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Through the Eyes of Foreign Filmmakers

Contradictions and Paradigms of Cuban Cinema after the Revolution

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The global impact of the Cuban revolution emerged on the sociopolitical map of the 1960s in several different ways. Artists, politicians, sociologists, philosophers, athletes, and celebrities from many countries were curious to visit the island to see for themselves the feat of a group of bearded youngsters under the leadership of a lawyer-turned-leader of the independence movement and later commander-in-chief: Fidel Castro. In the midst of dramatic changes in the economic, social, political, and cultural structures of the country, the government started enforcing new legislation aimed at building a nation not only free from illiteracy, police abuse, and administrative corruption but also, above all, free and independent from U.S. rule. But with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the onset of the Special Period in Cuba, Cuba underwent further change. Thus, in the context of this analysis of Cuban cinema, there exist two separate periods of filmmaking. The 1960s was the beginning of a new historical moment for Cuba with the triumph of the revolution in achieving complete independence from the United States. In addition, there was the advent of faith in new values through complete social, economic, and political changes on the island. Moreover, Cuba became one of the best allies for the socialist bloc in the Caribbean zone. This situation changed by the 1990s with the fall of the Berlin Wall and the disappearance of the socialist bloc as the utopian dream of a better country and the theory of the “new man” died. Cuba lost all of the support that it had received from its socialist allies from the 1960s to the 1980s. The subsequent deep economic crisis affected the whole structure of society in the so-called Special Period and Cubans began a new phase of their survival. Many foreigners attempted to film these changes but with a different perspective: it was not a romantic approach but, rather, a more realistic way to document what was happening on the island after the support that Cuba had received disappeared.

From the very beginning of the revolution, Cuban leaders were aware of the

need to educate the people in the ideological principles of the governing system that was chosen to rule the island: the socialist system.¹ The whole educational, political, and cultural structure was immediately geared to that objective, resulting in the creation of several cultural institutions for the preservation and promotion of national culture based on the principles of socialism. In January 1959 the newly established Division of Culture of the Rebel Army undertook the production of two documentaries: *Esta tierra nuestra*, by Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, and *La vivienda*, by Julio García Espinosa. Both films were produced by the Instituto Cubano del Arte y la Industria Cinematográficas (ICAIC, Cuban Institute of the Film Arts and Industry), created on March 24, 1959. Another organization, Casa de las Américas, was founded shortly thereafter, in April 1959, to develop and extend sociocultural relations with the other countries of Latin America; and it was followed in January 1961 by the establishment of the National Council for Culture.

In subsequent years, in the context of these new cultural institutions, the changes and transformations that took place within the Cuban revolution would be captured by the cameras of foreign filmmakers who visited the country. The particularities of the films these visitors made, and what their work shows as documentaries of a given time, are highly revealing—shaping the image of the revolution abroad, mostly in Europe, in the 1960s and 1970s.

In July 1959 French actor Gérard Philipe arrived in Cuba with the intention of making a film about the armed struggle in the Sierra Maestra. Although this project never materialized (Philipe died in November of that year), it was notable as the first attempt by a foreigner to make a film about the country's very recent history after the triumph of the revolution. At the end of that year, Italians Otello Martelli (cinematographer) and Cesare Zavattini (writer) arrived in the country. Martelli would collaborate on what would become the first film made by ICAIC, *Historias de la revolución*, directed by Tomás Gutiérrez Alea. Zavattini collaborated on the script of *El joven rebelde*, made by Julio García Espinosa in 1961. The Italians provided technical support for the then-young Alea and García Espinosa and brought with them the influence of Italian neo-realism, but otherwise did not particularly mark the aesthetics of these films.²

