaje; es un filme que sigue una estructura dramática lineal siguiendo los parámetros clásicos, los

cuales, además, fueron seleccionados intencionalmente'.<sup>78</sup> The experimental nature of the film is not to be found in the camerawork, nor in its formal aspects, but rather in its content. The film is significant because it chronicles the first radical movement in the island's cultural process, the literacy campaign, in fiction and in reality, and because it shows how the ICAIC was involved in this process, one of the greatest in Cuban history.

Unquestionably, it is important to acknowledge the role played by the ICAIC in the success of the campaign, and particularly the works developed by Cortázar as a film-maker. As noted above, two of his films are evidence of this fact: first *Por primera vez*, which documents the ICAIC's involvement in the educational project of the Revolution when cinema was taken to the poorest areas in the island; and later *El brigadista*, which recreates those creative and intense years of work against illiteracy in a documentary fiction story. This new type of teacher was a manifestation of the idea of the 'New Man' and the 'New Woman', someone dedicated to the construction of a new society and willing to sacrifice themselves to put the interests of the collective before their own individual aspirations. In this sense, Cortázar's decision to select an adolescent as the main character of the film recalls Soviet cinema of the 1950s, when adolescents aspired to become the positive heroes of the future communist society, demonstrated in the carnivalesque inversion of the re-education story, when a member of the youngest generation became the teacher of the oldest one, when the adolescent became the favourite hero in films because he rebelled against the former figures of authority, symbolising the changing values, the new values that socialism was bringing into society. *El brigadista* also recalls the Thaw cinema, manifested in the general spirit of revived utopianism in the 1960s.

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<sup>78</sup> Cited in Mayra Vilasis, 'El documental, Cortázar, *El Brigadista*', *Cine cubano*, no. 93 (1977), pp. 74–80 (p. 78).

### **The Reception of Cortázar's Film**

*El brigadista* is considered one of the most popular films in Cuba. Among other international awards, in 1978, at the Film Festival of the countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America in Tashkent *El brigadista* received a distinction from the Komsomol Committee of Uzbekistan. In 1980, Cortázar made another feature film, *Guardafronteras* (Border Guards), set in 1963, in which a troop of young soldiers is sent to an isolated area as a border patrol. The message of the film highlighted the importance of the patriotic military education of the youth. In 1994, Cortázar directed *Derecho de asilo* (The Right to Asylum), a film adaptation of Alejo Carpentier's literary work of the same title. On 27 of February 2008, Cortázar died suddenly at the age of 72 in Spain, while he was teaching a course on film production.<sup>79</sup>

### **Retrato de Teresa or the Birth of the 'New' Cuban Woman**

*Retrato de Teresa* was the first feature film made by Pastor Vega (1940-2005). As a child, Vega began working in radio with his father (the outstanding *décima* composer Justo Vega), and his adult professional training was in 'Teatro Estudio' under the direction of Vicente Revuelta. The first work that he had a part in was Tennessee Williams' *Glass Menagerie*. He performed in *Mother Courage* by Brecht among many other works, and then went into film. Vega was also a highly accomplished maker of documentaries.<sup>80</sup> In 1979, the same year that *Retrato de Teresa* was released, Vega became the first director of

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<sup>79</sup> At the time of his death, Cortázar was the director of the Hurón Azul Documentary Development Centre at the National Association of Cuban Writers and Artists (UNEAC). Cortázar has been both film-maker and teacher. He was a founder of the International Film and TV School at San Antonio de Los Baños, outside the capital, and he was a professor at the Faculty of Audiovisual Communications of the Higher Institute of the Arts (ISA).

<sup>80</sup> These included *Alicia en los países maravillosos* (1962), *Hombres del cañaveral* (Canecutters, 1965), *La canción del turista* (Song Of The Tourist, 1966), and his first feature-length work, *Viva la Republica!* (Long Live the Republic!, 1972).

the Havana International Film Festival, and he stayed director until 1991, as the festival became the leading such event in Latin America.

Vega was an assistant director on Maetzig's *Preludio 11*. Vega's film can thus be seen as a continuation of Maetzig's cinematic and transgressive representation of Cuban women and mothers in revolutionary times. It was dedicated to Saúl Yelín, the great promoter of the first film co-produced in the 1960s. Carlos Fariñas, the composer for *Soy Cuba*, is listed as part of the technical team. The script was written by Ambrosio Fonet. According to Fonet, 'no pretendíamos hacer una rosa, una obra perfecta, sino sólo el retrato de una cubana de su tiempo, una mujer resuelta, como la propia sociedad en que vivía, a seguir creciendo pese a todos los obstáculos'.<sup>81</sup> But what constitutes a good performance, how actors work, and shares insights into the director/actor relationship? According to Vega, 'yo he improvisado muchísimo. En mis películas hay muchas secuencias que son Toma 1. Sin ensayo. Improvisadas [...] es un entrenamiento y una técnica muy bien descrita por Stanislavski: el proceso de preparación del actor, que para el cine es fantástica'.<sup>82</sup> Daisy Granados, one of the most popular faces of Cuban cinema, plays Teresa. The film marked her return to work in cinema after a lengthy time dedicated to being a mother of three boys, who played the roles of her children in the film. Granados also had her own East-German experience, when she played a role in Egon Günther's film *Wenn Du grob bist, lieber Adam* (When You Are Grown Up, Dear Adam, 1965), one of the forbidden films of DEFA. Adolfo Llauradó plays Ramón,

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<sup>81</sup> Ambrosio Fonet, *Las trampas del oficio: Apuntes sobre cine y sociedad* (La Habana: Ediciones ICAIC, 2007), p. 193.

<sup>82</sup> Cited in Oneyda González Polvo de alas: el guión cinematográfico en Cuba (Santiago de Cuba: Editorial Oriente, 2009), p. 62. On Stanislavski acting method and its influence on Cuban theatre, see Carlos Celdrán, 'Otra vez hijos de Stanislavski' [http://www.argosteatro.cult.cu/articulos%20de%20Carlos /stanislavski.htm](http://www.argosteatro.cult.cu/articulos%20de%20Carlos%20/stanislavski.htm) See also 'Presencia de Stanislavski in Cuba (Eventos Teóricos del 13 Festival de Teatro de La Habana)', organised by Yana Elsa Brugal, director of Proyecto Arte-Tiempo ([http://www.cniae.cult.cu/13FITH\\_Stsanislavsky\\_enCuba.htm](http://www.cniae.cult.cu/13FITH_Stsanislavsky_enCuba.htm)).

the husband. This actor was also a distinctive figure in Cuban cinema. Llauradó became the cinematic image of Cuban *machismo*, established from the third story of Humberto Solás's *Lucía*. Llauradó's characters in films offer another example of intertextuality in the ICAIC. Certainly, Granados and Llauradó created memorable performances for Cuban cinema, and *Retrato de Teresa* is, for many, their finest cinematic interpretation.

The portrayal of women has been a crucial element for the question of gender in Cuban cinema, in the development of the cinematic discourse of the Cuban Revolution from the very first productions.<sup>83</sup> By the end of the 1960s, women featured strongly as film characters and were used by ICAIC film-makers to represent the major changes introduced by the Revolution. In *Lucía* (1967), for example, Humberto Solás presented three different stories of Cuban women: the first *Lucía*, played by Raquel Revuelta, is set in the period of Cuban Independence. In the second story, Eslinda Nuñez's *Lucía* is shown shoulder to shoulder with her male counterpart in their struggle against the corrupt and 'democratic' dictatorship of Gerardo Machado. The last *Lucía*, a role played by Adela Legrá, represented those women struggling not only against illiteracy but also against 'machismo' in order to achieve the goals of social equality heralded by the Revolution. *Retrato de Teresa*, for its part, is concerned with a socialist society and offers a good reference point through which to observe male and female roles in the family, at work, in real and fictional lives. Teresa is a working-class, energetic, dedicated young mother who is shown struggling with her duties at work and at home. *Retrato de Teresa* presents a good case for the analysis of the representation of motherhood in Cuban cinema and the difficulties faced by a mother of three attempting to

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<sup>83</sup> On this topic, Guy Baron's book will be published under the title *Gender in Cuban Cinema: From the Modern to the Postmodern* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2011).

balance her home life with her responsibilities to the work collective. From the very beginning, the film takes the side of the wife, mother and working woman. *Retrato de Teresa* forces the spectator to re-consider the traditional roles of male and female within society. In one sequence of the film we observe the everyday routine of an ordinary Cuban family. Teresa is the first to wake up, prepare the breakfast for her three children and her husband. Later, we see the father and the eldest son talking about their plans for the weekend: they decide to visit Lenin Park.<sup>84</sup>

In the film, the spectator also sees Teresa's children wearing the uniform of the pioneers, a Soviet feature of Cuban primary school education. The family has a very modest and decent life. It is clear that Teresa is heavily involved with all the tasks of childcare, cooking, laundry and cleaning, which demand a great deal of effort and time. In these sequences, we (the spectators) realise that all of this constitutes housework; it is 'unpaid' and definitely not recognised as 'work'. Even though we also see Ramón taking on more of the traditionally female activities in the family, and a greater share of the domestic workload and the child-care than would have happened previously, it seems inevitable that Teresa will remain burdened with the bulk of these duties. Ramón is clearly not the same character as the one found in Humberto Solás's *Lucía*. Though there has been an improvement in the male prototype, there is still something awry.

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<sup>84</sup> 'El Palacio de Pioneros' (Pioneers' Palace) is located in the same area, a Soviet-style recreational institution for schoolchildren that was inaugurated on 15 July 1979 and was named after Ernesto Guevara. On that *ocasión*, Fidel Castro said: 'A nosotros nos parece que hacen una magnífica combinación el Parque Lenin y el Palacio de Pioneros. Y tanto las dos instituciones como los nombres de Lenin y Ernesto Guevara, hacen una magnífica combinación, honrosa y estimulante, para todos nosotros'. See, 'Fidel Castro's speech at the opening of the Palacio Central de Pioneros Ernesto Che Guevara at Lenin Park', 15 July 1979, *Misceláneas*, Collection Biblioteca Nacional José Martí (no pagination).

*Retrato de Teresa* is not only concerned with the difference between male and female roles in the family but also in the work place, in particular the dichotomy between family (the individual) and workplace (the collective). The opportunities that the political project opened up to Cuban women inevitably had an impact on the hopes, expectations and personality of the ‘new’ woman. Teresa spends extra hours at work as a union leader in a textile factory and with her voluntary commitments as the cultural secretary of her union. Another sequence, at a staff meeting at work, shows the problems presented by working mothers in the factory. The management does not provide sufficient childcare facilities and faces problems as a result of absenteeism (of women who are in the majority in this factory). Teresa explains her personal situation in public, asking for somebody else to assume or to share her extra duties as cultural secretary. However, her colleagues, the Party and the union ‘politely’ demand more from her because an international event is being organised. The Party leader at the factory needs Teresa to ensure that the factory is well represented at the World Festival of Youth and Students.<sup>85</sup>

At home, Ramón believes that Teresa’s extra duties at work are taking away too much from their own time as a family. He is a caring father, but he overreacts when faced with his impotence in a situation that he feels is destroying the family: he worries that everything is getting worse. After another night coming home late, Teresa explains to Ramón that all of her extra activities will finish at the end of the week, but after the staff meeting Teresa is forced to carry on. Ramón demands more of her attention; their feelings are conflicting and

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<sup>85</sup> The World Festival of Youth and Students was a traditional Soviet-style mass celebration organised by the international representatives of left-wing and communist youth organisations. The XI Festival in Cuba was held from 28 July–5 August 1978, and was attended by 18,500 participants from 145 countries. On the ‘XI Festival de la Juventud y los Estudiantes’, see *Revolución cubana: 45 grandes momentos*, p. 238.



it all ends in domestic violence. They separate and he begins an affair. Ramón's macho attitude is that he is not against Teresa taking on other roles at work, but only if they do not impact negatively on her performance as a mother and as a wife. For him these are still her main duties. Indirectly, Ramón expresses concern about his loss of status, his 'historical and traditional role' as the macho in the family, as a consequence of Teresa's emancipation. In this respect the film is a good test-case through which to analyse the effects of Soviet-style socialism on the Cuban male personality, which were far from positive from Ramón's perspective. According to Pastor Vega, 'El enemigo de Teresa es Teresa y el enemigo de Ramón es Ramón. Es decir, una pareja que tiene constituida una familia y que debe responder a una situación histórica de la célula familiar, su inserción en el proceso revolucionario'.<sup>86</sup> Yet it can be argued that the Revolution became the centre of the Cuban family and also the Party and the union that do care about family stability, but only understood it within a political context, the socialist objective that needs to be accomplished. The film also shows the working relations and system of productivity in a Soviet-style society, and the system of emulation within a socialist economy.

*Retrato de Teresa* also portrays the antagonistic attitudes between two generations of women and mothers. Teresa talks to her mother about her problems with Ramón. Her mother cannot give any advice, except to return to the old ways in order to sort out her problems. According to her mother: 'Las cosas son así porque siempre han sido así, y eso ni Fidel podrá cambiarlo'. Teresa is also fighting against her mother's traditional views about what a wife and mother should be. One phrase that is often repeated throughout the film when Teresa compares her situation to that of a man is 'No es lo mismo' (It's not the same). This is the answer

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<sup>86</sup> Cited in Azucena Plasencia Hernández, 'Teresa o la nueva moral', *Bohemia*, no 71.41 (1968), p. 24.

that Teresa receives not only from her husband, but also from her mother and cousin Charo. Teresa replies: ¿por qué no es lo mismo? (Why is it not the same?). No one can give a clear answer. Teresa struggles against everyone and everything that does not recognise her right to emancipation. Vega used the female and male, mother and daughter characters to good effect to show the conflict between the old and the new within the socialist system.

Why did *Retrato de Teresa* appear at that particular moment? Was it a spontaneous cinematic project in response to the emancipation of Cuban women? Once again, the united forces, the relationship between political policies and cinema in Cold War times, are exposed. We should remember that this official ‘reconsideration’ of the issues facing women in Cuba was similar to that taking place in the countries of the Soviet-bloc at the time. In *Women and Ideology in the Soviet Union*, for example, Mary Buckley explains that ‘the main contribution of the Brezhnev years (1964–1982) to the woman question was the declaration that it was “unsolved”.’<sup>87</sup> In the cinematic field, according to Lynne Attwood, ‘despite the general lack of experimentation in the Brezhnev years, one prominent new genre did emerge. This was based on an exploration of women’s lives in Soviet society. Names like *Sweet Woman*, *Strange Woman*, *Young Wife* and *The Wife Has Left*, appeared one after the other on cinema billboards. Others, such as *Wings*, *Brief Encounters*, *Long Farewalls* and *Some Interviews on Personal Questions* addressed the same themes, if under less obvious titles’.<sup>88</sup> Something similar occurred at DEFA. As Andre Rinke points out, ‘films in the GDR tended to portray their heroines at their workplace, as ordinary average people, avoiding glamorous extremes; the majority of women on screen are working

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<sup>87</sup> Mary Buckley, *Women and Ideology in the Soviet Union* (New York, London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989), p. 161.

<sup>88</sup> Attwood, *Red Women on the Silver Screen*, p. 81.

mothers with one or two children, more often single than married'.<sup>89</sup> Referring to the *Gegenwartsfilme* (DEFA contemporary screen dramas), Rinke also mentions that a large number of these film productions were about everyday life and they were 'seen through the eyes of a female protagonist'.<sup>90</sup> In this sense, *Retrato de Teresa* is also a *Gegenwartsfilme*, which offers strong evidence that the ICAIC was following the same thematic development as the film industries of the countries of the Soviet-bloc, in this case DEFA.

In Cuba, Vega's film was released when equally important reforms were being implemented with the aim of eradicating machismo and changing the family structure, as indicated by the Family Code of 1975, which gave equal responsibilities in child-rearing and domestic duties to husband and wife. In his concluding address to the Second National Congress of the Federation of Cuban Women, *el Comandante* declared: 'what was the crux, the centre of the analysis and the efforts of this congress? The struggle for women's equality, the struggle for the full integration of Cuban women into society! And that is really a historical battle. And we believe that this objective is precisely the focal point of this congress, because in practice, woman's full equality still does not exist.'<sup>91</sup> Although, theoretically, the Revolution gave women equality with men, Cuban women carried a far harder and heavier burden than men. *Retrato de Teresa* exposes cinema's dependence on politics, in response to the question of the equality of Cuban women. Teresa is

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<sup>89</sup> Andrea Rinke, 'From Models to Misfits: Women in DEFA Films of the 1970s and 1980s', in *DEFA: East German Cinema: 1946–1992*, p. 183. See also Andrea Rinke, *Images of Women in East German Cinema, 1972–1982: Socialist Models, Private Dreamers and Rebels* (Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen Press, 2006).

<sup>90</sup> Rinke, 'From Models to Misfits. (p. 183).

<sup>91</sup> Cited in *Women and the Cuban Revolution, Speeches & Documents by Fidel Castro, Vilma Espín & others*, edited by Elizabeth Stone (London: Pathfinder, 2004), pp. 91–92. Also, it is relevant to mention the work developed by the German sexologist Monika Krause-Fuchs, who gained nationwide fame in her capacity as coordinator of Cuba's sex education program with a radio and TV programme of her own during this period. See *Monika, la Reina del Condón* (The Queen of Condoms, 2006), a documentary directed by Silvana Ceschi and Reto Stamm, *Educación sexual: Selección de lecturas* (Habana: Editorial Científico-Técnica, 1988), the first Cuban publication dedicated to the topic of sexual education. See also by Monika Krause-Fuchs, *Monika y la Revolución: Una mirada singular sobre la historia reciente de Cuba* (Tenerife: Centro de la Cultura Popular Canaria, 2002)

the 'new' woman of the Cuban Revolution, but she is not truly liberated. In *Cuban Cinema*, Michael Chanan observed Vega's film to be highly 'critical of machismo'.<sup>92</sup> According to the Cuban film-maker, machismo is only one of the sub-themes of the film: 'Esa interpretación es parcial, ése es un subtema de un tema mayor que tenía que estar presente, como otros, porque si no estuviésemos traicionando la realidad. El tema central de la película es la crisis de la estructura familiar habitual y la necesidad del cambio y esto por supuesto ha de ser un conflicto con desgarramientos.'<sup>93</sup>

In the last sequence of the film, when Ramón desires a reconciliation, Teresa asks what his response would be if she had had an affair too. 'But men are different' is his reply. Teresa walks out. Ramón runs after her. The final sequence shows Ramón, a traditional husband, who is looking for a traditional wife, a man who is looking for a woman that disappears before his very eyes. He probably will not find that woman, because that kind of woman no longer exists according to the film's ideological stance. Teresa walks on her own and, as part of the multitude of social changes, with a firm step. According to Vega, Ramón is looking for Teresa because: 'Teresa tiene el germen de una nueva actitud que le atrae, que le inquieta y por eso sale a buscarla'.<sup>94</sup> This is the most important scene of the film because it summarises the director's intention: the inevitable appearance of new social values. Nevertheless, Teresa and Ramón fail the test of a happy family in the ideal society. The spectator can speculate about whether the ideal Soviet family is supposed to be held together by love of the construction of the new society and not by any other necessity. The film demonstrates how this worked in practice.

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<sup>92</sup> Chanan, *Cuban Cinema*, p. 34.

<sup>93</sup> See the interview cited in Plasencia Hernández, 'Teresa o la nueva moral', p. 24.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 26.

### **The Reception of Vega's film**

*Retrato de Teresa* was very well received by Cuban audiences. At different times, in different reviews of the popularity of Cuban films in the island, the film is always listed as among the most popular in the ICAIC's film repertoire. It would seem also that Kurt Maetzig was happy with the film directed by the man who was his former assistant on *Preludio 11*. Proof of this lies in the fact that when Daisy Granados received the award for best actress at the eleventh Moscow International Film Festival in 1979, the German filmmaker was on the jury. *Retrato de Teresa* showed that Cuban women and the Cuban family were demanding new principles: a different status and a transition from the traditional patriarchal institution of the past to a situation in which women and men could enjoy a more equal partnership. *Retrato de Teresa* resembles the films produced on a very low budget, and in this Vega's film has similarities with films made for TV. One can note in the film the appearance of Soviet material culture, such as the edifications, which resembled the 'Soviet communal house' and 'artefacts', such as Krim Soviet television, Aurika washing machines, Minks refrigerators and Orbita ventilators, along with the Hungarian IKARUS omnibus used for public transport. All these developments in everyday life, including the Slavic names given to children, such as Boris, one of Teresa's sons, locate *Retrato de Teresa* in a particular time and space, when Cuba was in close interaction with the Soviets. The film thereby alludes to a 'Sovietised' Cubanness. It portrays many aspects of the Cuban family by raising a number of questions: how have families changed? Does the State create a new kind of family or destroy the concept itself? Is this a 'local' or 'global' phenomenon? Is the family in a terminal state of crisis?

*Retrato de Teresa* offers a compelling x-ray of the problematic state of gender relations in Cuba in the 1970s, a film work that depicts working-class life. This film raises rather than answers questions about the role of the individual within the family unit. In this sense, Vega's film is an effective, honest social realist film (not a Soviet-style socialist realist film); it reflects the realities of Cuban socialist society. Social realism, in the case of ICAIC, was also about the creation of *filmic types*, of typical characters of the socialist era. Teresa is the cinematic representation of the 'new' Cuban woman created by the Revolution.<sup>95</sup>

**Jesús Díaz, Founder of *Caimán Barbudo*: 'the Cuban Bearded Version of the Soviet Krokodil' (according to Cabrera Infante).**

Jesús Díaz's *Polvo Rojo* (1981) is examined here because it offers the best example of a Socialist-Realist feature film produced by the ICAIC. The film focuses on the atmosphere of the earliest years of the Revolution within the setting of an industrial factory, and portrays the workers as being interested in spiritual rather than material rewards. The film could almost be subtitled *Soviet Moral Values in Cuba*. *Polvo Rojo*, typical of a Socialist-Realist film, has a clearly didactic intention; it is a film about the acquisition of a 'new' socialist consciousness. Díaz was a Cuban writer and film-maker who supported the Cuban Revolution until 1991. He was the chief cultural editor of *Juventud Rebelde* (1965–66) and a member of the editorial committee of *Pensamiento Crítico* (1967–71). His short story collection, *Los años duros* (1966), won the Casa de las Américas Prize. In 1967, his dramatic work entitled

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<sup>95</sup> Vega and Granados comprised an artistic and family unit with their children. Vega went on to cast his wife and their children in later films such as *Habanera* (Havana Woman, 1984), *Vidas paralelas* (Parallel Lives, 1992) and *Las profecías de Amanda* (Amanda's Prophecies, 1999). He went back to his work in theatre, staging *La noche de los asesinos* (The Night of the Assassins) by José Triana in Mexico. It is also clear that Vega followed Maetzig's persistent interest in portraying female heroines.

