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**To Defend the Revolution is to Defend Culture:
The Cultural Policy of the 1959 Cuban Revolution**

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the
degree of Doctor of Philosophy (Sociology),
University of Strathclyde

May 2012

This thesis is the result of the author's original research. It has been composed by the author and has not been previously submitted for examination which has led to the award of a degree.

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This study examines the centrality of culture to the 1959 Cuban Revolution, which led to a creative vocation being supported by the revolutionary government, with artists, architects, writers and film-makers being welcomed back from exile and their work redefined as part of the production that would be essential to transforming society.

Tracing the formal evolution of policy by the Consejo Nacional de Cultura (CNC), from 1961 onwards, this research outlines the priorities that led tens of thousands of art teachers to train at special schools and disseminate their newly learnt creative skills to a large proportion of the population. It also follows the dark shadow of socialist realism that threatened to impose itself upon aesthetic discussions. In the process, it exposes the sectarianism that was perpetuated by certain defined factions, congealing into a stifling dogmatism that was only overcome when the CNC was disbanded in favour of a Ministry of Culture in 1976.

At the same time, departing from popular top-down conceptions of Cuban policy-formation, this account prioritises the contribution of artists and writers to emerging ideas. In examining congresses and confluences from the 1950s onwards, it establishes the close involvement of the country's creative intellectuals in the defining the parameters that would influence their praxis. The specific role that was adopted by, and advocated for, creative producers, is also examined, from the consolidation of national culture to a critique of the same.

Overall, this thesis is framed as a counterpoint to the cultural policy that has been developed under neoliberalism, giving primacy to emancipatory understandings of cultural appreciation and participation. In isolating the main tenets of Marxist-humanist cultural policy, as evinced in post-revolutionary Cuba, this forms the basis of a consideration of the value of art in terms that go beyond those of the marketplace.

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Acknowledgements

In a study spanning two continents, many people were inevitably encountered along the way. At the University of Strathclyde, my supervisors, David Miller and Colm Breathnach, deserve recognition for their endurance and their demonstration of a healthy scepticism that forced me to sharpen my arguments. I remain hugely grateful to Colin Clark (also at Strathclyde) for securing the faculty studentship that enabled me to undertake this work, which he supported from its inception through to the viva that he kindly offered to chair. The rare occasions I allowed myself to look up from these pages often coincided with cultural and culinary events instigated by my supportive doctoral colleagues, from whom I learnt a lot.

Although it may not be immediately obvious from the findings outlined here, Mike Gonzalez, from the University of Glasgow, was influential to this study, not least for unleashing an adolescent petulance that determined me to disprove him on certain counts and for introducing me to Professor Kapcia, at the University of Nottingham, whose contribution would be recognised much more effusively had he not agreed to act as external examiner. I am grateful to Adrian Pearce and the Society for Latin American Studies for providing a welcome contribution towards my Cuban fieldwork. Also in London, Stephen Wilkinson at the International Centre for the Study of Cuba provided a foretaste of what was to come, offering bibliographic advice and putting me in contact with Laura Monteagudo at the University of Havana who, together with Damaris Valdes, shed light on the sometimes fraught process of applying for visas.

In Havana, Jorge and Teresa Fariñas made an apartment at the back of their colonial-style Vedado house feel like home, helping to secure much-needed supplies and conspiring, together with our Norwegian neighbours, Gaute and Margot, to keep the dominoes, rum and cigars flowing into the night. Much laughter was provided at the University of Havana, not least by Alison and Paddy, while Marta Vega and Ivis Peraza Oliva spent an inordinate amount of time, both during and after class, patiently attempting to teach me their language. I am grateful to fellow researcher, Maria Inigo Clavo, for putting me in touch with Arien González Crespo, directora of the library at Casa de las Américas, who would introduce me to various people and ideas. Also at the Casa library, my thanks are due to Ángel Abreu, Eloisa Suárez, Rosa Marina

González, Yanet and Jamila for making me feel so welcome, and to Adriana Urrea, a colleague from Columbia, who paved the way for me to contact Ambrosio Fornet via Zaida Capote Cruz, whose partner, Jorge Fornet at Casa de las Américas, recommended Gilman's book about the revolutionary role of intellectuals in Latin America. The contribution of Adelaida de Juan and Graziella Pogolotti, who gave their time to this study so graciously, by consenting to be interviewed, will be evident throughout.

Thanks are also due to librarians in the Biblioteca Nacional – particularly Michel, Nury, Iandra and Esperanza – who guided me through the dusty card files and snatched moments to reassure me, and at UNEAC to Mayra García, Lourdes M. Quijano and Alain Talavera for making available an unpublished version of a book about the various congresses to have taken place around the artists' union. At the Oficina de Asuntos Historicos del Consejo de Estado, the highly articulate Armando Gómez went out of his way to help me with my research, even kindly checking the wording of my interview with Graziella Pogolotti to save me from linguistic shame. Perhaps the nicest day in Cuba was spent with Ernesto Fundora, Alejandro de la Torre and Rolando Almirante when Ernesto – a professor at the Instituto Superior de Arte – extended an invitation to hear a lecture he was giving on the playwright, Virgilio Piñera, in advance of a romp around the terra cotta landscape of the National Schools of Art.

Back in the UK, various learned people took time to contribute to my research, and I am particularly grateful to Arnold Wesker for sending a copy of his reflections on the 1968 Cultural Congress and to Benedict Read for pointing the way to an issue of the ICA Bulletin containing his late father's speech to the same congress, which was efficiently sourced by Jennifer Reeves at the National Art Library. While the quest for Cedric Belfrage's speech to the 1961 congress, led by his son, Nicolas, and Peter Filado, ultimately proved fruitless, it provides an excuse for returning to Havana to revisit the conference publication from which I failed to copy it the first time around. Thanks are also due to Osmi Cocozza for beginning the transcription of the Pogolotti interview and to Elena Sola-Simon for finishing it while providing more polished translations of my interview schedules than I could ever have managed by myself. Sneaking back to London to check a final reference, I was delighted by the willingness of the librarian at iniva to postpone her lunch and help.

I am also greatly indebted to those who, at times unwittingly, provided the focused periods of time necessary to the vast process of translating documents and implementing notes into an increasingly unwieldy document, including Doreen Jakob and Bas van Heur, organisers of a panel at the annual conference of the Association of American Geographers in Seattle in April 2011. Special thanks are due to Lisa Rosendahl, Renée Padt, Jonatan Habib Engqvist and Suzi Ersahin for facilitating a precious three-week residency at IASPIS (May–June 2011) to undertake the final thrust of translations, and to friends in Stockholm and Fränsta for ensuring that time spent in Sweden had its lighter moments. I am grateful to those who responded so positively and incisively to my first tentative presentation of this research at IASPIS, especially to Milena Placentile for her thoughtful reflections on this and all my work. Others who have shown a level of interest and confidence in my research that I hope will not be misplaced include Leslie Sklair at London School of Economics, Justin O'Connor at Queensland University of Technology and Vicky Coltman, Angela Dimitrakaki, Kirsten Lloyd, Iain Boyd White, Claudia Heide and Louise Fleming at the University of Edinburgh. Historically, the same must be said of Marianne Möller and Klaus Jung and, more recently, of Arno van Roosmalen and the team at Stroom Den Haag.

Every doctoral study inevitably relies on the tangible and intangible support of family and friends. In my case, this involved a father who availed me of the tranquillity of rural Staffordshire during crucial writing phases and a mother who sent me cuttings about Cuba from the capitalist press that galvanised my thoughts. Enquiries about my work from friends are too numerous to mention but all of them much appreciated, particularly when their eyes didn't glaze over during my response. Among these, Oran Wishart deserves special mention for recommending *Castro's Cuba, Cuba's Fidel*, while Tim Savage stands out for his empathy in relation to the experience of Cuba. Much respect goes out to Anthony Davies for his continued input, and to Jacob Lovatt for providing the soundtrack to my torment. And finally, I have tears in my eyes as I think of the support offered by Kyle McCallum, who accompanied me on this literal and metaphorical journey – the Cuban national anthem at the Pedro Marrero Stadium plays for you.

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Diagram commissioned by Arts Council England (2004), showing the central position of the market in the cultural field under capitalism

Bacardí Building, Havana

Graffiti in Santa Clara, citing the US as the greatest terrorist

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Reading room at Biblioteca Nacional José Martí, the national library, with bust of Martí. visible behind the card filing system

Publication produced to commemorate the First National Congress of Writers and Artists, 1961, at which UNEAC was formed

José Antonio Echevarría library at Casa de las Américas

The vertical archive at Casa de las Américas

Roberto Fernández Retamar has lunch at Casa de las Américas

The Office of Historical Matters of the Council of State with artwork by Asger Jorn and Raúl Martínez and photograph of Fidel's confidant, Celia Sánchez Manduley

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Fidel Castro Ruz

Ernesto 'Che' Guevara

Cover of Carlos Franqui's book, *Family Portrait with Fidel*, showing his purported erasure from Cuban history

Alfredo Guevara Valdés

Roberto Fernández Retamar

Haydée Santamaría Cuadrado

Haydée Santamaría with Fidel Castro upon his release from prison

Armando Hart Dávalos with Fidel Castro at the 1971 congress

Carlos Rafael Rodríguez

Tomás Gutiérrez Alea meets Che Guevara in the Sierra Maestra

Foyer of the Instituto Cubano de Artes e Industrias Cinematográficas (ICAIC)

Yara Cinema in Havana

ICAIC poster promoting mobile cinemas

Casa de las Américas

Diagram showing the omnipotence of the CNC president between 1971 and 1976

Covers of the UNEAC journal, *Unión*

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The National Museum of Fine Arts (national section)

The Centre for the Development of Visual Arts

The Wifredo Lam Contemporary Art Centre

The Casa de Cultura in Trinidad de Cuba

A bird's-eye view of the National School of Plastic Arts

Main facade of the National Schools of Art

The National School of Dance

The National School of Theatre

Covers of *Lunes de Revolución*

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Publication produced to commemorate the First National Congress of Writers and Artists, of 1961, which includes the slogan 'To Defend the Revolution is to Defend Culture'

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Diagram showing how preparatory meetings fed into congresses at a municipal, regional and provincial levels, culminating in the First National Congress of Education and Culture, 1971 (Instituto Cubano del Libro, 1971).

Fidel takes centre stage at the First National Congress of Education and Culture, 1971

Issue of *Juventud Rebelde* commemorating the First National Congress of Education and Culture, 1971, emphasising the development of mass education

Graph showing the number of exhibitions by professional artists between 1966 and 1984, which dipped in 1970, with no data being collected between 1971 and 1974

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Participants at the first Meeting of Latin American Plastic Artists in 1972

Working groups at the first Meeting of Latin American Plastic Artists in 1972

Haydée Santamaría (centre) at the first Meeting of Latin American Plastic Artists in 1972

Participants at the second Meeting of Latin American Plastic Artists in 1973, with Haydée Santamaría and Mariano Rodríguez

Participants at the second Meeting of Latin American Plastic Artists undertake some al fresco painting on the patio of the National Museum of Fine Arts in 1973

Key to Institutions

Casa de las Américas	House of the Americas
Casas de Cultura	Houses of Culture
Comité Estatal de Estadísticas	State Committee of Statistics
Centro Nacional de Aficionados	National Centre of Amateur Artists
Centro Provincial de Aficionados	Provincial Centre of Amateur Artists
Confederación de Trabajadores Cubanos (CTC)	Cuban Workers' Confederation
Consejo Nacional de Cultura (CNC)	National Council of Culture
Consejo Provincial de Cultura (CPC)	Provincial Council of Culture
Escuelas Nacionales de Arte (ENA)	National Schools of Art
Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias (FAR)	Revolutionary Armed Forces
Instituto Cubano de Artes e Industrias Cinematográficas (ICAIC)	Cuban Institute of Cinematic Arts and Industries
Instituto Cubano del Libro	Cuban Book Institute
Unión Nacional de Escritores y Artistas de Cuba (UNEAC)	National Union of Writers and Artists of Cuba
Ministerio de Cultura (MINCULT)	Ministry of Culture
Ministerio de Educación (MINED)	Ministry of Education
Ministerio de Industria (MININD)	Ministry of Industry
Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores (MINREX)	Ministry of Foreign Relations

Key to Abbreviations

i.i.o.	italics in original
i.a.	italics added
u/p	unpaginated

Chapter One: Embarking on a Study of Cuban Cultural Policy

'Culture brings freedom' – José Martí y Pérez¹

The endgame of neoliberal cultural policy has recently crept into sight in the UK. Public sector contributions to culture are dwindling, art has become synonymous with the market and its role within society has been systematically eroded. As will be elaborated in the next chapter, this is the result of the sustained, ideologically motivated campaign dating back more than three decades, which has witnessed the withdrawal of the state from the cultural field in favour of free market initiatives.

In response to the current state of affairs and motivated by a desire to prompt discussion about governmental attitudes to art and culture, this doctoral study considers the approach to culture that was adopted as a consequence of the 1959 Cuban Revolution. It combines an understanding of the shortcomings of cultural policy under neoliberalism with an inkling that the revolutionary government in Cuba followed a trajectory distinct from that of capitalist globalisation.² Research like that conducted by Antonio Carmona Báez adds fuel to this optimism, finding that:

[...] the Cuban government and people are now at a political moment where they are found to have been developing on a domestic scale counter-hegemonic tendencies that contradict the neo-liberal practice. Cuban discourse [...] is often centred on criticising the globalisation of neo-liberal ideas and placing the market and profits before the interests of the people. Fidel Castro and the PCC [Cuban Communist Party]³ promote an alternative form of globalisation, one that is based on the co-operation of states in material development and fair trade among the nations instead of competition (2004:8).

When this perceived resistance to the logic of neoliberalism is carried over into a study of cultural policy, it is done so in the hope that the early years of the Cuban Revolution enabled the subsidy, production and distribution of culture to be rethought from first

1 Cuban poet and revolutionary (1853–95) who died fighting against the Spanish colonists in Cuba as part of the late nineteenth century resistance movement. A bust of Martí is to be found in the gardens of the majority of public buildings in Havana.

2 For a consideration of generic, capitalist and alternative globalisations, see Sklair, 2009.

3 Partido Comunista de Cuba. Fidel described the party as 'the revolutionary vanguard, the political organization of the workers who, manifesting the power of the state, mobilize the masses to the accomplishment of the tasks and functions of the Revolution. It educates them, it organizes them, it directs and controls the administration, it draws up the plans of work and controls the carrying out of those plans. It is, in short, the political power' (Lockwood, 1967:154).

principles. Again, this supposition would seem not to be misplaced, with the artist and German-born citizen of Uruguay, Luis Camnitzer, observing that:

It is clear from the Cuban experience that public funding dealing with the artist as a totality – not just financing some of the produced collectibles – can be successful not only in helping the artist individually but also in raising a general level of culture. It is also clear that this success is optimized if there is a belief in culture as an intrinsic, active part of society's productivity and not just as a decorative appendix. Without this belief as a formative part of the social philosophy, it would not be possible to have this type of support nor these results (Camnitzer, 1994:318).

It would seem, then, that a small island in the Caribbean Sea provides fertile ground on which to seek forms of relations between culture, state and society that transcend their reducibility to mercantile values.

In pondering alternatives to capitalist cultural policy, this study finds that, in its totality, the experiment carried out in Cuba represents the most ambitious rethinking of cultural participation and provision from a Marxian perspective in the twentieth century. Yet, compared to the volume of analysis that exists around comparable advances in the fields of health and education, surprisingly little consideration in the English-speaking world has been given to the specific cultural policies that were developed during this time.⁴ It is this gulf between popular understanding outside Cuba and the significance of culture to the Revolution that the research presented here attempts to address.

The Cuban Revolution is both an event and a process. As is well known, the event was triggered on 26 July 1953, when Fidel Castro's men attacked the Moncada barracks in Santiago de Cuba (a date that would provide the revolutionary force with its name), and lasted until the military dictator, General Fulgencio Batista, relinquished power on the last day of 1958. Viewed with hindsight, the declaration of national independence on 1 January 1959 marks the beginning of the next phase of the Revolution, which was characterised by an extensive period of social reconstruction (Fernández Retamar, 1996). With some necessary consideration of the era before 1959, which may be thought of as pre-revolutionary, this study embraces the formative years of revolutionary cultural policy up to its consolidation in 1977.

⁴ A scant number of UK-based academics have considered Cuban cultural policy, notably Professor Antoni Kapcia at the University of Nottingham and Professor Nicola Miller at University College London, who are cited throughout.

As will be seen below, this period was characterised by a transitional political situation in which the rhetoric of socialism and communism was pursued and organisational forms inherited from the Soviet Union adopted and rejected. Accordingly, every attempt will be made to locate this research in its appropriate geopolitical context. In considering a decidedly non-uniform policy landscape, this report draws on a range of sources, cross-referencing government documents with the perspectives of practitioners to permit the gap between rhetoric and reality to be assessed. As one might expect in such a volatile atmosphere, several disparate approaches to revolutionary culture vied for supremacy, and the polemics of this period will be extrapolated to provide an insight into the main points of contention. Spanning conceptions of culture in capitalist and socialist societies and their respective implications for aesthetic freedom and the role of creative intellectuals, these discussions remain hugely pertinent today.

Colleagues in the European cultural field tend to anecdotally invoke two reasons for dismissing Cuba's cultural gains – the notorious persecution of homosexual artists and writers (which will be discussed more fully in chapter nine) and the Revolution's lack of adhesion to an ideal typical route in its seizure of power and pursuit of communism. While few people would nowadays dispute that Marxist-Leninist theory underlies the Cuban Revolution, debate has historically been centred on whether or not a premeditated attempt was made to smuggle communism into the American continent by stealth. Looking at the evidence, it seems clear that communism had not represented a revolutionary option in the 1950s. In 1938, the Cuban Communist Party⁵ had stood opposed to all those who sought to displace Batista, which enabled the dictatorship to assimilate the resistance of the labour movement by officially recognising the Cuban Workers' Confederation,⁶ the only national organisation representing labour. Added

5 Then known as the Unión Revolucionaria Comunista (URC) [Revolutionary Communist Union], which, in 1944, changed its name to Partido Socialista Popular (PSP) [Popular Socialist Party], led by Blas Roca Calderío, before merging with Fidel's 26 July Movement and Faure Chomón's Directorio Revolucionario Estudiantil [Revolutionary Student Directorate] in July 1961 to form the Organizaciones Revolucionarias Integradas (ORI) [Integrated Revolutionary Organisations]. On 26 March 1962, the ORI became the United Party of the Cuban Socialist Revolution (PURSC) which changed its name to Partido Comunista de Cuba (PCC) [Cuban Communist Party] on 3 October 1965.