In September 1960, also at the invitation of ICAIC, Dutch filmmaker Joris Ivens came to Cuba to teach several workshops. As a final exercise, he made the documentaries *Carnet de viaje* and *Pueblo en armas*. Cuban technicians Jorge Herrera, Gustavo Maynulet, Ramón Suárez, Jorge Fraga, José Massip, and Saúl Yelinn participated. As the head of ICAIC's Information Center, Dr. Mario Rodríguez Alemán, noted at the time, "*Carnet de viaje* is a film message to Charles Chaplin, in which Ivens reveals all the truth about Cuba and its Revolution. . . . *Pueblo en armas* shows the creation of the national militia and

the operation against the ‘worms’ in the Escambray Mountains. The exhibition of these documentaries was banned in France by the Ministry of Information, fearful perhaps of the great revolutionary teachings they present.”³ Both documentaries are proof of the filmmaker’s enormous interest in showing the new Cuba and its novel social system to the rest of the world. *Carnet de viaje* presents footage of scenes shot in Havana, the Zapata peninsula, Manzanillo, Trinidad, Santiago de Cuba, and the Sierra Maestra, among other places; *Pueblo en armas* presents the war against the bandits in El Escambray.⁴

At the end of 1960, Roman Karmen, the well-known Soviet documentary filmmaker, visited Cuba. Karmen made two documentaries, *Alba de Cuba* and *La lámpara azul*, the latter about the literacy campaign. Then, at the beginning of 1961, the French documentary filmmaker Chris Marker visited Cuba. Marker made two notable documentaries, *¡Cuba Sí!* and *Libertad*. The epic nature of these documentaries and Marker’s eagerness to publicize internationally the transformations implemented in Cuba, as well as the close bond existing between Fidel and the people, caused them to be banned in France. The Cuban newspaper *El Mundo* commented on this censorship:

News has come through *Les Lettres Françaises*, the great Parisian literary weekly newspaper: the Ministry of Information of General de Gaulle’s government has banned the screening of *¡Cuba Sí!* and *Libertad*, two documentaries on the Cuban revolution made by Chris Marker. The argument behind the measure is that the two films “constitute an apologia to Castro’s regime,” and even though it admits that “what the films say or inform about the previous regime is in agreement with the historic truth,” it notes that “passing from a right-wing totalitarian regime to another extreme left-wing totalitarian regime has not prevented the occurrence in Cuba of new excesses and multiple violations of freedoms, of which the films in question do not provide any testimony.”⁵

Unquestionably, the images captured by Marker revealed his admiration for Fidel Castro as a leader. In an interview Marker stated, “Well, the answers to Castro’s questions are chorused by the people, who become increasingly aware of a given problem. But Castro takes these questions from one level to another, gradually enabling everyone to fully understand the issue. And you know, it is extraordinary to see how a million people understand the agricultural program, U.S. imperialism, and socialism.”⁶

As closer ties were being established with the countries of the socialist bloc, more filmmakers from these countries visited Cuba. In 1962 Czech filmmaker Vladimir Cech arrived to make the film *Para quién baila La Habana*. The year before, as part of a Czech delegation visiting Cuba, Cech stated, “just like ev-

eryone who had a chance to see for the first time the revolutionary enthusiasm of the Cuban people, I was captivated. And I wanted to preserve and convey that impression to everybody else. So I had this idea that it would be interesting to make a film about Havana, about the transformation of old Havana into a new Havana.”⁷ His good intentions, however, were not enough to produce a good film, as he was not able to capture the spirit of the Cuban people either through the actors or with the script, nor was he careful with certain obvious details, such as showing in the film an edition of *El Quixote* published after the time in which the story takes place. When the film premiered, it received bad reviews. The well-known Cuban critic Guillermo Cabrera Infante, in his article “¿Para quién bailamos?” stated: “The coproduction lacks knowledge of Cuban reality, it fails to understand the psychology of the average Cuban, and the actors’ performance is falsely emotional.”⁸

ICAIC did not assimilate the lesson it should have learned from this film’s false representation of Cuban reality; on the contrary, it allowed four more films to be made by foreign filmmakers, all of whom also failed to capture the Cuban essence. These films were *Crónica cubana* (1963, by Ugo Ulive of Uruguay), *El otro Cristóbal* (1963, by Armand Gatti of France), *Preludio II* (1963, by Kurt Maetzig of East Germany), and *Soy Cuba* (1964, by Mikhail Kalatozov of the Soviet Union).