*Unos hombres y otros* received a first mention at the Sixth Festival de Teatro Latinoamericano. In the same year, Díaz visited the Soviet Union as part of the Cuban delegation invited to the celebrations for the 50th Anniversary of the October Revolution. In 1979, he was awarded the Premio UNEAC for his testimonial book *De la patria y el exilio*. This literary work has been published in different countries and translated into several languages.

It was during the 'Grey Five-Year period' that Díaz started to work for the ICAIC. Díaz the writer became a film-maker during the time of the 'institutionalisation' of the Revolution, recognised in the First Congress on Education, Culture and the Intellectuals (1971), when a Ministry of Culture, following the Soviet version, was created in order to institutionalise the intellectual life of the whole nation, under the leadership of Armando Hart. Díaz was selected to coordinate the ideological and political work within the ICAIC as its first secretary to the Communist Party (PCC). During the same period, Díaz collaborated on a number of projects as a co-scriptwriter, including Pastor Vega's *¡Viva la República!* (Long Live the Republic! 1972) and Manuel Octavio Gómez's *Ustedes tienen la palabra* (Have Your Say, 1973). According to Ambrosio Fernet, Díaz as the secretary of the PCCC 'succeeded in fostering intense political activity between 1976 and 1980'.<sup>96</sup> We should also remember that the Communist Party in its Soviet version was not a mass party, but a selective party. It persuades Cuban citizens because of their character and their 'merits' to join Communist cells. For many long years, those citizens undergo a process of apprenticeship, of performance of 'duty' and of direct experience. One way to learn what made the 'new elite' of the Cuban Revolution is by

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<sup>96</sup> See Ambrosio Fernet's Epilogue in Jesús Díaz, *The Initials of the Earth* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), p. 373.

studying how someone became a leading voice of the political and artistic discourse of the Revolution.

The case of Díaz is a great example of the skills and experiences of those who succeed in the party bureaucracy and the cultural elite. His books varied in size and design, but they were identical in content. They were written in the best style of the Soviet tradition, which means that Díaz understood very well that writing politically correct books would lead to personal gain through getting closer to those in power. Díaz won a definitive place within the Cuban *nomenklatura* as a result of his role in the controversy over Heberto Padilla, which began in June 1967 and finished in March 1968, a period that matched Díaz's time in *Caimán Barbudo*. What kind of publication did Jesús Díaz direct? According to Guillermo Cabrera Infante, it was 'the Cuban bearded version of the Soviet Krokodil'.<sup>97</sup> Certainly, *Caimán Barbudo* as a supplement of the Cuban Newspaper *Juventud Rebelde* was the Cuban version of the Soviet magazine *Krokodil*, the supplement to *Komsomol'skaia Pravda*. These publications shared a main objective: that of identifying what was unfavourable and alien to 'socialist principles' and exposing 'bourgeois and counterrevolutionary' attitudes and pro-imperialist reactionism within intellectual circles.

An important study of the history of this Cuban publication is Liliana Martínez Pérez's *Los hijos de Saturno: Intelectuales y revolución en Cuba*. According to Martínez Pérez, 'el grupo fundador de *El Caimán Barbudo*, por otra parte, insistió, explícitamente, en representar a los "intelectuales

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<sup>97</sup> In 'Mordidas del Caimán Barbudo', by Cabrera Infante, *Mea Cuba*, p. 115. The *nomenklatura* is a Soviet term that defines a small elite group within the Soviet Union and other Eastern Bloc countries who held various key administrative positions in all spheres of the intellectual life of those countries. See Michael Voslensky, *Nomenklatura: Anatomy of the Soviet Ruling Class* (London: The Bodley Head, 1984).



de la Revolución”, lo que suponía un doble significado implícito: sus miembros se consideraban los primeros intelectuales nacidos con la Revolución y, por tanto, creían y proclamaban ser los únicos intelectuales verdaderamente revolucionarios.<sup>98</sup> Certainly, *Caimán Barbudo*, published as a monthly tabloid, offered the first consolidated promotion of authors that had emerged since the Revolution, including Luis Rogelio Noguerras, Víctor Casaus, Guillermo Rodríguez Rivera and Raúl Rivero, among many others. These young, radical journalists created the forms of journalism that came to dominate the Cuban press, responding to the Party’s directives to mobilise Cuban society for the monumental task of *institutionalisation*. They considered themselves ‘trabajadores intelectuales’. *Caimán Barbudo* shaped a master narrative that set out to create a socialist identity for the new generation of the Cuban Revolution. It profoundly marked the critical conception of that period in Cuban literature. It was part of the organising and denunciatory functions of the Soviet-style press that had been established in Cuba.

### ***El caso Padilla***

Díaz was the director of *El Caimán Barbudo* during its first period (1966–67), and this strategic position gave him a central role within the *nomenklatura*, visiting a number of countries as a representative of the ‘new’ intellectuals of the Cuban Revolution.<sup>99</sup> Edition number 15 of the supplement (not dated, but probably published in June 1967) brought together a controversial issue dedicated to an advisor at the National Council of Culture, Lisandro Otero and his novel *Pasión de Urbino*. The intention had been to print Padilla’s review of Otero’s book along with those of two other critics, all under the caption ‘Tres generaciones opinan’ (Three Generations

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<sup>98</sup> Liliana Martínez Pérez, *Los hijos de Saturno: Intelectuales y revolución en Cuba* (México: FLACSO, Miguel Ángel Porrúa, 2006), p. 19.

<sup>99</sup> On the history of the publication *Caimán Barbudo*, see also Jaime Crombet, General Secretary of the UJC, who mentioned Díaz by name in his letter concerning this polemic in Heberto Padilla, *Fuera de juego: Edición conmemorativa 1968–1998* (Miami: Ediciones Universal, 1998), p. 99.

Give Their Opinion). Padilla made a terrible mistake, according to the cultural policy that had already been established at the time. In his book review, Padilla took the side of an exiled writer, considered an enemy of the Revolution, celebrating Cabrera Infante's *Vista del amanecer en el trópico* (now known as *Tres tristes tigres*), which had received the Spanish literary prize *Biblioteca Breve*, over Otero's book.

The epistolary diatribe between Padilla and the editors of *El Caimán Barbudo*, led by Jesús Díaz, was published in the pages of the *órgano de la juventud cubana*. The articles define and explain the sharp change in the tone and content of Cuban journalism, particularly during the years of Soviet-style institutionalisation in the 1970s. Everything was closely watched by the State security. As a result, Padilla fell into disgrace, he was cast out of the *nomenklatura*, and Díaz became one of the leading figures of his generation. Undoubtedly, the affair helped Díaz to climb the *apparatchik* ladder in his dual role as Party member and intellectual. The event was just another moment in the *polémica de las generaciones* that had essentially an administrative character. It was the way that the character of the generation was defined.<sup>100</sup>

In 1968, Heberto Padilla won the *Julián del Casal Poetry Prize*, awarded by an international jury with a book entitled *Fuera de Juego* (Out of the Game). The award — consisting of a trip to the Soviet Union and 1,000 pesos in cash — was never given to him. A poem in the book entitled 'Instrucciones para ingresar en una nueva sociedad' read as follows:

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<sup>100</sup> Portuondo, *Orden del día*, p. 143.

Lo primero: optimista.  
Lo segundo: atildado, comedido, obediente.  
(Haber pasado todas las pruebas deportivas).  
Y finalmente andar  
Como lo hace cada miembro:  
Un paso al frente, y  
Dos o tres atrás:  
Pero siempre aplaudiendo<sup>101</sup>

Padilla's book led to political controversy because of its attack on the centralisation of Cuban culture. *Fuera de Juego* was the first open and public denunciation from an official, public figure, and was clearly not welcomed by Cuban cultural mentors. In *Mea Cuba*, Cabrera Infante explains: 'El caso Padilla tenía sus raíces en la dialéctica comunista: el que no elogia a un miembro del Partido es un enemigo del Partido (...) el silencio es el último refugio del enemigo de clase y el escepticismo una peligrosa desviación a la derecha. Pero el silencio, más que la conformidad, fue lo que salvó a Boris Pasternak, la falta de pelos en la boca y la indiscreción, fue lo que perdió a Osip Mandelstam. Padilla, que había vivido en Moscú decidió comportarse como ambos poetas a un tiempo.'<sup>102</sup> Cabrera Infante suggests that the Cuban poet certainly knew about similar events in the former Soviet Union. At that time, Padilla was one of the cultural representatives of the Revolution, travelling abroad as a correspondent and working in several Eastern European countries. The reaction to this book and Padilla's responses to it were played out almost as a theatrical performance, a sort of remake of the infamous Soviet show trials. One can argue that this particular situation offered Padilla the possibility of a place in Cuban cultural history, a place that he gained due to the political values of his poems. This was a common feature of many literary works of Cold War times, and politics

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<sup>101</sup> Heberto Padilla, *Fuera de juego: Edición conmemorativa 1968–1998* (Miami: Ediciones Universal, 1998), p. 30.

<sup>102</sup> Cabrera Infante, *Mea Cuba*, p. 116.

was often the main reason why they became internationally well known. According to Mikhail Iampol'skii, in the ethics of Soviet censorship there was something that distinguished it from the 'normal' functioning of ordinary censorship: 'in the USSR, prohibitions instituted against films, books and live performance were ordinarily accompanied by an astounding song and dance. Public judgements, analyses, artistic advice, declarations and resolutions generated such deafening cannonades that they inevitably attracted much attention to the prohibited work'.<sup>103</sup>

Traditionally in Cuba poets have also been recognised as men and women of action. A phrase well known in Russia, 'Poet v Rossii bol'she chem poet' (A poet in Russia means more than just a poet) could be also applied to the case of Cuba. It identifies another Soviet feature that reveals how the notion of belief in the power of the word (poets as 'men' of action) was experienced in the intellectual life of the Cuban Revolution. For the Soviets and for the Cuban cultural mentors, words have a substantial force, capable of changing a political system. The Soviet 'cult of the word' is in opposition to the so-called Western perception of 'freedom of speech', a belief that you can say publicly whatever you like, so long as it changes nothing.<sup>104</sup>

Padilla's arrest was followed by an open letter to Fidel Castro that was published in the French newspaper *Le Monde* on 9 April 1971 and signed by writers who supported the

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<sup>103</sup> See Mikhail Iampol'skii, 'Censorship as the Triumph of Life', in *Socialist Realism without Shores*, edited by Thomas Lahusen and Evgeny Dobrenko (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1997), p. 165.

<sup>104</sup> For a compilation of documents related to this event, see Padilla, *Fuera de juego*, pp. 89-173. On similar cases in the countries of the former Soviet bloc, see George H. Hodos, *Show Trials: Stalinist Purges in Eastern Europe, 1948-1954* (New York: Praeger, 1987), and Joel Carmichael, *Stalin's Masterpiece: The Show Trials and Purges of the Thirties — the Consolidation of the Bolshevik Dictatorship* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1976).

Revolution, including Mario Vargas Llosa, Simone de Beauvoir, Jean-Paul Sartre, Julio Cortázar and Gabriel García Márquez. On the day of his release, Padilla was escorted to a meeting of the UNEAC, where he made a confession of his ‘crimes’. Following this, a second letter was published by the same French publication asking once again for respect for the freedom of expression. This time, Cortázar and García Márquez’s names were not among the signatories. At the time that the ‘*PM* affair’ occurred, it was a national event, but this one was not confined to the national sphere. The Padilla affair was the first to have an internationally negative repercussion, and it had a direct impact on the ICAIC. Jesús Díaz, the *militant* (the Cuban term for someone belonging to the Communist Party) signed, and allegedly wrote, the *Declaración de los cineastas cubanos*, which condemned the negative international repercussions of this event: ‘¿De qué libertad de expresión hablan? ¿De la de una minoría? ¿Es que un intelectual verdaderamente revolucionario puede aspirar a cristalizar en unos pocos la libertad de expresión?’<sup>105</sup>

The reaction by Díaz and the ICAIC has to be understood against the political background of the creation of the institution. Their declaration confirms that the film industry was not only searching for a revolutionary art, but also an art that supported the aims of the Revolution. Again, the problematic question concerning the role of artists and intellectuals in the political sphere was spectacularly revealed in this incident in the intellectual life of the Cuban Revolution. Indeed, the problem of dissidence among artists and intellectuals remained a thorny problem for the Revolution. The so-called ‘caso Padilla’ provides important evidence of the tropicalisation of the

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<sup>105</sup> Jesús Díaz and others, ‘Declaración de los cineastas cubanos’, *Cine cubano*, no.11.69–70 (May–July 1971), pp. 1–4 (p. 3).

Soviet practice of denunciation within the Cuban context and the internationalisation of the domestic conflicts of the Cuban Revolution.

### **Jesús Díaz: ‘Ideológico de una Generación’**

During a visit to the former GDR, Díaz became aware of the imminent collapse of the Soviet system. Throughout Eastern Europe, the Soviet project was collapsing and Cuba was becoming isolated. Díaz ‘jumped ship’ before it sank, becoming a ‘political refugee’. In 1992, he made public his break with the Revolution in an article ‘Los anillos de la serpiente’ (The Serpent’s Ring).<sup>106</sup> He took up residence as an exile in Berlin. In the epilogue of *The Initials of the Earth*, the first of Díaz’s books to be translated into English, the Cuban writer Ambrosio Fornet, who was Díaz’s close friend at the ICAIC, referred to Díaz’s unexpected 1992 denunciation of the Revolution. When referring to the 1971 ‘Padilla Case’, Díaz would write that in those days ‘many, I among them, were fascinated by the Cuban utopia, blind to the dictatorial reality already hiding behind it’.<sup>107</sup> What for Fornet ‘rendered this claim untenable was not the invocation of blindness itself, but rather that the alleged blindness would for Jesús last *twenty years more*’.<sup>108</sup>

Suddenly, Díaz, the former secretary of the PCC in the ICAIC, ‘refused to stay silent’ about ‘the crimes’ of the Cuban Revolution, founding the journal *Encuentro de la cultura cubana* in order to promote dialogue between Cubans at home and abroad. In *From Cuba*, a special issue of *Boundary 2*, an international journal of literature and culture, John Beverley

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<sup>106</sup> Cited in Rocío García’s article, ‘Jesus Díaz: Escribo para acompañar, no para denunciar’, in the Spanish newspaper EL País (online version)- Madrid - 29/01/1996. See [http://www.elpais.com/articulo/cultura/DIAZ/\\_JESUS/Jesus/Diaz/Escribo/acompanar/denunciar/elpepicul/19960129elpepicul\\_2/Tes](http://www.elpais.com/articulo/cultura/DIAZ/_JESUS/Jesus/Diaz/Escribo/acompanar/denunciar/elpepicul/19960129elpepicul_2/Tes) [accessed in July 2010].

<sup>107</sup> Cited in Díaz, *The Initials of the Earth*, p. 8.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., p. 374.

explains that '*Encuentro* has become, in effect, an exile publication, which rarely has anything good to say about Cuba and which publishes primarily those intellectuals in Cuba who are explicitly identified with a dissident or "liberal" position, like its own. As such, it cannot represent the full array of intellectual and artistic voices "from Cuba": intellectuals in Cuba who are pro-Castro or who, despite criticisms and reservations, remain committed to the project of the Revolution are less and less likely, I believe, to publish anything more than a rebuttal in its pages.'<sup>109</sup>

*Encuentro* failed to engage fully not only with the work of intellectuals and artists who had remained in Cuba, but also with many personalities of the Cuban diaspora. This was the case of Cabrera Infante, the most well-known writer of the Cuban literary scene abroad, who never once collaborated with Díaz's Spanish publication, nor did he ever reply to Díaz's letters and invitations to be part of his new project. 'Caín's' memories of him were too negative to allow this to happen. Díaz vilified Cabrera Infante in *Caimán Barbudo*, which proclaimed to be the voice of the Communist Union of Cuban Youth. What kind of person was Jesús Díaz? How should we judge an intellectual like him, by his life or his works, or both? On the island, his former Party colleagues accused Díaz of being a traitor to the Cuban Revolution. Such was the case of the articles published in a digital magazine *La Jiribilla* in 2001, such as *Cuando Jesus Díaz destruía el mundo capitalista* by Pedro de la Hoz, and *Vivir para ver* by Ángel Guerra Cabrera, among many others. Those articles concluded that Díaz's opportunism was as great as his personal ambition. Another article 'Carta abierta de *La Jiribilla* a Carlos Monsiváis', reads as follows:

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<sup>109</sup> John Beverley, 'From Cuba', *Boundary 2*, 29(3) (2002), pp. 1–10 (p. 9).

Jesús Díaz carece de la más mínima autoridad moral para promover ‘diálogos’ o ‘encuentros’; su vergonzoso itinerario político descalifica su pasado y su presente. Fue un perseguidor de homosexuales en los años sesenta, como bien lo saben los fundadores de *Ediciones El Puente*; se sumó a la campaña contra *Paradiso* en nombre de la ‘moral revolucionaria’; y fue un detractor de la persona y la obra de Reinaldo Arenas. En los difíciles años setenta, durante el llamado ‘quinquenio gris’ no estuvo de parte de sus dignos amigos cubanos, sino que se convirtió en un activo cineasta-funcionario dedicado a los viajes oficiales y a fabricar, casi en solitario, ‘realismo socialista’.<sup>110</sup>

The article suggests that Díaz was one of those ‘inquisidores’ who gained a place in the *nomenklatura* by denouncing other writers, artists and intellectuals. Where is the evidence for this statement? *El Caimán Barbudo* published a section under the title ‘La carabina de Ambrosio’, which set out to criticise and to ‘denounce the decadent attitude of Cuban intellectuals’. For example, referring to a poetry reading at *El gato tuerto bar*, *los caimanes* said:

En aquel ambiente cursi, delirante (en el peor sentido de la palabra), de mediocridad, las canciones de Marta [Valdés] y la voz de Miriam (Acevedo) y los dibujos de Carruana se perdían en la atmósfera. Los de siempre (los que en el ballet gritan *bravo* y le tiran flores a Alicia Alonso) estaban allí, aplaudiendo los lamentables poemas de Virgilio Piñeira, la lamentable corbata de Pablo Armando Fernández, la lamentable mirada de Antón Arrufat, la lamentable presencia allí (lamentable para nosotros porque son gente joven y valiosa que

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<sup>110</sup> See *La Jiribilla*, available at <http://www.lajiribilla.cubaweb.cu>. [accessed in July 2010].



nada tenían que hacer en aquel lamentable ambiente) de Miguel Barnet, Nancy Morejón y Lina de Feria. Allí no ha entrado (y nos permitimos diferir de la opinión de Virgilio Piñera) la revolución.<sup>111</sup>

This evidence, and much more, about Díaz's leadership of the first generation in *El Caimán Barbudo* can be found in Martínez Pérez's study of the publication. It is also interesting that Martínez Pérez recognised that during her interviews with him Díaz could not remember any of these articles. So the question arises: was Jesús Díaz a 'victimario' or a victim of the system? Certainly, Martínez Pérez's *Los hijos de Saturno* should be accompanied by a question mark if the title addresses the truth presented by the testimonies in the book.

Lilliam Oliva Collman's study of Díaz's literary work is another important point of reference to take into account. The subtitle of her book, *El ejercicio de los límites de la expresión revolucionaria en Cuba* (1999), is certainly an appropriate heading since Jesús Díaz, like Cabrera Infante before him, helped to establish the limits to revolutionary and creative work in Cuba. If we simply look at Díaz's record as an ordinary member of the PCC, and later as general secretary of the Communist Party in the ICAIC, and if we read his extensive publications in search of the 'new' man in Cuba and his celebration of Marxism-Leninism and communism, these provide enough evidence to prove a kind of practice which had its roots in the Soviet experiences in Eastern Europe, and the most infamous of them were the so-called purges and public trials. Díaz played a leading role in the introduction of Soviet patterns of behaviour such as mobilising party activists to use denunciation from below in order to monitor others. Díaz was a person in command in the

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<sup>111</sup> Cited in Martínez Pérez, *Los hijos de Saturno*, p. 308.

conceptualisation of the intellectual/artist's role and that of the 'new man' for the Cuban Revolution. Ambrosio Fornet points-out: 'Jesús no era cualquiera. Jesús era Jesús – una prueba palpable de la existencia de la Revolución – y ahí estaban su trayectoria política y su obra narrativa y cinematográfica para demostrarlo (...) nadie había participado en tantos combates y escaramuzas, ni fungido como ideológico de una generación'.<sup>112</sup>

### ***Polvo Rojo: the 'Kollektiv' and the Individual in Cuba.***

*Polvo Rojo* was Díaz's first feature film, after previous documentary works such as *55 hermanos* (55 Brothers and Sisters, 1978), a film about a group of Cuban-American youngsters on their first visit to the island, and *En tierra de Sandino* (1979), a film about the Sandinista Revolution, among many others. Those two documentaries received the Paloma Prize in Leipzig when they were released. *Polvo Rojo* alludes to the story of the Moa Mining Company, which was renamed Planta Minera Pedro Sotillo Alba after its nationalisation (Ley 851, 6 August 1960). *Gramma* — the official newspaper of the Communist Party of Cuba — published Carlos Galiano's interview with Díaz on 28 March 1982. Regarding the aim of the film, Díaz explained that he set out to show

En primer lugar, la importancia económica que tiene para nuestro país la región de Moa. En segundo lugar, mi experiencia como secretario del núcleo del Partido del ICAIC en la organización de exposiciones de las inventivas técnicas de los obreros para resolver problemas industriales a pesar del bloqueo

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<sup>112</sup> Díaz died in Madrid on 2 May 2002. For a list of Díaz's pro-Soviet articles published in *Cine Cubano*, such as 'Apuntes sobre cultura e ideología' 8(47):9-11 (1968), 'Para una cultura militante' 11(66-67):94-99 (1971), 'Asaltar el cielo: función de la cultura revolucionaria' 13(84-85):82-85 (1973), see *Índice de la revista de Cine cubano*. See Ambrosio Fornet's 'Jesús en la memoria' in 'Homenaje a Jesús Díaz', a special edition of the journal *Encuentro de la cultura cubana*, No. 25 (Summer 2002), (42-50), p. 45.

imperialista [...] también me sentí motivado por mi contacto con la brigada Antonio Maceo — jóvenes que fueron sacados de Cuba por sus padres cuando eran niños — conocí vivencias que de cierta forma trato en la película.<sup>113</sup>

The film tells the story of an engineer, Fonseca, played by José Antonio Rodríguez. He has been educated in North America and is working for a North American-owned nickel plant in Moa in Eastern Cuba. At first, the US owners believe there is room for them within the Revolution; however, their properties are then nationalised. In response, they convince all their professionals to leave, thereby paralysing the plant. Thanks to the actions of one individual, Fonseca, a black engineer, who decides to stay behind, the plant continues to produce nickel. Fonseca decides to stay in Cuba even though all the rest of the professional, technicians and administrators, including his own family, leave for the United States. In one scene, Fonseca says: ‘mi esposa me desprecia y yo la odio’. How might one explain Fonseca’s attitude?