6 Confederación de Trabajadores Cubanos (CTC), founded in 1939.

to this, the shadow of McCarthyism did little to convince the Cuban intelligentsia that international Marxism would better their situation (Fernández Retamar, 1966).

According to Samuel Farber (2006), Fidel Castro was privately committed to left-wing anti-imperialism (which accorded with the founding ethos of the communist PSP), but he lacked a master plan, which eventually led, via left-wing authoritarian nationalism, to communist nationalism and a new kind of left.⁷ Admitting to being politically illiterate when he entered university, Fidel describes how, before he had studied any Marxist or Leninist material, he was a ‘utopian Communist [which] is someone whose ideas don’t have any basis in science or history, but who sees that things are very bad, who sees poverty, injustice, inequality, an insuperable contradiction between society and true development’ (2006:99-100). And, while Alfredo Guevara (2007) testifies to the fact that Marxist texts were consulted by some of the revolutionary leadership as part of their intellectual evolution in the run-up to the Moncada attacks,⁸ they remained sceptical about communism.⁹ Indeed, Lumsden cites Fidel’s May 1959 assertion in the 26 July Movement’s daily newspaper, *Revolución*, that ‘capitalism starves people to death, [while] Communism [...] resolves the economic problem, but suppresses the liberties which are so dear to man’ (1969:541-2).

Marx had never envisaged a revolution taking place in an underdeveloped country lacking in heavy industry and a class-conscious proletariat, and ‘the Castroists did not expect the masses to lead the revolution, but merely to lend their admittedly

7 The perspective of the revolutionary leadership was that they: [...] did not belong to the old left intelligentsia – the older men who had gone through Communism and been disillusioned with Stalinism and with the purges and the trials and the 35 years of all that – we’ve had one enormous advantage as revolutionaries. We’ve not gone through all the terribly destructive process; we are revolutionaries of the post-Stalin era; we’ve never had any ‘God That Failed.’ We just don’t belong to that lineage. We don’t have all that cynicism and futility about what we’re doing, and about what we feel must be done. [...] We are new men. That is why we are so original and spontaneous and so unafraid to do what must be done in Cuba. There really are no ex-radicals among us. We are new radicals. We really are, we think, a new left in the world (Mills, 1960:43).

8 Among those influenced in this way, Guevara includes Fidel, Raúl, Pedro Miret and Léster Rodríguez (Guevara, 2007). In 1967, Haydée Santamaría (1978) would add her brother, Abel, to the list of those having read Lenin and Marx.

9 In a speech delivered in 1967, Haydée Santamaría (Ibid) would attest to the fact that, when they attacked Moncada, it was not with the intention of making a socialist revolution, but with the intention of making a change to the government. Members of the incipient movement had felt themselves to be Martíanos, which, for her, represented no conflict with their latter-day identity as Marxists, allowing them to remain both.

crucial support to what was predominantly a military action' (Karol, 1970:152). What this meant, in the second half of the 1950s, was that 'guerrilla centers would have to be set up in the remote mountains, from where the revolt would spread to all classes of society, thus gradually breaking the stranglehold of the army and state' (Ibid:370). In 1960, the revolutionary leaders were keen to emphasise that it had not been the old economic order *per se* that made the Revolution, nor was it a 'fight between peasants and landowners, or between wage workers and capitalists – either Cuban or Yankee; nor was it a direct nationalist battle between Cubans and any foreigners' (Mills, 1960:46); rather, young university intellectuals had led an insurrection that the peasants quickly joined.¹⁰

K.S. Karol details how:

The PSP remained a party of the poor, highly disciplined, devoted, and often persecuted. And then someone else made the revolution in its place, and in so doing cast doubt on all its theories, tactics, and on its very *raison d'être*. A party born for revolution and convinced that it had a monopoly in this field was suddenly forced to stand by almost idly while socialism triumphed all around. The resulting shock was in no way lessened by the fusion of the parties. [...] All the old Communists realized only too well that they owed their presence in the revolutionary ranks to nothing but the benevolence of Fidel, Che, and some others. And that many Castroists would have greatly preferred to ostracize them (1970:58).

It is necessary to dwell on these historical facts in order to provide some context for the discussion that follows, particularly when seeking to understand the fractious relationship between Cuba and the US and between some of the orthodox Marxists of the PSP and Fidel's 26 July Movement.

After 1959, when the option of joining revolutionary institutions became available, whatever rebellion might have been implied in joining the Communist Party during Batista's time evaporated, and it would be the 'more old-fashioned kind of "radical" who tend[ed] to stay with the Communist Party' (Mills, 1960:108). In the summer of 1960, the esteemed sociologist, C. Wright Mills, visited Cuba, to be told by

¹⁰ Fidel describes his rationale that, 'If you can't count on the working class, the campesinos, the under-class, the poor and the humble, in a country terribly exploited and suffering, then none of it makes any sense. There was no class consciousness, except for those who were members of the Popular Socialist Party, who were pretty well educated politically; there was, though, what I sometimes call a class instinct' (2006:105). Possibly in an attempt to distance the Revolution from communism, Mills (1960) argues that, when Batista fled the country, the urban workers (who had not until then developed a revolutionary consciousness) were transformed, supporting and radicalising the Revolution.

Fidel that his 1956 book, *The Power Elite*, had been the bedside reading of most of the *guerrilleros* in the Sierra Maestra (Karol, 1970).¹¹ Formulating his findings as an address to citizens of the United States, entitled *Listen, Yankee*, Mills determined three main factors that would increase the political power of the Communist Party in Cuba: anticommunist rhetoric being used by the US against Cuba; the revolutionary government persecuting the Party and, most seriously, the US making serious economic difficulties for Cuba or encouraging the organisation of counter-revolutionaries abroad in the name of anticommunism. As history has shown, the US played its part most effectively, and the Cuban people, mediated by Mills, would articulate the suspicion that ‘It was the U.S. pressure, it was the U.S. propaganda, it was what the U.S. has failed to do in connection with our revolution that has forced us, finally, to see that maybe we do *belong* in the Soviet political alliance’ (Ibid:152; i.i.o.). Similarly, Fernández Retamar argues that ‘The aggressive reaction of the United States precipitated the socialist character of a revolution that did not begin that way’ (1996:174).

Farber describes how, rather than being a direct response to US hostility, ‘the development of Cuban Communism [was] a virtually automatic, predetermined response to objective economic, social and political conditions as understood and acted upon by men whose guerrilla experiences cautioned them to act as realistic revolutionaries to survive’ (2006:4-5).¹² This leads him to conclude that it was the agency of the revolutionary leaders, while the Soviet Union was seen to be in the ascendant, which led to confrontations with the US.¹³ Yet, the trigger for Fidel’s declaration of the socialist character of the Revolution on 16 April 1961 was a specific act of US aggression – the bombing of Havana airport as a prelude to the Bay of Pigs invasion.

11 According to Karol (1970), the two men spent three and a half days together, devoting an average of eighteen hours a day to discussions. Among others Mills (1960) mentions meeting are: Osvaldo Dorticós Torrado, Che Guevara, Armando Hart and Carlos Franqui.

12 In outlining the national, rather than social, beginnings of the 1959 Revolution, Farber describes Fidel Castro as a product of the Cuban populist tradition (as distinct from Marxist voluntarism), which ‘glorified action and denigrated theory as if the two were necessarily opposed’ (2006:41). This interpretation proposes that Che Guevara was both a voluntarist and an adventurer, Fidel was simply an adventurer, albeit less anti-intellectual than some observers claim; something of a dilettante, he was initially supported by middle class liberals as a softer option than his brother, Raúl, or the explicitly Marxist Che.

13 Fidel describes how the Soviet Union coming to their aid, combined with the imperialist foreign policy of the US, made Cuba more amenable to Marxism (Lockwood, 1967).

In formalising the incipient socialist character of the Revolution at the funeral for those killed in the attacks, Fidel would assert that he had ‘proclaimed what was already a fact’ (1962:15), thereby taking what Karol describes as the short step from the realisation that his enemies were resistant to social change to the ‘conviction that his program had been socialist from the beginning’ (1970:158). Yet, almost a year earlier, on 28 July 1960, Che had said ‘if you ask me whether this Revolution before your eyes is a communist Revolution, we would come say that this Revolution will be Marxist because it discovered, through its methods, paths which point to Marx’ (Mills, 1960:112).¹⁴

Lenin claimed that ‘the only scientific distinction between socialism and communism is that the first term implies the initial stage of the new society, arising out of capitalism, while the second implies the next and higher stage’ (1909:21). In Cuba, the socialist path was actively pursued until 1963 (Rafael Rodríguez, 1966), followed by a push towards communism during the 1960s and ’70s and what Eckstein (1994) relishes calling a retreat back into socialism.¹⁵ Given the beginnings of the Cuban Revolution, the reliance of its leaders on canonical texts may seem misplaced. But President of the Republic, Dr. Osvaldo Dorticós Torrado,¹⁶ who had been a young communist (Kapcia, 2008), would dismiss this perspective as orthodox, to explain that ‘Marx had fixed the final goal and explained the nature of the future society; the rest was simply a matter of discovering the right means. And the more appropriate the means the more quickly the ends would be attained’ (Ibid:360).¹⁷ While there are those who maintain that Cuba has

14 For a consideration of the grassroots factors precipitating communisation, see Kapcia, 2008.

15 The march towards communism was still being mentioned in the late 1970s (see Sarusky and Mosquera, 1979).

16 Karol describes the President as:

An advocate, and a senior member of Fidel’s team, though he was only forty-eight, Dr. Dorticós, with his glasses, small moustache, and grave voice, looked the typical academic. He is clearly not a Castroist like the rest; he never fired a gun in the Sierra Maestra, is beardless, and does not wear olive-green. The militiaman’s uniform he occasionally wears at mass demonstrations looks quite out of character on him. With his quick mind and quiet manner, he is obviously an intellectual and, indeed, his intimacy with socialist writings, from Marx to Gramsci, is extremely impressive. As leader of the civil resistance movement in his native Cienfuegos, President Dorticós did not meet Fidel Castro until after Batista’s fall. Then he joined the government and was made responsible for the drafting of all the revolutionary laws. Six months later, when President Urrutia clashed with the Castroists and thus forced them to appoint new head of state, Dorticós was chosen unanimously and has remained at his post ever since (1970:356-6).

17 The idea that the most appropriate means could be found – so long as the ultimate end of communism was reached – combined with the unorthodox seizure of power through armed struggle to constitute what was somewhat ironically described as the ‘Cuban heresy’ (Ibid). The idea of heresy came from Lenin’s attempts, in a rebuttal of Bogdanov, ‘to ensure that Bolshevism would be identified with orthodox Marxism rather than “revisionism.”’ (Sochor, 1988:7). In thus attacking Bogdanov on

found neither the means to nor the ends of socialism, the director of *Temas* magazine, Rafael Hernández, concludes that ‘the revolution was not a change of regime or the rise of a communist party to government, but a fundamental social transformation; it was and continues to be a process with deep social roots, as characterized by Marx and as can be found in the Cuban revolutionary tradition’ (2003:29).¹⁸

In July 1961, Fidel’s 26 July Movement merged with the less radical PSP, which had been ‘Stalinist from the outset’ (Ibid:60).¹⁹ In considering this alliance of revolutionary factions, an émigré-friendly commentator who describes the Cuban leader as a ‘Pragmatic diplomat and master manipulator’ (Tismaneanu, 1986:570) notes that ‘What happened to Fidel in the years following the victory of the revolution was not a genuine conversion to the Marxist-Leninist faith, but the result of a thoroughly calculated maneuver to lure the communist watchdogs making use of their symbols and stratagems’ (loc cit). This explanation is more sinister than the one offered by Karol (1970) – that the communists were perceived as disciplined, organised, responsive to hierarchical structures and in possession of allies in the east, all of which made them valuable to the Revolution.²⁰ Nonetheless, both accounts find that orthodox Marxists of the PSP were entrusted with vital roles. As we shall see, the cultural field was no exception and this quickly became a battleground on which internecine struggles would be played out.

philosophical grounds, Lenin ‘implanted in Marxism the notion of philosophical heresy and ultimately created a link between a “correct” philosophy and politics’ (Ibid:8).

18 As such, ‘in their task of establishing a socialist system of economic production based on state ownership of the means of production, the Cuban leadership drew on values of collectivism, egalitarianism, and work to justify and regularize new practices and productive relations’ (Fernandes, 2007:30).

19 Having ‘never thought that they were contributing to the birth of a new type of socialism in Cuba, or that they were being overtaken by a movement which, according to doctrine, was quite unfit to lead a socialist revolution’ (Karol, 1970:155) the post-revolutionary demands on the part of the PSP were similarly moderate.

20 Kápacia (2008) concurs that their unconditional support, discipline, political skills and membership of around 6,000 were perceived as a useful asset. Karol concedes that:

It is of course possible that defections from the ranks of the July 26th Movement did drive Fidel Castro into the arms of the PSP: he could no longer play the supreme arbiter between the various factions in his vast coalition movement, simply because the right flank had deserted en masse. Had all his old associates had stayed on and accepted the necessity for Cuban socialism, the influence of the PSP would undoubtedly have been greatly reduced. But the reasons which had prevented the deserters from accepting Castro’s socialist aims had nothing to do with questions of character. Cuba’s ever closer links with the Soviet Union did much to speed up the process of disintegration, driving a good number of waverers over to the other side (1970:235).

Previous attempts to distinguish the Cuban ideological variant from that developed in the Soviet Union have had recourse to the notion of ‘Martían Marxism’. This implies a Marxism tempered by José Martí’s insistence on resistance to North American imperialism being mounted across ‘Our America’. These ideas will be discussed in chapter eight, to inform an intellectual role at the vanguard of a continent-wide anti-imperialist struggle that will be realised in chapter ten. Kronenberg (2011) posits Ernesto ‘Che’ Guevara as having introduced Martían Marxism into the constitution, and Cintio Vitier would find such a reconciliation of Martí and Marx to be alien to the dogmatism that had led to the installation of socialist realism in Europe (Retamar, 2009). While the ideas of Martí indisputably influenced the broader ideology of the Cuban Revolution from Moncada onwards, this study finds post-revolutionary cultural policy to have been explicitly defined in terms of Marxist humanism. Accordingly, this study seeks to isolate the main tenets of Marxist-humanist cultural policy as it was manifested in Cuba, beginning with a consideration of its theoretical underpinnings in the next chapter. That said, this is not an attempt to reinvent the wheel, and precedents for the discussions being outlined here will be mentioned throughout, from early Soviet experiments in cultural policy and conceptions of the new man to discussions around aesthetics in 1930s Germany and the germ of democratised culture in Poland from the late-1940s to the mid-1950s.

In light of the above, the volume of studies about Cuban culture that neglect, or negate, considerations of Marxism is astonishing, often leading to substitutions of the unfashionable ‘M’ word with euphemisms like ‘modernity’ or with antithetical concepts such as ‘postmodernism’. So, for example, Catherine Davies moves from Giddens’s assertion of the origins of postmodernism (in the substitution of capitalism by socialism) to Lyotard’s refutation of nostalgia for meta-narratives, to ground her study in a ‘post-Soviet delegitimation of the Marxist grand narrative of emancipation’ (2000:116). Discerning a meta-critical, ironic attitude in certain Cuban cultural works,²¹

²¹ In chapter eight, we shall see how other notions of the artistic critique that is enacted in Cuba differs from this interpretation. In the meantime, Camnitzer explores other elements of the postmodern lexicon to dismiss their relevance to the Cuban case. Cuban artwork, he concludes, is not derivative of that being produced in the West, nor privy to its scepticism. If it shares the visual eclecticism of postmodernism, this is because ‘Cuban art continues to be both the product of the belief in and a tool for striving for the

she concedes that this is most prevalent in the diaspora. In fact, as several commentators have pointed out, postmodernism – as it played out in the capitalist world during the period covered by this study – implies a rejection of the Enlightenment aims that had underwritten modernism, which presumed ‘the accumulation of knowledge generated by many individuals working freely and creatively for the pursuit of human emancipation and the enrichment of daily life’ (Harvey, 1980:12). As we shall see, this makes postmodernism inimical to the Marxist-humanist approach to culture that was consistently developed on the island.²²

Whatever the political peculiarities of Cuba in the first half of the twentieth century, the Revolution overcame Batista’s tyranny,²³ following four centuries of colonial rule and fifty years of US imperialist control (Sarusky and Mosquera, 1979),²⁴ and, since 1961, the revolutionary government has actively opposed the agendas of its neighbour ninety miles to the north (Gott, 2004). Having established herself on this basis, Cuba would turn her attention to inequalities beyond her borders. Cuban art critic and president of the writers’ and artists’ union, Graziella Pogolotti (2006), describes the Revolution as a turning point in history, exposing Cuba to an international panorama characterised by change and an intensification of debate. Mills would declare that ‘Cuba’s voice today is a voice of the hungry-nation bloc and the Cuban revolutionary is now speaking – most effectively – in the name of that bloc’ (1960:7). We shall see how this voice spoke most eloquently through cultural events and dialogues in the 1960s and ’70s.²⁵

betterment of society, and it uses any means available’ (1994:312).

22 In the process, Harvey (1980) notes that Marx was, in many ways, a child of Enlightenment thought as he sought to convert utopian thinking into a materialist science, showing how emancipation might emerge from class-bound repressive capitalist development.