Crónica cubana presents the revolutionaries’ actions at the beginning of the revolution. The story starts on January 1, 1959, and ends with the victory of the Cuban troops at Playa Girón (Bay of Pigs). The idea of covering in a single film several events in the political scenario of the country’s recent history (sabotage to stores—specifically the El Encanto department store—the ideological struggle in universities, the creation of the revolutionary militias, and the Bay of Pigs invasion) turns the actors into caricatures. Once again the reviews criticized the placing in foreign hands of the responsibility for presenting the key events of Cuban history: “the other very serious problem that plagues the film is the inability of Argentine Osvaldo Dragún—scriptwriter—and Uruguayan Ugo Ulive—director—to construct a Cuban atmosphere and to make the characters Cubans. . . . In *Crónica cubana* no one or almost no one seems to be Cuban. The actors move slowly, with great composure; there are long periods of silence and intense looks, in the best tradition of the Argentine or Mexican melodrama.”⁹ The lack of authenticity weighed down the product of this film project, which apart from being a bad propaganda piece, could not meet the expectations of the audience and much less of the critics.

Gatti’s *El otro Cristóbal* is a curious case because, in spite of its artificial and terrible adaptation to cinema, the film was entered and accepted for competition in the 1963 Cannes Film Festival. The synopsis says the film is a satirical

parable that presents the destruction of political and moral slavery through the struggle of the people in an imaginary Latin American country. The reviews in France describe the film as “deranged,” “completely crazy,” “poetic,” “naive,” and even “wonderful.” The French left tried to justify its tangled, complicated plot, while the right described it as “Castro’s propaganda” and “demagogic.” As the prestigious critic José Manuel Valdés Rodríguez stated,

“it was a mistake, perhaps a major mistake, of Armand Gatti in this film to use elements of Afro-Cuban mythology, which requires not only a quantitative, but a qualitative and in-depth understanding. . . . One of our Cuban filmmakers, fully mastering the mythology and the rituals, could have used the Afro-Cuban component. But even then, it would have been too risky.”¹⁰

Gatti should never have attempted to capture a theme as complicated as Afro-Cuban mythology, something that calls for years of research and systematic practice.

Maetzig’s *Preludio II* was another film that showed an ignorance of Cuban culture, and of rural and urban life. Very similar in plot to *Crónica cubana*, it presents the clash between revolutionaries and counterrevolutionaries in a simple, schematic manner, with no nuances and above all in a very unnatural manner disconnected from Cuban idiosyncrasies. In this regard, after the premiere, Cuban critic Alejo Beltrán wrote: “Kurt Maetzig does not know the Cuban countryside or the revolution (except in theory). Therefore, if we strike out the word ‘revolution,’ and eliminate the name of ‘Cuba,’ the film would be (and actually is) a story of adventures in the Philippines, Nicaragua or Madagascar seen by a person from the moon.”¹¹ Although other critics at least praised the cinematography, the performance of the German actors, and the action scenes, the film did not manage to portray the depth of the conflicts it depicted.

Kalatozov’s *Soy Cuba* is a rare case of the rediscovery of a 1964 film that had fallen into oblivion until 1992, when it was screened at the Telluride Film Festival in the United States. It was later shown in San Francisco in 1994, where Francis Ford Coppola and Martin Scorsese saw the film and were struck by Sergei Urusevsky’s powerful photography. Both Coppola and Scorsese promoted the release of the film on laser disc. Later, in 1996, it was transferred to VHS in the United States and received favorable reviews and comments. The interest in the film has since continued, with essays, articles, and other texts attempting to deconstruct Kalatozov’s objectives in this epic film about the Cuban revolution.