Louis A. Pérez, in *On Becoming Cuban* (1999), explains: ‘men and women trained in North American methods of problem solving, and imbued with many of the same expectations, brought those experiences to bear on behalf of a better Cuba’.<sup>114</sup> There is also another factor to be taken into consideration. The racial discrimination that Fonseca suffers in North America and later among his colleagues in Cuba explains his decision to stay in Cuba. On the other hand, the film shows his political ambivalence and his belief in the unsuitability

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<sup>113</sup> Cited in Carlos Galiano, “‘Polvo Rojo’ la historia de una planta minera, entrevista con el realizador Jesús Díaz’, *Granma* (28 March 1982), p. 6.

<sup>114</sup> Louis A. Pérez, *On Becoming Cuban: Identity, Nationality, and Culture* (North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), p. 488.

of Soviet technology for the plant, and the fact that he has been educated in the USA provokes suspicion and fear among the new administrators of the plant. They are revolutionaries without any proper qualifications, professional experience or knowledge, but what they do have is their loyalty to the Revolution. In an article ‘¿Qué filma ahora?’ by Díaz, published in the magazine *Revolución y cultura* in July 1979, the film-maker explained that his film ‘Tratará una historia, desarrollada aproximadamente entre los años 1957 y 1962, cuyo núcleo central es la situación que se produce ante, durante y como consecuencia de la nacionalización de la empresa de níquel de Nicaro. Pretendo realmente que sea una metáfora de la lucha de clases en los primeros años revolucionarios’.<sup>115</sup> Certainly his film is a metaphor in the style of Socialist Realism. The characters of the film are reminiscent of those in the classics of Socialist Realism. In *Cinema and Soviet Society, 1917–1953*, Peter Kenez points to the follow characteristics of Socialist Realist film:

Socialist realist film included three stock figures with depressing regularity: the Party leader, the simple person and the enemy. The Party leader was almost always male, ascetic, dressed in a semi-military style, unencumbered by a family or love affairs. The simple person could be male or female, and was allowed to have an interest in the opposite sex. Sexual relations were always chaste: the viewer could never see more than a kiss, and these relations often needed to be straightened out by the Party leader. The enemy, whose function was to wreck and destroy what the Communists were building, was always a male. On occasion, but rarely, he attempted to win over

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<sup>115</sup> See Jesús Díaz, ‘¿Qué filma ahora?’, in *Revolución y cultura* (July 1979), p. 80.

the simple person to his side by lying and subterfuge, but mostly he limited his activities to blowing up things.<sup>116</sup>

According to Kenez's definition, *Polvo Rojo* may be classified as a Socialist Realist film. Ingeniero Fonseca is a 'simple person'. Fabiana (the role played by Cristina Obin) is a character who represents a passive woman. The enemy is represented by the US owners and the Cuban professionals who decide to emigrate. All of these characters are set against that of the stereotype of the 'Party leader' played by Luis Alberto Ramírez, the sagacious 'el comandante' who can solve problems. According to one Cuban review of the film, 'siempre dispuesto a dar la batalla al enemigo en todo terreno, sin desdeñar armas, circunstancias ni hombres'.<sup>117</sup> The film and the review conform to the three basic elements of the Socialist-Realist formula: 'partiinost' — party-mindedness — 'narodnost' — popular-mindedness or awareness of the people — and 'klassovost' — class-mindedness. According to Kenez's definition, the first is the most important and is made explicit via the political message of the film.<sup>118</sup> Fabiana wants to leave the country with her child and her new husband. Fabiana's father (Salvador Wood) and her former husband José (Adolfo Llauro) want the child to stay in Cuba. Fabiana eventually leaves with her daughter, leaving her son behind. Thus, the film portrays another great dilemma of Cuban society: the destruction of the traditional family unit and the division of its members as a result of the Revolution: children without a father or mother; grandparents without descendents, children against parents and husband against wife. According to Díaz:

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<sup>116</sup> Kenez, *Cinema and Soviet Society, 1917–1953* (London: Tauris, 2001), p. 158.

<sup>117</sup> Cited in Azucena Isabel Plasencia Hernández, 'Polvo Rojo', *Bohemia*, 13 (24 March 1982), p. 20.

<sup>118</sup> Kenez, *Cinema and Soviet Society*, p. 144.

En la película están los que se van y los que se quedan. Los primeros en su mundo triste y oscuro que se destruye y autoconsume. En su última noche en Cuba cantan ‘Lágrimas negras’, escuchan un disco de Barbarito Diez, es decir salen de Cuba marcados por este país. Los que se quedan tienen un mundo por hacer y muchas razones para vivir. El hecho de hacer andar la planta es sólo un símbolo. Para ellos queda abierta la vida en la Revolución, no como en el paraíso de los cristianos, sino como el reino de este mundo.<sup>119</sup>

Díaz’s schematic vision of Cuban emigrants was a recurrent topic in his works at the ICAIC, particularly in his last feature film *Lejanía* (Distance, 1985). The interesting aspect is that Díaz himself became one of those exiles, in his own words — quoted above — living ‘in a sad and dark world that is destroying itself’. He explains that the final sequence of the film is a tribute to Eisenstein, an example of intertextuality in films. It reproduces a classic sequence of *Oktiabr*’, namely the storming of the Winter Palace. In his film the Cuban workers take the plant during a demonstration, and remove the imperial eagle, which is an expression of the US domination of the island. *Polvo Rojo* received an award from the official organ of the Czechoslovak Communist Party *Rude Pravo* and the award from the Union of Drama artists in the Karlovy Vary International Film Festival in its XXIII edition.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> Cited in Ciro Bianchi Ross, ‘Jesus Diaz habla de Polvo Rojo’, *La Nueva Gaceta* (April 1982), p. 10.

<sup>120</sup> Galiano, ‘Polvo Rojo: la historia de una planta minera’, p. 6. For Jesús Díaz’s filmography, see Revista Cine Cubano Online <http://www.cubacine.cu/realizad/jdiaz.html> [accessed on 1 August 2010].

## Chapter IV

### The 1980s

#### KinoGlasnost and the Return of the Cuban Vernacular

Anna Lawton's *Kinoglasnost: Soviet Cinema in Our Time* is a pioneering study about Soviet cinema under Gorbachev. Lawton explains that 'at no other time were there so many titles ending with a question mark or suspension dots – a visible sign of anxiety and frustration'.<sup>1</sup> Certainly, kinoglasnost reflected a new state of Soviet mind: pessimism, secessionist feelings everywhere from the Baltic to the Caucasian republics, general disillusionment, a deep crisis in Marxist-Leninist moral values among intellectuals, artists, disaffected youths and ordinary people in general in the countries of the Soviet-bloc. Kinoglasnost predicted and recorded the collapse of the Soviet-bloc, and as a consequence those films were about that process.

In November 1987, the Kinoglasnost 'Semana de Cine Soviético' was held in Havana. One of the films shown was *Pokaianie* (Repentance, 1984) by Georgian director Tengiz Abuladze: 'here the Georgian tradition of folktale and comedy in a surrealist, phantasmagoric vein appears similar to Latin American "magic realism" with a socio-political punch, as rendered by Gabriel García Márquez in *One Hundred Years of*

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<sup>1</sup> This book was reedited in 2007. See Anna Lawton, *Before the Fall: Soviet Cinema in the Gorbachev Years* (Washington, DC: New Academia Pub., 2007), p. 234. For a discussion of the cinema of Soviet cinema under Glasnost, see also Andrew Horton and Michael Brashinsky, *The Zero Hour: Glasnost and Soviet Cinema in Transition* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1992); *Russian Critics on the Cinema of Glasnost*, edited by Michael Brashinsky and Andrew Horton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); and Nicholas Galichenko, *Glasnost: Soviet Cinema Responds* (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 1991).

*Solitude*.<sup>2</sup> The documentary *Vai viegli būt jaunam?* (Legko li byt' molodym?, Is it Easy to be Young? 1987), by Latvian director Juris Podnieks, which is considered to be among the most controversial movies of its era, was also shock therapy for the Cuban audience. Podnieks's film portrays the alienation of Soviet youth and the banalities of the Soviet system. The screening in Cuban cinemas of this film was cancelled because of its anti-Soviet message; paradoxically, however, *Is it Easy to be Young?* was later broadcast on television. What was the response from the Cuban film institute? Under these unusual economic, political and cinematic conditions, the ICAIC was in the process of examining the methods and options for survival. According to Michael Chanan, 'the answer was to devolve control over the production process to three "creative groups" (grupos de creación), with their own programs of productions, which they supervised themselves from beginning to end.'<sup>3</sup>

Certainly, it encouraged film-makers to work in a very difficult and unstable financial-political situation, bringing into film production more initiatives. These groups were formally set up in 1988, headed by Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, Humberto Solás and Manuel Pérez, and were known as 'los verdes', 'los rosados' and 'los rojos' (greens, pinks and reds), respectively. However, were these 'creative groups' really a new initiative and a homemade solution to the question of film production? Or were they good examples of a Cuban interpretation of Eastern European cinematic practices? This model of film production was nothing new for the ICAIC. As García Espinosa explains, 'si analizas la

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<sup>2</sup> Horton and Brashinsky, *The Zero Hour: Glasnost and Soviet Cinema in Transition*, p. 41.

<sup>3</sup> Chanan, *Cuban Cinema*, pp. 428–29. See also 'Grupos de creación; un reto artístico y organizativo' in *Cine Cubano* 122 (1988), pp. 2-5.



historia del ICAIC verás que el cine cubano siempre funcionó así'.<sup>4</sup> 'Los grupos de creación' were definitely not a homegrown response, but a reformulation of the film production system of the early 1960s. We should consider Gutiérrez Alea's explanation with regard to what had happened in previous decades in Eastern Europe, as seen through the Polish experience (for further discussion see above Chapter 1).

### **José Raúl Capablanca (1888–1940): Chess and Cinema**

Chess is one of the world's most popular games; it has been identified as an abstract sport, a science and even an art form. The game of chess and the lives of its players have been recurrent topics for artists: from music to ballet, from literature to cinema. Captivating stories have been written about them. *The Royal Game* by Stefan Zweig and *Zashchita Luzhina* (The Luzhin Defence) by Vladimir Nabokov are, among others, evidence of a persistent literary interest. Great literary works about chess were adapted into films by directors who accepted the challenge of portraying a game that is particularly appealing as a result of its distinctive visual image and addictive nature.

From 1986 to 1988 a series of events were organised to commemorate the centenary of the birth of Cuban chess champion José Raúl Capablanca (1888–1940). Capablanca, the 'Mozart of chess' is recognised as one of the best players of all times, a 'chess machine' and child prodigy whose brilliance in the game was noted at an early age. According to those who knew him, Capa was virtually invincible, but very different to those masters who were unhealthily obsessed with chess. Although Capablanca did not found a school, many world champions and players reacted

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<sup>4</sup> See Víctor Fowler Calzada, *Conversaciones con un cineasta incómodo: Julio García-Espinosa* (La Habana: Centro de Investigación y Desarrollo de la Cultura Cubana Juan Marinello: Instituto Cubano del Arte e Industria Cinematográficos, 2004), p. 82.

favourably to his style in general. In fact, his circle of admirers extended from chess masters to composers.<sup>5</sup>

The ICAIC knew that chess and ‘Capa’ were two major passions for the Soviets, particularly in Russia, where a very successful chess-sport apparatus was well established.<sup>6</sup> For the ICAIC to make a film about ‘Capablanchik’ — as he was known by his close friend Prokofiev — was a practical decision and a move towards reconciliation at a time when everything was falling apart. Particularly in Cuba, in portraying a national hero who was admired and loved by the world, the film may also have helped to engender a feeling of optimism. Capablanca had a friendly and sociable personality, particularly as far as women were concerned. This facet of his personality was well represented in Vsevolod Pudovkin’s first film, the comedy *Shakhmatnaia goriachka* (Chess Fever, 1925).

The film tells a fictional story inspired by an actual event: the first International Chess Tournament to take place in the USSR. A young man (Vladimir Fogel') is completely obsessed with the game, and his fiancée (played by Pudovkin’s future wife, Anna Zemtsova), who has no interest in chess, becomes frustrated and depressed by his disregard for her. Wherever she goes, chess is there. On the verge of giving up the relationship, the girl eventually meets a charismatic chess champion, Capablanca himself, with the unexpected result that she develops a love of chess. When we next see her, she is attending a chess game and declaring ‘what a wonderful game chess is’. The title of the film summed

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<sup>5</sup> See Guillermo Cabrera Infante, ‘Capa, hijo de Caissa’, in *Vidas para leerlas* (Madrid: Alfaguara, 1998), pp. 211-27.

<sup>6</sup> On Capablanca and the Soviets, see José Massip, ‘A propósito de Capablanca’, *Cine cubano* no. 3(10) (April 1963), pp. 37-43; Aleksandr I. Sizonenko, *Kapablanka: Vstrechi s Rossiei* (Moskva: Znanie, 1988). See also Andrew Soltis, *Soviet Chess, 1917-1991* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 2000).

up the popular fascination for this event in the catch phrase ‘chess fever’. As Andrew Soltis explains, ‘men’s ties, cuff-links, shirts or any article of clothing, in fact, that had a chess design was suddenly fashionable’.<sup>7</sup> This entire ambience is captured very effectively in Pudovkin’s film, which reveals the game of chess to be deeply cinematic. The film shows a gallery of the world’s greatest chess players and several leading Soviet film-makers of the period (Boris Barnet and Iakov Protazanov, among several others). Pudovkin recorded Capablanca as the only Cuban ‘actor’ of the Golden Age of Soviet cinema, playing the twin roles for which he was best known, in establishing personal relationships with women and seducing them in the context of a chess tournament.

The intercut close-ups of Capablanca and a crying woman show a very nervous, highly non-mobile Capa, who certainly had no future as an actor. Is this a documentary feature film? *Shakhmatnaia goriachka* is a great exercise in montage, where the true drama lies not in performance but in the juxtaposition of images, by cross-editing images of the audience and the players, combining newsreel with staged footage. Illustrating his theory that ‘the foundation of film art is editing’, Pudovkin uses apparently unrelated images of real life and the game of chess to create a well-integrated unified whole through montage. Also, when Capablanca and the other chess players ‘became’ film characters, it confirmed a Soviet film style of working with non-professional actors (found particularly in Eisenstein’s films). *Shakhmatnaia goriachka* confirmed for Bolshevik cinema an outstanding place in today’s so-called avant-garde arts. In *Shakhmatnaia goriachka*, the border between documentary and feature film vanishes completely. Today, *Shakhmatnaia goriachka* is recognised as a cult classic from the

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 40. See also Panayiota Mini, ‘Vsevolod Pudovkin’s *Chess Fever* in its Historical Context’, in *Spotlights on Russian and Balkan Slavic Cultural History*, edited by Alexandra Ioannidou and Christian Voss (München: Sagner, 2009), pp. 201–11.

silent era, the best opening for the other Pudovkin masterpieces to come: *Mat*' (Mother, 1926), *Konets Sankt-Peterburga* (The End of St. Petersburg, 1927) and *Potomok Chingis-khana* (The Heir to Genghis Khan, also known as Storm Over Asia, 1928).

It has proven impossible to locate any personal reference from Capablanca, either in published works or interviews, to his brief and fascinating film affair. However, it can be confirmed that he was overwhelmed by the heady spirit of those revolutionary days in Moscow, even asking for radical changes to the rules of the chess game. The Cuban master published an article in *Revista Bimestre* entitled 'El torneo internacional de Moscú: conveniencia de modificar el ajedrez para la lucha entre los grandes maestros'.<sup>8</sup> Capablanca presented to the Cuban reader his views about chess in the country of the Soviets, demonstrating the importance of the game for the Soviet authorities and explaining how chess had been promoted on such an enormous scale in the USSR that it had become an instrument of state policy. He suggested that the sport could never be separated from politics. In 1986, the same context of the Moscow chess tournament in 1925 became the topic of another film, this time directed by Manuel Herrera, a Cuban film-maker.

### ***Capablanca: a Winning Cinematic Move?***

Herrera had become an established film-maker following his debut in 1960 as Tomás Gutiérrez Alea's assistant director on *Las doce sillas* (The Twelve Chairs) and his work in 1962 on Vladimir Čech's *Para quién baila la Habana* (For Whom Does Havana Dance). He went on to make documentaries, and then feature films such as *Girón* (1972), *No hay*

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<sup>8</sup> J.R. Capablanca, 'El torneo internacional de Moscú: conveniencia de modificar el ajedrez para la lucha entre los grandes maestros', *Revista Bimestre Cubana*, XXI. 2 (March -April 1926), 161-68.

*sábado sin sol* (There's No Saturday Without Sun, 1979), another masterpiece of Cuban Socialist Realism presented at the Tashkent Festival (1980), and *Zafiros, locura azul* (Zafiros, Blue Madness, 1997).

*Capablanca* was Herrera's second major cinematic project. It tells the story of the chess world champion during the so-called 'década sangrienta' in Havana, in those 'democratic' years when Capablanca (César Évora) was also acting as a diplomat for the government of Machado. The film produces an intriguing hypothesis regarding Capablanca's political dilemma, when the chess champion agrees to participate in a match in Soviet Russia. A journalist, Gonzalo (played by Ramón Veloz), and a politician, Barraque (Alejandro Lugo), have urged him not to go. They fear that the communists could use his presence and he could suffer as a result. Despite everything, Capablanca travels to Russia, where he renews an old affair with a Spanish woman (a role played by Eslinda Nuñez, in real life Manuel Herrera's wife) and starts a new relationship with a Russian ballet dancer Sasha Mozhaeva (Galina Beliaeva). The great chess master pulls all sorts of stunts and even deliberately loses some games so as to leave the chess hall early and meet his new Russian girlfriend, bored as he is with the competition. The film has a tragic (ballet) end that reinforces the over-the-top, melodramatic narrative.<sup>9</sup>

The Cuban casting for *Capablanca* included a significant number of established names, such as Adolfo Llauradó, and rising stars such as César Évora, Beatriz Valdéz and Vladimir Cruz. On the Russian side, there was the Gorky Central Film Studio for Children and Youth, Dal Orlov, the co-scriptwriter, the cameraman Igor Klebanov and Galina Beliaeva (Emil Lotianu's *Anna Pavlova*,

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<sup>9</sup> The choreographer Alberto Méndez created a ballet piece especially for Herrera's film, which is a good example of the long-term collaboration between the ICAIC and the Ballet Nacional de Cuba.

1983). Herrera could not count on an enormous amount of resources or support from Moscow as Kalatozov had done for *Soy Cuba*. On this point, he explained:

Los soviéticos se mostraron muy reticentes al uso de *La fiebre del ajedrez* y en un final pidieron un precio excesivamente alto (en dólares) por el uso de esas imágenes que Cuba debía pagar. El guionista Eliseo Alberto incluyó algunas escenas que serían reconstruidas por nosotros sobre el filme. Incluso en la propuesta inicial Pudovkin era un personaje. La parte soviética no estuvo de acuerdo con esto, alegaban que no se ajustaban a la realidad y tuvimos que desecharlas. Las escenas de *La fiebre* y el comentario sobre ella estarían incluidos en los créditos finales pero el alto costo y las demoras (alegando problemas con los negativos originales) y las presiones de tiempo me obligaron a desistir. Por su parte en mis investigaciones y conversaciones con participantes de *La fiebre...* surgió una fea historia cotidiana de la cual nunca se habla que desmoronaba completamente la personalidad de Pudovkin, al parecer no muy apreciado por sus contemporáneos.<sup>10</sup>

Herrera's account offers great insight into the effects of glasnost on Soviet cinema in relation to Cuba. For the new mentors of the Soviet film industry the priority was the acquisition of hard currency, not political or ideological matters. Specifically, the honeymoon initiated by the film production of *Soy Cuba* between the *ostrov svoboda* (island of freedom) and the Soviet Union was over. Also, the role played by Pudovkin within the film industry was questioned by the mentors of glasnost, both in Mosfilm and in the film world of the Soviet-bloc. According to John

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<sup>10</sup> Email correspondence with Manuel Herrera (4 July 2005).

Cunningham, in his book *Hungarian Cinema from Coffee House to Multiplex*, Pudovkin acted as a watchdog: 'he visited Hungary twice, in 1950 and in the autumn of 1951, spouting the party line ad nauseum; Pudovkin's influence could only have been harmful. He interfered in a number of productions; as well as sacking the director of *Gyármat a föld alatt* (Colony Underground, 1951).'<sup>11</sup> The Cuban Herrera did not ignore Pudovkin's *Shakhmatnaia goriachka* when working on his own film project on Capablanca. The Soviet film-maker was even considered as a character for the Cuban film but, as noted previously, even Pudovkin had come under severe criticism during glasnost. Another problem for Herrera was that he could not use any of Pudovkin's original footage because of the high price demanded for the copyright use of those images. Such materials and other historical documents dating back to that time in Moscow could significantly have improved the argument of this Cuban film.

*Capablanca* is also representative of the ICAIC's departure from Soviet Socialist Realist films, their heroes and political commitment, despite the fact that the rhetoric of previous decades is still clearly present in the film. It is obvious that Cuban colloquial speech is struggling to emerge from within the unnatural and rhetorical dialogues. In one sequence of the film, Capablanca sounds like a Soviet commissar referring to 'el diario cumplimiento del deber'. However, there is a clear intention to give some place to the vernacular, traditional and popular songs and artists. If there is one thing to be acknowledged in this film, it should be its excellent soundtrack, a pleasant combination of Ernesto Lecuona and Rita Montaner, together with the music composed by Sergio Vitier, a key representative of ICAIC's film music.

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<sup>11</sup> John Cunningham, *Hungarian Cinema from Coffee House to Multiplex* (London: Wallflower, 2003), pp. 70–71.

### **The Reception of the Film *Capablanca***

With regard to the reception of the film in the USSR, Herrera has noted: ‘no fui al estreno en Moscú. Pero quienes asistieron me dicen que fue una buena acogida. Tanto en el estreno como en su circulación comercial. Tuvo buenas críticas sobre todo referentes a lo sorprendente que resultaba que un extranjero hubiera podido reflejar la esencia rusa. Al parecer, algo le comunicaba al público ruso. Dos años después pasé por Moscú y aún se exhibía comercialmente’.<sup>12</sup> Certainly, the film seems to have been made to please the Russian audience, rather than the Cuban one. In this sense, the film might instead have been called ‘Capablanchik’.