23 With US support, Batista killed an estimated 20,000 Cubans (Mills, 1960:23).

24 Of imperialism in the old Cuba, it was said that this ‘rested, of course, upon foreign-owned capital. And it wasn’t only the sugar fields and the mills and the oil refineries and the electric company and the rubber-tire plants and the telephone system. It was also the preferential tariffs given to U.S. capitalists – and only to U.S. capitalists – who sold so many things to Cuba that Cubans had to have’ (Ibid:72). Elsewhere, this period of subordination under the US is described as one of neo-colonialism, with Cuba being ‘subjected to its tutelage’ (Fernández Retamar, 1971:10) and distinguished from more conventional colonies (such as Puerto Rico and the Philippines) maintained by the US after their liberation from Spain. More specifically, citing Mariátegui, Fernández Retamar asserts that ‘The Latin-American countries are experiencing a belated entry into competitive capitalism. The dominant positions are already well established. The fate of such countries, within the capitalist order, is that of simple colonies’ (Ibid:28) to observe: ‘Incorporated into what is called with a bit of unintentional humor the “free world,” our countries – in spite of shields, anthems, flags, and presidents – would inaugurate a new form of not being independent: neocolonialism’ (loc cit).

25 Navarro (2007a) observes four ideological tropes in contemporary Cuba – barracks communism,

Culture, the reticent third pillar of Cuban social change, stands slightly overshadowed by its cousins, health and education (especially literacy). Notwithstanding, the extent to which health care and education are taken to have improved in post-revolutionary Cuba, depends on an evaluation of the situation beforehand. Susan Eckstein – a US-based academic who confesses to holidaying in Martha’s Vineyard and writes of the ‘well-to-do’ rather than the capitalist class – makes claims for a relatively healthy pre-revolutionary situation. Relying on figures that veil the concentration of wealth, health and resources in urban areas, she contends that ‘on a number of indicators Cuba already did well before the Revolution. Accordingly, Castro has an impressive social base on which to build’ (1994:148). Fidel has countered this in the following terms:

That false image of prosperity, which was really the prosperity of one small class, is the image which the United States still tries to present of Cuba before the Revolution. They try to hide the true image of that epoch, the image of terrible economic and social conditions in which the vast majority of the country lived. Naturally we have not made this majority rich, but we have extraordinarily improved the condition of their lives. We have guaranteed them medical assistance at all times, we have blotted out illiteracy, and we have offered facilities and opportunities for study to everybody, children as well as adults (Lockwood, 1967:90).

In considering this persistent perceptual gulf, Farber (2006) asserts that those, including politically conservative exiles, who present Cuba as economically sound before the Revolution are misguided, and that fundamental contradictions remained within Cuba’s economy, which eventually provided the impetus for the majority of the population to support a radical solution. Time and again, in the literature published in the so-called developed world, we are reminded of ‘the ambivalence that well-fed children of the enlightenment so often suffer when confronted with such profound transformations’ (Fagen, 1969:viii).

A sympathetic history of Cuba adds nuance to this discussion, contending that ‘pre-Revolutionary Cuba was not backward in its provision of medical services. The island had some of the most positive health indices in the Americas, not far behind the

democratic socialism, state capitalism and neoliberal capitalism – the first three of which have been united in their opposition to North American annexation and against the demands enforced by the barracks model.

United States and Canada. Both in life expectancy at birth, and in doctors per thousand of the population, Cuba was among the leaders. In terms of doctors per person, Cuba before 1959 was eleventh in the world' (Gott, 2004:165).²⁶ But, this account continues, these statistics 'were heavily biased towards the urban population, for most of Cuba's doctors were based in Havana and the large regional towns. Conditions in the rural areas [...] were certainly rough – few doctors, few roads, few schools and little regular employment – while many of the inhabitants of Havana were comparatively prosperous' (loc cit) and a private system of health care existed for those who could afford it.

In much the same way, the 1961 Year of Education²⁷ and its centrepiece, the literacy campaign, are the subject of contested findings. Fuelled by a desire to industrialise and confronted with a population, an estimated 23 percent of which was illiterate (again centred on rural areas), the revolutionary government launched an experimental and ambitious campaign. On 22 September 1960, Fidel announced at the United Nations General Assembly that the Revolution would eradicate illiteracy within a year.²⁸ A census was conducted which, by the end of August 1961, had identified 985,000 illiterates (Fagen, 1969). One hundred thousand teenagers, armed with politicised teaching manuals, oil lamps and oversized pencils (Ibid), were sent out into the countryside (*campo*) to teach the peasant population to read in an 'episode [which] transformed Cuba's political and cultural landscape and also all those who participated, by enrolling thousands of mostly young urban Cubans as educators (*brigadistas*

26 Above Britain, France, Holland and Japan. In Latin America, it ranked in third place after Uruguay and Argentina (Gott, 2004).

27 Names have been given to each of the post-revolutionary years. Andrew Salkey attended the ninth anniversary of the triumph of the Revolution and witnessed Fidel asking the assembled crowd what they should call 1968. Someone shouted 'The Year of the Heroic Guerrilla' in honour of Che Guevara's death three months earlier.

28 A transcript of this speech is available at <http://lanic.utexas.edu/project/castro/db/1960/19600927.html> (accessed 5 July 2011). The roots of this campaign can be traced back to Fidel's 'History will Absolve Me' speech, delivered at his trial in the wake of the 26 July 1953 attack on the Moncada Barracks in Santiago de Cuba (during which Fidel led an armed mob of proto-revolutionaries in an action that caused disproportionate loss of life, at the time and by way of retribution thereafter, and gave the rebel movement its name), and, more explicitly, to a manifesto issued from the Sierra Maestra mountains in 1957 (Fagen, 1969). From April 1959, initiatives connected with the newly instated Literacy Commission and the National Institute for Agrarian Reform (INRA), run by Che Guevara, began a modest programme of literacy work alongside the ongoing efforts of the Rebel Army (Ibid). In October 1960, preparations were made to extend this programme nationally.

alfabetizadores) and bringing life-changing and empowering benefits to many thousands more, especially in the *campo*' (Kapcia, 2005:119-20).²⁹

Camnitzer (1994) charts illiteracy falling from 23.6 percent in 1953 to 3.9 percent in 1961 and mentions the specially designed flag that was hoisted to show that illiteracy had been eradicated from villages.³⁰ Farber gives complexion to the statistics, explaining that, according to a 1953 census conducted across Latin America, 76.4 percent of the pre-revolutionary population of Cuba could read and write,³¹ but the growing population and its dependence on the monocultural sugar trade led to increasing unemployment and dramatic differences between the rural and urban populations and between Havana and the rest of the country:

[...] whereas in 1953 the rate of illiteracy for the Cuban nation as a whole was 23.6 percent and the rate for Havana was only 7.5 percent, 43 percent of the rural population could not read or write, hardly surprising in light of the [1956-7 Catholic Association of Havana] survey's finding that 44 percent of these rural working people had never gone to school, compared to only 26 percent of the urban population (2006:21).³²

Having co-ordinated a guerrilla campaign from the densely-forested Sierra Maestra mountains at the south-eastern tip of Cuba for more than two years, the triumphant 'urban-based revolutionaries declared war on conditions in the countryside and on socioeconomic backwardness in general. They controlled enough men, materials, and political support to initiate such a war, and they faced enemies – hunger, disease, illiteracy – real enough and evil enough to make their efforts both self-explanatory

29 Wesker describes how 'the universities were told to close so that students could go out into the cities and mountains to teach everyone to read and write' (1969:16).

30 Carlos Rafael (1969) describes how this work continued, taking 400,000 former illiterates up to secondary teaching level, with UNESCO proclaiming the programme as the greatest in the history of teaching in Latin America and positing it as an example to the governments of other developing countries.

31 In this regard, Cuba was beaten only by Argentina, Chile and Costa Rica (Farber, 2006).

32 In illustrating how education in general, and the literacy campaign in particular, became one of the cornerstones of an attempt to stimulate a new political culture in Cuba, Fagen emphasises the state of pre-revolutionary education:

The statistics of the 1950's [sic] testified that Cuban society was in fact in dire need of educational reform. The 1953 census indicated that of all citizens ten years or older, approximately 25 percent had never been to school at all and slightly over 50 percent had dropped out of school before finishing the sixth grade. Thus three out of four Cubans who had 'completed' their schooling were either illiterate or at best semieducated. Although the picture might have looked slightly different had there been another census in 1958, the basic deficiencies of 1953 remained essentially untouched when the Rebel Army marched into Havana (1969:35).

and popular' (Fagen, 1969:25). The broader rationale for this is to be found in Lenin's assertion that 'in order to abolish classes completely, it is not enough to overthrow the exploiters, the landlords and capitalists, not enough to abolish *their* rights of ownership of the means of production, it is necessary to abolish the distinction between town and country, as well as the distinction between manual workers and brain workers' (1909:23; i.i.o.). Within Cuba, it was understood that writing and related activities – beginning with literacy – would reduce inequality to a minimum (Fornet, 2007); thus, literacy 'was seen, next to economic independence, as a primary tool [through which] to achieve not only cultural autonomy but also [to confer] the ability to create a new culture within the new social order' (Camnitzer, 1994:112). In a pamphlet published by UNESCO, it was claimed that the Revolution kept its promise in 'an extraordinary feat on the part of the Cuban people who, in but one year, succeeded in eradicating an evil considered as insuperable in more developed countries' (Saruský and Mosquera, 1979:13). But, as is typical in studies of this curious island, these claims can be unravelled to reveal a more complex picture:

One can point out that only first-grade levels of skill in reading and writing were officially claimed for the new literates, and that such levels are much too low to be of real and immediate use either at work or at home. Similarly, it is clear that many of the new literates were so located geographically and demographically that even this marginal increment would rapidly slip away from them without intensive follow-up work and practice. Furthermore, as the final statistics of the campaign attest, 272,000, or 28 percent, of the illiterates located in the special census either could not or would not be taught to read and write during the year. Finally, when the costs, both direct and indirect, of organizing, training, supplying, and at times paying those who participated in the campaign are measured against the tangible results, it is easy to conclude that the campaign was far less than the smashing success the revolutionaries claimed. But such a conclusion, however true in some respects, is in large measure irrelevant to an appreciation of the enduring legacy of the Year of Education (Fagen, 1969:54-5).

Indeed, taking a wider view, Gott details how, at both local and international level:

[...] what was done in 1961 helped to define the image of the Revolution in its early years, at home and abroad. Its impact on the peasantry was electric and it was also a defining moment for the teenagers who found themselves in distant corners of the national territory into which they had never penetrated before. For a generation that had missed the revolutionary war, the experience gave them the right to call themselves revolutionaries.

The literacy campaign caught the imagination of the world, and became the Revolution's most important selling-point in its early years. Its success encouraged the

government to engage in a continuing campaign to encourage adult education, helping to produce a workforce that was both better prepared and more politically aware. [...] This was not just a matter of devoting large sums to the provision of a free national schooling system for everyone aged six to fifteen. Cuba also became known for its willingness to innovate and experiment (2004:189).³³

From 1961, the momentum of the literacy campaign was continued into education more broadly, and grants were made available to students wishing to train as teachers. Initially prioritising the *brigadistas*, 40,800 grants were made; by the first semester of 1961, this had risen to 50,000; by 1973, to 458,000 and, by the start of courses in 1974–5, to 542,000 (MINED, 1975).³⁴ This inevitably stimulated an increase in the number of children entering primary education, with 717,000 alumni in 1958–9 multiplying to 8 million entrants in 1967–8, the same picture being seen at secondary and tertiary levels and a commitment being made to increase not only the quantity but also the quality of educational opportunity for revolutionary students (Llanusa and Dorticós, 1967). This commitment to education found its way into the balance sheets of the revolutionary government. In 1957–8, Batista had invested 79.4 MMP (million pesos) in education; by 1965, this had jumped to 260.4 MMP and, by 1974, to 741.5 MMP (MINED, 1975).

While raised educational levels ‘strengthened the ties uniting the urban and rural masses’ (Saruský and Mosquera, 1979:13), they also signalled ‘the start of their transformation into an audience capable of receiving and enjoying outstanding work having deep roots in the national culture and, at the same time, of playing an active part in the creation of artistic and literary works’ (loc cit).³⁵ In 1969, the respected Uruguayan novelist, poet and journalist, Mario Benedetti,³⁶ who had been visiting Cuba since 1966, observed that:

33 This continues that ‘In later decades, with Soviet assistance and a large budget, Cuba developed an improved educational system without parallel in Latin America – and free to all. A start had already been made in the first year, with the construction of more than 3,000 schools. Some 300,000 children attended school for the first time, and 7,000 additional teachers were recruited and trained’ (Gott, 2004:189).

34 Fidel describes the successes of the Minas del Frio school for student teachers: ‘Before it was very difficult to get teachers who would go to teach in the mountains. Now, students from every province and from all the towns of the country go into that school, and when they graduate they begin to teach in the mountains’ (Lockwood, 1967:108).

35 In relation to the broader cultural field, improved literacy had an impact on subsequent generations of readers and writers, which is evident in the near-universal attendance at the International Book Festival that travels around the island every year.

36 Described as ‘one of the intellectuals of the most political prestige’ (Gilman, 2003:205).

Education on so massive a scale [...] has created a craving for culture that cannot always be met by the present Cuban artists and intellectuals, and this is easy to understand: a culture is not improvised in a decade. Of course, there is always someone who demands great creations, legitimate masterpieces on the topics to which the revolution gives rise every day, and that, without doubt, is a demand that has not been fully met to date (1969:501).³⁷

In 1971, the First National Congress on Education and Culture would attest that ‘the literacy campaign, the nationalisation of teaching and the means of mass communication, the plans for grants and the creation of cultural institutions were essential premises of this transformation. From this followed in the people the eagerness for books, theatrical works, films, art’ (Santana, 1977). Thus, burgeoning literacy may be regarded as the foundation stone of the discussions in these pages, priming a population for informed participation in culture.

In 1960, Mills observed that ‘At the moment, “culture” is very much education, necessarily of the rudimentary sort; “culture” is now mainly the construction of a primary school system, and the quick training of technicians and lower administrative personnel’ (1960:134).³⁸ Miller notes that:

What culture meant under the Cuban Revolution was broadly conceived from the outset. All the results of creative activity geared towards aesthetic, ethical or spiritual expression – artistic, literary, musical, theatrical – professional or amateur, artisanal or industrialised, individual or collective, were brought in under the umbrella of the government’s commitment to culture.

Culture was seen as a powerful integrating force, one which could reconcile the individual with society; a commitment to a rational approach to life with personal impulses and collective norms; values with ideas and imaginings (2008:686).

As we shall see, the definition of culture shifted as the policy pertaining to it evolved.

Throughout this study, the words of the Cuban poet, Roberto Fernández Retamar are

37 A few years earlier, Fernández Retamar had described how the frustrations of an artistic vanguard, confronted with a semi-literate population in an underdeveloped country, were being assuaged through mass campaigns, which, ‘far from being in opposition to rigorous and demanding creation, are the condition for its development’ (1966:285). As we shall see, the democratisation of education and culture would have an impact on the definition of intellectuals in Cuba.

38 At the same time, the curriculum was changed to reflect the aims of the new society, and, during interviews conducted in the mid-1960s, Fidel would describe how: [...] children are being educated to live in a Communist society. From an early age they must be discouraged from every egotistical feeling in the enjoyment of material things, such as the sense of individual property, and be encouraged toward the greatest possible common effort and a spirit of cooperation. Therefore, they must receive not only instruction of a scientific kind but also education for social life and a broad general culture (Lockwood, 1967:110). Miller (2008) cites not only Soviet influence on education in Cuba but also the ideas of Paulo Freire and Frantz Fanon.

borne in mind – that ‘Although “culture” is all the creation of a human community, here I am going to refer to it above all in relation to literature, the arts and thinking. The other meaning is not dispensable, however, especially in our country where the term is often taken to refer to both camps’ (1966:266).

Two years into the Revolution, the government became alert to the growing cultural demand, and, in August 1961, President Dorticós would tell of how:

In the first years of a Socialist Revolution, most of the attention is absorbed by emergencies and the fundamental priorities of the work of a Revolutionary Government. Evidently, it would be a luxury to discuss literature and art had we not first discussed production in our country; indeed, the material and human resources of the people’s revolutionary strength had first of all to be applied to the needs connected with the economic changes and the construction of socialism (MINREX, 1962b:75).³⁹

Thus, once sovereignty had been established, militarily and on solid economic foundations, it became possible, and necessary, to consider politics and culture, because these two factors would ‘determine what kinds of men and women, what kinds of human beings the Cubans of the immediate future are going to be’ (Mills, 1960:118).⁴⁰ In a novella reflecting on a society undergoing acculturation, Edmundo Desnoes⁴¹ observes that ‘Even our feelings are underdeveloped: joy and sorrow are primitive and direct here, they haven’t been elaborated and worked on by culture’ (1968:24). As Gramsci had foreseen, ‘One must speak of a struggle for a new culture, that is, for a new moral life that cannot but be intimately connected to a new intuition of life, until it becomes a new way of feeling and seeing reality’ (1931-5:98).

By the time Dorticós delivered his speech, building work had begun on an ambitious complex of five national schools of art (to be discussed in chapter five) and, while it was estimated that this would provide professional training for around 600 alumni, the same anti-elitist ethos that permeated the broader educational field found its way into cultural education. As will be seen in chapter nine, one of the most important

39 Among the priorities dealt with during the early years, Dorticós identified agrarian reform, the nationalisation of industries and the creation of the material basis for the new society (minrex, 1962b:75).

40 At that time, it was predicted that ‘sooner than you could expect, the problem of culture will be central in Cuba – and in the world attention given to Cuba’ (Mills, 1960:134).

41 Weiss asserts that ‘Desnoes stands out as a distinguished literary critic with a “third world” perspective [who] does not concern himself strictly with literary problems or questions of a cultural nature, but does venture into the realm of photography, mass media and the fine arts’ (1973:147).

implications of Cuban cultural policy after 1 January 1959 is that ‘the Revolution took culture “to the people” in a process of conscious democratisation’ (Kapcia, 2005:22). Similar in scope to the literacy campaign, a programme was implemented to train thousands of new art teachers which, in turn, led to the creation of up to a million amateur artists in a population of around seven million. This tendency of the revolutionary government towards widening access and involvement will be explored in more detail as an integral part of this study.