After the premiere, however, several unfavorable reviews were published in the Cuban press. In one of them, critic Luis M. López stated that the cam-

era movements made him suffer from vertigo. Because Urusevski was intent on making each shot a unique photograph, instead of conditioning his camerawork to the actions, the filmmaker did the exact opposite, constantly conditioning the actions to the camera. The result is a feeling of an external folkloric and superficial look at Cuban reality treated in a light and schematic way.

Moreover, foreign critics did not give the film particularly favorable reviews. For example, *Positif* magazine published a particularly harsh comment:

the photography is constantly deformed, continuously tortured; the characters adopt extremely unnatural sculpture-like positions, against a cloudy background hardly ever seen in Cuba; the peasants look like *mujiks*; the episodes are a “*déjà vu*” by an overflowing “poetic” mind, and this “transposition,” which deprives the film of verisimilitude and of all the interest in a documentary work, is made in an ineluctably pompous sense.¹²

Even outside Cuba, then, the story, the acting, and the ambience were perceived as lacking in legitimacy.

These four nearly simultaneous feature films—the first three produced at the same time and the last one a year later—were not the “fresco” of the most recent struggles for independence in Cuba that the creators had intended them to be. On the contrary, they served only as temporary propaganda for the Cuban revolution abroad, and none of them illustrated the real dimension of building a socialist society that was taking place on the island. Nor did they manage to reveal the essence of Cuban revolutionary culture or of its most elementary social practices. All four of the films reiterate the clashes between revolutionaries and counterrevolutionaries and the attacks and acts of sabotage against Cuba by Yankee imperialism—and all this subject matter is treated naively and unsubtly.

Necessary Nuances in the Imaginary of the Sixties

Critics have said that the foreigners who made documentaries in 1960s Cuba did capture the changes that were taking place and that they also encouraged the young filmmakers who had studied in the workshops to ponder several issues, such as the role of women in the new society, marginality, education, class equality, race, the search for national roots, the need to have an identity as a people, and above all popular participation in the building of socialism.

Although the documentary *¡Cuba Sí!* made by Marker in 1961—described by British researcher and critic Michael Chanan as a film devoted to extolling the revolution—is the best example of this kind of documentary, it is not the only one found in the film production of those years.

In 1963 French filmmaker Agnès Varda visited Cuba, filmed several sequences in Havana, and took many photographs for a documentary she would eventually make, *Saludos cubanos*. In a very skillful and enjoyable manner, the documentary presents a synthesis of Cuban history with its traditions, its cultural background, its heritage values, its religious practices, its struggle for independence, its dances, its music. It even gives a special tribute to Benny Moré, one of the greatest musicians in popular music, who had died while she was editing the film.

The subtlety with which Varda describes how Cuban men protectively embrace their girlfriends or their wives, with a certain sense of possession and domination, constitutes a shrewd touch that shows the sense of masculine authority prevailing on the island, a sort of patriarchal hegemony in a country in the midst of changes, a country that had just undergone a social revolution. This is even more evident in her portrayals of the cowhands, with the influence of the genre of U.S. westerns notable in how Cuban cowboys dress and in their attitudes. The documentary lists all the laws passed to better the people, highlighting the benefits that the revolution brought to the majority of the people. The audiences identified with the romantic, brave, and daring rebels, who were at the same time heroes in flesh and blood: Fidel Castro, Raúl Castro, Juan Almeida, Camilo Cienfuegos, and Che Guevara.

The film also informed audiences in a positive and genuine manner about Cuba and its revolution and contributed to reaffirm in the international community the collective enthusiasm of the Cuban people and their participation in the building of a socialist society. Each event or occasion is shown as a battle of a brave people who decided to fight for a country free from bourgeois atomisms, of people seeking better living conditions.