The reviews were not favourable. For Michael Chanan, Herrera’s film was ‘a prosaic biography of the Cuban chess player’.<sup>13</sup> According to Rolando Pérez Betancourt, ‘Entre los defectos de *Capablanca* el mayor de todos es la carga literaria que de principio a fin lo lastra. Por momentos parece ser una película para ser oída por la radio. Nuestro campeón mundial (José Raúl Capablanca), interpretado por César Évora, se expresa casi siempre con un lenguaje sentencioso, hijo no de la natural improvisación que caracteriza cualquier diálogo normal, sino de un rebuscamiento tal que rápidamente se le hace evidente al espectador; en *Capablanca* la esencia de lo que se narra y cómo se narra es el resultado incoloro de una gran imprecisión artística.’<sup>14</sup> According to Azucena Plasencia, Herrera’s film is ‘Un producto cultural clase B, o cine de formulitas, bastante débil en su estructura dramática, de guión superficial, casi turístico, en las escenas que pretenden rehacer a la

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<sup>12</sup> Email correspondence with Manuel Herrera (4 July 2005).

<sup>13</sup> Chanan, *Cuban Cinema*, p. 433.

<sup>14</sup> Rolando Pérez Betancourt, ‘Capablanca: imprecisiones artísticas en una floja partida’, in his *Rollo crítico* (Habana: Editorial Pablo de la Torriente, 1990), pp. 253–54.



manera costumbrista, estampas de la vida nacional'.<sup>15</sup> I agree with this opinion. *Capablanca* is not a good movie, since it lacks a convincing story. Unbearably slow for a motion picture, it is neither well acted nor well directed. César Évora seems to be completely frozen: perhaps the Moscow winter was too much for him. His role as the Cuban world chess champion is not portrayed successfully. Eslinda Núñez, in her role as Capablanca's Spanish lover, acts poorly and adds nothing interesting to the plot. At least Beliaeva contributed her Russian beauty and professional skills as a ballerina, the only authentic features of the film. The personality of the world chess champion is reduced to the most superficial representation. In the film, Capablanca is shown in a number of sequences passing his fingers through his hair. Such a gesture is afforded great significance, while an important quality such as his ability to speak foreign languages is lost because of the use of dubbing. His marriage to a Russian émigré, Olga Chagodaieva, in New York is ignored in the film; even his friendships with prominent Russian personalities, including the composer Prokofiev, are overlooked. Key historical facts were underestimated, creating a fictional character that did not correspond to the original. Indeed, *Capablanca* is not even a convincing chess film. As far as the game is concerned, none of the film's scenes or conversations conveys any real knowledge of chess. Like cinema, chess is based on strategy; it is not a game of chance. But there are no memorable sequences to show this facet of the game.

Eliseo Alberto, the Cuban script-writer, is the author of six scripts for the ICAIC, but his *Capablanca* simply does not work as a film story, though perhaps it might work as a literary work for radio. Although he is a member of a celebrated family of poets, this

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<sup>15</sup> Azucena Plasencia, 'Capablanca: en marcha por los senderos de las buenas intenciones', *Bohemia*, 26 February 1988, pp. 10–11.

background did not appear to help him when writing screenplays. *Capablanca* was his checkmate as a scriptwriter. His Russian counterpart, Dal Orlov, seems, as Evgenii Evtushenko did for *Soy Cuba*, to have played the role of proof-reader for the Soviet audience, eliminating from the script any joke that might possibly have ridiculed Russia, translating and reducing episodes of Cuban intellectual life into a sort of Soviet circus, offering only the most superficial view of a tourist, possibly acceptable to some but certainly not to the Cuban viewer. Any good intentions the director might have had could not save *Capablanca*. Herrera made too many mistakes. However, this film is an indispensable point of reference when looking at the ICAIC's history in terms of its usefulness for the analysis of the final period of the cinematic exchange between Cuba and the Soviet Union. It was the last film Cuba co-produced with the Soviet Union, and it epitomises ICAIC's role in those final years of the Soviet Union, in both domestic and foreign matters, in a relationship now characterised by non-communication.

***Dejen en paz a Robinson Crusoe: Hungarian Cinema, Daniel Defoe and 'The Dark Island'***

This film, directed by Péter Tímár, is a Hungarian-Cuban addition to the cinematic adventure tales that reconstruct the structural elements of Crusoe's island story. *Hagyjatok Robinsont!* or *Dejen en paz a Robinson Crusoe* (Leave Robinson Crusoe Alone, 1989) was the first film that Cuba co-produced with Hungary, and the final one that it co-produced

with a country of the Soviet-bloc. The film was released in Hungary on 4 January 1990, but it was never shown in Cuba.<sup>16</sup>

The synopsis of the film is as follows: Daniel Defoe (Garas Dezső) takes home a drunken sailor, Robinson Crusoe (played by Mikó István), from the pub and lets him tell his stories about an uninhabited island. Crusoe explains to Defoe that he was dropped from a ship as a punishment. After early encounters on an island with cannibals, he finds a beautiful girl on the island whom he names Péntek (Friday, Milagros Morales). From the very beginning, Crusoe is attracted by the exoticism and eroticism of the young cannibal girl. After persistent efforts to approach her, little by little Crusoe manages to persuade her to become his lover; soon after, the couple have to deal with the arrival of a sales agent (Max Álvarez — for the Hungarian version of the film voiceover, Máté Gábor), a commune organiser (Raúl Pomares — voiceover Hollósi Frigyes) and a missionary (Miguel Navarro — voiceover Fülöp Zsigmond). These three present their ideas to the couple, but they are not impressed at all by their proposals about how to live; Robinson and Péntek decide to put the visitors in cages. Up to this point, the film has coherence and differs from the original English story. However, later sequences show the arrival of pirates and their fight for buried treasure on the island, which follows the plot of the original story but seems completely unnecessary for the Hungarian variant. Still later on in the film, Defoe evicts Crusoe from his place. The writer then continues the story based upon his own fantasy. Meanwhile, Robinson sleeps in the streets and dreams about returning to the island where the sensual Péntek awaits him. Maximillian E. Novak, in his study *Daniel Defoe: Master of Fictions*, in which he queries whether the story of Robinson Crusoe was in fact based on the accounts of the sailor

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<sup>16</sup> See <http://www.filmkultura.iif.hu:8080/articles/filmography/timar.en.html>. Tímár's film is not included in a study on film adaptations of Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*: see Robert Stam, *Literature through Film: Realism, Magic, and the Art of Adaptation* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), pp 63–98.

Alexander Selkirk, notes the following: 'He (Selkirk) expressed a dislike for alcoholic drinks when they were offered him, and he seemed to have lost some of his ability to use language, a fact that supported those who believed that language was neither a natural nor a necessary human acquirement.'<sup>17</sup> Although Tímár appears to defend this perception in principle, the Hungarian *Crusoe* is quite different from the Scottish Selkirk. The film character is a loquacious alcoholic.

### **The Cuban-Hungarian *Crusoe* as a *Kinoglasnost* film**

In her pioneering study *Kinoglasnost*, Anna Lawton examines the intriguing world of Soviet cinema under perestroika; using attributes which can be easily explain the generally pessimistic mood in the film industries of the bloc during that period. Having lost faith in ideology, with its promises and illusions, film-makers looked for thematic substitutes. In this sense, this Cuban co-production could really be said to be a *Kinoglasnost* movie. Tímár's film is less an inquiry into Defoe's inspirational source and more an indication of the particular film production values in the countries of the Soviet-bloc at that time, when traditionally negative characters such as drunks, prostitutes, dubious individuals and intellectuals were given a sympathetic representation. Tímár's other significant departure from Defoe's original story is the introduction of three new characters, the sales agent, the Utopian socialist philosopher and the missionary (those roles were played by Cuban actors Max Álvarez, Raúl Pomares and Miguel Navarro, respectively). Tímár depicts them arriving on the island at different moments, at which point each makes his rhetorical speech in front of Robinson and his girlfriend. *Crusoe* does not question these new arrivals; instead he contents himself with the enjoyment of contemplating them, until he decides, with the help of Péntek, to put them in cages. Tímár makes powerful use of editing techniques to

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<sup>17</sup> Maximillian E. Novak, *Daniel Defoe: Master of Fictions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 539.

caricature these characters, speeding up short impulsive movements to accentuate how unconvincing they are, or slowing the characters down to show them wallowing in their own narcissistic attitudes. Certainly, Tímár's film is a great example of a Glasnost film, the East European use of the joke in a cinematic context, of reflective laughter and also of the Cuban , to mock serious topics such as philosophy, religion and the economy, which were three major linchpins of Soviet ideology (Marxism-Leninism).<sup>18</sup>

*Dejen en paz a Robinson Crusoe* is a bizarre filmic experiment, a humorous depiction of a negative reality. Tímár's view of the false options offered by philosophy, economics and religion is notable for its satire, which highlighted the collapse of the Soviet ideal. As a film it reflects the pessimism that was felt in relation to the Soviet reality of those days: centred on the absence of hope, feelings of frustration and ideological disbelief. Tímár has an interesting cinematic idea that does not entirely succeed as a film proposal in using the metaphor provided by Daniel Defoe's original story to observe the human condition and spirit and, in the particular case of this Hungarian film, to testify to the deep confusion of the time in the Eastern European state of mind. Tímár, like any good cinematographer of the glasnost period considered sexually explicit matters to be another vital aspect of contemporary filmmaking. His presentation of people of African extraction, of women and sex as pleasurable and vital aspects of life, also calls to mind Freudian references to female sexuality. Indeed, *Dejen en paz a Robinson Crusoe* can also be read as a cinematic exploration of Freud's theory of female sexuality.

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<sup>18</sup> A relevant publication on this topic is Abel Prieto Jiménez, *El humor de Misha: La crisis del "socialismo real" en el chiste político* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Colihue, 1997). Prieto Jiménez is the current Minister of culture in Cuba.

### **Colonialist Ideology in Postcolonial Times: Representation of ‘the Other’**

As Robert Stam has pointed out, ‘(...) despite Defoe’s attempts to distance Friday from blackness and Africa, any number of filmic adaptations (not to mention illustrated versions) of Robinson Crusoe have intuitively turned Friday back into an African and black man, thus restoring precisely what Defoe himself had gone to such pains to repress’.<sup>19</sup> In the Hungarian film version, Friday is turned into a black African female character, and thus the film-maker gets rid off the clearly homoerotic subtext of the original literary story, keeping intact the ‘social contract’ of enslavement and adding a sexually explicit storyline to the film narrative. The film-maker also keeps the ideological use of the cannibalism storyline in the novel to differentiate the white European from the native inhabitant of the island, giving the same colonialist representation of the ‘other’ as an inferior human being. In this sense, Tímár managed to maintain the colonialist ideology of Defoe’s novel, a fact difficult to believe of a so-called ‘socialist’ cinematic discourse. Tímár's treatment of female sexuality brings to mind the English term ‘dark continent’, which was a nineteenth-century term for Africa, so used because it was largely unknown and therefore mysterious to Europeans. According to Theresa M. Senft, ‘Sigmund Freud made continual allusions to female sexuality as a dark continent, and urged people to travel to these metaphorical dark places of femininity, and report on their findings (...) it is as if Freud’s work had gone uninterrogated in the last one hundred years.’<sup>20</sup> In *Dejen en paz a Robinson Crusoe*, the spectator sees in close-up a group of half-naked cannibals in a ritual dance around a monumental female figure, lying on her back with her legs apart. The figure’s colossal

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<sup>19</sup> Stams, *Literature through Film: Realism, Magic, and the Art of Adaptation*, p. 72.

<sup>20</sup> See Theresa M. Senft, ‘Writing (and) Independence: Gaytri Spivak and the Dark Continent of Ecriture Feminine’, available on <http://www.terrisenft.net/students/readings/spivak.php>. [accessed on 1 May 2010].

vagina, the most sensitive part of a woman's body, is exposed and penetrated by an artificial black giant erect penis. It is an unashamedly and transparently sexual scene.

The film-maker displays a certain understanding of naturalistic erotic art, but mainly seems to have taken this as a good excuse to present beautiful, naked bodies in explicitly sexual movements. The selection of Afro-Cuban people to play these roles suggests that the European colonial perception of 'the dark continent' of the nineteenth century had changed little in Tímár's twentieth-century film, confirming the persistent European male sexual fantasy about African bodies. However, is the Hungarian *Crusoe* nothing more than an erotic film? In *Erotic Cinema*, Douglas Keesey and Paul Dunacan suggest that 'erotic movies are a dream world where we live out the sinful, shameless and infinitely gratifying sexual fantasies that are off-limits in real life'.<sup>21</sup> This kind of film focuses on a subject with either suggestive or sensual scenes, illustrating human nudity and lovemaking, though not of an extremely explicit nature. Erotic films appeal to the emotions of the viewer, with their emphasis on pleasure and human companionship. Bringing together the exotic and the erotic, *Dejen en paz a Robinson Crusoe* encourages us to explore this aspect of the aesthetic meaning of primitive art, by observing half-naked bodies in erotic ritual dances. However, if there is one general characteristic which can be applied to *Dejen en paz a Robinson Crusoe* as an erotic film, it is its comical quality. The comic aspect of eroticism is deftly demonstrated in several sequences of the film. Ultimately, Tímár's *Robinson Crusoe* is a visual celebration of sexuality. The film music helped to confirm this quality; played by

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<sup>21</sup> See *Erotic Cinema*, edited by Douglas Keesey and Paul Dunacan (Cologne; Los Angeles: Taschen, 2005), p. 9.

Cuban boy band 'Moncada', who were very popular at the time, it provided the film with a convincing sense of carnival and disorder.

### **The Reception of *Dejen en paz a Robinson Crusoe***

Even nowadays, while Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* remains a popular adventure narrative, its Hungarian cinematic version is still unknown to many. The only review of the film reads as follows: 'this is a slow and not very interesting movie of an excellent Hungarian director with two good actors, István Mikó and Dezső Garas. The camerawork is interesting, but the songs are extremely long, and the story is thin.'<sup>22</sup> However, Timár's film could be more appropriately classified as experimental. Its sense of absurdity is brilliant. For the purpose of the present thesis, the Hungarian-Cuban film introduces new factors, revealing hidden similarities between dissimilar things. It connects, for example, the narrative of Cuban cinema with the story of Robinson Crusoe, a man alone, trapped on a lonely place, a dark island. Carlos Varela, a singer who became very popular among young people in Cuba because of his songs of dissidence and disillusion, also made a similar identification with the theme of the lonely island. In one of his most popular songs, *Robinson (solo en una isla)*, Varela sang:

La religión empieza en los murales de la escuela,  
en una foto, en un altar, en un montón de velas.  
Algunos hablan de la crisis del marxismo,  
algunos lloran, ríen, a otros les da lo mismo.  
Están tumbando las estatuas del osito Misha  
en este juego de la historia, sólo pasamos ficha.

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<sup>22</sup> Review by Peter Hannes, available on <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0097472/> [accessed on 8 September 2002].



Many leitmotifs from Daniel Defoe's English novel (suffering, resistance, paranoia, belief, disbelief, destiny, hope and confusion)<sup>23</sup> were particularly appropriate for Cuba at that time. To continue in solitude, as Defoe's fictional character had done for decades, could be said to represent the natural condition for *el Comandante* and his revolution, isolated on 'the dark island' by economic and ideological borders, as well as by its geographical position. But *el Comandante*, like Robinson Crusoe, was determined to survive. Then a great historical event took place to help: in 1982, the PSOE came to power, Spain's first leftist government since the Spanish civil war. With this, 'la Movida Madrileña' ('the Madrid movement'), a socio-artistic movement, came into being. Pilar Miró, the late film-maker and twice cultural minister in the socialist government of Felipe González, obtained government subsidies to support the work of young film-makers and strongly supported co-productions with Latin America and particularly with Cuba. Among them was a film directed by Enrique Pineda Barnet, the co-scriptwriter of Mikhail Kalatozov's *Soy Cuba*.<sup>24</sup>

### ***La Bella del Alhambra or De Vulgari Eloquentia***

The matter of the eloquence of the vernacular brings to mind Dante Alighieri's essay *De Vulgari Eloquentia*, which offers a great defence of the spoken word and oral literature. Alighieri's essay was written in Latin and was initially meant to consist of four books. In the first book, Alighieri defines the vernacular as 'the language which children gather from those around them when they first begin to articulate words; or more briefly, that which we learn without any rules at all by imitating our nurses'.<sup>25</sup> The Italian poet refers to the first

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<sup>23</sup> On these themes, see E.M. Foster, *Aspects of the Novel* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976), pp. 163-64.

<sup>24</sup> See *Duetos de cine: Coproducciones hispanocubanas con música de fondo*, edited by Inmaculada Gordillo (Cádiz: Pedro Romero S.A., 2007).

<sup>25</sup> Dante Alighieri, *De Vulgari Eloquentia*, edited and translated by Steven Botterill (Cambridge: New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 47.

and natural language that we speak and the search for an *illustrious vernacular*. His work is an analysis of the structure of popular song, *canzone*, which was according to him, ‘a very important and noble literary genre’. This could be said to be at the heart of Enrique Pineda Barnet’s film, *La bella del Alhambra*, which celebrates the vernacular.

Pineda Barnet remained determined to become a film-maker, even though *Soy Cuba*, his first film experience, was not well received by either the Cuban or the Soviet public. *Giselle* (1964), *Mella* (1975), *Aquella larga noche* (That Long Night, 1979) and *Tiempo de amar* (Time to Love, 1983) are among his best-known works. The majority of them are celebrations of revolutionary heroism and, thus, epitomise ICAIC film production of the time of socialist institutionalisation. Without doubt, *La bella del Alhambra* (1989) is his finest moment as a director. This film was inspired ‘de manera muy libre, en la novela de Miguel Barnet’s *Canción de Rachel* (Rachel's Song), que en realidad no se llamaba Raquel sino Amalia Sorg, una vedette muy famosa del teatro Alhambra entre la década del 20 y parte de la del 30’.<sup>26</sup>

The opening credits inform the spectator that the film is a co-production between the ICAIC and Televisión Española. *La bella del Alhambra*’s opening sequence follows a young girl. Raquel (played by Beatriz Valdés) is walking slowly along a busy street, unaware of her surroundings. Her movements give the impression that she is performing before a public. She is beautiful and dreaming about the most famous theatre of the time:

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<sup>26</sup> Cited in Enrique Valdés Pérez, ‘Un nuevo filme cubano: *La bella del Alhambra*’, *Bohemia*, 81.40 (6 October 1989), pp. 4–7 (p. 5). On Amalia Sorg, see Manuel Octavio Gómez’s documentary *Recuerdos de la Alhambra* (Memories of the Alhambra, 1963). See also Miguel Barnet, *La canción de Rachel* (La Habana: Editorial Letras Cubanas, 2001).

La Alhambra. In this way, Pineda Barnet establishes the atmosphere of the film, Havana's belle époque, and thereby encapsulates briefly the entire plot: the relation between a female character and the world of theatre.

Where Raquel works, artistic performance, fun, prostitution and exploitation are the order of the day. She is determined to put a stop to the sexual advances of the manager (a role played by Ramón Veloz Jr), who is also the lover of her mother (Veronica Lynn). Raquel's real ambition is to become the star of the Alhambra. Raquel has the support of Adolfo (Carlos Cruz), a gay man. He seems to know what she needs to learn, not only by following and repeating certain steps in order to develop her artistic skills, but in order to express her inner self. To help develop her career, Adolfo takes Raquel to see the Afro-Cubans dancing and singing in 'el solar'. This sequence of the film seems to emphasise that the African element is at the core of Cuban dance and song, and that the eroticism of Cuban women comes from their African ancestors. However, the original Raquel was different. In the literary story *Canción de Rachel*, Raquel was the daughter of a Hungarian woman and a German man. Pineda Barnet ignores this fact, which is necessarily a 'bad thing' if you intend to connect the 'other' Europe and Cuba, and worse if the main character of the story becomes an allegory for Cuban women's sensuality, the sensuality that was the most important attribute for a place like the theatre Alhambra.

The Alhambra Theatre was opened in 1890, staging 'zarzuelas', 'revistas' and 'comedias'. It was there that two dramatists established themselves as 'bufo' theatre writers. The first, Ignacio Sarachaga, was known for *En la cocina* (In the Kitchen, 1880), and the second, Raimundo Cabrera, for *Del parque a la luna* (From the Park to the Moon, 1888). La

Alhambra developed its own vernacular genre of erotic and colourful plays known as Alambresco, which were based on *teatro bufo*. In theatre, the Cuban vernacular was defined by Francisco Covarrubias and his *teatro bufo*.<sup>27</sup> The Alhambra was ‘for men only’; men who were looking to satisfy their sexual fantasies about women. In this sense, femininity is shown to be an expression of marginalisation. Through a theatre, Pineda Barnet found a vehicle to demonstrate Cuban patriarchy, as an allegory of the city, the republic and the whole nation. Consciously or unconsciously, the film assumes a feminist discourse, portraying a truth that highlights the role of images and stereotypes.

According to Richard Dyer, ‘the role of stereotypes is to make visible the invisible, so that there is no danger of it creeping up on us unawares; and to make fast, firm and separate what is in reality fluid and much closer to the norm than the dominant value system cares to admit’.<sup>28</sup> This idea helps us to understand the portrayal of the main characters in the film. Adolfo is a key personage in *la Bella* and in Cuban film history. For the first time a new character emerges, that of a sad young man who represents the male homosexual from a sympathetic perspective. He is recognised by the Cuban spectator as gay not only because Raquel’s mother screams ‘Maricón’ (queer) at him in one sequence of the film, but also because the audience identifies him as different because his character always looks sad. Even in fiestas ‘Adolfo’ stays in a corner, alone with his sadness. The way he speaks, the kind of job he does, all are Cuban stereotypes associated with being gay, referring to the people, practices, and culture associated with homosexuality. In one sequence of the film,

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<sup>27</sup> On its history, see Rine Leal, *Teatro bufo, siglo XIX* (La Habana: Editorial Arte y Literatura, 1975). See also Enrique Larrondo y Maza, *Francisco Covarrubias, fundador del teatro cubano* (Habana: Cultural, 1928).

<sup>28</sup> Richard Dyer, *The Matter of Images: Essays on Representation* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 16.

Adolfito and Raquel are standing in front of a mirror; he shows her how to move her hands, how to move her eyes, how to look at people, how to communicate her female self. Adolfito, in effect, instructs Raquel how to express her femininity. The sequence suggests that femininity is a lot more complicated than dressing and speaking as a woman. Femininity is more of a learning process. As Bertolt Brecht puts it: “‘gest” is not supposed to mean gesticulation: it is not a matter of explanation or emphatic movements of the hands, but of overall attitudes. A language is gestic when it is grounded in a gest and conveys particular attitudes adopted by the speaker towards other men.’<sup>29</sup>

In a later sequence, we see Raquel in an improvised and impulsive act, performing for the Cuban social ‘elite’ at a party, in order to be noticed and to gain the attention of the Alhambra’s theatre manager. Later still, Raquel is shown in rehearsal, demanding to be treated as an artist. In her first public performance, she seems to be determined to gain the favour of the male audience, ‘to steal’ the limelight from the star of the show ‘La Mexicana’ by stripping off her clothes. The male audience responds euphorically, but ‘Adolfito’ does not. Raquel thereby becomes *la Bella del Alhambra*, with all the glory and misfortune such success can bring. Raquel runs crying from the stage, wearing ‘the look of a hunted animal’. Such a reaction ‘can become a social gest if it is shown that particular manoeuvres by men can degrade the individual to the level of a beast; the social gest is the gest relevant to society, the gest that allows conclusions to be drawn about the social circumstances’.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> ‘On Gestic Music’, see *Brecht on Theater: The Development of an Aesthetic*, edited and translated by John Willett (London: Methuen Drama, 1978), p. 104.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 104–05.