As in the areas of health and education, the pre-revolutionary picture must be borne in mind. Miller argues that one of the legacies of the earlier revolution, in 1933, was ‘that it cemented the importance of culture in Cuba’s radical tradition’ (2008:683) and, more specifically that:

When the *comandantes* came to power, culture had long been embedded in Cuban concepts of what it is to be fully a human being and a citizen. [...] the revolutionaries themselves grew up in the context of this tradition, and their own political views had been shaped by it. Thus the revolutionary government did not so much try to found a wholly new culture as seek to connect the radical elements of Cuba’s existing cultural traditions to the revolutionary project of cultural decolonisation. Just as the revolutionary leaders found many useable elements in pre-revolutionary historiography – predominantly but by no means only in revisionist history – so did they identify several key features of Cuban culture that complemented their political aims (Ibid:685).

Indeed, as Miller points out, the comparatively enlightened constitution of 1940, produced under Fulgencio Batista’s first elected presidency,⁴² included a fifth section split between family and culture. While the emphasis of the latter subsection is on education, culture is cited as a ‘fundamental interest of the state’ alongside the idea that ‘scientific research, artistic expression and the publication of their results are free’ (Pichardo, 1940). In February 1959, the Fundamental Law of the Republic, which served as the post-revolutionary Cuban constitution for almost two decades, would re-iterate this wording exactly (Urrutia and Lleo, 1959).

Despite acknowledgement having been made of the strategic importance of culture before the Revolution, conditions for its production had generally been regressive, which was later interpreted as part of a concerted effort to destroy Cuban

⁴² During his presidency in the 1940s, Batista established a constitutional democracy which he viciously eradicated after resuming power in 1952 following a military coup (Carmona Báez, 2004).

nationality (CNC, 1963a). Armando Hart (1989), who would serve as the first post-revolutionary Minister of Education and then Culture, charts the ways in which the annexation of Cuba to the United States in the twentieth century retarded the cultural development of the island, subordinating culture to the parasitic interests of a neo-colonial bourgeoisie and preventing the evolution of creativity with profoundly Cuban roots.⁴³ Writing in the first issue of the influential *Nuestro Tiempo* [Our Time] magazine to be published after the triumph of the Revolution by the cultural society of the same name, Mariano Sánchez Roca⁴⁴ would give voice to the frustration of a generation, describing how Batista's henchmen had not only engaged in acts of physical repression but also deprived people of the right to think or to express their thoughts through the known means of distribution (Hernández Otero, 2002). Ambrosio Fornet – a writer whose work is central to this study – reflects on the pre-revolutionary Era of Contempt, in which ‘to write, paint or read poetry were suspicious acts which ought to be executed in the strictest secrecy’ (2004:11). Similarly, a writer of whom it was said that ‘in the genre of the novel, so far the greatest credit should be given’ (Benedetti, 1969:518), Lisandro Otero,⁴⁵ sketches the Cuban cultural field of the 1950s: ‘Economic insecurity, subservience to the tastes of the ruling class, the commercialization of art, the scanty possibilities of getting to the top, and the intervention of unworthy political consideration were the characteristics of the milieu in which art in Cuba had to be pursued, with great difficulty, before the advent of the Revolutionary Government’ (1972:23). In 1961, the novelist and playwright, Eduardo Manet,⁴⁶ would describe how,

43 Earlier, Sarusky and Mosquera had described how, ‘during the more than fifty years of neo-colonial oppression, the legitimate expressions of Cuban culture were stifled, silenced, the subject of persecution, or traduced, and the narrow intellectual life was a reflection of the interests of the foreign oppressor’ (1979:12).

44 A lawyer and journalist from Madrid, exiled in Cuba during the Spanish Civil War.

45 Son of a well-known journalist, Otero distinguished himself in publishing – with *Bohemia* and *Revolución* – going on to publish several novels (Karol, 1970). A contemporary of other writers mentioned in this study, such as Fernández Retamar and Fornet, and a member of the 26 July Movement in Havana, Otero was appointed vice president of the National Council of Culture (discussed in chapter five) to become, ‘one of the first writers and artists to be absorbed into the higher echelons of the organizational machine’ (Weiss, 1977:53). He also served as Cuba’s cultural attaché to Chile during Allende’s presidency’ (Ibid) and, later, to the USSR (Loomis, 1999). Guillermo Cabrera Infante (1968a) depicts him as a new Zhdanov.

46 Manet would seek exile in Paris in the 1970s and assume French nationality in 1979, aligning himself with conservative émigré intellectuals. Together with others – including the Peruvian, Mario Vargas Llosa and the British writer, Hugh Thomas – he became a spokesperson of the main exile groups (Calvo Ospina, 2001).

in former times, taking the decision to become an artist implied living at the margins of society, publishing books with one's own money or struggling to gather together enough funds to stage a theatrical performance. For him, the worst consequence of this state of affairs was the feeling of uselessness that it conferred upon creative practitioners (UNEAC, 1961).⁴⁷ And, in an autobiographical statement to the Cultural Congress of Havana in 1968, another writer, Onelio Jorge Cardoso, would describe how:

[...] life and work in the pre-Revolutionary years were marked by frustration and humiliation. Publication was accorded to the privileged few who were sycophantic and dishonest and who were aspiring for political favours. The writer who was poor and without connections was lost. He was alone. He was unheard. The Revolution has changed the situation radically. The intellectual now has a free voice and the people know what he is saying, and they in turn are given the opportunity to hear him (Salkey, 1971:111).

In interview in 2010, Pogolotti movingly explains how, before the Revolution, it would bring disgrace upon a family if one of its members decided to become an artist, because it was regarded as dedicating oneself to something senseless and useless. By contrast, many parents inspire their children to become artists – a profession that is highly respected in contemporary Cuba.

The pre-revolutionary situation meant that, although intellectuals had been involved in awakening national consciousness and fomenting the 1933 Revolution (Saruský and Mosquera, 1979), 'most of the leading intellectuals of the 1940s and 1950s spent very little time living freely in Cuba: they were either in prison or in exile,⁴⁸ and thus had scant opportunity to acquaint themselves with the conditions in their country' (Miller, 1999:75). While this underplays the voluntary nature of exile to sever intellectuals from their home, Miller rightly contends that the Revolution would inevitably mean cultural rebuilding, and there is every reason to believe that the triumphant guerrillas acknowledged the 'importance of culture to the legitimacy of the

47 Lockwood characterises Fidel's official photographer, Korda, who famously produced the iconic image of Che Guevara: 'Like many another middle-class Cuban, Korda had been a happy-go-lucky hedonist whom the victorious revolution struck with moral lightning. It bestowed upon him perhaps its greatest gift – a sense of identity and direction, of counting for something. His perspective changed completely. For the first time in his life, he says, he became concerned about other people' (1967:2).

48 Kapcia (2005) describes how exile was voluntary in the case of Alejo Carpentier, Virgilio Piñera, Jaime Saruský, Roberto Fernández Retamar and others, and political in the case of PSP activists such as Nicolás Guillén and José Antonio Portuondo.

revolutionary government' (2008:675).⁴⁹ With 'the old institutions, patrons and spaces irrelevant, any "new" culture would respond to different expectations: of a government with ever clearer views on the role of culture, of a society being transformed daily, and of a cultural community⁵⁰ lacking clear parameters for operation and definition of its role' (Kapcia, 2005:128). In the chapters that follow, detailed consideration will be given to the ways in which the revolutionary government consolidated its position on culture and in which the cultural communities envisaged and enacted their role.

Gramsci describes culture as 'a basic concept of socialism, because it integrates and makes concrete the vague concept of freedom' (1917:25), and Pogolotti (2006) observes that, when the socialist character of the Revolution was made explicit, this implied that the role of culture would be valorised. Indeed, this valorisation is consistent throughout the rhetoric of the revolutionary government during the period of this study, culminating in the observation at the first congress of the PCC in 1975 that 'The Party, beginning in its historical work of constructing a socialist society, highly values the singular importance of the development of the artistic culture of our country' (Comité Central del PCC, 1976:501).

In the wake of the Revolution, the impossible became possible, the unusual became habitual and, against a backdrop of major socio-economic upheaval at home and hostile sanctions from abroad, the revolutionary government made its commitment to culture. Sochor describes culture as the 'critical missing ingredient in revolution, the difference between a complete and a failed revolution, the sine qua non for the transition to socialism' (1988:15), explaining that 'A cultural revolution can be taken to mean a radical effort to transform values and attitudes, a slower but more thorough

49 Evidence of a generalised cultural strain permeates documentation of the Revolution. For example, two of the exhibits at the Museum of Clandestine Struggle in Santiago de Cuba detail how, of the rebels involved in the attacks on Santiago de Cuba, originally timed to coincide with the Granma landing, José Tey Saint-Blancard organised an artistic-literary circle at the Normal School for Teachers and José Lupiáñez Reinlein held a card for the School of Art and Trades in the eastern province.

50 Kapcia celebrates the merits of this term, which transcends considerations of class and movements to acknowledge the self-selecting nature of communities in a way that allows us to speak of elites as either 'those who are placed in positions of cultural authority by the hegemonic social or political elites and thus given the task of defining, directing and sanctioning cultural forms and of establishing the canon, or [...] those who constitute a self-appointed group or "community" of arbiters of cultural definition which is internally hegemonic' (2005:14).

process of consciousness-raising, or a campaign to eliminate illiteracy' (Ibid:16). In post-revolutionary Cuba, it meant all three things, and the proactive process this implied will be dealt with throughout.

By the end of the 1970s, it was observed that:

All this fruitful concern for the advancement of culture took tangible shape in a country devoting the bulk of its resources to a gigantic task of economic and social development, while beset by all kinds of aggression and blockade. Nothing can better testify to the importance which the people, the State and the Communist Party of Cuba attach to art and literature as instruments of the advancement of society and of the inalienable rights of man (Saruský and Mosquera, 1979:19).

As this statement implies, culture was not prioritised at the expense of economic and social development; rather, material recovery was bound up with the cultural and spiritual progress of the nation. In a landmark speech in June 1961 that would come to define cultural policy, Fidel emphasised that:

[...] just as we want a better life for the people in the material sphere, so do we want a better life for the people in a spiritual and cultural sense. And just as the Revolution is concerned with the development of the conditions and forces that will permit the people to satisfy all their material needs, so do we also want to create the conditions that will permit the people to satisfy all their cultural needs (1961:19).⁵¹

This understanding of culture, as an integral part of fostering the new spirit of society, will be explored in chapter six and beyond. What was immediately clear was that the definition of culture would have to be broadened in the society under construction, and Pogolotti (2006) notes that notions of artistic creation overflowed into considerations of culture as a conscious process of historical construction with human growth as its ultimate purpose, which permitted an expanded consideration of culture that went beyond experiments attempted elsewhere.

Fornet finds that 'The first contribution of Cuban thinking to the culture of the 1960s lies in our conviction that that decade started in 1959. We do not treat this as a difference of years but of epochs' (2004:9).⁵² Otero describes how the 'first decade of the Cuban Revolution opened all the windows of the imagination' (1997:118).

Addressing the same time period, Miller asserts that 'many participants in the events

⁵¹ This sentiment would be reiterated, as the country emerged from the grey years, in Saruský and Mosquera, 1979.

⁵² Following Fornet, Gilman (2003) disputes the appropriateness of considering Latin American culture according to decades such as 'sixties' and 'seventies', preferring to consider certain epochs.

of the 1960s, not only intellectuals but also people experiencing education and culture for the first time, have indeed recalled the aftermath of the revolution as a period of extraordinary creativity marked by a moving sense of common purpose' (2008:679). Attempting to pin down this period of activity, Antoni Kapcia describes how 'The first burst of radicalisation lasted approximately nine years, once the initial uncertainties were clarified by mid-1961. Until then, the Revolution was characterised by political confusion, ideological discovery and economic disruption, all underpinned by an ever-deepening process of radical social change, partly directed from above but mostly generating its own empirical momentum on the ground' (2005:119).⁵³ While mid-1961 would, indeed, seem to signal the official elucidation of cultural policy, marked by Fidel's aforementioned speech, the events leading up to this point have not been sufficiently considered. Chaotic the initial atmosphere may have been, but two weeks after the January 1959 triumph of the Revolution, Che Guevara would open a cultural school in one of Batista's former prisons and, within a few months, two new cultural institutions – the Cuban Institute of Cinematographic Arts and Industries (ICAIC)⁵⁴ and the pan-Latin American organisation, Casa de las Américas⁵⁵ – would be founded by two influential figures from the Sierra Maestra days (to be introduced in chapter four), and remain hugely important fifty years on. In chapter five of this report, an analysis of these and other institutions will be attempted, through a consideration of governmental and legislative documents and an examination of their ethos.

Another important juncture from these early years is a little-discussed meeting that took place between intellectuals in October 1960. This resulted in a manifesto being issued that concluded with the phrase 'To Defend the Revolution is to Defend Culture', which was adopted as the slogan for the First National Congress of Writers and Artists in 1961 from which the National Union of Cuban Writers and Artists (UNEAC) was

53 Kapcia continues that 'The confusion owed as much to the initial revolutionary alliance as to the uncertainties of the leading political actors and the external context' (2005:119), which will be borne in mind as this analysis progresses.

54 Instituto Cubano de Artes e Industrias Cinematográficas.

55 House of the Americas.

formed.⁵⁶ Thus, Kapcia's timeline, which locates mid-1961 to mid-1970 as the crucial years, is expanded here at its earlier end to 1959. Attention will be paid to the initiatives and institutions that have been inscribed into legislation since the Revolution, while scrutinising the accompanying rhetoric in a bid to determine the Marxist-humanist character of cultural strategies. As will be described in chapter three, this requires a methodology that relies not only on secondary sources but also on first-hand research conducted in the libraries and archives of Havana and in conversation with cultural protagonists active since the 1950s and '60s. Again keeping the pre-revolutionary picture in mind, it has proven essential to delve deeper into the 1950s to find precedents for the kind of cultural discussions being analysed here.

Within the collective momentum described above, it quickly becomes clear that various individuals – guerrillas turned institutional figures, practising writers and artists – helped to shape emerging policies on culture, and chapter four seeks to unravel the contribution of committed cultural protagonists from the official policy that was being constructed by the National Council of Culture (CNC) from January 1961. Through close scrutiny of published memoirs and transcripts of discussions held in response to a constantly changing situation, this study examines the key dialogues of the post-revolutionary period. In the process, the position of various players within post-revolutionary society will be explored.

As may already be apparent, the process of devising and implementing revolutionary cultural policy was not without its paradoxes and the various waves through which it passed will be analysed in their appropriate historical context. The generally accepted lineage is that the 'first discordant note sounded with the closing down of the weekly cultural supplement *Lunes de Revolución* [November 1961], its first major schism came with the Padilla case [1968–71],⁵⁷ and the process of officially imposed "cultural

56 Unión Nacional de Escritores y Artistas.

57 Following a 1967-8 debacle, involving 'first generation' poet (Casal, 1971), Heberto Padilla (see Appendix A), he was arrested without charge and imprisoned for thirty-eight days in 1971, which provoked an international outcry that will be discussed in more detail in chapter eleven.

parameters” that ushered in a period of profound dogma following the 1971 Congress of Education and Culture’ (Padura Fuentes, 2001:178). It is also well documented that, in the wake of the first PCC congress in 1975 – which presaged the opening of the Ministry of Culture (MINCULT) the following year (fully operational from 1977) – state control of culture was loosened. In chapters seven, nine and ten of this thesis, this calendar of ostensibly opaque or unrelated events, and the claims associated with them, will be supplemented through a discussion of the various congresses⁵⁸ and confluences of the 1960s and ’70s. Referring extensively to archival documents held in Havana, this will shed light on the mechanisms through which official discourse shifted.

Fornet has condemned the shadow that fell over creativity between 1971 and 1976 as the *quinquenio gris* [five grey years], and accepts that those castigated during this era may prefer the term *decenio negro* [black decade].⁵⁹ Two things are notable about the five-year period identified by Fornet. The first is that it coincided with a shift in the way in which culture was administered, specifically through a change of leadership at the CNC at the same time as this state organisation was reorganised to confer maximum power on its president. It will be significant to draw this out in order to establish the source of dogma emerging in this era. The second noteworthy point is that discourse among artists and writers during this period, often centred on the most open-minded cultural institutions, offered some resistance to the orthodoxy. Important in this regard is a series of meetings between Latin American visual artists to have taken place at Casa de las Américas during the 1970s, and chapter ten will include an attempt to locate the grey areas in the grey years.

58 Benedetti points to:

[...] a factor that has been vitally important in the development and expansion of Cuban cultural life [...] the congresses and cultural events that take place constantly on the Island. During this decade, the following have been held in Cuba: two international ballet festivals, one Latin American music festival, a protest song meeting on an international basis, six Latin American drama festivals, ten versions of the House of the Americas prize [...] seven events in the Havana Exposition [...], the explosive May Salon brought from Paris with the widest variety of samples of the very latest trends in European painting, and especially the Havana Cultural Congress, which met early in 1968 (1969:512-3).

59 For Navarro (2001), the immediate acceptance by the government of the euphemistic phrase ‘five grey years’ underplayed the fifteen years between 1968 and 1983 that may be attributed to this black period. Kapcia finds that the ‘incoming Reagan administration [and the] fears arising from the 1968–76 experiences left many Havana artists and intellectuals still cautious’ (2005:157), with the 1976 reforms needing to pass the test of time until they were trusted.

By this rationale, Kapcia's date range is also extended at its latter end to encompass such ambiguities up to the opening of MINCULT, which heralded a generalised opening up of cultural policy. In unravelling the various interests at play over a period of two decades to 1977, this study makes clear distinctions not only between the ethos of Fidel's 26 July Movement and that perpetuated by the PSP but also between the individual members of both organisations, dating back to the pre-revolutionary period. This consideration also reinstates a role for artists and other creative intellectuals in thwarting orthodoxy and refocusing the key points of the debate.