In 1962 Danish filmmaker Theodoro Christensen visited the country for a showcase exhibition of Danish films. He returned to Cuba in 1963 to work as adviser to ICAIC's Department of Artistic Productions, where he guided and taught young Cuban filmmakers. In 1964, during his time in Cuba, he made the documentary *Ellas*, structured as a series of questions. Do Cuban women have the same rights as men? Are women taking part in the work of the revolution? To what extent? He interviewed a wide variety of women from all sectors of society: housewives, students, shop assistants, peasants, schoolteachers, secretaries, political cadres.

Critics responded warmly to the validity of this filmmaker's project. His selection of what was a sensitive problem at the time, the integration of women into the workforce and into the work of the revolution, was highly controversial and appreciated even in the context of strong male domination. Mario Rodríguez Alemán stated in a review: "The thirty-minute film is attractive and

natural. The women interviewed talk to the camera naturally, as if they were at home, not at all shy. This gives the film a special charm and a special character. Each work of art should have a form to match its contents. Christensen proves this axiom.”¹³ Christensen’s extensive contact with young Cuban filmmakers probably contributed to the making of a film in which his status as a foreign filmmaker was not evident. He was an artist who knew how to capture the essence of his chosen topic and was able to put it on the screen, mastering in a remarkable way the Cuban scenario.

In reference to the global documentary cinema movement and to the interest in such outstanding figures as Ivens, Marker, Christensen, and others, Chanan points out in his book on Cuban cinema, “Cuba became a subject of great interest to practitioners of the new documentary because the whole circumstance of the Revolution made a great deal much more directly available to the camera than was normal elsewhere. And because it was a symbol of the throwing off of shackles, which was part of the spirit of the new documentary too.”¹⁴ The timely coincidence of all those factors provided the documentary genre with ideal conditions to film any story in the period of unrest during the 1960s. The surrounding reality could truly provide the camera with all it needed to register the transformations that were becoming the face of the Cuban revolution for the rest of the world.

The Cuban Film That Never Was: History of a Film That Was Never Screened

Between 1967 and 1969 Cuban directors created the four films that are today considered “the classics of Cuban cinema of the sixties”: *Las aventuras de Juan Quín Quín* (1967, Julio García Espinosa); *Lucía* (1968, Humberto Solás); *Memorias del subdesarrollo* (1968, Tomás Gutiérrez Alea), and *La primera carga al machete* (1969, Manuel Octavio Gómez).¹⁵ Each of these films marks a turning point in the emerging aesthetics of the national cinema and shaped a visual map revealing a characteristic common to all four: the influence of the documentary in fictional films.

Meanwhile, in 1968 Japanese filmmaker Kazuo Kuroki came to Cuba at the invitation of ICAIC officials who had previously visited Japan to buy some films. Kuroki planned to explore the possibility of making a film in Cuba. Once he had made his inquiries, he returned to Japan to find funding, then came back to the island to make the feature film *La novia de Cuba*, also known as *Más cerca de ti . . .* (the title in Spanish as it appears on the commercial DVD and in some international databases).¹⁶ For unknown reasons,

the film was never screened in Cuba, though it was shown in Japan and other countries.

The protagonist is Akira, a Japanese sailor who lives on the island and falls in love with Marcia, a young and beautiful Cuban woman determined to join the guerrilla movement in Latin America. Akira decides to accompany Marcia as she travels to Santiago de Cuba to visit the graves of her relatives. Eventually they develop a physical relationship, but Marcia's guerrilla calling is much stronger and she decides to leave for her mission. The plot, however, is not much more than a pretext to make a road movie, telling a story that travels across the island to well-known Cuban locations and cities that had been sites of the Revolutionary Army's armed struggle against Batista—the cities of Santiago de Cuba, Trinidad, Santa Clara, and Havana.

The woman who played Marcia was not a professional actress, and many of the scenes in the film show the marked influence of the free cinema. Akira's actions as he talks to people in the streets—people who clearly were not recruited to participate in the film as actors—demonstrate the director's fascination with something undoubtedly exotic for him: an unknown society that he never quite unravels and never manages to represent with authenticity.