When the spectator recognises in Raquel's face 'the look of a hunted animal', as explained by Brecht, this is 'gest'. Pineda Barnet used this particular 'look' to show the development of a character. From Raquel's initial movements in front of the mirror to the sequence in which she is stripped before a male audience we can read this as a social gest. Pineda Barnet, and in this he follows Brecht, shows things as they are and not only as an artificial reconstruction of reality. It is a vital precondition of this kind of perspective to consider alienation only in proportion to the emotional meaning it undercuts, a technique in acting which produces the effect of alienation. According to Brecht, 'the aim of this technique, known as the alienation effect, was to make the spectator adopt an attitude of inquiry and criticism in his approach to the incident'.<sup>31</sup>

Pineda Barnet, whether consciously or not, transferred specific Brechtian theatrical concerns such as the question of pleasure and spectacle into the area of film. Conflicting class interests, developing the spectator's sense of distance/identification with the main character of the film, represent the historical process in the film understood in a Marxist sense. But as Brecht once said art must also give pleasure. Although this film is not interested in realism but in real life, the set designs, the gestures, the fact that the actors do not speak a natural dialogue, but in proverbs, imbues every scene in the film with a certain sense of play: Cuban intellectual life is shown to be like a theatrical play. *La bella del Alhambra* is a flamboyant film despite the fact that the colour of the film seems to belie this; everything seems to be monochromatic, shrouded in darkness. An analysis of the kitsch elements in *La bella del Alhambra* is predicated on a sense of the transliteration of Brecht's realist theatre into Cuban

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 136.

cinema, which is, as we have seen, a persistent feature in ICAIC's film production.<sup>32</sup> In this particular case, Pineda Barnet succeeded in transferring gestic acting to Cuban music, speech, movement and silent sadness, thereby bringing together the concepts of social gest and Cuban vernacular within the cinematic discourse of the Revolution.

*La Bella del Alhambra* is also a musical. It includes complete song and dance sequences as part of the narrative. For Pineda Barnet, his film is 'un melodrama con música'. The Cuban film-maker managed, for the first time in the history of the ICAIC to combine many aspects of Hollywood musicals in terms of the film's melodramatic storyline, the singing and dancing. The 1920s, the decade that the film recreates, was a period of widespread receptivity to Cuban popular music, because it was also the time of the introduction of the gramophone record, radio and Hollywood movies, which helped to increase the levels of exposure to Cuban music and dance. Of the film's soundtrack the director stated the following: 'solamente Gonzalo Romeu fue capaz de captar lo que requería y él agrupó a su adorable tío Mario en una fusión de respeto y acople inigualable'.<sup>33</sup>

In an emotional scene in the film, dressed like a man, and in the company of her first lover, Raquel goes for the first time to the Alhambra. On the stage 'La Mexicana' (Isabel Moreno) is performing *Quiéreme mucho*; but the real voice is Omara Portuondo, a legendary Cuban singer and one of the members of the celebrated *Buena Vista Social Club*. This is a celebration of the 'tragic style' of the Cuban *canción, el bolero*. Combining Mario and Gonzalo Romeu's music with some of the symbols of Cuban vernacular theatre, the so-called *teatro bufo* — 'el negrito'

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<sup>32</sup> Private interview with Pineda Barnet which took place on 15 November 2005.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

(the little black man) and ‘el gallego’ (a Spaniard from Galicia) — Pineda Barnet successfully recreated a melodramatic musical of the time, acknowledging its role in Cuban theatre and intellectual life. The use of *teatro bufo* in this film addressed key questions concerning Cuban society. The film acknowledges the crisis of high culture and identifies *el choteo* (mockery), a form of word-play, as an expression of the island’s subconscious.<sup>34</sup>

*El choteo*, as Mañach explains, goes beyond simple humour, serving either as a way to express solidarity and respect or as a method of ‘subterfugio ante el fuerte’, a means of destabilising power relations. The disorder that is suggested by *el choteo* is what produces ‘la alteración de estado cualquiera de concierto y de jerarquía, así sea en el orden físico y objetivo’.<sup>35</sup> Pineda Barnet uses this technique through *teatro bufo*. In one sequence of the film, during the performance of *La isla de las cotorras*, the spectator observes the destabilising of the established order implied by *el choteo*. The film also offers an exploration of the politics of representation and the ideological implications of the Cuban vernacular — *teatro bufo* — in both theatre and cinema, marking the end of decades of Soviet seriousness and the return to the Cuban vernacular, epitomised by *el choteo*.

The personality of Raquel is revealed in a single sequence. After further success, newspaper reporters interview her. We realise that Raquel is a dreamer, an unrefined, strong-minded and egocentric person. Her first love, Eusebio (a role played by Jorge Martínez), commits suicide because of his inability to deal with social prejudices; he is from a middle-class

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<sup>34</sup> These two matters were the topics of lectures given by the scholar Jorge Mañach in the years on which Pineda Barnet’s film is based. See Jorge Mañach, *La crisis de la alta cultura en Cuba* (Miami: Ediciones Universal, 1991).

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 57.



family and she is a chorus girl, working in a seedy establishment. Raquel also becomes involved with an older man (Omar Valdés), trading sexual favours for professional success. She is the very image of frustration, living with a sexual desire that cannot be fulfilled until she ‘captures’ a young career-minded politician (César Évora), who seems to satisfy her sexually, although not to the point of persuading her to become his faithful partner. Her emotional insecurity is played out in her sexual relations with several men. Raquel is also a *femme fatale*, a central character of the *film noir*.<sup>36</sup> A grandiose mise-en-scène is achieved in the last sequence of the film. Pineda Barnet summarises Raquel’s life in her last moments without vocally articulating it through the framework of spoken dialogue; when the camera show us her disorganised room to reflect the disorganisation in Raquel’s life in general and her flamboyantly decorated room to convey a character ‘full of life’, Raquel is also an anti-hero, completely in opposition to the socialist traditional heroine. Like any good *film noir*, *La bella del Alhambra* does not question the virile potency of male sexuality but instead exploits it.

### ***La Bella del Alhambra: A Kinoglasnost film***

The 1980s was a time when film-makers seemed to have been interested in showing naked men in explicitly sexual scenes. Concerning male nudity in Kinoglasnost films, Lynne Attwood referred to the Soviet films that she saw at the 17th Moscow Film Festival: ‘It was the male bottom which appeared on screen with astonishing frequency — naked and always in vigorous motion. This, it turned out, was the favourite way of depicting the sex act, a virtually obligatory

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<sup>36</sup> For further discussion of film noir, see Sarah Berry-Flint, ‘Genre’, in *A Companion to Film Theory*, edited by Toby Miller and Robert Stam (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), pp. 25-44 (esp. pp. 35-37).

feature of Soviet films in the era of perestroika'.<sup>37</sup> The same applies to Pineda Barnet's film. In this sense, *La bella de la Alhambra* is also a Kinoglasnost film, a taboo-breaking film. Until that moment, ICAIC, like their Soviet counterparts, had not been keen to show naked bodies in films, even for the purpose of sex or love scenes. A taboo had been created in relation to portraying sex, sexuality and nudity in films, calling to mind the infamous declaration: 'there is no sex in the USSR!'<sup>38</sup> Raquel's young lovers, roles played by Jorge Martínez and César Évora, are shown in similar situations to those described by Attwood. Following this film, those actors became 'sex symbols' in Cuban and Mexican 'telenovelas'. For the director of the film, 'la Bella... me permite hacer una analogía. La Bella es una imagen analógica de la República. Raquel no es otra cosa que la República que quiso ser hermosa, que quiso ser bella, que quiso ser armónica, que quiso tener el único amor esperado, romántico y hermoso. Y no pudo ser amable. Y resultó, al fin y al cabo, una prostituta, una artista vulgar'.<sup>39</sup>

### **The Reception of *La Bella de la Alhambra***

*La bella del Alhambra* enjoyed enthusiastic plaudits in Cuba and abroad. The film received *Coral* awards for its music, stage design and story adaptation at the Festival del Nuevo Cine Latinoamericano in 1989. According to the Cuban film critic Amado del Pino, 'Pineda Barnet logra aquí un precioso homenaje a la cultura cubana en sus costados más esenciales'.<sup>40</sup> According to Eduardo López Morales, 'en este filme, todo es música y

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<sup>37</sup> See Lynne Attwood, 'Sex and the Cinema', in *Sex and Russian Society*, edited by Igor Kon and James Riordan (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), p. 64.

<sup>38</sup> Cited in Andrey Shcherbenok, 'Russian/Soviet Screened Sexuality: An Introduction', *Studies in Russian and Soviet Cinema*, volume 3, issue 2, 2009, p. 135.

<sup>39</sup> Personal interviews with the director, who came to London for the Discovering Latin America Film Festival (24 November - 4 December 2005) for the screening of Kalatozov's film and the premiere in UK of *Soy Cuba, O Mamute Siberiano* (I Am Cuba, the Siberian Mammoth, 2005) at the Tate Modern Starr Auditorium on Sunday 27 November 2005.

<sup>40</sup> Amado del Pino, 'Una inundación de cubanía', *Juventud Rebelde* (29 October 1989), p. 9.

razón'.<sup>41</sup> In Spain the film received the prestigious *Goya Prize*. In 1991, for the first time in the history of Cuban cinema, Pineda Barnet's film was nominated for an Oscar as best foreign film. It can be argued that Hollywood rapidly understood the real challenge of this film. With the Oscar nomination, the American Academy had sent out a clear political message to Cuban film-makers, reminding and encouraging them to use the technique and purposes of *el choteo* as a way of undermining authority and thus constituting a real and dangerous form of rebellion. In this sense, *La Bella del Alhambra* is a political film, which perhaps naively sought to destabilise the hierarchical critique, suggesting a space for other political options when socialism was under attack.

As Freud explains, a joke can be seen as a social process in relation to the unconscious. Jorge Mañach has argued that '*el choteo* no toma en serio nada de lo que generalmente se tiene por serio'.<sup>42</sup> 'Choteo' is wild and unserious, even if the business at hand is of the highest importance. It reflects disrespect for the established institutions of society. *El choteo* in Pineda Barnet's film is in opposition to the serious and doctrinaire Soviet way of doing things. Its wit targets power, with the purpose of undermining law and order. At the end of the 1980s, for the first time since the establishment of the Cuban Revolution, the audience was shown a film on screen that celebrated traditional popular music, eroticism and kitsch.

*La Bella del Alhambra* introduced some innovations into the ICAIC's repertoire: firstly the topic, the Cuban vernacular theatre and music, was perhaps surprisingly uncommon for the time. Secondly, the way the film approached its themes, giving those elements of the

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<sup>41</sup> Eduardo López Morales, '*La bella de la Alhambra: todo es música y razón*', *Cine Cubano*, no. 130 (1990), pp. 41–47 (p. 47).

<sup>42</sup> Mañach, *Indagación del choteo*, p. 57.

vernacular — traditional song, *teatro bufo*, eroticism, *el choteo* — the same importance that had previously been reserved for the events of the Cuban Revolution, was novel. What kind of film is *La Bella del Alhambra*? *Film noir*, a musical, a political, gender or historical film? *La Bella del Alhambra* is a celebration of the new anti-hero and is characterised by a complex cinematic style and the use of several film languages. Although difficult to classify, it confirms the co-existence of distinct varieties within a single linguistic code. The theory is recognised in linguistics as heteroglossia, an English term that is a translation of Mikhail Bakhtin's *raznorechie* (different-speech-ness).<sup>43</sup> Bakhtin goes to the heart of what the transcultural condition is about. The concept helps to define and explain the suggestive nature and the originality of *La Bella del Alhambra* and the ways to read it as a work of art.

Everything in this film — the characters, the customs, the music, the dance and the locations — tends towards the expression of the contradictions of life in Cuba in the late 1980s. After many years, film-makers finally had a chance to show male nudity, sexually explicit scenes and a gay character. It is clear if one compares *Soy Cuba* with *La Bella del Alhambra* that Pineda Barnet's film work had progressed from Socialist Realism to 'choteo', using music as the central sign of *Cubania*. Enrique Pineda Barnet's film encapsulates the Cubanisation of the Cuban moving image, *national in form and national in content*, a fact expressed in 'the discovery' of the vernacular, time-honoured songs which, and artists like Francisco Covarrubias (1775–1850), who were forgotten or downplayed by the National Institute of the Film Art and Industry. *La Bella del Alhambra* might thus be seen as the ICAIC response to Kinoglasnost.

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<sup>43</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, *Slovo v romane* (1934), published in English as 'Discourse in the Novel', in *Literary Theory: An Anthology*, edited by Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan (London: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), pp. 674–85.

Despite the significant international recognition enjoyed by *La Bella del Alhambra*, Pineda Barnet did not make another feature film until 2009 when he directed *La anunciación*. According to the film-maker, 'the movie works as my testament, although not the final one'; inspired by the painting of the same name by Cuban artist Antonia Eiriz, *La anunciación* revolves around the family separation and antagonisms stemming from inter-generational and, above all, ideological differences that persist in Cuban society.<sup>44</sup> Filmed on a very low budget, the premiere of the film was part of the programme of celebrations for the 50th anniversary of the ICAIC, a programme that would end with another festivity: the 20th anniversary of the premiere of *La Bella del Alhambra* was marked with the release of a special DVD commemorative edition, which includes a documentary on the making of the film directed by Carlos Barba's *Canción para Rachel* (Song for Rachel, 2007).<sup>45</sup>

### **The 'Other' Cuban Image: The Video Movement**

Glasnost and its cinema were welcomed, not by ICAIC officials, but by the video movement, which was not officially recognised at the time and worked almost like an underground group. The so-called Kinoglasnost films had an immediate response from the new generation of Cuban video makers. In Havana by the end of the 1980s there existed a variety of subcultures, which had borrowed their names from the English language, such as the 'frikis' (freaks), or were a neologism of the Cuban Revolution, such as 'jineterismo'.

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<sup>44</sup> Private conversation; Pineda Barnet received the Premio Nacional de Cine in 2006. In 2007, Pineda Barnet e-mailed me about his new film about separation and antagonisms in the Cuban family. *La anunciación*, he said was a 'a song to tolerance' that suggests to the spectators that they should love each other 'above all difference' because 'there's no greater refuge than ourselves'. See also *20 Aniversario de La bella del Alhambra* (La Habana: Ediciones ICAIC, 2009).

<sup>45</sup> See Carlos Barba Salva's blog <http://carlosbarbaab.blogspot.com/> [accessed in July 2010].

Three main groups of video makers can be identified: women who were not working as a single coherent group but for different cultural institutions (ICAIC, UNEAC and ICRT), among them Mayra Segura, Mayra Vilasis, Rayza White and Lizette Vila; Tomás Piard-the Hermanos Saíz Association and the EICTV.<sup>46</sup> They developed a new artistic form of expression both because their work was in video format and because they brought to the Cuban screen such taboo issues as the frustrations of young people and women, transsexuality, religious matters, the underground business world, bribery and the corruption rampant in everyday life. These were new elements to be added to the cinematic discourse of the Cuban Revolution, and they questioned the Soviet roots of the Revolution. The first group constituted a sort of female wave, despite the fact that they did not work as a coherent or organised group. In this way, women certainly moved from being fictional characters in films to becoming active creators of motion pictures in video. Lizette Vila, who was one of the vice-presidents of UNEAC at the time, played an important role in this video movement. Her documentary series in six chapters, *Los que llegaron después* (Those who Came Afterwards, 1989), on the social reality of the period can be seen as the Cuban response to Juris Podniek's *Vai viegli būt jaunam?*. Aaron Yelin represented the first group of Cuban graduates from EICTV. Yelin's *Muy Bien* belongs to the production within the context of the so-called 'Muestras de cine joven' (1988–92) and is therefore the most significant for the present study.<sup>47</sup> This video work identifies the interests of the 'new generation' of Cuban film-makers, using as a test case a key audio-visual observation

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<sup>46</sup> On 6 November 2006, I curated a film retrospective of the EICTV at the UCL Bloomsbury Theatre, in association with the UCL Department of Spanish and Latin American Studies. See <http://www.thebloomsbury.com/node/168>. In 2007, I created the project: UCL Festival of the Moving Image (FMI); coordinating the visits of Lizette Vila and Tomás Piard. For the first time, their works were screened in the UK. About the UCL-FMI See <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/news/news-articles/0811/08111704> see also, <http://americas.sas.ac.uk/events/programmes/TheOtherCubanImage.html> [accessed in July 2011]. Tomás Piard and Vladimir Smith talk: 'The Other Cuban Image: EICTV and the Video Movement in Havana'.

<sup>47</sup> Among those that followed, one should mention *Diana* (1988) by Juan Carlos Cremata; *Hilo directo* (1988) by Fran Rodríguez, *Sonata para Arcadio* (1989) by Fernando Timossi and *En la calzada de Jesús* (1991) by Arturo Sotto. See Mariví Rodríguez Triana, *Catálogo de la producción fílmica de la EICTV 1987–2002* (La Habana: FNCL, 2007).

of the period by Aaron, the son of Saul Yelín (a founder of the ICAIC and the main mentor of the film co-productions with the countries of the Soviet-bloc).

### **Aaron Yelín's *Muy Bien*: a Cuban Anti-Utopia?**

Founded by Gabriel García Márquez, the New Latin American Cinema Foundation, in turn, established its most important project: the EICTV. In 1986, the ICAIC became independent from the Ministry of Culture. In the same year, Fidel Castro inaugurated the EICTV, also known as the Escuela de Tres Mundos (School of Three Worlds: Latin America, Asia and Africa) in San Antonio de los Baños, on 15 December. The EICTV, as a film school uses film-makers as film teachers, thereby combining theory and practice. With regard to the aim of the EICTV, its first director, the Argentinean film-maker Fernando Birri, once explained: 'Nos proponemos trabajar en función de la liberación de la imagen. Tratamos de dar una respuesta más que única, inédita, aunque respetamos todo lo que se ha hecho.'<sup>48</sup>

In order to research the theme for the video film *Muy bien* (Very Good, 1989), Aaron Yelín decided to visit three different local primary schools in San Antonio de los Baños. Regarding that research, he explains:

Mi propuesta era hacer un documental sin utilizar los tres 'pilares' básicos del género: entrevistas, voz off y música. Exponer el tema sin demasiada intervención explícita de mi parte. Sólo con la elección de las situaciones, el encuadre y, por

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<sup>48</sup> Cited in Angel Rivero, 'En San Antonio de los Baños', *Cine Cubano*, no. 118 (1987), pp. 1–10 (p. 4). On the history of the EICTV, see twenty years on from its foundation Fernando Birri's documentary *ZA05: lo Viejo y lo Nuevo*, which was shown as part of the 2007 UCL FMI. See also *Escuela de todos los mundos* (La Habana-Alcalá de Henares: EICTV, 2001), *Un lugar en la Memoria: Fundación del Nuevo Cine Latinoamericano 1985–2005* (la Habana: FNCL, 2005), and Alberto García Ferrer, *Ojos que no ven* (Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI de Argentina editores, 2004).

supuesto, el montaje. Que los protagonistas hablasen y se mostrasen lo más cercanos a su cotidianidad. Esta intención la subrayo, cambiando radicalmente la forma en las tres secuencias en blanco y negro (filmadas en 16 mm) que incluyo al principio, en el medio y al final, en las que sí quiero forzar el discurso y hacer valer ‘mi voz’.<sup>49</sup>

The opening, central and final sequences are indeed the most important. The first shows the beginning of a child’s education. The teacher shows ‘the correct’ position, like a correct attitude to life, which the school child (a ballet student) has to assume. After this black and white sequence, we see, in colour, scenes taken from everyday life in the classrooms, with teachers guiding the children in warning and patronising tones. They are instructed where to play, what to draw, how to speak. With whom was Aaron Yelin establishing a dialogue? Which Soviet doctrine was Yelin exposing? This work seems to be directly focussed on analyses of the concept of the ‘new man’ and the Soviet educational view of him, as it was applied within the project of the Cuban Revolution. According to this video, Cuban intellectual life is more like an educational establishment, a sort of ‘religious’ school, in which the main principle is to educate Cubans in order that they might become the citizens of the ideal society of the future: communism. *Muy bien* seems to suggest that the Cuban Revolution is most usefully viewed not as a prison, labour camp or as one of George Bush’s ‘axis of evil’ countries. These views seem to be dangerous distortions of Cuban reality. For *Muy Bien*, the main point of conflict in Cuban society is the question of civil liberties, which are portrayed as being at the mercy of the capricious judgment of the authorities. In another black and white sequence, a vigilant eye observes the children dreaming. The image of the eye recalls the slogan of a fictional character created by George

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<sup>49</sup> Personal email dated 22 February 2003.



Orwell in his novel *1984*, 'Big Brother is watching you'. This invented character is echoed in the way that an all-powerful and perpetual watchfulness is trained upon these children. The material shown as the content of their dreams is derived from their everyday experiences, defining memory in terms of dreams.

Yelin's documentary reveals that Cuban primary schools are not rich in cash and resources; the fabric of the school is very poor and it has a lack of equipment and basic resources. The film also reflects moments of calm and peaceful atmosphere in the schools and the warm relationships between teachers and students. Throughout the film, we observe how the teachers obsessively ask their students to understand and repeat that everything has to be done 'muy bien' (very well). The children's faces communicate doubt and confusion. They seem to ask themselves: why and what next? In one sequence, in a 'free' drawing lesson, a teacher is seen correcting a child who draws a house and a plant in the air: 'Look, Liolis, the house has to go there on the ground, because houses never go in the air and this bush also goes on the ground, do you understand?' The sequence reveals a pattern of treating children restrictively and intrusively. This was understood in the Soviet educational model as a form of discipline and was used to shape the children's perception of the world by force, a 'tender' way to kill creativity and imagination, suggesting that spontaneous drawing and play were censored because they might help to develop a subversive attitude towards authority.

According to the Soviet model, to think about individual choice or artistic creation and freedom for its own sake is subjective, egoistic and involves a dangerous avoidance of social responsibility. This sequence suggests that Cuban children were growing up in an

extremely controlled though caring environment, and observes that these children had little chance to be independent or go off to explore on their own. They were not allowed to be spontaneous. They were not given a chance to think for themselves, or to grow up independently. They were, therefore, unable to become complete adults. The film questions whether this educational method was the ideal basis for any system and the creation and development of the 'new man'. In another sequence, a caretaker instructs the children about which games to play and where they can be played. According to her, girls should play separately from boys; there are games for girls and different games for boys. Before the children start to play, the teacher reminds them to take care of 'the things the Revolution has made for their enjoyment'.