The following chapter will provide a framework for understanding the ways in which the Marxist-humanist cultural policy developed in Cuba deviates from both neoliberal and orthodox Marxist approaches. Chapter three explains how, in order to better understand the relationship between the revolutionary government and culture, it is first necessary to establish the main people and places on which cultural policy was centred. This will lead into a chronological consideration of policy formulation, organised over chapters seven (c.1956–1961), nine (c.1961–65) and ten (c.1967–77).⁶⁰ These sections will be interspersed with a dissection of the ideological framework that was being built up around culture. Chapter six looks at the connotations for cultural production of adopting a Marxist-humanism approach to culture, beginning with a consideration of the Cuban perception of conditions for creativity under capitalism as against the emancipatory possibilities offered by socialism. When the revolutionary government was called upon to clarify its position on aesthetics, a rift with orthodox Marxists was exposed that will be probed extensively, and, in a nod to the regime's detractors, an analysis will be undertaken here of the connotations of the above in relation to artistic freedom. In chapter eight, an examination will be undertaken of the changing role that was adopted by, and assigned to, creative intellectuals, which will involve an evaluation of the position of artists and writers in shaping individual and collective cultural identity as part of a constructively critical process at the vanguard of post-revolutionary society.

⁶⁰ Kapcia (2008) outlines the limitations of such a periodic approach.

While there are as many versions of pre- and post-revolutionary history as there are writers on the subject, it has been necessary to ground this study in a handful of relatively unassailable historical facts. Mindful of the impossibility of considering cultural developments in a vacuum, a range of resonant events is chronologically laid out in the timeline which forms Appendix A. It is hoped that this will guide the reader through territory that may not be immediately familiar. Just as the social, political and economic backdrop against which cultural policy is formed is integral to its understanding, the cultural modes emerging from said policy speak volumes about the direction in which culture is travelling. It has been shown that film ‘offered an unparalleled opportunity for cultural revolution’ (Kapcia, 2005:142) and that drama was initially identified ‘as a preferred form for developing cultural awareness and latent talent, stimulating a boom in local amateur performance’ by taking ‘revolutionary theatre outside Havana to the peasantry, copying early Soviet efforts in the use of culture as an instrument of revolutionary change’ (loc cit). Writing thirty-five years after the triumph of the Revolution, Camnitzer described how, ‘in pragmatic terms, art provides Cuba with an internationally perceivable image. The Cuban government support of the arts addresses this factor with an interest in ensuring that Cuban artists excel in their trade on the international scene, very much as with Cuban athletes’ (1994:136). This refers to the visual arts – or *artes plasticas*⁶¹ – which, with an initial emphasis on painting (Benedetti, 1969),⁶² ‘proved most capable of fusing the outward gaze and endogenous expression’ (Kapcia, 2005:100). In the mid-1960s, Lockwood would describe how:

Perhaps the liveliest of all Cuban arts is painting. Lacking government subsidies, painters feel free to experiment with new styles and unpopular ideas. Raúl Martínez paints critical canvases in pop style utilizing multiple images of Fidel and Che; Antonia Eírez’ giant expressionist canvases evoke a tortured world akin to that of Francis Bacon; Amélia Peláez and René Portocarrero⁶³ are older non-objective painters whose work is known internationally but who still live and work in Cuba. So far, Cuba has not attempted to coerce her artists to produce only such art as can serve as propaganda for the Revolution (1967:136)

61 In the late-1970s, in an educational context, the plastic arts were defined as engraving, painting, sculpture, with consideration being given ‘to the possible inclusion of town planning, interior design, furniture design, toy design and stage design in the plastic-arts section’ (Saruský and Mosquera, 1979:39).

62 Benedetti attributes the primacy of painting over sculpture and etching to a scarcity of materials (1969:506).

63 Salkey describes Portocarrero as ‘the epitome of the secure and settled and consequently relaxed revolutionary artist’ (1971:151)

We shall return to the point about subsidies in chapter seven. Yet, while Cuban film (Chanan, 2003), music (Moore, 2006) and literature (Kapcia and Kumaraswami, forthcoming) have all been considered, the relationship of art (Camnitzer, 1994) to the policies developed to support it has been less well evident in the literature relating to policy. In an attempt to address this gap, any analysis of raw data will give primacy to statistics pertaining to visual forms. This is consistent with Fornet's observations about his position on literature as 'the only field that I know through my own experience' (2007:382).

With respect to modes of creative practice, Kapcia reminds us that, 'in tracing any community's cultural history, we should not focus principally, or at all, on the products of a culture (since that inevitably privileges forms that have been recorded and accorded prestige by those who control or dominate the means of communication and dissemination) but, rather, on the individual processes of creation and on the collective sites and communities for creation, authority-bestowing and change' (2005:17). As such, except to note some general trends in artistic practice in relation to the Revolution, this study will not dwell on individual artworks or oeuvres. While a thorough investigation of the art of the Revolution would provide ample material for a separate study, Appendix B contains a brief overview of the visual forms to have emerged in the post-revolutionary period, as an aid to the reader. In considering the centrality of Cuban art, as facilitated by cultural policy, it seems appropriate to cite the words of a catalogue essay that was published to coincide with a 2007 exhibition of Cuban art in the US. Couched in the usual disclaimers, it was nonetheless found necessary to state that:

Contemporary Cuban artists point to the future, not in an abrupt break with the past, but with an openness to the unknown future, to multiplicity and difference. They challenge the utopian projects of the East and the West, questioning the reality of these past and present ideologies even as they function as a part of them. Cuban artists living in and outside of Cuba employ multiple aesthetic and political approaches that counter the imposition of any single or overarching global perspective. Insisting on the unique history and geopolitical position of their island, Cuban artists draw from a past of hybrid identities, a tradition of political and aesthetic independence, and an extraordinary national regard for art and culture. They embody the spirit of the *invento*, the legendary ability to make something out of nothing in a country with few material resources. Cuban artists are embedded in a global dialogue and exchange. Politically and aesthetically, Cuban art has facilitated the exposure to pluralistic, unorthodox, and experimental alternatives across the world (Oliver-Smith, 2007:20).

A note on style by way of conclusion; as has perhaps already become evident, Fidel will be identified by his first name, in recognition of the way he is referred to by the people of Cuba while serving to distinguish him from the other historically important Castro, his brother, Raúl. The same informal approach will be applied to Che (thus avoiding confusion with the unrelated Alfredo Guevara) and to Haydée Santamaría (who emerges as a key cultural figure in chapter four), and is no way intended to imply irreverence. It is also worth noting that two surnames are used in Latin America – father’s first, then mother’s – but that one of these is usually dropped (usually the mother’s) in informal speech. For the purposes of this study, formal nomenclature will be adopted. Other personnel will be contextualised in the body text, while those who are mentioned in passing will have their credentials outlined in a footnote to aid identification. On the subject of footnotes, sections of this thesis will be heavily annotated to provide supplementary detail; as it has been relatively uncommon for primary research to be undertaken in Cuba, it is felt necessary to provide as much information as possible that may be cross-checked and supplemented by future scholars. Notwithstanding, the arguments outlined in the body text may be considered self-contained and read without recourse to the notes.

Somewhat surprisingly, many of the texts commentating on the Cuban situation use US English, which will be retained here only for direct quotations, being bracketed by UK/international English. A handful of linguistic anachronisms persist in texts cited from the period, notably the use of ‘man’, to mean humanity, and other outdated terms such as ‘the masses’⁶⁴ and the ‘Third World’, although we can already see this latter being questioned by 1968. Also on the subject of language, this report has been supervised and may be examined by those who do not necessarily read Spanish, which means that the names of institutions, publications and congresses are given in English translation throughout, with original titles footnoted in Spanish. The only exceptions to this general rule are proper names – of organisations, such as Casa de las Américas and Casa de

⁶⁴ In 1965, Che Guevara would assert that ‘This multifaceted being is not, as it is claimed, the sum total of elements of the same category (and moreover, reduced to the same category by the system imposed upon them) and which acts as a tame herd’.

Cultura, and the titles of newspapers and journals, such as *Granma*⁶⁵ and *Revolución y Cultura*⁶⁶ – which, due to their ubiquity on the ground in Cuba, are retained in their original in the body text with any necessary explanation being given in the footnotes. And, finally, while the Revolution may not be televised, it will be capitalised on its initial letter when appearing as a noun; this will serve to indicate its significance, which is common among those commentators sympathetic to the political, social and cultural transformations it signalled.

65 The Official Organ of the Central Committee of the Cuban Communist Party, named after the boat on which Fidel and his comrades set sail from Mexico to Cuba to start the Revolution.

66 Revolution and Culture.

Chapter Two: Theoretical Framework

Cultural policy is defined by UNESCO as ‘a body of operational principles, administrative and budgetary practices and procedures which provide a basis for cultural action by the State’ (1970:7). Whether conducted at a local, national or regional level, any study of cultural policy must take account of two basic determinants. In the first place, the relationship between culture and the state must be considered, with an emphasis on the role that cultural producers are expected to play within society. At the same time, the socio-economic framework that has been created to support cultural provision must be taken into account, particularly whether cultural production and dissemination is provided for wholly or partially by the state and, if partially, which other mechanisms are relied upon to make up any shortfall. These two primary determinants are interdependent in that a proportional relationship tends to exist between the perceived social role of culture and the extent to which it is funded by the state. In turn, these factors influence the central discussions that are broached within the cultural field, such as those around the relationship between art and ideology, form and content, autonomy and engagement.

If we consider the cultural policy of capitalist Europe in relation to the two primary determinants outlined above, we find that the emergence of a private market for art swiftly led to its exemption from playing a social role. When the economy of art moved away from the whims of individual patrons and towards the market system during the late eighteenth century, it was initially presumed to confer more freedom on creative practice (Shiner, 2001), and, for a period, ‘the art that regarded itself as autonomous continued to reflect critically upon society’ (Shulte-Sasse, 1984:x). In the years leading up to the French Revolution, the intellectual world aligned itself on ideological grounds, transcending political, social and economic level to become men of action, which culminated in the Paris Commune of 1871, one of the last occasions on which a broad sector of writers, poets and artists participated in a political action of exceptional scope’ (De Micheli, 1967:13). One of the artists involved, Gustave Courbet,

had published a Realist Manifesto in 1855, an explicitly political document on which later justifications of realism draw.¹ After the rout of the Commune, this tendency was superseded by an evacuation of political content, leaving an art that ‘wants to be nothing other than art’ (Bürger, 1974:27) which would later prompt Walter Benjamin to bemoan the cult of ‘art for art’s sake’ as ‘a negative theology in the form of the idea of “pure” art, which [...] denied any social function’ (1936:514).

Significantly, this shift coincided with an increased exploration of aesthetic theory. In the late eighteenth century, Immanuel Kant (1790) posited aesthetic judgement to be distinct from both practical reason (moral judgement) and understanding (scientific knowledge), forming a necessary but problematic bridge between the two. A sensory realm opposed to the anaesthetic and distinct from cognition,² aesthetics is defined as ‘a branch of philosophy which addresses questions of beauty and taste’ (Grenfell and Hardy, 2007:36), the aristocratic connotations of which have been identified as a lever with which the privileged exert their dominance (Bourdieu, 1984).³ Terry Eagleton (1990) argues that the emancipatory potential contained within the sensual aesthetic domain was constrained by the imposition of theory as part of an attempt to engender the social cohesion necessary to a society based on consensus and economic autonomy. As an antidote to Kantian aesthetics, the Italian art critic, Mario de Micheli (1967) – whose work on the European artistic vanguards of the twentieth century would be published by UNEAC in Cuba – cites Hegel invoking artistic work being created for the public, representing the people in their epoch in a way that was comprehensible to them.

In the context of this discussion, it is interesting to distinguish Marxist-Leninist use of the term vanguard from that of ‘avant-garde’ that emerged in capitalist Europe.

1 Oposing the universalising tendencies of modernism, Courbet refused to be assimilated into any lineage and asserted that human experience should be conceived of historically. De Micheli (1967) would note that this understanding of realism presupposed a rejection of Romantic subjectivism and embraced a new objectivism, grounded in the Hegelian Idea, which reconciled form and content.

2 Whereby cognition is an active process that reconciles subject and object, through rational use of the imagination (Grenfell and Hardy, 2007).

3 Bourdieu argued that ‘Taste classifies, and it classifies the classifier. Social subjects, classified by their classifications, distinguish themselves by the distinctions they make, between the beautiful and the ugly, the distinguished and the vulgar, in which their position in the objective classifications is expressed or betrayed’ (1984:6).

One of the Cubans at the 1968 congress is reported as having ‘deplored “*avant-garde*” and insisted on “vanguard”. He was applauded’ (Salkey, 1971:199). Susan Buck-Morss reminds us that:

Despite the common Renaissance-military origin of these words, their meaning had diverged in history. Specifically, the military connotations of the term *avant-garde* had become purely metaphorical by the nineteenth century. It applied to literary and aesthetic rather than socio-political praxis. And if in the pre-1848 period the artistic *avant-garde* allied itself with political revolutionaries and after the failure of the Paris Commune that alliance was removed, the subsequent movement of *art-pour-l’art* [art for art’s sake] clearly demonstrated that politics was not its essential characteristic. The *avant-garde* rejected bourgeois cultural tradition; the fact that such a rejection functioned as social protest was in many cases a secondary consideration, or even totally unintentional. Lukács’s notion of the Party vanguard implied that the intellectual’s role was one of leadership and political instruction, whereas the model of the *avant-garde* was antiauthoritarian; the intellectual was an experimenter, open-endedly defying dogma; his leadership was exemplary rather than pedagogic (1977:32).

Beyond semantics, Peter Bürger distinguishes an historical *avant-garde* in Western Europe, centred on the Dada and surrealism of the early twentieth century. The explicit aim of these movements was the elision of art with the praxis of life at a time when ‘the attempt to do away with the distance between art and life still had all the pathos of historical progressiveness on its side’ (1974:50). For Bürger, this European project failed, serving only to reassert the autonomy of art within bourgeois society. By contrast, in Cuba in the early 1960s, as we shall see, the hope of a socially consequential role for art was firmly embraced and, in its first cultural policy document, the CNC would state that ‘In socialist society, it is logical to aspire that writers and artists would have intimate contact with life, capable of representing in their work not only objective reality but also reality in its revolutionary development, helping it in its important task of transforming old ways of thinking, lapsed ideas, educating workers in the spirit of socialism, overcoming the contradictions between cultural technique and action’ (1963a:2).

Turning to a consideration of the cultural framework that has more recently been provided by the state in the UK, we find that the late capitalist era coincided with the imposition of the ideas of John Maynard Keynes onto the cultural field, most directly through his 1942 appointment as chairman of the Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts (CEMA). Under Keynes’s jurisdiction, CEMA

would become the Arts Council of Great Britain (ACGB), with a remit for providing state support for the arts, intended to operate alongside the marketplace and at arm's length from government agendas. Top-down and paternalistic, the governing council and specialist committees of the national funding body were largely devoid of practising artists (Witts, 1998), thus robbing practitioners of any structural impact upon their fate.

This way of working continued until Margaret Thatcher came to power and began the substitution of government by business. A few months before the 1979 general election, Thatcher promised the Chairman of ACGB that her government would continue to support the arts; but, once elected, she cut spending in all areas of public policy, including the cultural field, reducing arts expenditure by £3 million (out of a total £63 million) in its first budget. The right wing of the Conservative Party had called for the total abolition of ACGB. Understanding that this would cause resistance, it was decided that, rather than scrapping the council, the government would implement its policies *through* the existing organisation, eradicating the arm's length principle by appointing politically-aligned chairmen to reshape the council.⁴ Consistent with her belief that gaps in patronage should not be substituted solely by the state, Thatcher appointed Norman St John-Stevas as Arts Minister, who argued that the private sector must be looked to for new sources of cultural funding. A campaign was launched, aimed at doubling the 1979 figure for private sponsorship of £3-4 million, and St John-Stevas established a fourteen-member sponsorship committee that included corporate executives and offered tax relief to businesses supporting the arts. A special grant was made to the Association of Business Sponsorship of the Arts, which was responsible for brokering deals between corporate sponsors and cultural institutions, and a tirade was launched against the 'welfare state mentality' that the government perceived to exist among arts organisations (Wu, 2002). Throughout the 1980s, ACGB was compelled

4 The ardent Tory supporter, Sir William Rees-Mogg, was appointed in 1982 and the developer, Lord Peter Palumbo, in 1989. Fast-forwarding to the twenty-first century, we find that the Conservative-dominated coalition government has unceremoniously declined to renew the tenure of Arts Council chair, Dame Liz Forgan (see <http://www.guardian.co.uk/culture/2012/mar/23/liz-forgan-arts-council-england>), and that neoliberal think tank, the Institute of Economic Affairs, has recommended the closure of the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (<http://www.iea.org.uk/in-the-media/press-release/closing-down-dcms-could-save-%C2%A316bn>) both accessed 23 April 2012.

to advocate private support (specifically business sponsorship), and prevailed upon to outline new business ideas to its core-funded organisations. Museums were exposed to market forces and Conservative businessmen were appointed to their boards, forcing them to become more enterprising. This ‘harnessing of the power of corporate capital into what had hitherto, at least in Britain, been an almost exclusively public domain’ (Ibid:47) meant that arts organisations found themselves competing with each other to attract sponsorship.⁵

The art historian, Julian Stallabrass, details ‘the explicit aim of the Conservative government led by Margaret Thatcher to transform the uncomfortably political character of contemporary art by making it more dependent on market forces’ (2004:134). Aside from corporate intervention into the arts at museum level, the private market had been growing in parallel with finance capitalism since the stock market crash of 1989, leaving the UK accounting for around a quarter of the global art market. During the New Labour era, this burgeoning market was aided and abetted by the UK’s arts councils, through measures including the subsidy of commercial galleries and the introduction of interest-free loans for art collectors (Gordon-Nesbitt, 2006). In 2004, Arts Council England commissioned a report from private consultants, entitled *Taste Buds: how to cultivate the art market*, which unequivocally placed the flourishing private market at the centre of the art system and examined how it could be better exploited, identifying 6.1 million potential collectors of contemporary art (Morris Hargreaves McIntyre, 2004). In the process, all activities in what was traditionally regarded as the public sphere – from art school and artist-led activity to public gallery

5 Multinational companies began to involve themselves in the direct sponsorship of exhibitions and in giving awards to artists. In the case of the Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA) in London, for example, the Beck’s Futures prize was aimed at emerging artists and their youthful friends and involved the hearty consumption of a certain German beer at launch events. This followed a three-year sponsorship of the ICA by Toshiba, which had seen the electronics giant’s logo appearing on all publicity material, and the company’s gadgets being prominently displayed in the gallery’s foyer. During this time, the corporate approach to sponsoring the arts moved from the passive provision of solicited donations to the proactive deployment of funds as part of a targeted public relations strategy. This became part of a two-pronged attack which either made a connection between the brand and exhibition – exemplified by the distribution of a drinks manufacturer’s product at a private view – or aimed to improve the corporate image, which proved especially useful for companies whose brands (alcohol, tobacco, oil or armaments) were in need of burnishing in the public eye. In turn, this marked a shift from a ‘something for nothing’ attitude to a climate of ‘something for something’, in which sponsors often demanded lavish receptions at which they could entertain their guests, providing them with a seemingly apolitical space in which politicians could be met and lobbied (Davies and Ford, 1998; 1999; 2000).