Although the film did not capture the essence of the Cuban spirit, audiences and critics at the time were unfairly prevented from seeing and evaluating it. Today, with the passage of many years, the reception of the movie, with new standards in place for assessment, is very different. But its earlier screening in Japan is especially notable. Obdulia Plasencia, the actress who played the role of Marcia, was able to travel to Japan for the premiere, thanks to the financial contribution of her co-protagonist, Masahiko Tsugawa, who played the role of Akira. In an interview Tsugawa said, "The audience was a 'minority' and for obvious reasons, most of the attendees had a strong political motivation, which explains the interest created by a film coming from distant and admired Cuba."¹⁷

From the 1990s On: New Times, New Subjects, and Transnationalization

Cuban film production started changing in the 1990s. The fall of the Berlin Wall and the disappearance of the socialist bloc meant the collapse of the national economy. The impact of this collapse on the industrial sector extended to the modest Cuban filmmaking sector, practically wiping out any possibility of producing films with national resources.

Cuban filmmakers were forced to find funding for their films abroad, and

coproductions became a necessity rather than an option. Several authors have suggested ways to classify the films made under such an arrangement. For example, British film critic Mike Wayne, in *The Politics of Contemporary European Cinema*, presents a classification of “national cinema produced to operate in an international environment.”¹⁸ He suggests that the prevailing types are (1) *embedded films*: typically national projects produced essentially for the domestic market either because of budget constraints or because of their excessive localism; (2) *disembedded films*: those with the cultural potential and budget to succeed in the U.S. market; (3) *cross-border films*: those that make it to the international market outside the United States, particularly the European market, and offer a sort of porosity of national identities within the framework of a more generic European identity; and (4) *antinational-national films*: those defined by their criticism of the collective myth sustaining the national identity.

In his *Elogio posmoderno de las coproducciones*, Spaniard Manuel Palacio offers three different categories of coproductions. The first group consists of “strictly economic coproductions in which two or more companies pool their financial resources together for a better position in international markets, and in which even though there could be some degree of exchange of artists or crews, the national look is still predominant.” The second is made up of coproductions with an international flavor that “try to wipe out all vestiges of the national viewpoint in a search for an international style.” And the third is that of multicultural or hybrid coproductions—in his opinion the only true coproductions—that cannot be “limited to an economic agreement between partners,” but “reflect the ambivalence in the construction of a collective identity” and “break with ‘official stereotypes.’”¹⁹

Based on these different classifications, three coproductions provide particularly good examples of the representation of new aspects of Cuban society—aspects highlighted because of the international interest in them. They are *Maité* (1994, Spain-Cuba, by Eneko Olasagasti and Carlos Zabala); *¿Quién diablos es Juliette?* (1997, Mexico-Cuba, by Carlos Marcovich), and *Habana Blues* (2005, Spain-Cuba, by Benito Zambrano).

The topics treated are the search for marriage with a foreigner to enable emigration; prostitution; Cuban music; the deterioration of values; the destruction of the city; the black market as the only possible means of survival; the revival of the old glories of Cuban music; the desperation over not having opportunities for individual development and prosperity; and the obstinate persistence in using certain forms of representation associated with “the Cuban,” which in fact only reaffirm stereotypes of what is globally understood as Cuban.

Maité is the story of two Basque entrepreneurs who establish businesses

in Cuba. One of them meets a five-year-old girl, through whom he meets the mother and falls in love with her. This romantic comedy could be classified as a multicultural or hybrid coproduction given its interest in breaking with traditional stereotypes about unions between Cubans and foreigners, because the girl's mother is the manager of a hotel—a woman who earns her living in gainful employment rather than as a prostitute, which counters what many people would assume when hearing of this type of marriage. The respect with which the directors presented the topic was welcomed by Cuban audiences in the International Film Festival of the New Latin American Cinema of Havana, where it won the Popularity Award.