The video makes clear the fact that political instruction starts early in the Cuban education system. The theme of 'identity' is underscored repeatedly and is focussed on patriotism — the love of national heroes and national symbols. Certainly, each Cuban school is named after a local hero, which inspires the pupils to explore notions of loyalty. In Cuban primary education, the individual is responsible to the group for his or her behaviour, and group-imposed discipline is guided by authority, a process that starts with a great deal of moralising in games. The idea of loyalty, which was implicit in exhortations to every social group — from children to workers, from peasants to intellectuals — is based on the Soviet conceptualisation of the collective. The treatment is utilitarian: to preserve and to help construct the ideal society. The watchwords were tidiness, freedom only to do what is right, and to do it *muy bien*. Once again, this brings to mind Anton Makarenko, one of the 'engineers of the human soul', and his experimental methods and educational manual of service to the Revolution. Makarenko's professional experiment was in the treatment of delinquents and those displaying antisocial

behaviour, and as the main mentor of Soviet education he applied the same concepts to all children. According to his system, children needed to be moulded and taught to acknowledge everything that the authorities (the state, the Revolution) provided for them, to celebrate that provision and never to criticise it. This required a total submission to authority, an attitude that is in opposition to the romantic vision of a revolutionary education and stifles the critical development of every member of society.

The final sequence of Yelin's documentary shows a ballerina dancing as a dying swan. Why choose ballet and why this image in particular? The symbolism of ballet is very interesting because Cuban ballet has a strong Russian influence that began even before the Revolution.<sup>50</sup> It seems that Aaron Yelin agreed with what Evgenii Zamiatin expressed in his most influential science fiction novel *My (We)*. In Zamiatin's book, ballet is a dance seen as a metaphor, a beautiful and 'unfree' form of motion. The author claims that the profound meaning of ballet lies precisely in the absolute nature of its aesthetic subordination: 'it means only one thing: the instinct of unfreedom is organically inherent in man from time immemorial'.<sup>51</sup> The image of a dying swan is perhaps the most recognisable moment in the history of dance and indeed, in Cuba, because it is one of the best known of all the classical performances by the Ballet Nacional de Cuba. Perhaps the director decided on this 'finale' because of its evocation of tragedy and romance. For Cubans, it is a gracefully executed dance, which represents, metaphorically, in the context of this study, the dying of that Soviet illusion intended for the children of the Cuban Revolution.

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<sup>50</sup> See M.A. Rossiiskii, *Russkoe zarubezh'e na Kube: Stranitsy istorii* (Moskva: Veche, 2002), pp. 6–62.

<sup>51</sup> Evgenii Zamyatin, *We* (New York: EOS, 1999), p. 4.

Aaron Yelin's video revealed the continuing influence of Makarenko's theories on the blueprint of the Cuban Revolution in response to questions of how to bring up and educate children. For the purposes of the present study, Yelin's work is seen as an experiment in social diagnosis and represents a synthesis of the controversial Soviet variant of the concept of the 'new man' and of society. In this sense, it is useful for the analysis of the psychological effects of the early education system in Cuba. However, the existence of such constant external control does not necessarily mean that it is internalised or becomes absorbed into the personality. The existence of this documentary and Yelin himself, who could be identified as one of those children portrayed in the video, educated under the same system, proves that the perception of having total control of the individual is itself elusive. *Muy Bien* is a work of passive disobedience, which is characterised not by radical opposition, but by its ethical/political warning. The video's black and white sequences provide the audio-visual images that identify Yelin's filmic idea with the works of the so-called dystopian fiction, not in the sense of predicting the future but in the sense of a picture visualising an undesirable future.<sup>52</sup>

In *Muy Bien*, true to the genre of dystopia, the illusion of a proper education is sustained by a method that maintains omnipresent control. The effect of this is shown in the visualisation of the children's dream, demonstrating the pernicious effect of the Soviet influence on the genesis of the educational system of the Cuban Revolution. *Muy Bien* is in many ways similar to *My*, *Animal Farm*, *1984*, and Andrei Platonov's *Chevengur* and *Kotlovan*. Those works represent the Soviet experience as past history. This is the historical time and space of the video. In a wider context as a documentary, it deals with the topic of the

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<sup>52</sup> For a study of dystopian classics, see Erika Gottlieb, *Dystopian Fiction East and West: Universe of Terror and Trial* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001).

contemporary Big Brother, the rearing of children and their relationship with adults, and their contrasting vision of the real world and freedom. The final credits of the video show the international composition of the technical crew of *Muy Bien* and the transcultural nature of EICTV film productions in general, which includes students from many different countries. Despite its innovative methodology and praxis — this is, after all, transculturation as film praxis — *Muy bien* remains a little known video-work.

In Cuba and produced by the ICAIC, Yelin made another documentary, this time about his Jewish family background: *A Mis Cuatro Abuelos* (To My Four Grandparents, 1990).<sup>53</sup> Yelin emigrated and currently lives in Madrid. Aaron Yelin Rozengway's name has become one more among those of the Cuban diaspora. The next documentary to be examined, *Havana* by Jana Bokova, shares the passion and nostalgic feelings of those who emigrated and of all those who experienced the Soviet project, whatever their nationalities.

### **Bokova's *Havana*: A Portrait of the Nation as a 'Lost City'**

Nation, national identity and nationalism are frequent topics in motion pictures. The significance of the city in the shaping of a nation has been recognised by many filmmakers. Films such as Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1927), or Roberto Rossellini's *Roma, città aperta* (Rome, Open City, 1946) or Luis Buñel's *Los olvidados* (The Young and the Damned, 1950), to give but three examples, demonstrate that the city has always played a fundamental role in cinematic discourse.<sup>54</sup> Jana Bokova is an expert on documenting urban

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<sup>53</sup> See Ilene S. Goldman, 'Documentaries about Jewish Renewal in Contemporary Cuba: Hope or Hype?', *Latin American Research Review*, 32.3 (1997), pp. 258–68.

<sup>54</sup> On this topic, see *Cinema & Nation*, edited by Mette Hjort and Scott MacKenzie (London: Routledge, 2002), which analyses the ways in which nation and cinema are connected, and how film production is shaped by ideas of the nation, national identity and nationalism, and vice versa.

life, as suggested by the number of films concerning city life directed by her, such as *Dallas: The Big Store* (1981), *Tales From Barcelona* (1989), *Flamenco - un voyage andalou* (1991), *Tango salón* (2004), *Bye Bye Shanghai* (2008), among many others.<sup>55</sup> Bokova's interest in Cuba's capital city was stimulated as a result of her close relationship with the late author Guillermo Cabrera Infante, who wrote a great deal about Havana. This city was the natural setting for Cabrera Infante's literary work; once separated from it he was powerless, and his imagination knew no rest. He once wrote: 'La Habana hace rato que ha dejado de existir como ciudad real. Para mí, es una ciudad completamente literaria. Es una ciudad que reconstruyo cada vez que escribo, pero la reconstruyo con palabras, no con ladrillos y cemento. Para mí lo que se llama La Habana real no tiene ninguna consistencia. No tiene, por tanto, ninguna existencia.'<sup>56</sup> It was in search of this elusive and unreal city that Jana Bokova travelled to the island.

Bokova's *Havana* opens with fragments of a period documentary featuring the triumphant arrival of Fidel Castro and his *barbudos* in Cuba's capital city, capturing a poetic evocation of those days of jubilant high spirits. Next, the image jumps to 1989. The spectator walks the streets of Old Havana, captured via the lens of a hand-held camera. Certainly, an obligatory part of the itinerary of any visitor to the Cuban capital is the oldest part of the city; as the city historian Eusebio Leal once said: 'Old Havana lives its tradition and its legends, a very particular, intimate atmosphere that makes it unforgettable'.<sup>57</sup> The old

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<sup>55</sup> See the entry for Jana Bokova at <http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0092607/>; the Internet Movie Database (IMDV).

<sup>56</sup> Cited in Marien Prieto, 'La Habana para un infante difunto. Para una relectura del espacio ciudadano', in *Revista de la Biblioteca Nacional José Martí*, special edition for Roberto Fernández Retamar's 70th birthday, 91.1-2 (January-June 2000), p. 133.

<sup>57</sup> Cited in Carmen R. Alfonso Hernandez, *Havana: the Magic of my City* (La Habana: Pablo de la Torre Publishers, 1999), p. 20. On the history of the Cuban capital city, see Julio Le Riverend Brusone, *La Habana:*

buildings are in a decrepit state, some are supported only by wooden stakes, braced precariously against the pot-holed pavements. The contrast, when compared with the opening images of joy and hope, shocks the viewer. There is no music, no sound other than that produced by the people. No commentary explains what has happened; it is a sequence that makes visual the reasons why the adjective ‘crumbling’ is so often used in relation to Havana. In this way, Bokova provides an impressionistic view of a specific urban place, the Cuban *solar*, as an authentic *city symphony* film.<sup>58</sup>

With the cameraman, we ‘walk’ up a few stairs, gaining access to those private places called home. The scene is one of total decay, with pools of rotten water lying about the building. Such images recall those of *Soy Cuba*, in particular the sequence in Part I with the Afro-Cuban girl, when she takes a tourist to her decrepit home. In 1989, similar images are presented after thirty years of Revolution. It is a sequence that seems to confirm the old saying ‘the more things change, the more they stay the same’. The shocking images are used to question how and why these beautiful townhouses and palaces of Cuba’s capital city are crumbling away. After all, what was the Cuban Revolution about? According to Bokova, the Revolution has failed to change the face of Cuban poverty. The social situation of Afro-Cuban people has remained the same: most are poor and frustrated, living in dilapidated housing that has not improved during the years of the Revolution.

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*Espacio y vida* (Madrid: Editorial MAPFRE, c1992); see also a special edition of *Revista Universidad de la Habana* no. 222 (1984) entitled ‘La Habana: 465 aniversario’.

<sup>58</sup> The ‘City Symphony’ film was developed as a sub-genre of documentary film. These are often abstract, experimental films loosely structured around the theme of the day in the life of a city. Alberto Cavalcanti’s *Rien que les heures* (Only the Hours, 1926) was the first of the ‘City Symphony’ films made in Europe during the 1920s and preceded the better known Walter Ruttmann’s *Berlin: Die Sinfonie der Großstadt* (Berlin: Symphony of a Great City, 1927). Another example is Dziga Vertov’s film *Chelovek s kinoapparatom* (Man with a Movie Camera, 1929). See Patricia Aufderheide, *Documentary Film: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press US, 2007), pp. 14–15; and Kristin Thompson and David Bordwell, *Film Art: An Introduction* (New York; London: McGraw-Hill, 2001), p. 378.

However, there are those who would criticise Bokova's film because of its suspiciously political manipulation and the simplification of a complex social phenomenon. So the question arises: is this film biased? Among the books published on Cuban capital city, an interesting and insightful academic study is Antoni Kapcia's *Havana: The Making of Cuban culture*. Kapcia reminds us of the fact that the architecture of Old Havana began its descent into decay at the end of the nineteenth century recognising the city as a real cultural problem between 1934 and 1958.<sup>59</sup> Its wealthy inhabitants showed a preference for modern housing and left Old Havana for the new suburbs (Vedado, Miramar and Playa), while the poor moved in to take their place. The mansions of Old Havana became blocks of flats and were subdivided to accommodate people coming from the countryside. Often an extra mezzanine floor would be hastily erected, which would become so hot that it would be referred to as the 'barbacoa' (the 'barbecue'). Old Havana, one of the most beautiful city neighbourhoods in the world, became a Unesco World Heritage Site in 1982. This offered a much needed boost to the Office of the Historian of the City of Havana, instituted in 1938 under the direction of Emilio Roig de Leusenring, which sought to safeguard monuments and historic sites from destruction. Later, with the Revolution, a proper social project was put in place. This is the institution that has taken on the task of rescuing Havana from its mortal decay.<sup>60</sup>

After 1959, provincial immigration to Havana from the provinces increased. Paradoxically, although the Cuban Revolution was able to send thousands of troops and doctors to Africa,

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<sup>59</sup> Antoni Kapcia, *Havana: The Making of Cuban Culture* (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 2005), pp. 88-91.

<sup>60</sup> The author of this thesis worked on two major projects directed by the current director Eusebio Leal in the Oficina del Historiador de la Ciudad de Habana (Office of the Historian of Havana City), first as a Librarian for the Biblioteca Alfonso Reyes at Casa Benito Juarez and later for the Biblioteca Cubano-Americana at the Palacio de los Capitanes Generales. Concerning the work developed by the office of the Historian of Havana City, see Luis Alberto García (Jr)'s documentary *Leal al tiempo* (2008) and Cuban television series *Andar la Habana* by Eusebio Leal Spengler, director of the restoration program of Old Havana and its historical center, UNESCO World Heritage Site.



to construct a modern airport in Grenada, and to build schools in Jamaica, it was incapable of keeping up the work of conservation and renovation needed in Havana. The ambitious and pretentious project of Soviet urbanisation in large and poor areas in the countryside became a higher priority and the maintenance of the capital city was largely forgotten. Certainly, traditional *barrios marginales* such as Las Yaguas and La Cueva del Humo were disappearing and many of their residents were housed in ugly new Soviet-style complexes in the East of the city (Alamar and the so-called Siberia). Havana was in the process moving 'eastwards'. The political transformation of Cuban urban space outgrew its eclectic architecture, which by the 1980s looked strangely confused. By ignoring this historical complexity, Bokova decided simply to condemn rather than create a cinematic dialogue. In this respect, Bokova echoes the perspective of the Miami right-wing extremist groups. In this sense, *Havana* is a political film.

Jana Bokova is Czech by origin, having been brought up in Prague; Bokova's family has lived in France, the United States and Britain since the events of 1968. Bokova has a very personal interest and a desire to capture in motion pictures the body and soul of a nation deeply affected by socialism. In her view, 'it is impossible to appreciate what it is like if you were born in a free country'.<sup>61</sup> *Havana* is, thus, a film which tells us an attractive story but fails to balance the filmmaker's ideological convictions and political position with objective filmmaking and fair judgement. As a result, Bokova's documentary looks more like a piece of Socialist Realism in reverse. The viewer also feels manipulated by the kind of rhetorical questions Bokova asks in the film: 'Are you happy with the Revolution?' One of the interviewees, an old Afro-Cuban woman,

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<sup>61</sup> Cited in Mark Sanderson, 'Havana', *Time Out*, 1025 (April 1990), p. 51.

reacts to the film-maker's intention and almost screams at her: 'Yo soy muy feliz con la Revolución. Yo siempre digo Dios en el cielo y Fidel en la tierra.'

Havana's carnival is also present in Bokova's documentary. In one sequence, we hear the voice of Fidel Castro giving one of his interminable speeches. Meanwhile, people are gathering, preparing and patiently waiting for the carnival to start. When *el Comandante* finishes his address to the nation with the historical ending 'Patria o Muerte Venceremos,' the carnival begins. We see the overpowering passion of the dancers, men and women, Afro-Cubans and white people alike, 'todos mezclados', the colourful flamboyance of their costumes, the erotic dance of half-naked bodies; all these images seem to be totally in opposition to the words of law and order enunciated just minutes before by the leader of the Revolution. The carnival becomes in Bokova's film an annual exercise of exorcism from religious syncretism, ideology and official discourse. In another sequence, we observe people dancing 'guaguanco', an early dance accompanied by the distinctive sound of African drums and two stick claves, with its sensual movements and explicit eroticism in 'el solar'. Along with the music we hear the words of the very popular *Son 16* of Nicolás Guillén:

Estamos juntos desde muy lejos,  
jóvenes, viejos,  
negros y blancos, todo mezclado;  
uno mandando y otro mandado,  
todo mezclado;

'Todo mezclado' (All mixed as one) is the key concept of this sequence and of the film as a whole: it explains that Havana is a synthesis of the whole nation, the capital of a transcultured world. 'Todo mezclado' illustrates the essence of Cuban national identity, where traditional and contemporary songs and music serve to exemplify social memory. In

the sequence dedicated to the *jinetera* (the young female prostitute) and the survival strategies pursued by the urban population during the 'special period', looking for dollars, as living standards have slumped, a hit song is played by the *salsa* group 'Los Van Van', entitled 'Se acabó el querer' (Love has finished), which reflects both the young woman's mood and the general atmosphere portrayed in the film. This is not film music understood in the traditional sense; music is the main character of the documentary and of the 'special period' in Cuban history. Like Vladimir Čech in 1961, Bokova's audiovisual images seem to ask the same question: for whom does Havana dance? This documentary suggests that the Cuban capital city 'dances' with the sadness of one who has lost its soul, sold to the best buyer, in a 'fixed' auction; all this is represented in *la jinetera*. According to Bokova's film, *Havana* also dances for foreign tourists and for their dollars.

Bokova understands that in order to comprehend that real meaning of what was 'lost', it was imperative to talk about 'little Havana', the 'other' Havana, a Cuban city 'invented' in Florida by those who had left the island. The film-maker interviews writers in exile, who express their dislike of Miami city. In the film, one of them says: 'It looks like a desert; you do not see a human being walking. There is a sense of desolation.' The last testimony in *Havana* comes from Reinaldo Arenas, who displays a wonderful sense of humour. The writer describes his own situation as 'stateless', and explains that legally he does not exist. According to Arenas, he possesses all the qualities to ensure that he will never be published: he is homosexual, anti-religious and anti-Castro, which meant he lived on the fringes of Cuban society. The writer recalls the events of April 1980, when thousands of Cubans stormed the Peruvian embassy in Havana seeking political asylum. In response to this, anyone who desired to leave the country was allowed to do so through the port of

Mariel. According to the leader of the Revolution: ‘construir el socialismo es una obra absolutamente voluntaria’ (1 April 1980).<sup>62</sup> Through the Mariel boatlift, thousands of Cubans migrated to the United States.

In Bokova’s *Havana*, Arenas also complains about his new existence in the USA. He never managed to live in Miami city, describing it as a ‘horrible’ place; instead, he prefers Miami Beach for its constant sense of danger. His spontaneity and sense of the ‘nonsense’ of the ‘American dream’ is hilarious. In this sequence, Bokova reveals important details from both Reinaldo Arenas’s own and Cuba’s intellectual life. His personal testimony is one of the most important ‘portraits’ of *Havana* as a historical document. From Arenas himself, we learn about his life and social background as a poor peasant, born and raised in the country, and educated by the Revolution in Havana. The poet is shown to be both a rebel and a courageous man, qualities which are also present in his memoirs, *Antes que anochezca*. Key features of Reinaldo Arenas’s nature were omitted in the film of the book directed by Julian Schnabel’s *Before Night Falls* (2000). Many sequences of the feature film are lifted directly from Bokova’s documentary. From the opening sequences of the film until Arenas’s final moments, Schnabel’s film, a winner at the Venice International Film Festival and nominated for an Oscar, is a masterpiece of plagiarism, ‘stealing’ much from Bokova’s documentary. However, the feature film did not reflect the true Reinaldo as Bokova did. Cabrera Infante described Arenas as follows: ‘Tres pasiones rigieron la vida y muerte de Reinaldo Arenas: la literatura no como juego sino como fuego que consume, el sexo pasivo y la política activa. De las tres, la pasión dominante era, es evidente, el sexo. No sólo en su vida sino en su obra. Fue el cronista de un país regido no por Fidel Castro, ya

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<sup>62</sup> See *Revolución cubana: 45 grandes momentos*, pp. 243–51.

impotente, sino por el sexo.’<sup>63</sup> This precise description was given by the man, who acted as Schnabel’s advisor for the film. Paradoxically, ‘Cain’ opted to reduce the poet’s memoirs into a political pamphlet, denying that: ‘En la novela de la vida de Reinaldo Arenas no hay más que penes y penas.’<sup>64</sup>

The novel is very ‘visual’, a fact that would have made the literary story very easy to transfer into film language. While *Before Night Falls* is a political manifesto *Antes que anochezca* is a sexual testimony. *Before Night Falls* is, thus, not strictly speaking a film adaptation of the novel *Antes que anochezca*. The film and the book speak different languages, and tell very different stories. Schnabel does not take the trouble to translate the key literary ideas into audio-visual images. The book is written in Cuban-Spanish, but the film ‘speaks’ Hollywood’s language. The casting of the film (Sean Penn, Johnny Depp and Oliver Martinez) shows that Schnabel is the kind of film-maker who is deeply concerned about the demands of the ‘star system’ and the box office. Schnabel was not interested in the story of the book, which is located in Cuba and told by Cubans. The director did not even select Cuban actors for the main roles; Cubans were cast as minor characters and were routinely relegated to the background in group sequences. The film suffered a major production problem: the choice of location. Paradoxically, for a story that is located in Cuba and in its capital city, they both were out of the picture. What could possibly double for them? Nowhere; once again, Cabrera Infante’s conceptualisation of the Cuban nation in Havana as ‘the lost city’ is evident. Even the ‘Arenas’ of the film, the role played by Javier Bardem, speaks not in Cuban Spanish but in English with an obviously European Spanish accent. This is a grave mutilation of the original story, lacking all the subtle

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<sup>63</sup> See ‘Arenas or destruction by sex’, cited Guillermo Cabrera Infante, *Vidas para leerlas*, p. 181.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, p.187.

gestures that in combination with the right voice could have portrayed the real harmony of the Cuban that was Reinaldo Arenas. *Before Night Falls* provides another example of a good documentary feature film because of the use of archival footage that is well integrated into the fictional narrative. It is also a good commercial product, emerging even when historical facts were ignored in order to allow the film-maker to express his personal viewpoint. The film confirms the adage that truth in cinema is certainly unreal.

Bokova's *Havana* is about Cuban intellectual life, which is seen within the realm of a particular collective memory. The film is not just about Havana as a modern city and its memory, shared, passed on and also constructed by Bokova. It is also, more importantly, a condemnation of the society invented by a one party Marxist-Leninist system. It can be argued that Bokova's Cuban documentary was also a response to her Czech family background; her education in exile in the West and her deeply felt memories of the Soviet experience. In this sense, *Havana* is a testimony to two historical and universal characters: the émigré and the Soviet experience as a collective memory. Thus, the very private experience of *melancholia* of the poet Arenas, the writer Cabrera Infante and the film-maker Bokova is shown also to be an integrated experience, despite the very different reasons for their existence as émigrés.