The Art Eco-System Model

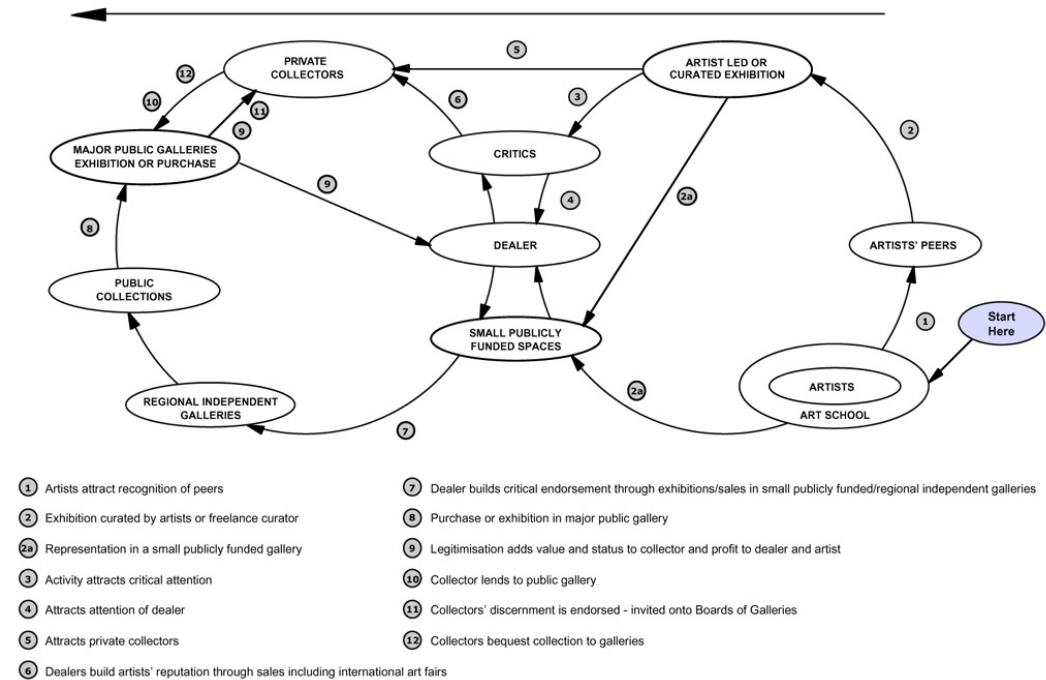


Diagram commissioned by Arts Council England (2004), showing the central position of the market in the cultural field under capitalism

– were rendered subordinate to the market. Nowadays, the main point at which art and life collide is within the market economy, with the market adopting an ideological function that renders art subordinate to capital. Towards the end of his life, Pierre Bourdieu would observe with regret that ‘what is currently happening to the universes of artistic production throughout the developed world is entirely novel and truly without precedent: the hard won independence of cultural production and circulation is being threatened, in its very principle, by the intrusion of commercial logic at every stage’ (2003:67). Those working in the highly professionalised and individualistic contemporary cultural field in the capitalist world face a situation in which ‘The international art market is the sole mechanism for conferring value onto art’ (Robertson, 2005:13). At the same time, ‘aesthetic production today has become integrated into commodity production generally: the frantic economic urgency of producing fresh waves of ever more novel-seeming goods (from clothing to airplanes), at ever greater rates of turnover, now assigns an increasingly essential function and position to aesthetic innovation and experimentation’ (Jameson, 1984:56).

The potency of the market and the competitiveness it engenders means that many artistic investigations in the capitalist world are driven by financial considerations. This implies ‘the total subordination of work contents to profit motives, and a fading of the critical potencies of works in favour of a training in consumer attitudes’ (Bürger, 1974:30) and entails the relentless pursuit of formal innovation and ‘the impossibility of content, of saying anything whatsoever [...] ideological fetters [which] conclusively eradicated every possibility of a social practice in relation to art’ (Burn, 1975:35). The general trend in recent decades has been that ‘aesthetics has triumphed over ethics as a prime focus of social and intellectual concern’ (Harvey, 1980:328). This renewed denial of the social role of artists leads to a situation in which ‘artists, for all their predilection for anti-establishment and anti-bourgeois rhetoric, [spend] much more energy struggling with each other and against their own traditions in order to sell their products than they [do] engaging in real political action’ (Ibid:22). For conservative critics – for whom ‘the ending of modernism did not happen too soon [because] the art world of the seventies was filled with artists bent on agendas [...] putting art at the service of this or that personal or political goal’ (Danto, 1997:15) – this trend is to be celebrated.

In the case of Europe and the US, then, the capitalist era witnessed the introduction of a private market for art that initially promised to liberate practitioners from the bespoke requirements of their patrons, paving the way for socially critical works that would be offered up for sale. However, this emphasis on the political content of artworks was quickly displaced by an abiding concern with their formal properties. In turn, this has consolidated the commodity character of artworks, exempting artists from playing a social role. And, while the introduction of state funding was intended to militate against the total subsumption of art to commercial (or governmental) interests, the neoliberal doctrine that has defined relations in the cultural field over recent decades has seen a recession of the state from the funding arena in favour of private enterprise.⁶

As an antidote, many artists and cultural commentators advocate a return to the

⁶ Other ways in which private interests have intruded into the cultural field include: the ring-fencing of public funds, through agendas such as social inclusion, aimed at increasing participation in the labour market (Cultural Policy Collective, 2004), and the use of culture to encourage relocation, stimulate property development, increase tourism and kick-start failing economies (Gordon-Nesbitt, 2008).

autonomous status of art, which would have the effect of reinforcing the gulf between art and society.

By contrast to the capitalist model briefly outlined above, we can isolate the main theoretical tenets of revolutionary approaches to culture. In relation to the two primary determinants of cultural policy, we can say that the social role of culture is acknowledged by the state and provided for accordingly. More specifically, it is argued here that Cuba developed its cultural policy along Marxist-humanist, or ‘Martían Marxist’,⁷ lines and, while the socio-economic framework that was created for culture will be thoroughly interrogated in subsequent chapters, it is useful to consider in more detail here the social role that has been ascribed to culture within canonical literature. Central to this is the revolutionary aim of total human emancipation, elaborated in *The German Ideology* of 1846, which implies that political emancipation must be accompanied by its social equivalent and that both these abstract concepts must be underwritten by a detailed understanding of humanity. For Marx and Engels, one of the key considerations in advancing emancipation was consciousness, grounded in a sensual awareness of one’s surroundings but transcending the instinctive to become a rational social product.⁸

Zenovia Sochor (1988) isolates the two basic prerequisites of revolution – de-legitimation of the existing regime and the emergence of a competing ideology. Opinion has historically been divided over the nature of the second process – its timing (before, during or after the seizure of power), its trigger (whether ideological shifts would occur as a natural consequence of changing socio-economic structure or need to be implemented) and its tenets (a focus on class consciousness or on ideology in itself). Whereas Marx had every faith in the ability of the proletariat to overcome false consciousness at the moment of revolutionary rupture, Lenin did not believe that this

7 Kronenberg (2011) posits Che having introduced Martían Marxism into the constitution. This reconciliation of Martí and Marx would be reiterated by Cintio Vitier as alien to the dogmatism that, in Europe, had led to the installation of socialist realism (Fernández Retamar, 2009).

8 In their formulation, alienation (brought about by the majority of humanity being rendered propertyless) would be a key motivator in advancing revolution, but the liberation of man would not be achieved by self-consciousness alone – this, they remind us, will depend on concrete means including technological improvements.

would happen spontaneously, advocating instead the intervention of the vanguard party and its intellectuals. In the Soviet context, Sochor would observe that:

Among the problems facing revolutionary leaders, one of the most difficult is how to transform the attitudes, beliefs and customs inherited from the old society that hinder the creation of a new society. Clearly, there is no automatic change when power is seized; the population at large may have altered its expectations but not its familiar habits in work and social behavior. Yet without cultural transformation, the building of socialism may remain an evasive goal. Even when the political opposition has been subdued and economic development has at least been launched, the cultural sphere is not easily changed. Revolution and culture are pitted against each other (1988:3).

While the vanguardist implications of this understanding will be considered in chapter eight, the predicted emergence of a new revolutionary subject or ‘new man’ would be central to ideas around expanding consciousness. Gramsci elaborated on this concept during his internment between 1931 and 1935, taking Lenin’s original understanding to be shorthand for new social relations. In considering the gendered aspect of this terminology, Gramsci would attest that new literature, ideology and superstructures would not occur spontaneously – as through asexual reproduction in females – but would require the ‘male’ element to fertilise them – that of history and revolutionary activity.

In considering the humanistic character of Marxism, the work of Argentinean writer and politician, Aníbal Ponce, is of particular relevance to this study. In 1935, Ponce undertook a detailed study of the humanism that had arisen in the capitalist world, centred on a ‘conception of man in whom individuality implies absolute autonomy [...] detached from any social stratum, category or class’ (Troise, 1969:227), to conclude that class society made the idea of a universal culture impossible. Analysing the problems of consciousness, the individual and society, he found dialectical unity to exist between man and his natural and social world. Within this formulation, culture could be understood as a form of social consciousness that integrated individual consciousness. For Ponce, the Russian Revolution had paved the way for the emergence of a proletarian humanism, as a ‘consequence of the revolutionary process and the concomitant appearance of the new man’ (Ibid:283). In later chapters, we shall see how Ponce’s ideas around consciousness and the new man would reinforce Che’s ideas

(Fernández Retamar, 1971) and how his distinction between bourgeois and socialist humanism would be maintained at the first congress of the PCC in 1975.

Also central to this study is the clash between the kind of Marxist-humanism elaborated by Ponce and the orthodox Marxism being perpetuated by the Soviet Union. Symptomatic of the latter position in Cuba would be the ideas emerging from the CNC via its president, Edith García Buchaca (1961). Conceding art and literature to be social phenomena – arising in specific communities and serving as a means of human communication – to locate the history of art within the history of man, she persists in confining culture to the superstructure, rendering it susceptible to criteria of the moral order. Artist, Colin Darke, has written of how Marx's definition of base and superstructure⁹ was misinterpreted 'as a call to abandon revolutionary activity, as politics – being a constituent part of the superstructure – are wholly defined by economic constraints. This led to Marx denying that he himself was a Marxist and, after his death, to Engels asserting the "relative autonomy" of the superstructure' (2004:34). While similar claims of partial autonomy have been made in relation to the cultural field, Raymond Williams would dismiss the formula of base and superstructure for 'its rigid, abstract and static character' (1971:20) and for its centrality in utilitarian, and hence bourgeois, thought. Rather, he would articulate a more holistic understanding of culture that considered the relations between elements of social life, preferring Marxist theories of culture to begin with the 'proposition that social being determines consciousness' (1973:31).

In favouring humanist over orthodox conceptions of culture, this study is influenced by Williams's fear that 'the proposition of base and superstructure, with its figurative element, with its suggestion of a fixed and definite spatial relationship, constitutes, at least in certain hands, a very specialized and at times unacceptable

⁹ In the introduction of *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, the relationship between base and superstructure is elucidated as follows:

The totality of [the] relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which arises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political and intellectual life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness (Marx, 1859).

version' (1973:35) of social understandings of culture. This permits us to take a broader approach to production and consider the entire constitution of society (rather than just its capitalist relations), wherein the base emerges as central to cultural processes and renders us 'less tempted to dismiss as superstructural, and in that sense as merely secondary, certain vital productive social forces' (loc cit). A humanist understanding also corresponds with Williams's advocacy of the power of culture in presaging 'those more recognizable changes of formal idea and belief which make up the ordinary history of consciousness' (1971:25). This led him to attest that 'art is one of the primary human activities, and that it can succeed in articulating not just the imposed or constitutive social or intellectual system, but at once this and an experience of it, its lived consequence, in ways very close to many other kinds of active response, in new social activity and in what we know as personal life' (loc cit). After much trial and (acknowledged) error, this is the position at which the revolutionary government would arrive.

In considering humanist readings of Marxian theory, Hudis and Anderson note that 'For Marx the subjective struggle of the workers is capable of attaining a liberatory, human self-determination by experiencing the dialectic of absolute negativity' (2002:xxii). Since Marx, attempts have been made to expand upon the emancipatory connotations of this theory in a bid to re-imagine a revolutionary future without recourse to totalitarianism. This has often involved a return to Hegel's theory of absolute negativity, which implies a two-stage process in which the abstract becomes concrete – the negation of existing reality, followed by a negation of this negation – such as that found in the transition from rejecting private property to creating new social relations, thus paving the way for positive humanism. In the mid-twentieth century, Raya Dunayevskaya worked with CLR James (who visited Cuba in 1968) to find in absolute negativity the basis for a philosophy of human emancipation and 'the quest by masses of people, not simply to negate existing economic and political structures, but to create *totally new human relations* as well' (Ibid:xxiv; i.i.o.). While this theory did not

directly address the Cuban situation, the relevance of this way of thinking will become evident in due course.

The Spanish-born Mexican Marxist aesthetician, Adolfo Sánchez Vázquez (whose lectures on aesthetics would be influential in Cuba in the 1960s), broaches the logical gap between Marxist-humanist approaches and cultural production, by arguing that ‘artistic creation and aesthetic gratification presupposed, in Marx’s eyes, the specifically human appropriation of things and of human nature that is to prevail in a communist society, a society that will mark humanity’s leap from the realm of necessity into that of true freedom’ (1965:10). In this formulation, both (passive) appreciation of and (active) engagement in creative practice were vital to building a better world foreshadowed by human desire. More than this, art was deemed to have a function in both exposing the previous failings of society and helping to repair them:

Because of its class origin, its ideological character, art is an expression of the social division or gash in humanity; but because of its ability to extend a bridge between people across time and social divisions, art manifests a vocation for universality, and in a certain way prefigures that universal human destiny which will only be effectively realized in a new society, with the abolition of the material and ideological particularisms of social classes (Ibid:24-5).

In this regard, a second highly instructive point to be taken from *The German Ideology* is Marx and Engels’s rejection of the Romantic idea of creative activity being confined to a unique individual:

The exclusive concentration of artistic talent in particular individuals, and its suppression in the broad mass which is bound up with this, is a consequence of division of labour. If, even in certain social conditions, everyone was an excellent painter, that would not at all exclude the possibility of each of them being also an original painter, so that here too the difference between ‘human’ and ‘unique’ labour amounts to sheer nonsense. In any case, with a communist organisation of society, there disappears the subordination of the artist to local and national narrowness, which arises entirely from division of labour, and also the subordination of the artist to some definite art, thanks to which he is exclusively a painter, sculptor, etc., the very name of his activity adequately expressing the narrowness of his professional development and his dependence on division of labour. In a communist society there are no painters but at most people who engage in painting among other activities (1846:109).

In this way, it was envisaged that the individualism of the capitalist world would be overcome and the latent creative talent of all the people encouraged. In a revolutionary

situation, the laws of production could not be applied to the creation of a new culture, which instead required that 'Bourgeois careerism will be shattered and there will be a poetry, a novel, a theatre, a moral code, a language, a painting and a music' (Gramsci, 1921:50-1) of revolution which 'means to destroy spiritual hierarchies, prejudices, idols and ossified traditions. It means not being afraid of innovations and audacities, not being afraid of monsters, not believing that the world will collapse if a worker makes grammatical mistakes, if a poem limps, if a picture resembles a hoarding or if young men sneer at academic and feeble-minded senility' (Ibid:51). This anti-elitist conception of culture was advanced by Gramsci shortly after the Russian Revolution, following Lenin and Bogdanov's work on proletarian culture:

[...] one must understand the impetus by which workers feel drawn to the contemplation of art, to the creation of art, how deeply they feel offended in their humanity because the slavery of wages and work cuts them off from a world that integrates man's life, that makes it worth living. The struggle of the Russian communists to multiply schools, theatres and opera houses, to make galleries accessible to the crowds, the fact that villages and factories which distinguish themselves in the sector of production are awarded with aesthetic and cultural entertainments, show that, once in power, the proletariat tends to establish the reign of beauty and grace, to elevate the dignity and freedom of those who create beauty (1919:38).