¿*Quién diablos es Juliette?*, by Carlos Marcovich, was made between 1995 and 1997 and filmed in Havana, New York, Los Angeles, Morelia (in central Mexico), and Mexico City. It is the story of two orphaned young women, a Cuban prostitute, Yuliet Ortega, and a Mexican fashion model, Fabiola Quiroz. In various ways, Marcovich explores Yuliet's desire to become a model, though he does not stop there, further exploring the origins of this young girl marked by negative experiences that have pushed her to prostitution as the only way out of her economic hardships. The style of this false documentary, or “mockumentary,” allows the director to articulate a discourse aimed at showing the differences, similarities, and aspirations of women in completely different places.

According to Mike Wayne's classification, this is a cross-border film because it reveals a sense of national identity in crisis and features porosity according to his definition. Regarding the character of Yuliet, Deborah Martin says, “Yuliet appears to internalize such exoticizing discourses concerning Cuban woman as sexual and colonial other and which serve the interests of those who would emphasize the ‘sensual’ rather than the ‘intellectual’ capacities of the colonial subaltern. Interestingly, Yuliet's father tells us he chose her name because it is Italian. Yuliet herself learns to speak Italian through the Italian tourists she meets on the beaches of Havana, and whose money she accepts for sex. So Yuliet's father has inscribed her in a system of both mimicking Europe and of prostituting herself to it.”²⁰ Martin goes on to point out that

reflecting the new constellation in which Cuba finds itself at the beginning of the 1990s, the film resists the centre/margin binary by using four locations (Cuba, Mexico, New York and New Jersey). It privileges Cuba, making it the centre of the film and thus turning any notion of Cuba as periphery on its head. Yuliet's choice of Cuba over a career abroad reinforces this, and can be read as Cuban resilience at a time when political

and economic independence was suddenly imperative. The implication throughout the film (and generally in the international media) is that of a generalized desire in Cuba to ‘get out.’”²¹

This Mexican filmmaker pries open the personal history of Yuliet Ortega, recreating aspects of life in a Havana suburb where the quality of life is extremely low and all the conditions are present for the development of illicit criminal activities, which the community nonetheless considers natural. The character of the country has changed radically since the romanticism of the early sixties, when the will for change rose above all other things, to the deterioration and abandonment of all desire for transformation and improvement.

The musical *Habana Blues*, by Benito Zambrano, shows no signs of a foreigner’s hand, perhaps because this Andalusian director studied at the International Film and Television School (EICTV) in San Antonio de los Baños for two years and was able to immerse himself in the Cuban reality. He eventually turned his experiences into a script, and later into a film, providing a very contemporary and up-to-date story of the underground world of musical production in the Cuban capital.

Applying Manuel Palacio’s classification scheme to this film, we can include it as a type of multicultural or hybrid coproduction. It tends to distance itself from the official discourse to delve deeply into aspects such as the Havana black market, the makeshift recording studios, the promotion of the individual, the prostitution of men, the predatory nature of foreign talent scouts, and particularly the absence of economic advancement for young musicians in their search for professional success—artists who are blocked by the lack of spaces where they can promote themselves and who also face severe restrictions on traveling abroad and exhibiting their work internationally.

Undeniably, Cuban culture has been transnationalized by these and other films. The original efforts made to present the advantages of building a new world, free from bourgeois vice and lack of opportunities to study and rid economic, political, and social injustice, have shifted to a recognition of a country in which social blights such as prostitution, marginalization, housing shortages, and family overcrowding, as well as lack of resources for repairing houses, have inevitably proliferated.

Cuban ruling authorities and power circles face the enormous challenge of working to recover those underprivileged and disadvantaged social strata and to reconfigure the aspirations for social justice and humanism that for so many years were the symbol of the Cuban revolution. Film, then, has been a transnational medium—publicizing that challenge and assessing the evolution of the Cuban reality with increasing realism.