*Havana* is historically important because it provides an audiovisual record of a unique historical moment, produced by ordinary people, intellectuals and artists and by their city itself. *Havana* confirms that, together with the Spanish guitar, African rhythms and the sound of drums are at the core of Cuban music. Bokova brilliantly expresses the nation's literary identity through the works of Virgilio Piñera, Lezama Lima, Alejo Carpentier,

Nicolás Guillén, Reinaldo Arenas and Guillermo Cabrera Infante, whose words support the narrative of the film, thereby becoming the oral literature of the urban.<sup>65</sup> The greatest success of Bokova's documentary is the selection and combination of literary, musical and visual fragments. Many artists — from poets, writers and singers, to painters and artists of the moving image — have recorded the beauty and conflicts of Havana, its inhabitants and its architecture. Bokova introduces the spectator to the diverse face of the *habanero*: dissident artists, traditional musicians, *la jinetera* (the prostitute), those who were rich before the Revolution and despite everything stayed in the city, the poet Dulce María Loynaz, a major figure of Cuban poetry and winner of the Cervantes prize, Pablo Armando Fernández, a poet of the Revolution and a rural immigrant, among many others. Together they make a perfect harmony, and the result is a beautifully illustrated documentary which suggests how film art, politics, music, architecture, dance and literature can come together to represent the capital city of *cubanía*.

*Havana: A Portrait of the Nation as a 'Lost City'* raises two main issues: first, Bokova's orientation for the film comes via Guillermo Cabrera Infante. It is also important to point out that the transculturalism of James Joyce, author of *Ulysses*, shaped Cabrera Infante's concepts of the city and the nation. As is known from other accounts, Joyce's fictional ideas were one of Cabrera Infante's persistent references, especially Joyce's conceptualisation of urban geography, in the way that the city summarises the nation as a concept.<sup>66</sup> The structure of *Havana*, indeed, brings to mind *Dubliners*, a collection of portraits,

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<sup>65</sup> On Havana in literary works, see Claudia Lightfoot, *Havana: A Cultural and Literary Companion* (Oxford: Signal Books, 2002).

<sup>66</sup> See Michael Wood, 'Cabrera Infante: Unruly Pupil', in *Transcultural Joyce*, edited by Karen R. Lawrence (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 49–62.

written as stories dealing with the personal and collective experiences in the everyday lives of a capital city's residents. Like Joyce, who intended to eliminate the moralising attitude that had dominated literary fiction previously, Bokova, in her documentary, set out to destroy the mystical, idealised and romantic image of the Cuban Revolution.

The documentary confirms that the centrepiece of Cuban intellectual life is its capital city. For Bokova, in the days of socialism Havana is a lost city like Pompeii, Babylon or Troy. Her perception of it is a further example of the influence of Cabrera Infante's ideological presence. Bokova delves into the secrets of a lost city in the same way the spectator might view the classical Athens of Socrates, the Cuzco of the Incas or the Florence of the Medici. In *Havana*, the filmmaker portrays the vanished glories of the past, the intellect, the hopes and disillusion of the people who created the unreal and vibrant Cuban capital city. In *Havana*, Bokova uses three main types of source: literary episodes, individual/group interviews and visual records. Her film suggests that *cubanía* is made up of many traditional and new identities, explicit and implicit, such as the erotic/exotic, the counterpoint of tobacco and sugar, the writer and the Cuban variant of Spanish, the carnival, the dissident, *el mar*, the vernacular, *el solar*, the rebel, the exile and the opportunist, the Afro-Cuban and the Cadillac, *la santería*, the Revolution and Soviet ideology.

*Havana* presents the counterpoint of two concepts: hope and disillusion, past and present, home and abroad, fiction and everyday life, nation and city. For the first time, a documentary acknowledged the distressing decay of the city's historical buildings, a fact that had been forgotten or ignored by ICAIC film-makers because they were complicit in the political process. *Havana* was produced in Britain, yet many members of the ICAIC's technical team worked on the film: José Riera and Ramón Suárez on camera (colour); and



José Borrás and Henri López on sound, among others. It was shown on BBC2's Arena arts series and won the Special Jury Prize in San Francisco's Golden Gate Festival. *Havana* was never released in the Cuban network of cinemas or on Cuban national television, but it circulated widely through pirate copies in the capital city and is very well known in intellectual circles.<sup>67</sup> If we look at ICAIC film productions, films such as Gutiérrez Alea's *Fresa y Chocolate* (Strawberry and Chocolate, 1991), Enrique Álvarez's *La ola* (The Wave, 1995); Arturo Sotelo's *Amor vertical* (1997), or Fernando Pérez's films *Madagascar* (1994), *La vida es silbar* (Life Is to Whistle, 1998) and *Suite Habana* (Suite Havana, 2003) somehow these films reproduce both the notion of 'letting the city speak for itself' and the same melancholia of Bokova's *Havana*. It is all the more remarkable, then, that many of the slums portrayed in Bokova's documentary are slowly being returned to their original beauty, a fact reflected in the ICAIC's new film productions. If the aim of ICAIC films is to establish a dialogue, the heart of *Havana* is undoubtedly to condemn and to isolate the Cuban Revolution, portraying the whole nation as a city that exists nowhere but in memories. One of the very few reviews of the film suggested that 'Film-maker Jana Bokova has crafted a sharp view of the Cuban capital in *Havana*, a clearly biased anti-Castro documentary.'<sup>68</sup> In this sense, the film might have been called *Havana versus El Comandante*, since Bokova's approach seems to be certainly that of a fervent anti-communist, and her devotion to that cause leads us to question her credibility as an objective observer. Undoubtedly, Bokova's *Havana* and the city have a shocking beauty, vitality and decadence, reflected in the variety of testimonies and visions of artists, intellectuals and ordinary people. Bokova's documentary portrays a key period in Cuban

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<sup>67</sup> See Eulalia Douglas, *La tienda negra*, p. 208.

<sup>68</sup> Cited in Devo, 'Havana (British-Docu) in *Variety* (3 December 1990), p. 78.

history: the end of the Soviet illusion in the imagined *Havana* of Guillermo Cabrera Infante (Caín), the Cuban capital city, which was to him: ‘a lost love, the lost city’.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Quoted from a press statement released by Andy García upon news of the passing of Guillermo Cabrera Infante. Andy García’s film, *The Lost City* (2006), which he also produced and directed, is based in part on G. Cabrera Infante’s novel *Tres tristes tigres* (Three Trapped Tigers).

## Conclusion

What was it that the distant audiovisual culture, film theories and practices of the Soviet-bloc offered Cubans? They contained all the elements for the conceptualisation of the cinematic discourse of the Revolution, so well represented by the ICAIC and its socialist films of commitment in order 'to de-colonize' the moving image. According to Julio García Espinosa, 'the disappearance of the Soviet Union and the fall of the Berlin Wall put a stop to this great cinematographic movement whose main aim was to close down once and for all the colonial cycle that we have suffered for more than five hundred years'.<sup>1</sup> Certainly, for the ICAIC, Soviet-bloc cinemas were reliable compasses that had shown them the way to tie up the loose ends of colonialism. They believed in the social mission of film art. Thus, the cinematic discourse of the Cuban Revolution was seen to be integrated in the international system of socialism as the decisive force in the ground-breaking transformation of the world. The Cuban moving image, in the period between 1961 and 1991, can only be fully understood if we take into consideration the audiovisual culture of the 'other' Europe. Was the Cuban moving image another case of acculturation (Sovietisation)? The present thesis argues that it was a process of give and take because it was a complex interaction of benefits and losses for both sides. Definitely, it was a case in which cinematic discourses were pursuing compatible aims because they believed in Marxism-Leninism as the extension of Marxism through Lenin's ideas. Central to the cinematic discourse of the Revolution was a move to reconcile Marxism-Leninism with

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<sup>1</sup> Julio García Espinosa, 'Cine cubano: un largo camino hacia la luz', lecture delivered at University College London on 16 February 2005. It is published in *When was Latin America Modern?*, edited by Nicola Miller and Stephen Hart (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 171.

Cuban nationalism. The fusion was considered to be the ideology of the cinematic discourse and a film production.

Who influenced whom in Soviet-Cuban cinematic relations? ‘Lo exacto es hablar de continuidad’ was Pastor Vega’s direct answer to this question. Vega explained that it is accurate to speak of continuity in order to fully understand the significance and the magnitude of the contribution of the cinemas of ‘the other’ Europe. I believe that Vega is right because he was referring to those film-makers who shared the same ideology that came with the Soviets. I do not think the aims that ICAIC established in 1959 were changed. After the declaration of the socialist character of the Revolution, the objectives were extended to reflect that change in ideology, which sometimes enriched, sometimes limited the aspirations. One might say that the ICAIC undertook the task of interpretation to enable the Cuban people to understand Soviet discourse, using a language and a terminology that had been completely unfamiliar until that moment, in an attempt to resolve all the conflicts of social inequality. The term interpretation here refers to the knowledge that Cuban film-makers and intellectuals acquired about the Soviet experiment, in order to decide on its suitability for the revolutionary context. Interpretation describes what the ICAIC did in order to make the Soviet example relevant for the Cuban people. This was knowledge that had to be disseminated quickly and then put into practice. The transmission of such new ideas was facilitated by the new social order that was in place, but effective interpretation required that the ICAIC understood both the local political and artistic language and that being used by ‘the other’. This particular process of cultural change in Cuban history can be defined by the counterpoint between form and content, cinema and Soviet ideology, which released a great deal of intellectual and artistic energy. The resulting fusion of film languages brought about a distinct cinematic discourse, which is

neither Italian Neo-realism, nor Soviet nor even Latin American in its pure sense; it is the moving image, the socialist cinematic discourse of the Cuban Revolution. The ICAIC sought to set up a film industry in a small and poor country. Naturally, the objective is one thing and the experience itself was, at times, another. Artists are always going to face practical problems in completing their works. We have seen that, since 1959, the ICAIC welcomed left-wing, progressive film-makers, those who wanted to get involved in the mission of shaping the moving image and the cinematic discourse of the Revolution. In order to achieve this, the ICAIC sought financial, technical support in Japan, France, Mexico, everywhere. Many projects were born as a result of these endeavours. The reality was that the only support came from the Soviet side, and it was that support that finally allowed the film production of the Cuban Revolution to flourish. The significance of Soviet and East European cinemas for the Cuban moving image has been analysed through four main subjects: film theory and criticism, film administration and industry development, the spectator, the makers of the moving image and the result of their work (films, videos, television practices, audiovisual culture).

### **Film Theory and Criticism**

In order to understand how great this influence was, I had to take into account *Cuban film theory and criticism* from its inception. Here I mean mostly the film essays that are distinguished by their different approaches to the moving image. Thus, I defined four main groups of film essay writers: *the reviewer*, *the critic*, *the scholar/historian* and *the creator* of the moving image himself. They all contributed towards the way in which Soviet-bloc film practices and theories were understood in Cuba. The act of writing about Soviet-bloc

cinemas involved the ‘translation’ of its language and its ideology, the identification of those elements valuable for the Cuban moving image and cinematic discourse’s own needs.

In the chapter on the pre-Revolutionary phase in the present study, we observed that the influence began in a highly critical and defining period of Cuban history, a time in which artists and intellectuals were seeking an alternative way to establish a national film production. *KinoCuban* has demonstrated that, even before the declaration of the socialist character of the Revolution in 1961, Soviet cinema was progressively influencing the orientation of a nascent Cuban film criticism and film theory in general. The influence of the cinematic discourse of ‘the other’ Europe started with the arrival of the news about the Russian Revolution, which also brought in waves of the silent Soviet cinema. The need for reliable information about what was happening in that distant country was to be completed through the showing of Soviet films. That cinema was known in Havana almost exclusively through journalism. An analysis of early Soviet attempts to influence Cuban intellectual life was demonstrated in the fact that the showing of Soviet films positively influenced Cuban film criticism, writing of articles and publications, as well as cultural activities. In this sense, Mella’s and Carpentier’s film reviews are testimonies of great importance. I have pointed to the significant role played by the film reviewers and critics at that time by introducing, translating and decoding the Soviet cinematic discourse for the Cuban film enthusiast and cinemagoers, in order to define cinema as a revolutionary art form, which reflects and transforms society. Another point to note is that after the showing of Eisenstein’s film *Potemkin*, as it was recognised in Cuba, cinema was no longer synonymous with spectacle; rather, it became a vital element of the cultural debate on the island and an expression of political confrontation.

*El cine de Octubre* was considered politically subversive and was initially banned from showing in Cuba. As a result, new organisations, film clubs, educational and cultural projects were supported and/or created by Cuban Communists to disseminate the Soviet cultural project. Among them, one should mention *La Sociedad Cubano-Soviética de Relaciones Culturales*, which was endorsed by a non-Marxist intellectual, Fernando Ortiz. We learnt that at that time there were difficulties experienced in the exhibition and distribution of Soviet films, but on the whole it was possible to see them, to write and to publish articles about them.

I have also pointed out that in the several books about the Cuban moving image, both in Cuba and abroad, the pioneering contribution to film criticism made by women has only a minimal presence or is omitted from the authors' discussion. Without doubt, Mirta Aguirre's film reviews published in the 1940s and her work with the amateur film group of the cultural society *Nuestro Tiempo* are an essential reference point in this process. Aguirre's work is important in this regard since it provides a great deal of insight into the way in which the 'Nuestro Tiempo' cultural society functioned; of particular interest is the fact that its membership included the intellectuals and film-makers who would create the ICAIC as well as the fact that it had strong links with the communists, members of the Partido Socialista Popular (PSP) in Cuba. An analysis of Mirta Aguirre's film reviews has shown that early Soviet cinema helped Cuban intellectuals and, in particular, left-wing groups to reaffirm the category of film art as a relevant, provocative, transgressive art form. The 'realism' of Soviet cinema made it a compulsory referential source for Cubans who were interested in film as the art of the future. At that time, film critics were seen as crucial to a film's box office success and critics do wield a real influence on audiences.

Likewise *KinoCuban* refers to those scholars and historians who drew theoretical cinematic conclusions, evaluating Soviet-bloc audiovisual cultures, using this as a stimulus, as a point of departure for their own theoretical conceptualisations. This is the case of Manuel Valdés Rodríguez, who is recognised as the ‘father’ of film criticism in Cuba and a pioneer of film studies in the Americas. Valdés Rodríguez introduced film studies programmes as part of the Havana University curriculum and was inspired by Eisenstein’s teaching methods at the Moscow film school VGIK. Many of the best known names from the ICAIC and the cultural mentors of the Cuban Revolution graduated from Valdés Rodríguez’s film courses and workshops, among them those who were members of *Nuestro Tiempo*, such as Alfredo Guevara, Rodríguez Alemán, Titón, García Espinosa and Santiago Álvarez. Another important reference with regard to Valdés Rodríguez which was taken into consideration was the creation of a film archive at Havana University. The first film copy acquired for this centre was Eisenstein’s *Aleksandr Nevskii*. The archive also contained copies of many classics of Soviet and East European cinemas.

### **Film Administration and Industry Development**

The institutional analysis explains the way that a film institution works in a socialist system under the supervision of the Communist Party. The help from the countries of the Soviet-bloc was vital in providing technology, in building the industrial base for Cuban film production and its cinematic discourse, in setting up mechanisms for distribution and training graphic designers, film-makers, technicians. Great examples are the experience of the *Cine móvil* and the fact that Cuban film-makers, artists and technical staff went to



Moscow, to Prague for their studies, among them Octavio Cortázar and the composer Carlos Fariñas.

All facets of film, television, video and the moving image were nationalised after the Revolution under the close watch of the Communist Party. There were significant advantages and disadvantages for the moving image in Cuba as a state-supported industry. Its production was not as dependent on the box office as it has been traditionally in the West. The moving image became the centre of major debates throughout Cuba. It brought together intellectuals, film-makers, cinematographers and the general public and put them in a position to create a national and distinctive moving image. In the first years, veteran international directors and artists were often invited from all over the world, in particular from the countries of the Soviet-bloc, to teach and to direct film productions, financing projects which were considered politically and socially beneficial for the project of the Cuban Revolution. The moving image was considered to be fulfilling a social-educational mission. This foreseen promise with respect to the development of the moving image was confronted with serious political and economic restrictions and dangers. Politically, the dangers are very obvious to everyone. The moving image was shaped as the ruling Communist Party wanted it to represent reality. Thus, cinema, television and video were bound by the political party visions of how life had been or should be. Centralised decision-making in reality was a process whereby the decision was made by one person.

The ICAIC was a creation of the political leadership. The '*P.M.* affair' in 1961 shows the confrontation between two different cinematic options in two contexts: the artistic and political sphere. The '*P.M.* affair' also helped to illustrate how the elite cultural hegemony

of the Cuban Revolution was established. From that moment, cinema, the arts and all intellectual life became essentially political. In this sense, the '*P.M.* affair' marked the end of an era. It demonstrates the political demands imposed on Cuban intellectuals by the socialist state. Each had a role to play, assigned by the cultural mentors of the Revolution. Ever since *P.M.*, there have been discussions and debates within the different groups of intellectuals about 'the role' of the artist that have continued to the present day. I have described how after the '*P.M.* affair', the ICAIC, as the cinematic voice of the Revolution, itself self-appointed elite, became intrinsically authoritarian and highly centralised. Titón recognised this fact after the '*P.M.* affair', suggesting the adoption of '*zespoly filmowe*', the Polish model of film units, which helped to minimise the centralisation of decisions within ICAIC. The mode of production of the Hollywood studio system and the big film studios of the Soviet Union or India standardized the way films were produced throughout the world; that hegemony was openly challenged by the experience from Poland in the 1950s, when it produced many films that were effective using small budgets. That success encouraged the ICAIC to embrace the Polish '*zespoly filmowe*'. The choice can be explained by the limited availability of resources to film-makers. It is this reality that explains the constant search for alternative modes of production first formulated in the 1960s and later reorganised in the 1980s under the '*grupos de creación*'. Certainly, the ICAIC film administration was set up following the socialist model, which is ideologically centralised and controlled by the Communist Party. Therefore, the everyday life of the Cuban film-maker was political and lacking in flexibility because all-important decisions from management to personal, to planning and production targets were and still are dependent upon the central administration. Censorship in the Cuban film industry works in a similar way to that used previously in the Soviet-bloc countries. We observed that the

'P.M. affair' and the Padilla case reflect the existence of a particular style of censorship in Cuba in the 1970s and 1980s, which still to some extent obtains nowadays. To use Fidel Castro's words: 'dentro de la Revolución todo; contra la revolución, nada' (within the Revolution, everything, against the Revolution nothing).

### **Film Production**

Another important feature of a socialist film mode of production adopted from 1961 is its *thematic planning*. It was introduced for rational economic reasons and acted as another means of regulation; in order to help control the content and quality of film production. The *thematic planning* generated a series of particular themes that had to be covered, which helped to designate the particular quantity of films that were to be made in a given year. Another trait of socialist film is that it does not follow but leads its audience. Films were not produced in order to satisfy an already established public taste but rather they tried to change it. ICAIC's film production during the period 1961–91, as in the countries of the Soviet-bloc, is essentially political because it was a direct result of a particular political moment, following political directives. For example, 1961 was 'Año de la Educación'; in that year a good number of films on the literacy campaign were produced. In the late 1970s and the 1980s films were about heroic actions or productive activities without much formal innovation or aesthetic elaboration. The treatment of history and the reconstruction of the past as core elements of the socialist cinematic discourse had penetrated deeply into Cuban filmmakers. It was reflected in the number of historical and commemorative films produced such as *La sexta parte del mundo*. Another key theme of the period was the re-evaluation of the situation of women in socialist society. Pastor Vega's film *Retrato de Teresa* is the best example of the Cuban contribution to the socialist cinematic debate on the topic. The

'virtues' of the Cuban moving image of the period are not to be found in experimental or artistic effectiveness but in the communication of ideological messages dictated by political goals, which is generally seen as a defining feature of Soviet cinematic discourse.

During the Gorbachev period, and in relation to the film industries of the countries of the Soviet-bloc, the ICAIC played a highly diplomatic role, seeking out sympathetic topics for collaboration in a very confused, almost unfriendly environment. The last two co-productions were feature films; one with the Soviet Union about a Russian episode in the life of a Cuban chess personality, the second film, co-produced with Hungary, was based on Daniel Defoe's first novel. We have seen that ICAIC did not play its glasnost card in political terms, but rather in terms of its desire to return to the vernacular and address film production from a 'nationalist' point of view. Glasnost was understood as an opportunity to return to the original discourse of nationalism. In terms of cinematic plots, the themes of the Revolution were still popular but somehow felt to be 'old-fashioned' by this point in time. The 'rectification' process in cinema was a return to the tradition of nineteenth-century Cuban chroniclers, which expressed the individual concerns of the Caribbean islander. Film-makers began to portray what was customarily recognised as Cuban, which had often been underplayed in earlier film productions. The use of Cuban traditional music in films is a great indicator of this fact. Its best example can be found in Pineda Barnet's *La bella del Alhambra*.

The membership of UNEAC is another means of organisation within ICAIC as a socialist film institute. Another part of this was the film education and training of its members. We know about the arrival of a great number of film specialists from the countries of the Soviet-bloc, who helped to create key departments within ICAIC, offering essential

technical and financial support in the acquisition of film materials and developing colour film prints. Soviet and East European film-makers, technicians and artists came to work with Cubans in order to assist in the development of key technical departments in ICAIC: from film poster design to animation. The ICAIC film poster is a unique material for the scholar or student in modern art, the history of graphic arts or film art; it provides great testimony to two facts: the widespread dissemination of the film production of the Soviet-bloc countries in Cuba since 1959, and the inspiration that those films provoked in Cuban graphic artists, who created a new kind of design different in content and in form. Key departments in ICAIC were created thanks to the financial, material and technical help and support of the film industries of the Soviet-bloc. Thus, initially, ICAIC colour film production was developed in Czechoslovakia.

### **Film Distribution**

In the 1960s, the ICAIC developed the so-called 'film-week' dedicated to the cinemas of the Soviet-bloc; that experience was extended to the cinematography of other countries. In the same way, the ICAIC developed Cuban film weeks abroad. Another important form of film distribution was the participation of Cuban films and film-makers in international film festivals not only in the countries of the Soviet-bloc but also in the West and in countries of the Third World. ICAIC feature film productions received their first awards in the film festivals of the former Soviet-bloc such as Moscow and Karlove Vary in their mission to support, develop and promote the art forms of the moving image in Third World countries, by identifying and rewarding excellence and inspiring practitioners film works, which also reflected the dominant political headlines of the bloc. Those festivals became genuine meeting places for film-makers and the principal channels through which the films reached

audiences in Europe. In 1989, the ICAIC created its own festival in Havana: El Festival del Nuevo Cine Latinoamericano, an important medium of cultural diplomacy, which promoted not only films but also audiovisual culture in general.

### **The Spectator**

We should remember that spectatorship was one of the major concerns in the conceptualisation of the cinematic discourse of the Cuban Revolution. As part of the social mission towards the ‘decolonización de las pantallas’ film-makers wanted cinema, the moving image and audiovisual culture to change the way that the spectator understood the world. Certainly, it is difficult to assess the specific impact of the Soviet-bloc experience on Cuban minds and attitudes. Thus, it was more appropriate to identify the set of practices, personalities, historical events and film works created in order to transform the spectator’s film consciousness.