The Russian precedent for democratising culture would find easy accommodation with Cuban aims. And, while Cuban conceptions of the revolutionary agent would tend towards the peasantry and the student body (Karcia, 2008) rather than the party or industrial working class, a key tenet of Marxist thought was in evidence – that of 'the formation of a new class, the coming to consciousness of a new class' (Williams, 1973:42). However, this in no way implied the wholesale replacement of capitalist with socialist culture, and another key tenet in the cultural thinking of Marx and Engels is of relevance here, concerning our relationship to historical art. In the *Introduction to a Critique of Political Economy* of 1857, the artefacts of Greek culture were found to provide continued aesthetic pleasure and argued to be vestiges of the 'historical childhood of humanity', making them worthy of preservation. In 1967, Carlos Rafael Rodríguez would cite Marx's appreciation of Greek artworks as a product not of their own time but as something capable of retaining a valid message in contemporaneous

times, in which the ‘mystery of permanence’ would reside in the highest quality artistic work. Building on this understanding, Lenin would assert that ‘Marxism has won its world-historic significance as the ideology of the revolutionary proletariat because, far from rejecting the most valuable achievements of the bourgeois epoch, Marxism, on the contrary, has assimilated and reshaped the more valuable elements accumulated in the course of more than two thousand years of development of human thought and culture’ (1920:79-80). Echoing Lenin, Ponce asserted that the working class should conquer and elaborate on its cultural inheritance, assimilating and rethinking culture in the process of passing from one class to another (Troise, 1969).

In this way, culture emerges as a vital aspect within the desired shift to classless society, and its prominence prompts an analysis of the status within society of artists and creative intellectuals. Gramsci proposed that the category of ‘intellectual’ did not depend on the intrinsic character of mental activity but on the system of social relations in which this kind of work was encouraged from selected people complicit with the status quo. In this schema, ‘The traditional and vulgarised type of the intellectual is given by the man of letters, the philosopher, the artist’ (1949:9), whereas in fact ‘Every social group, coming into existence [...] creates together with itself, organically, one or more strata of intellectuals which give it homogeneity and an awareness of its own function not only in the economic but also in the social and political fields’ (Ibid:5). It is commonly presumed that this refers to a clear-cut division between two categories of intellectual – traditional and organic respectively – based on their class of origin and ethos. In a study of the *Casa de las Américas* journal, for example, Judith Weiss draws lines ‘between the organic intellectuals who engage in tasks serving the perpetuation of the present system, and those true intellectuals – thinkers, artists, and writers who choose exile or active opposition to the system’ (1973:29). However, this description of the choices available to intellectuals appears to turn on its head Gramsci’s indictment of those *traditional* intellectuals favoured by, and perpetuating, the existing regime while exonerating those (equally traditional) intellectuals who choose to leave or resist. Rather,

Gramsci's schema may be thought of as an attempt to expose the selective processes through which certain traditional intellectuals are favoured *within class society* at the expense of the latent mental labour operating at all levels of society, the latter of which presumes that:

There is no human activity from which every form of intellectual participation can be excluded [...]. Each man, finally, outside his professional activity, carries on some form of intellectual activity, that is, he is a 'philosopher', an artist, a man of taste, he participates in a particular conception of the world, has a conscious line of moral conduct, and therefore contributes to sustain[ing] a conception of the world or to modify[ing] it, that is, to bring into being new modes of thought (1949:9).

From this, the revolutionary idea emerges that the intellectual capacity of the huge breadth of organic intellectuals needs to be encouraged (as Marx and Engels had envisaged), wherein 'The problem of creating a new stratum of intellectuals consists [...] in the critical elaboration of the intellectual activity that exists in everyone at a certain degree of development' (loc cit).

Miller advises specific caution in relation the transposition of Marxist interpretations of European capitalist society to a Latin American context, arguing that Gramsci's work on intellectuals in relation to class and the state 'was not widely known in Spanish America until the 1970s' (1999:13). However, this is at odds with evidence from Cuba, and, at a 1962 critics' forum in the national library, Fornet (2004) would appeal to his paraphrasing of Croce (in the *Prison Notebooks*) in a bid to delimit the educative character of art. Gramsci's thinking also visibly influenced other intellectuals on the island, notably Fernández Retamar, and his ideas around the social function of intellectuals were taken as the explicit starting point for the 1968 Cultural Congress of Havana. Conceding that 'a series of translated excerpts from the *Prison Notebooks* was published in Buenos Aires from 1958 to 1962' (1999:13), Miller describes Gramsci's understanding of organic intellectuals as 'those who were ready to acknowledge their class position' as compared to their traditional counterparts 'who were not' (Ibid:19); in her view, the latter group claim autonomy while serving as lackeys to the dominant powers, by whom their dissent would be repressively tolerated (to paraphrase Marcuse).

Parenthetically, but not irrelevantly, Miller's interpretation attributes powers of acknowledgement or denial to the two groups of intellectuals that appear to be absent in Gramsci's original.

Although Miller's description of the position traditional intellectuals roughly corresponds with conditions under capitalism, as Gramsci intended, it cannot be convincingly applied to subsequent developments in pre-revolutionary Cuba. Recognising geographical specificity at the end of the first half of the twentieth century, Gramsci would observe that:

No vast category of traditional intellectuals exists in Central or South America [...], but the question does not present itself in the same terms as with the United States. What in fact we find at the root of development of these countries are the patterns of Spanish and Portuguese civilisation of the sixteenth and seventeenth century [...]. The change-resistant crystallisations which survive to this day in these countries are the clergy and a military caste, two categories of traditional intellectuals fossilised in a form inherited from the European mother country. The industrial base is very restricted, and has not developed complicated superstructures. The majority of intellectuals are of the rural type, and, since the latifundium is dominant, with a lot of property in the hands of the Church, these intellectuals are linked with the clergy and the big landowners (1949:21).

While the role of the church is somewhat overstated in the case of Cuba, the latifundists held considerable sway over cultural life alongside indigenous and foreign capitalists with investments in industry. Consistent with Gramsci's demography, the majority of mid-twentieth century Cuban intellectuals mentioned here could not precisely be defined as traditional as they received negligible encouragement from a ruling class that sought to suppress them. Indeed, while a number of writers, artists and thinkers maintained some kind of praxis under Batista, we received a hint in the previous chapter that this was carried out in a self-financed and often samizdat fashion that risked punitive consequences. At the First National Congress of Writers and Artists, the now-deceased national poet, Nicolás Guillén (1961),¹⁰ would assert that Cuban intellectuals had never formed a distinct social class; belonging to the exploited class under capitalism, they had unwittingly propagated the system that oppressed them.

¹⁰ Whom Guillermo Cabrera Infante (1968a) dismisses as the 'nightingale of emperors' on account of his perceived complicity with regimes from Machado to Castro via Batista.

While the latter part of this formulation would seem to conform to definitions of traditional intellectuals from the capitalist world, we shall see in chapter five that, during the 1950s, intellectuals vociferously opposed the Batista regime, and clear battle lines were drawn between those who were prepared to serve the dictatorship (through its National Institute of Culture) and those who were not.

Despite the fact that the soubriquet ‘traditional’ cannot be applied with absolute conviction to those pre-revolutionary Cuban intellectuals who took a stand against the dictatorship, Weiss maintains that:

The responsibility of the intellectual is, first and foremost, to liberate himself from the colonized bourgeois mentality, in other words, to betray the class to which he presently belongs, before he can participate actively in the planning of the new order. The concept of ‘class betrayal’ is valid in the case of the intellectuals even though they do not constitute a distinct social class, because they do have a class interest: that of the class that, as planners and thinkers, they are historically bound to serve (1973:11).¹¹

This fits with the orthodox position, in evidence in Cuba, that all intellectuals and ideologues represent the interests of a particular class, which would inevitably give rise to a conflict if the superstructure remained in the hands of the class that the revolutionary situation aimed to eradicate (García Buchaca, 1961), and we shall see how this crept into Che’s thinking around intellectuals formed before the Revolution. Miller finds evidence of post-revolutionary Latin American intellectuals obfuscating class divisions in what she regards as a somewhat disingenuous attempt by ‘intellectuals of petty-bourgeois or bourgeois social origins’ (1999:21) to align themselves with their organic counterparts through their mutual support for social revolution. She argues that Gramsci had foreseen a situation in which new traditional intellectuals might be created from organic ranks but that the reverse process had not been envisaged beyond solidarities within the revolutionary party. If, as seems clear, Gramsci’s intention was to encourage a wholesale reappraisal of the mechanisms by which education was made available to a populace, his evocations may be seen to have been enthusiastically taken

11 In extrapolating Fernández Retamar’s position into a Marxian/Gramscian framework, Weiss argues that, ‘except for that sector proceeding organically from the exploited classes, the intelligentsia that considers itself revolutionary must break all ties with its class of origin (frequently the petite [sic] bourgeoisie) and must besides sever the nexus of dependence upon the metropolitan culture from which it has learned, nonetheless, a language as well as a conceptual and technical apparatus’ (1971:40).

up in Cuba, with intellectual training becoming available to all strata of society at the same time as attempts were made to erode those strata, in a way that permitted organic intellectuals to develop their intelligence without betraying their class of origin. As a more inclusive definition of intellectual activity prevailed and education was extended to those organic intellectuals (primarily from peasant backgrounds) who would come to make up a sizeable proportion of the intelligentsia in Cuba (Camnitzer, 1994; Kirk and Padura Fuentes, 2001) Fernández Retamar (1971) would find evidence in *The Communist Manifesto* of traditional intellectuals detaching themselves from their class of origin to align themselves with the oppressed, with 'traditional' territory being willingly conceded to those developing their mental capacities anew (Fernández Retamar, 1966). Arguably, then, Gramsci's concept of traditional and organic intellectuals reaches its natural limit when the social relations underlying it are disrupted, being displaced by evolving ideas that are underwritten by less sectarian interpretations.

As we have seen to be the case for cultural production in the capitalist world, the kind of policy being pursued in the field has an impact on discussions around aesthetics. Arguably, the key debate around Marxist aesthetics in Europe was staged around the abstraction of German Expressionism in the 1930s. György Lukács, with his 'lifelong insistence on the crucial significance of literature and culture in any revolutionary politics' (Ibid:200), dismissed the subjectivism and faux criticality of abstract artworks to advocate Socialist Realism. In his prescriptions, he was much more rigid than his revolutionary forebears; while Trotsky had expressed support for realistic art in its widest definition,¹² he had also written that, 'as far as the political use of art is concerned, [...] the actual development of art, and its struggle for new forms, are not part of the party's tasks, nor is it its concern' (1924:429). In an afterword to the collected

12 In *Literature and Revolution*, Trotsky writes:

What are we to understand under the term realism? At various periods, and by various methods, realism gave expression to the feelings and needs of different social groups. Each one of these realistic schools is subject to a separate and social literary definition, and a separate formal and literary estimation. What have they in common? A definite and important feeling for the world. It consists in a feeling for life as it is, in an artistic acceptance of reality, and not in a shrinking from it, in an active interest in the concrete stability and mobility of life. It is a striving either to picture life as it is or to idealize it, either to justify or to condemn it, either to photograph it or to generalize and symbolize it. But it is always a preoccupation with our life of three dimensions as a sufficient and invaluable theme for art. In this large philosophical sense and not in the narrow sense of a literary school, one may say with certainty that the new art will be realistic (1924:432).

English publication of the German texts four decades after they were written, Fredric Jameson attributes to realism a cognitive, as well as aesthetic, status. In this, he finds a potential corrective to the reifying effects of capitalism in obscuring class division, while conceding that ‘other kinds of political aesthetics obviously remain conceivable’ (1977:213).

In response to the spirited debate arising from Lukács’ position, Ernst Bloch found the merit in anti-academic abstraction to lie in the fact that ‘it directed attention to human beings and their substances, in their quest for the most authentic expression possible’ (1934:23). In the UK, this discussion was taken up by Herbert Read, who proclaimed abstract artists of every persuasion ‘the true revolutionary artists, whom every Communist should learn to respect and encourage’ (1935:503). In the Latin American context, and without prescribing an aesthetic trope appropriate to revolutionary situations, Ponce considered a retreat into art for art’s sake to be self-isolating in its attempt to deny the socio-historic context of the artist. Acknowledging Communist Party understanding that, in order to create an artistic literature destined for the masses, it would be necessary to break with aristocratic condition, Ponce dismissed any attempt to define an ‘Aesthetic vanguard of the proletariat’ (Troise, 1969:293).

In the inter-war period, Brecht (1938) pointed to culture as a form of knowledge about the world that could lead to its transformation, which coincides with the Enlightenment hope that one would inevitably bring about the other. In turn, this is predicated on the idea that all art is inherently political because, ‘even in the absence of any explicit political agenda, [...] cultural production had to have political effects. Artists, after all, relate to events and issues around them, and construct ways of seeing and representing which have social meanings’ (Harvey, 1980:29). However, Trotsky had earlier dismissed a purely reflective approach on the grounds that ‘art [...] is not a mirror, but a hammer: it does not reflect, it shapes’ (1924:428). We shall see how a significant debate around the extent to which cultural production could shape society was generated between film-makers and functionaries in 1960s Cuba.

In the parallel development of aesthetics and capitalism, Eagleton discerns the revolutionary potential of contemporary art, whereby ‘the aesthetic, understood in a certain sense, provides an unusually powerful challenge and alternative to these dominant ideological forms’ (1990:3). For him, the emancipatory potential of art lies in the fact that, ‘if the aesthetic is a dangerous, ambiguous affair, it is because [...] there is something in the body which can revolt against the power which inscribes it’ (Ibid:28). In much the same way, Stewart Home argues that ‘One purpose of revolutionary activity is to reconcile the sensual and the rational’ (2005:45), which points to the importance of reclaiming aesthetics from the creation and manipulation of desires. Sánchez Vásquez had earlier explored the main tenets that had historically underwritten considerations of aesthetics – art, society, class, ideology, form, content, autonomy, beauty, reality and reflection – to find that the simple equation of art with ideology had been proscribed by Marx and Engels. Instead, his thinking was predicated on the idea that the humanistic character of Marxism encompassed aesthetics, which:

Requires an understanding of Marxism as a philosophy of praxis; more precisely of a praxis which aims to transform human reality radically (on a concrete historical level, to transform capitalist society) so as to establish a society in which humanity can give free rein to its essential powers, frustrated, denied, postponed, and emasculated for so long. This understanding of Marxism as the true humanism, as the radical transformation of humanity on all planes, fulfills Marx’s aspiration. Aesthetics cannot be alien to this humanist Marxism, since [...] it is an essential dimension of human existence (1965:10).

Reconciling aesthetics and thought, Sánchez Vásquez proposed art as a form of cognition that differed from both scientific knowledge and the mechanical reproduction of existing reality – one which created a new reality, providing insights into humanity in the process. While this approach might be considered realist, he argued, this should not be distorted to make representation an end in itself, ‘rather than a means at the service of truth’ (Ibid:33) in the construction of a new human reality. In the process, he would discredit institutionalised socialist realism¹³ (as opposed to non-sectarian socialist

13 Sánchez Vásquez argues that:

[...] when socialist realism became institutionalized on both the theoretical and practical levels, it began to close itself off behind increasingly rigid lines, causing such a deep schism between its content and its form that in many cases it became nothing more than a new content pumped into an old form. [...] This rigid conception of realism, allowing only one approach and closing the door on formal experimentation, ended any benefits that a new socialist art might draw not only from other artistic trends, whether alien or opposed to it, but also and above all from the formal

realism) and reinforce an anti-dogmatic approach (railing against the elevation of relative to absolute truths), which was particularly useful to Cuban creative intellectuals at that moment in their development. In chapter six and beyond, we shall see how the polemic around socialist realism in Cuba persisted into the 1960s, becoming framed as a conflict between idealism and historical materialism, two tendencies that Marx and Engels had earlier been able to reconcile.

To summarise, then, this study of cultural policy interrogates the relationship between culture, state and society in post-revolutionary Cuba. Departing from the rigid confines of base and superstructure, culture will be placed centre stage when considering the creation of new social relations. Key to this will be an analysis of the perceived role of intellectuals in engendering revolutionary consciousness, prioritising a notion of critique that is not confined to the negation of existing reality. In seeking to define a Marxist-humanist approach to culture, the emancipatory connotations of both aesthetic enjoyment and creative participation will be explored, predicated on democratic understandings of intellectual work. As we saw in the case of cultural policy under capitalism, these factors have an impact on the expectations that are placed upon artistic production, and this research offsets the generalised Marxist tendency to prioritise realism over abstraction against a humanist emphasis on the provision of new insights about humanity that do not rely on strict reproductions of reality. In turn, this will help us to resolve some enduring artistic dichotomies, between sensory and cognitive, form and content. But, first, in order to penetrate this previously unknown field, it will be necessary to pose some prosaic research questions, which will be undertaken in the next chapter.

As a final theoretical consideration, it seems relevant to state that this isolation of the central tenets and methods of Marxist-humanist cultural policy as manifested in Cuba is intended as a work of committed scholarship, in which Howard S. Becker's

breakthroughs that the new ideological content demanded. [...] All of this led to a socialist realist aesthetic which ceased to postulate infinitely diverse ways of dealing with reality and began to establish norms and fix models, thus turning into a normative aesthetic, incompatible with the Marxist principles on which it pretended to base itself (1965:20-1).

timely reminder of the impossibility of conducting research that is ‘uncontaminated by personal and political sympathies’ (1967:239) makes itself felt. It will be remembered that Becker’s justification of taking sides was mounted in the face of accusations of over-identification with his subaltern subjects, and, while Becker’s subjects were undoubtedly individuals rather than states or populations, Cuba would frame itself as an underdog – a country suffering from underdevelopment as the result of enduring colonial and neo-colonial oppression. In response to Becker, Gouldner would argue that ‘sociological study from an underdog standpoint will be intellectually impaired without clarifying the *grounds* for the commitment’ (1968:105, i.i.o.). Such grounds might include the provision of ‘new information concerning social worlds about which many members of our society, including ourselves, know little or nothing’ or of ‘new perspectives on worlds that we had thought familiar and presumed that we already knew’ (loc cit). Accordingly, this study seeks to cast new light on the cultural field of Cuba, about which what little is known in the capitalist world has been tainted by ideologically motivated campaigns.