Notes

1. The socialist character of the revolution was officially declared in 1961 at the funeral of the victims of the bombings of Ciudad Libertad and San Antonio de los Baños airports.

2. Italian neorealism was a cinematic movement that developed in Europe shortly after the Second World War. It was characterized by presenting the bare facts of the everyday lives of ordinary people. Some of its most notable representatives were Roberto Rossellini, Vittorio De Sica, Luchino Visconti, and Cesare Zavattini. Cuban filmmakers Tomás Gutiérrez Alea and Julio García Espinosa studied in Rome in the 1950s and had firsthand experience of this genre; it was evident in their early films, although it was assimilated and integrated into the personal poetry of their respective works.

3. Dr. Mario Rodríguez Alemán, letter, May 25, 1961, in *Carnet de Viaje* film dossier, Cuban Cinematheque, Havana.

4. The war against the bandits was the struggle fought for six years (1960–66) by the militias of Fidel Castro's government against counterrevolutionary bands that had emerged in the Escambray Mountains shortly after the establishment of the revolutionary government.

5. *El Mundo* (Havana), March 2, 1962, in *¡Cuba Sí!* film dossier, Cuban Cinematheque.

6. Chris Marker, interview by journalist Francis Gendron for *Miroir du Cinéma*, in film dossier, Cuban Cinematheque.

7. Interview with Jirima Klimentová, Prensa Latina news service, published in the "Cinema" section of *Girón* (Matanzas), July 18, 1962, in film dossier, Cuban Cinematheque.

8. *Revista Mella*, "¿Para quién bailamos?" October 5, 1964, in film dossier, Cuban Cinematheque.

9. José de la Colina, "Crónica de una crónica," review article, *Revolución* (La Habana), July 20, 1964, in film dossier, Cuban Cinematheque.

10. *El Mundo*, review, January 2, 1964, in film dossier, Cuban Cinematheque.

11. *Hoy* (Havana), February 6, 1964, in film dossier, Cuban Cinematheque.

12. P. L. Thirard, "Semana de cine cubano," review, *Positif* 67–68 (February–March 1965), in film dossier, Cuban Cinematheque.

13. Mario Rodríguez Alemán, review, *Revista Mujeres*, December 1, 1964, in film dossier, Cuban Cinematheque.

14. Michael Chanan, *Cuban Cinema* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 193–94.

15. *Ibid.*; see also Juan Antonio García Borrero, *Otras maneras de pensar el cine cubano* (Santiago de Cuba: Editorial Oriente, 2009); Rufo Caballero, introductions by Francisco López Sacha and Enrique Álvarez, *Lágrimas en la lluvia: crítica de cine, 1987–2007* (La Habana: Ediciones ICAIC: Editorial Letras Cubanas, 2008); Joel del Río, *Contextos, conflictos y consumaciones: análisis crítico del cine cubano entre 2000 y 2006* (Camagüey: Editorial Ácana, 2008).

16. Mario Piedra, "La novia (desconocida) de Cuba," unpublished essay, 2011. The year 1969 is the most widely accepted date for the film's premiere. This film was rediscovered thanks to painstaking research carried out by Piedra, a researcher and university professor who teaches Cuban cinema to students of art history at the School of Arts and Letters, University of Havana. His research has enabled critics and researchers of Cuban cinema to watch the film on

DVD, first because he obtained a copy of the film from Japan, and second because he has written a comprehensive essay in which he explains in detail the steps in the production and postproduction of the film, which undoubtedly should be reclaimed at least as a document.

17. Ibid.

18. Alejandro Pardo, "Coproducciones internacionales españolas: ¿estrategia financiera o expresión multicultural?" www.unav.es/fcom/comunicacionysociedad/es/articulo.php?art_id=47.

19. Ibid.

20. Deborah Martin, "Spectatorship, Performance, Resistance: Carlos Marcovich's *¿Quién diablos es Juliette?*" *Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies* 15, no. 3 (2006), 341–53, quotation on 347.

21. Ibid., 349.