From 1959 onwards the nationalisation of the film distribution market in the country led to the arrival of a great number of films from the Soviet-bloc; since the majority of these films were not high-quality, they met with a luke-warm reaction. Often they were ‘relegated’ to a screening on Cuban television. Thus, Cuban TV became the most regular medium for the broadcasting of Soviet-bloc materials in the Western Hemisphere: from cartoons to ballet performances, drama series to musical festivals; well-known Soviet-bloc television series were popular and certainly influenced similar productions on Cuban television. The examination here of the role of television has made it possible to address a number of key concepts in the study of the Cuban moving image in new ways. An issue which is still virtually uncharted in Cuban film studies is the ‘place’ of television in the cinematic

discourse of the Revolution and its relationship to Soviet culture. In this context, the work developed by Mario Rodríguez Alemán, a film scholar and historian who used to ‘teach cinema on TV’, was crucial in the analysis of the subject. Rodríguez Alemán launched the first television programmes used to promote Soviet and Eastern European films in Cuba. The first film screened on Cuban TV in times of Revolution, as part of the project on cinema on TV was Eisenstein’s masterpiece *The Battleship Potemkin* in 1959. His book *La Sala Oscura* (1982) can be considered a classic of Soviet film criticism in Spanish; indeed, it defines film art as a political art and the role of the film critic, everything conceptualised under the principles of Marxism-Leninism.

*El Cine de Octubre* was highly influential in Cuba. Firstly, it brought about a change of attitude towards cinema in many Cuban intellectuals; when the central political aspect of films was revealed to the Cuban intellectual mind by the classics of Soviet silent cinema they began to see it no longer as an entertainment medium but as something else. This led to a critical assessment of the situation of Cuban cinema itself and its spectator and brought about a change in the stylistic and thematic interests of those amateur film-makers. They believed in cinema as artistic expression, emphasising its social function. We have noted in *KinoCuban* that Tomás Gutiérrez Alea’s classic essay *Dialéctica del espectador*, his finest work, on film theory, was influenced by Soviet film theory, particularly Eisenstein, who played a central role in the formulation of film theory in Cuba, and indeed within the larger remit of the New Latin American Cinema Movement.

While García Espinosa and Gutiérrez Alea were perhaps the most brilliant proponents of the cinematic discourse of the Cuban Revolution they were by no means its sole authors.

*Cine Cubano*, one of the most significant cinema journals in the Hispanic world, is an eloquent testimony to this fact. It is also important to stress that this publication is also unique for the amount of first-hand information it contains about films and film-makers of the cinema of 'the other' Europe, published in the form of articles, interviews and special editions dedicated to the industry and artistry of the Soviet-bloc. The Spanish-speaking reader knew about these cinemas, thanks to those articles published in *Cine cubano*, which recorded those debates and cinematic experiences dating back to the October cinema, and then assessed their relevance for Cuba's Third World reality. The experience of the *cinemóvil* (a mobile cinema unit that brought films into the rural areas) recalls the Soviet experience of Medvedev's train cinema, and it was effectively documented in *Cine Cubano*.

As we have seen, the Cuban spectator was familiar with the 'Red Western', those Soviet-bloc film productions that portrayed the Native American Indians sympathetically, as oppressed people fighting for their rights, in contrast to US Westerns of the time, which frequently portrayed the Indians as villains. What was also significant was the amount of information, knowledge and understanding that Cubans acquired from the number of films, TV programmes and videos screened. The selection of some of the classic TV programmes of the 1970s from the Soviet-bloc provides a valuable insight into Cuban intellectual life in that period. Certainly, the huge number of events organised and visitors or technical assistants that came from the countries of the Soviet-bloc provided the Cubans with first hand information on the audiovisual production of those countries, which had a profound effect on the evolution of the Cuban moving image.



As part of the education of the spectator, these films were not necessarily shown in order to satisfy an already established public taste but rather to try to change it. What was obvious was that Soviet and East European films were almost unknown for the Cuban spectator, these films did not meet the 'taste', needs and demands of the spectator and this fact was a real problem for the cultural mentors. Already well-established viewing patterns of audiences from Hollywood to telenovelas resisted change. Thus, when a massive number of Soviet and East European films arrived in Cuban theatres, there was initially some resistance. As a result of this Rodríguez Alemán stepped forward and became the main mentor for the conversion of television into the main disseminator of Soviet-bloc audiovisual culture; thus, the role of television was conceptualised within the cinematic discourse of the Revolution. The idea was to fulfill its potential for improving and expanding the education of the general public, who, in theory, after contact with Soviet-bloc audiovisual culture, would become a more culturally and artistically developed agent.

***The Cuban Makers of Moving Images and the Result of their Work (Films, Videos, Television Practices and Audiovisual Culture)***

A study about the Cuban moving image has to begin with a reference to a documentary film because from the point of view of the Cuban Revolution in its early stages, the documentary was of crucial importance. ICAIC filmmakers certainly couldn't begin by making feature-length fiction films; documentary shorts had to clear the way first. Besides, documentary cinema had a more immediate connection to what was going on in the country in that time. Nevertheless, ICAIC filmmakers wanted to make feature films as well, in order to demonstrate that it was possible to make films, film art even without a proper technology. Certainly, this is one of the key ideological issues of a Cuban well-known film

essay *Por un cine imperfecto*. Today, we have the evidence that they were looking and asking everyone for financial support from Japan to Spain, from Mexico to France. It was only after the declaration of the socialist character of the Revolution that a real support came from the countries of the former Soviet-bloc. With the arrival in great numbers of the filmmakers, artists, films and aesthetic ideas the possibility for the development of a Cuban film art industry was real.

The influence that the audiovisual culture and cinemas of ‘the other’ Europe have had on the Cuban moving image is unquestionable. Themes from Soviet-bloc cinemas (such as socialist education, the ‘new’ man and woman, the struggle against the enemies of the Revolution) have been adopted both directly and indirectly by Cuban filmmakers and consequently affected the style of the film production of the period; the socialist topics of the 70s, Vega’s *Retrato de Teresa*, Cortázar’s *El brigadista* and Díaz’s *Polvo Rojo* are good examples of this. The very popular Cuban Television series in the 1980s about ‘Cuban agents of state security’ (*En silencio ha tenido que ser*, *Julito el pescador* and *Para empezar a vivir* (To Start Living) owe their origins to Soviet-bloc TV series such as the Soviet *Semnadtsat’ mgnovenii vesny* among many others.

In the same way the present study can refer to the most well-known Cuban filmmakers and their reception of Soviet-bloc cinemas, the October cinema and Eisenstein in particular, it is also an approach to these European artists and the way their theories and film works have universal values since they marked the works of artists in the island and consequently the moving image. For many Cuban filmmakers the ideal film art, a truly revolutionary cinematic discourse was displayed in Eisenstein and the October cinema. The ICAIC

converged ideologically with socialist cinema from ‘the other Europe’ in terms of its belief in the value of film with a political message. This was conceptualised in two directions: one that identified ICAIC with the post colonial film theory and the practice of the so-called ‘Third Cinema’, in its mission to emancipate and de-colonise the screens; on the other hand, one that saw the cinematic discourse of the Cuban Revolution as part of the socialist cinematic community. With the arrival of world-renowned directors like Kalatozov, Wajda and Maetzig to teach Cuban film-makers how to make films, many Cubans went to study in East European film schools and art schools. Such was the case with Octavio Cortázar, Carlos Fariñas, Pastor Vega and many others. It can be said that, from 1961 onwards, with the arrival in Cuba of a great number of films, film-makers and technicians, the aesthetic concerns and trends from the Soviet-bloc were of great importance in the shaping of the cinematic discourse of the Cuban Revolution and the moving image in general. In particular the production of the film *Soy Cuba* marks a before and after in the history of the moving image of the Cuban Revolution. Thanks to *Soy Cuba*, the ICAIC received all the equipment left by the Soviet team that helped with the further production of Cuban feature films. It is not coincidental that scholars often refer to this period of the ICAIC as the golden age of cinema on the island, above all, with Humberto Solás and his film *Lucia* (1969), for the innovative effort of Santiago Álvarez (*Now*, 1965) and by the maturity of Tomás Gutiérrez Alea’s film art, who reached with *Memories of Underdevelopment* (1968), his finest moment as a film-maker.

The most important contribution of Soviet-bloc audiovisual culture was the conceptualisation and development of the socialist cinematic discourse of the Cuban moving image. *Dvenadtsat’ stul’ev*, for example, a classic satirical Soviet novel by the

authors I'lf and Petrov was adapted by Gutiérrez Alea to the Cuban context, and, as a result, *Las doce sillas* marked the birth of the socialist cinema in Cuba. Stylistically and aesthetically, the ICAIC films released between 1961 and 1991, 'look and sound' different, from previous and post-Soviet Cuban film productions. Indeed, a great number of ICAIC films were developed in Eastern Europe, using the technology available in those countries at the time.

Montage as derived from Soviet aesthetics, as we have seen, also played a crucial role in the development of the Cuban moving image. Thus in Gutiérrez Alea's films, Eisenstein's 'intellectual montage' was a persistent artistic device. For the Cuban, as for Eisenstein, 'montage is conflict' (dialectical), where new ideas emerge from the collision of the montage sequence (synthesis) and where the new emerging ideas are not innate in any of the images of the edited sequence. This new concept of montage demanded a different kind of acting. In this respect, the use of non-professional actors was significant in the first films co-produced in the 1960s, the so-called use of typeage (so well demonstrated in *Soy Cuba*). Urusevskii's flying camera was of great influence for the golden period of the Cuban moving image, in the creation of the *cine urgente* of the Cuban Revolution. Maetzig's conceptualisation of the documentary feature film style helped young Cuban film directors to define a distinctive cinematic trend within ICAIC which combined documentary and fiction, as evidenced by Titón's *Memorias del subdesarrollo* and Octavio Cortázar's *El brigadista*.

As far as the glasnost period is concerned, we have seen that the video movement offers another important reference point in the context of the decentralisation of Cuba's film industry because it developed a different form of artistic expression and brought new topics

to the national screen, in particular, those that had previously been taboo. Topics such as religion, the frustrations of young people, 'jineterismo', transvestism and transsexualism were now portrayed in cinematic discourse. Aaron Yelin's *Muy bien* (Very Good, 1986) offers a corrective to some of clichés about the Cuban educational system, as we discovered. Pointing in a similar direction, Bokova's *Havana*, from the vantage-point of the Cuban Diaspora, offers a sobering view of Cuba's capital city, as 'broken' and crumbling, in effect, Havana as 'the lost city'.

### **What is the current situation?**

The collapse of the Soviet-bloc has transformed the intellectual life of Cuba. The state no longer subsidises 100 per cent of cultural production. The ICAIC, the most prominent cultural institution created after 1959, helped to define the cinematic discourse of the Cuban Revolution, and thus other voices need also to be considered. Studies on the Cuban moving image have to date focussed on its film production, ignoring other moving image producers on the island such as the EICTV (Escuela Internacional de Cine, Televisión y Video) and the video movement, for example. The Cuban moving image is no longer owned by the ICAIC because the range and provision of audiovisual culture is constantly expanding, to include television, film, media art and other audiovisual content, production on different platforms and through different distribution channels. For the Cuban moving image, something resembling a 'mission', so well defined in the previous decades of socialism, no longer exists. Whatever the future holds for the Cuban moving image, it is clear that its past was marked very deeply by its experience of Soviet and East European cinemas over an extended period of time.

*KinoCuban* builds upon an existing body of knowledge. By taking into account the different perspectives that have appeared since 1959 and more recently by examining the Soviet effect on Cuban culture; we have seen that finding the right tools to understand the Cuban socialist experience in the audiovisual field is not a straightforward task. This thesis demonstrates that the Cuban case needs to be carefully defined before generalisations can be made. The Cuban moving image is internationally recognised, particularly the cinematic discourse of the Revolution, which was shaped by the most diverse aesthetic tendencies of the time. Thus, it is possible to recognise Cuban films and film music and posters within the frame of ‘the other’ cinema. The intention of the present study has been to balance all views, all the different approaches, identifying the positive and the negative. By basing itself on previous studies of the Cuban moving image, this thesis has sought to develop a new awareness about the role played by Soviet and East European cinematic discourses in the evolution of the Cuban moving image. As Fidel Castro, *el Comandante, the last Bolshevik*, once stated: ‘¡Sin la existencia de la Unión Soviética no habría sido posible la Revolución Socialista de Cuba!’.<sup>2</sup> Consequently, without acknowledging the significance of the cinema of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe it will be not possible to fully understand the Cuban moving image, its cinematic discourse and, in particular, its socialist credentials. The Soviet-bloc audiovisual culture, cinematic experiences clearly left an indelible mark on its development.

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<sup>2</sup> Fidel Castro’s speech on 28 April 1963 at the Red Square in Moscow on the Cuban Government website: see <http://www.cuba.cu/gobierno/discursos/1963/esp/f280463e.html>. [accessed on 27 August 2010]

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## Filmography

The entries are as follows: Title (translated title), Director's name, year of release, studio/producer/country. Films to be analysed in:

### Chapter II

*¿Para quién baila la Habana?* (For Whom Does Havana Dance?), Vladimír Čech, 1963, Barrandov Studios and ICAIC.

*Preludio 11* (Prelude 11), Kurt Maetzig, 1963, DEFA and ICAIC.

*Soy Cuba* (I am Cuba), Mikhail Kalatozov, 1964, Mosfilm and ICAIC.

### Chapter III

*Doce sillas, Las* (Twelve chairs), Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, 1962, ICAIC.

*Sexta parte del mundo, La* (The Sixth Part of the World), Julio García Espinosa, 1977, ICAIC.

*Brigadista, El* (The Literacy Teacher), Octavio Cortázar, 1977, ICAIC.

*Retrato de Teresa* (Portrait of Teresa), Pastor Vega, 1979, ICAIC.

*Polvo Rojo* (Red Dust, 1981), Jesús Díaz, ICAIC.

### Chapter IV

*Capablanca* (1986), Manuel Herrera, 1986, ICAIC.

*Dejen en paz a Robinson Crusoe* (Leave Robinson Crusoe Alone), Péter Timár, 1989.

*Bella de la Alhambra, La* Enrique Pineda Barnet, 1989, TVE and ICAIC.

*Havana*, Jana Bokova, 1990, BBC and ICAIC.

*Muy bien* (Very Well), Aaron Yelin, 1989, EICTV.

Related films and other Cuban and foreign films mentioned in the thesis.

Cuban film titles are given in Spanish throughout and English translations of these titles accompany their first mention only. Other foreign film titles cited in the text have also been given their accepted English title on first mention.

- *A 90 millas* (90 Miles Distance), Carlos Fernández, 1962, ICAIC.
- *A orillas del Ágara* (On the Banks of Angara River), Jesús Díaz, 1977, ICAIC.
- *Aleksandr Nevskii* (Alexander Nevsky), Sergei Eisenstein, 1938, Mosfil'm.
- *Amistad*, Steven Spielberg, 1997, DreamWorks Studios.
- *Amistad* (Friendship), Jorge Fraga, 1975, ICAIC
- *Aquella larga noche* (That Long Night, 1979), Enrique Pineda Barnet, ICAIC
- *Arsenal*, Alexander Dovzhenko, 1928, VUFKU (Kiev).



- *Before Night Falls*, Julian Schnabel, 2000, Fine Line Features.
- *Beloved*, Robert Demme, 1998, Harpo Productions.
- *Berlin: Die Sinfonie der Großstadt* (Berlin: Symphony of a Great City), Walter Ruttmann, 1927, Fox-Europa.
- *Blade Runner*, Ridley Scott, 1982, Warner Bros.
- *Breve reportaje sobre Siberia, Un* (A Brief Reportage On Siberia), Juan Carlos Tabío, 1978, ICAIC.
- *Bronenosets Potemkin* (Battleship Potemkin), Sergei Eisenstein, 1925, Goskino (First Factory).
- *Brujo desapareciendo, El* (The Disappearing Magician), José E. Casasús, 1898, sponsored by a beer merchant.
- *Capablanca El Rey*, Otto Miguel Guzmán, 2008, Mundo Latino
- *Casta de Robles* (Hearts of Oak), Manuel Alonso, 1953, Estudios Nacional-Alonso/Producciones San Miguel.
- *Chapaev*, Georgii Vasil'ev and Sergei Vasil'ev, 1934, Lenfil'm.
- *Chelovek s kinoapparatom* (Man with the Movie Camera), Dziga Vertov, 1929, VUFKU.
- *Confusión cotidiana, Una* (An Everyday Confusion), Tomás Gutiérrez Alea and Néstor Almendros, 1950, Amateur-Club Cuba.
- *Confusión cotidiana, Una* (An Everyday Confusion), Vladimir Smith, 2005, The British-Cuban Heritage Foundation.
- *Con Maiacovsky en Moscú* (With Maiakovsky in Moscow), Víctor Casaús, 1976, ICAIC.
- *30 případu majora Zemana* (30 Cases of Major Zeman), 1976-1980, Jiří Sequens, Česká televize.
- *Cztery pancerni i pies* (Four Tankmen and a Dog from Poland), Andrzej Czekański and Konrad Nalecki, 1966-1970, Zespół Filmowy "Syrena".
- *Cine y azúcar* (Cinema and Sugar), Manuel Martínez, 1906, sponsored by the Manatí Sugar Company.
- *Démanty noci* (Diamonds of the Night), Jan Němec, 1964, Filmové Studio Barrandov.
- *Deputat Baltiki* (Baltic Deputy), Alexander Zarkhi and Iosif Kheifits, 1937, Lenfil'm.
- *Derecho de asilo* (The Right to Asylum), Octavio Cortázar, 1994, ICAIC.
- *De cierta manera* (One Way or Another), Sara Gómez, 1974, ICAIC.
- *Diana*, Juan Carlos Cremata, 1988, EICTV.
- *Don Kikhot* (Don Quixote), Grigorii Kozintzev, 1957, Lenfil'm.
- *En la calzada de Jesús* (On the Road of Jesús), Arturo Sotto, 1991, EICTV.
- *Ernst Thälmann: Sohn seiner Klasse* (Ernst Thälmann: Son of the Working Class), Kurt Maetzig, 1954.
- *Estepa de la abundancia, La* (The Steppe of Plenty), Jorge Sotolongo, 1980, ICAIC.
- *Fidel en la URSS* (Fidel in USSR), Santiago Álvarez, 1963, ICAIC.
- *Film o Mikhaile Kalatozove* (A Film about Mikhail Kalatozov), Mikhail Kalatozishvili, 2006, Russia.
- *Fresa y Chocolate* (Strawberry and Chocolate), Tomás Gutiérrez Alea and Juan Carlos Tabío, 1993, ICAIC.

- *General'naiia liniia/Staroe i novoe* (The General Line/ The Old and the New), Sergei Eisenstein 1929, Sovkino (Moscow).
- *Giselle*, Enrique Pineda Barnet, 1964, ICAIC.
- *Gost s ostrova Svobody* (Guest from Island of Freedom), Roman Karmen, 1963, Tsentral'naiia studiia dokumental'nykh fil'mov.
- *Guardafronteras* (Border guards), Octavio Cortázar, 1980, ICAIC.
- *Habanera*, Pastor Vega, 1984, ICAIC.
- *Hasta el último aliento* (Until the Last Breath), 1995, Vicente González Castro, ICRT.
- *Hilo directo* (Hilo Direct), Fran Rodríguez, 1988, ICAIC.
- *Historia de una batalla* (Story of a Battle), Manuel Octavio Gómez, 1962, ICAIC.
- *Historias de la Revolución* (Stories of the Revolution), Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, 1960, ICAIC.
- *Holubice* (The White Dove), Vlášil František, 1960, Filmové Studio Barrandov.
- *Hotel Tropical* (Tropical Hotel), Juan J. Ortega, 1953, CEPLIC (Comisión Ejecutiva para la Industria Cinematográfica) and co-produced with Mexico.
- *Intolerance: Love's Struggle throughout the Ages*, D.W. Griffith, 1916, Triangle Film Corporation and Wark Producing Corp.
- *Iron Curtain, The*, Darryl F. Zanuck, 1948, 20th Century Fox/ Darryl F. Zanuck Productions.
- *Ivan Groznyi* (Ivan The Terrible), Sergei Eisenstein, 2parts, 1944-46, TsOKS/Alma-Ata.
- *Idiot* (The Idiot) also known as *Nastas'ia Filippovna*, Ivan Pyr'ev, 1958, Mosfil'm.
- *Kafka*, Steven Soderbergh, 1991, Baltimore Pictures.
- *Kak zakalialas' stal'* (How the Steel was Tempered), Mark Donskoi, 1942, Kiev and Ashkhabad.
- *Kamennyi tsvetok* (The Stone Flower), Aleksandr Ptushko, 1946, Barrandov and Mosfil'm.
- *Kaninchen bin ich, Das* (I Am the Rabbit), Kurt Maetzig, 1965, DEFA.
- *Konets Sankt Peterburga* (The End of St Petersburg), Vsevolod Pudovkin, 1927, Mezhrabpom-Rus'.
- *Krasnaia palatka* (The Red Tent), Mikhail Kalatozov, 1970, Mosfil'm.
- *Lejanía* (Distance), Jesús Díaz, 1985, ICAIC.
- *Letyat zhuravli* (The Cranes are Flying, Mikhail Kalatozov, 1957, Mosfil'm.
- *Lucía*, Humberto Solás, 1968, ICAIC.
- *Leal al tiempo*, 2008, Luis Alberto García (Jr), ICAIC.
- *Maluala*, Sergio Giral, 1979, ICAIC.
- *Mat'* (Mother), Vsevolod Pudovkin, 1926, Mezhrabpom-Rus'.
- *Mauvaise conduite* (Improper Conduct), Néstor Almendros 1984, France.
- *Mégano, El*, Julio García Espinosa, 1955, Nuestro Tiempo.
- *Mella*, Enrique Pineda Barnet, 1975, ICAIC.
- *Memorias del subdesarrollo* (Memories of Underdevelopment), Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, 1968, ICAIC.
- *Monanieba* [Pokaianie] (Repentance), Tengiz Abuladze, 1986, Gruziiia fil'm.

- *Music Box*, Costa Gravas, 1989, TriStar Pictures, Inc.
- *Nacer en Leningrado* (To Be Born in Leningrad), Humberto Solás, 1976, ICAIC.
- *Nadie escuchaba* (Nobody listened), Néstor Almendros and Jorge Ulla, 1984, Cuban Human Rights project.
- *Neotpravlennoe pis'mo* (The Unsent Letter), Mikhail Kalatozov, 1960, Mosfil'm.
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- *8a-Ochoa*, Orlando Jiménez Leal, 1992, RAI.
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