Colombian investigative journalist, Hernando Calvo Ospina, documents the systematic attempts to undermine the revolutionary government from without, describing how – despite a pact being agreed between the superpowers, in the wake of the failed Bay of Pigs attacks, that the US would not invade Cuba – ‘invasion continued to be at the root of US policy. It simply became necessary to make believe that it was the émigrés alone, “orphans” of US help, who sought the “liberation” of their own country’ (2001:20). The influence exerted over Washington by the main émigré group, the Cuban American National Foundation (CANF)¹⁴ – which has manifested

14 In 1981, acting on the advice of the US National Security Council under Reagan, ‘old leaders of RECE and several operatives of the CIA got together and built a super-modern structure: the very focused, economically powerful, politically and ideologically ultra-rightwing Cuban American National Foundation’ (Calvo Ospina, 2001:31). The CANF was ‘structured along the lines of the powerful Jewish lobby, the American-Israeli Public Affairs Committee. That is to say, with a wing entrusted to work for political influence in the state apparatus, effectively the CANF itself, and a supposedly independent Committee of Political Action, whose function was channelling economic contributions to politicians without compromising the rest of the organisation’ (Ibid:32). At the same time, ‘The involvement of the extreme Cuban right wing in the strategy of the Reagan administration’ (loc cit) was consolidated through ‘Project Democracy’, a two-pronged military and propaganda approach to Central America (the latter through the National Endowment for Democracy).

itself most egregiously through the embargo-tightening Torricelli-Graham (1992) and Helms-Burton (1996) Acts – is common knowledge. Less well known is the fact that the CANF grew out of a terrorist organisation, called Cuban Representation in Exile (RECE), officially founded in Miami in early 1964¹⁵ (before which time the CIA-backed Operation Mongoose had been in effect).¹⁶ In the same year, an FBI memo would describe a plot to assassinate



Bacardí Building, Havana

Fidel, orchestrated by the US mafia, financed by the RECE founder and known about by the CIA.¹⁷ The strategic crossovers between RECE and the CIA are uncanny, as are their overlaps in personnel, with both organisations including many key Bay of Pigs mercenaries.¹⁸ Throughout the period of this study, RECE and its precursors mounted counter-revolutionary attacks throughout Latin America and beyond, with the knowledge and approval of the CIA.¹⁹

In much the same way in the cultural field, the CIA funded the Congress for Cultural Freedom,²⁰ which established offices in thirty-five different countries, employing dozens of personnel, publishing more than twenty magazines, organising exhibitions and rewarding artists (Saunders, 1999). The Latin American Institute of International Relations²¹ was created and one of the publications it financed, *Mundo*

15 With US knowledge, José 'Pepín' Bosch – husband of significant Bacardí shareholder, Enrique Schueg, who had been Minister of Finance when the Cosa Nostra established its 'Empire of Havana' and initially supported the Revolution – decided to organise the émigrés, selecting five prominent Cuban exiles to front his plans. It was officially disbanded as late as 1988 (Calvo Ospina, 2001:31).

16 A programme of covert operations against Cuba, initiated under the Kennedy administration in 1961

17 The memo was not released until 1998.

18 Calvo Ospina documents, for example, that an attempt to infiltrate Cuba by sea (in a boat donated by Bosch) just two weeks before the Bay of Pigs invasion included José Ignacio Rasco, 'chosen by the CIA to lead the government (as a front) that would have assumed power if the Bay of Pigs operation had triumphed (2001:20). In terms of personnel, the RECE's military chief was Erneido Oliva 'A man in the CIA's total confidence, he had been in the second command of Brigade 2506 at the Bay of Pigs' (Ibid:21). Taking account of the fact that the CIA had been given 'responsibility, by presidential order, of directing and/or controlling all the threads of the counter-revolutionary spider's web' (Ibid:22), Calvo Ospina asserts that the link between the two organisations is indisputable, especially as the latter can be shown to have financed RECE operations and operatives.

19 This campaign, which intensified while the US was otherwise engaged in Vietnam, included bombings of the Cuban Embassy in Paris, of the car in which Allende's former Minister of the Interior was travelling in Washington and of a Cubana Airlines flight over Barbados (Ibid).

20 The Congress for Cultural Freedom and the Washington-based Panamerican Union are both mentioned in Cuba as instruments in the deformation and subjugation of Latin American cultures (Rodríguez Manso, 2010).

21 Instituto Latinoamericano de Relaciones Internacionales.

Nuevo,²² published from Paris in Spanish (Lasch, 1970), was to prove particularly influential:

The project was clear: to challenge, from Europe and with a modern look, the hegemony of the revolutionary outlook in Latin American intellectual work. It would be mistaken to contend, and we never suggested, that everyone who published in *Mundo Nuevo* was necessarily hostile to the revolution. On the contrary, the editors' purpose was to create an atmosphere of confusion that would make it difficult to detect the real functions that the review had been assigned (Fernández Retamar, 1986:49).²³

Gilman supplements the picture of North American strategising in the region by elaborating on the polemic generated around Cuba by *Mundo Nuevo*, which would see other journals, published in and about Latin America, demonstrating their solidarity with the island.²⁴ It was in this forum that the main conflicts surrounding what became known as the 'Padilla case' (to be discussed in chapter ten) were felt in 1967-8 and again in 1971. Fernández Retamar also refers us to the Alliance for Progress, which 'plotted an academic version of its demagogic policy [...] Grants proliferated, colloquiums flourished, chairs to study and dissect us sprouted like toadstools after a rainstorm' (1986:48),²⁵ and Casa kept a suspicious eye on the Inter-American Foundation, which was backed by big business from the US (Weiss, 1973). Gilman (2003) describes how, although Latin American visual artists supported socialism, they were aesthetically close to the US and Europe, which meant that North American attempts to co-opt them were not implausible. As we shall see in chapter ten, promises of heightened international prestige – by means of exhibitions, grants, subsidies, biennales and prizes – led to a US dependency among some of the continent's artists that was most evident

22 New World. The precursor to this journal, *Cuadernos*, 'was so sclerotic that it was unable to ride the rising tide of the sixties, and thus, it capsized ingloriously on its one hundredth issue' (Fernández Retamar, 1986:48).

23 For an incisive account of the relationship between the Congress for Cultural Freedom, CIA, Ford Foundation, *Mundo Nuevo* and *Casa de las Américas*, see Weiss, 1973.

24 Gilman (2003) alludes to the letters exchanged by Fernández Retamar and the Uruguayan critic, Emir Rodríguez Monegal, in relation to *Mundo Nuevo* (of which Monegal was founding editor), which were widely published in the continent's journals. Despite the exposure of links with the CIA, Monegal persisted in publishing the magazine and claiming complete independence until 1971. For a detailed consideration of this debacle, in which Monegal's successor at *Marcha*, Ángel Rama, would play a leading part, see Ibid:120-30 and the timeline given in Appendix A. Veering from anti-imperialism to structuralism, Rama would recommend the reading of Russian formalism, and won universal fame for his seminal revolutionary methodology, published in *Marcha* in March 1970. Despite their ideological differences, Gilman cites Rodríguez Monegal and Rama as the two most important Latin American critics of the time.

25 Pogolotti (2006) describes *Casa* journal as a platform for the most radical thinking and the literature that was emerging in Latin America which had a full command of the language of contemporaneity, thus serving as an important weapon against the activities of the Alliance for Progress and *Mundo Nuevo*.

in international circuits (galleries, museums and itinerant exhibitions).²⁶ In addition to this, the Camelot plan, which was to be funded by the US Defense Department during the 1960s, intended to carry out a study of insurrection in Latin American universities with a view to eradicating it (Camnitzer, 1994).²⁷ As we shall see, these factors combined to give ‘considerable evidence for the Cuban leaders’ claim to be under siege, justifying a war footing and therefore continuing control of expression and political action’ (Kapcia, 2008:114).



Graffiti in Santa Clara, citing the US as the greatest terrorist

It is interesting to note that several distinguished academics allied themselves with the CIA-aligned Cuban émigrés. Irving Horowitz, who had written with Becker on the topic of partisan sociology, was appointed to the CANF-inflected Bacardí-Moreau Chair of Cuban Studies at the University of Miami (Calvo Ospina, 2001). In 1970, Horowitz edited a volume, entitled *Cuban Communism*, which, he trumpeted, offset the ideological tendency of the Cuban regime through its recourse to the rigours of social research. Littered with typographical errors, a later edition of this work of scholarship claims to represent ‘The triumph of honest research over stale ideology’ (1987:xiv).²⁸ This includes a 1985 text on ‘Writers and Artists in Today’s Cuba’ by Carlos Ripoll,²⁹ framed in terms of freedom of expression and heavily reliant on sources such as *Mundo Nuevo* and on commentators who had left the island.³⁰ Ripoll proffers an undialectical perspective of the ‘conflict between the view of art as the servant of

26 By contrast, North American foundations are alleged not to have received the same response amongst Latin American writers, due to the exceedingly active and militant resistance of groups of intellectuals (Gilman, 2003).

27 This plan was scrapped due to the public outcry that greeted its discovery (Camnitzer, 1994).

28 A sentence from Horowitz’s preface to the sixth edition speaks volumes about his perspective on the Cuban émigrés: ‘Even if it is the case that the Cuban exile community forms the “mass base” of support for researchers, it remains a fact that no single group of area specialists have suffered more ridicule and abuse than those who chose to examine Cuba without fears and without tears’ (1987:xiv).

29 In 1987, while at Queens College at the City University of New York, Ripoll published a pamphlet, entitled ‘Cubans in the United States’, which is nostalgic about pre-1959 Cuba and relies heavily on Reagan and Bush’s rhetoric towards the island thereafter. See <http://www.latinamericanstudies.org/academic/cubans-usa.pdf> (accessed 11 November 2011).

30 The influence of Carlos Franqui is notable in this text and, at one point, he declares that ‘The greatest victory for freedom of expression in Cuba in those years [the heady 1960s] came when Carlos Franqui managed to move the Salón de Mayo from Paris to Havana’ (Horowitz, 1987:462).

ideology and the view of ideas as the wellspring of art' (Ibid:456). In the process, he erroneously assimilates under the Marxist banner all creative intellectuals supportive of the Revolution, making no distinction between the diverse responses to Marxism that were formulated on the island, while being forced to admit that 'Castro's rejection of the orthodox ideas of Marxism-Leninism with respect to artistic creation and freedom of expression was intense' (Ibid:463). Such examples of skewed and obfuscating scholarship will be borne firmly in mind throughout this study in an attempt to expose the bias that has historically mediated our relationship to Cuba, particularly in the cultural field. This will be undertaken while remaining mindful of the fact that 'When the situation is political, the researcher may accuse himself or be accused of bias by someone else when he gives credence to the perspective of either party to the political conflict' (Becker, 1967:241).

Ultimately, Gouldner distinguishes radical from liberal sociology on the basis of the former's tendency to study those power elites that create the suffering endured by underdogs. In the case of Cuba, this poses complex problems, implying as it does an analysis of both external and internal elites as the need arises. While striving towards the objectivity that research of this nature demands, this scrutiny of the competing beliefs that shaped evolving policy takes value commitment to be a 'necessary condition of objectivity' (Gouldner, 1968:113). This presupposes that 'sociological objectivity involves the capacity to acknowledge "hostile information" – information that is discrepant with our purposes, hopes, wishes, or values. [...] Here, then, objectivity consists in the capacity to know and to use – to seek out, or at least to accept it when it is otherwise provided – information inimical to our own desires and values, and to overcome our own fear of such information' (Ibid:114). This research, then, is not simply a 'bland confession of partisanship' (Ibid:112) but rather an attempt to examine diverse standpoints and historical evidence as part of a consideration of the ways in which culture may be re-imagined as both anti-elitist and anti-dogmatic.

Chapter Three: Considering a Method for Unravelling Developments in Cultural Policy

Cuba is unique in many ways, not least because the definitive history of its post-revolutionary cultural policy remains largely unwritten, either at the time it was being formulated or thereafter. Whereas, in Europe, bureaucrats in government ministries, dealing with culture and various loosely related portfolios, tend to write documents describing the sluggish manoeuvres that will be attempted by a cabal of long-established institutions in the forthcoming years, in Cuba in 1959, scant cultural machinery existed beyond the pet projects of a handful of businessmen, which meant that cultural provision needed to be reinvented as quickly as its trajectories were being described.

Before the country could catch its breath, two vital cultural institutions had been founded – one committed to developing the ideologically important film industry and the other with a remit for fostering cultural dialogues across Latin America. Elsewhere, the successes of the literacy campaign were being applied to other branches of culture, with a programme of teacher training and mass creativity being continually refined and an apocryphal round of golf between Fidel and Che at a requisitioned country club in the suburbs of Havana giving rise to five specialist art schools, necessitating a feat of architecture that remains unsurpassed. Yet, the precise steps leading to these outcomes remain largely opaque. With this in mind, this chapter considers the tools that will be needed to trace a trajectory from the Sierra Maestra to the Ministry of Culture (MINCULT).

An Overview of Methods

This study deployed a combined methodology which began and ended with desk-based research. Between November 2008 and October 2009, an attempt to construct an overview of previous writing around the subject in English was centred on the libraries of London that hold significant Cuban collections, specifically those at London Metropolitan University, Senate House and the International Institute for the Visual

Arts. Literature was consulted that offered political histories and economic analyses of Cuba, alongside considerations of cultural production alluding to policy. Taking into account the breadth of this study, it was felt that readers would be best served if the results of the literature review were presented not as a large, stand-alone chapter but as the contextual backdrop to each of the chapters that follow.

This preliminary reading phase quickly revealed the slanted nature of the topic at hand. As Robin Moore, who has conducted research into music in Cuba, has observed, ‘Sources from the United States and elsewhere vary [...] in quality and objectivity. In some cases, they are not based on extended fieldwork in Cuba; in others, authors’ political views shape the analysis. Those interested in Cuban history face a decidedly polarized literature, one filled with opposing opinions that are difficult to reconcile’ (2006:xv).¹ Indeed, every volume consulted merely adds to a raggedy patchwork of knowledge that can never be truly neatenened without visiting the country. Even then, given the lack of documents describing cultural policy as it evolved, the problem facing the contemporary researcher is that much important data now exists only in the recollections of those who attended relevant events, faded by a distance of fifty years. Pogolotti describes how:

With the march of time, the atmosphere of an epoch is unrecoverable. The memories of survivors are contaminated by the walks of life; sharp images float in the broad territory of memory as illuminations in a process of selection and dismissal. Deceptively tangible, dispersed and devoured by the heat and humidity, documents emerge as enigmatic signs. In the attempt to overcome gaps and recover a lost chronology, research requires rescuing everyday happening, the accelerated rhythm of history and the traces of cultural action multiplied by institutions, the proliferation of magazines, books, premieres, conferences and the public presentations of intellectuals from everywhere (2006:ix).

The overview of literature enabled areas for further research to be determined, and paved the way for fieldwork undertaken in Cuba between November 2009 and March 2010 in a process that was documented in a research diary throughout. As will

¹ Added to this, it is noted that ‘The fact that the Cuban government has controlled domestic presses since the early 1960s means that information contained in books and journals is often incomplete or represents only one perspective. To the extent that such texts include rigorous analysis, they often avoid sensitive lines of inquiry’ (Moore, 2006:xv).

be described in more detail below, this second research phase was initially centred on the libraries and archives of Havana and later expanded, through use of a snowball method, to include semi-structured interviews. During this time, copies of hundreds of documents were taken and many books acquired that are unavailable outside of Cuba. This included early legislative material and state evaluations of cultural policy (which provide hints about the contemporaneous ethos), published memoirs (which tend to represent the consensus) and commemorative publications attempting a summary of achievements to date (for which the fiftieth anniversary of the Revolution in 2009 proved a useful source). This material was brought back to the UK to form the basis of another period of desk-based research that involved the laborious translation and collation of relevant data combined with discourse and policy analysis and scrutiny of official statistics in ways to be discussed.

Integral to this consideration of the methods for interrogating the cultural policy of the Revolution is an acknowledgement of the challenges of conducting research in a foreign language in a society that is wary of outside intervention. As will be elaborated in this chapter, researching in Cuba is not easy, and it is hoped that the experiences relayed here will serve as a useful guide to researchers undertaking fieldwork there in the future.

Research Questions

In considering the immediate aftermath of Batista's defeat, it becomes clear that the priority given to culture in post-revolutionary society required the commitment of specific individuals and groups, whose involvement was central to the dialogical process through which definitions were shaped and action agreed. For the first two years, this led to an ad hoc process, during which buildings were commandeered and legislation enacted as and when necessary. Thereafter, policy tended to be formulated during meetings, discussions and congresses at which the channels of communication between governmental and institutional figures and creative practitioners remained open, if at

times fractious. The main manifestations of these discussions were swiftly felt in the cultural institutions of the Revolution, sometimes before being inscribed into official cultural policy. Accordingly, the following questions were devised to frame this research:

- Who was convinced of the centrality of culture to the formation of a new society, and whose approaches were the most influential?
- How did the cultural infrastructure evolve and to what extent did that allow for a relationship to develop between art and the people of post-revolutionary Cuba?
- Through which steps was cultural policy determined and enacted, and which ideas, including those of artists and writers, were central to its development?

In turn, these questions, determine both the methodological framework for this investigation and the reporting of relevant results, with the first two questions reflected in the headings of chapters four and five and the third in chapters seven, nine and ten. In a bid to enhance understanding of these findings, broader revolutionary ideology will be borne in mind in chapters six and eight.

Conducting Research in a Foreign Language

As already mentioned, this project was incited by a curiosity about the cultural policy that has been developed in Cuba since the 1959 Revolution as a counter model to policies developed under neoliberalism. However, this over-riding interest in subject matter swiftly needed to be matched by a consideration of the pragmatic realities of undertaking research in a remote country in a language of which I had almost no knowledge.² As such, the first step was to learn Spanish to a workable level. Given the differences that exist between the Castilian that is spoken in Europe and that which has evolved in Spain's colonial outposts in Latin America, it was decided early in this project to undertake language lessons in Cuba. And so, after a 28-hour starter course of Latin American Spanish in London, I arrived in Cuba on 31 October 2009 and enrolled to take classes at the University of Havana.

² In the interests of transparency, it is, perhaps, necessary to declare that I undertook a year of Spanish lessons before choosing subjects to study at 'O' Level – which perhaps gives an indication of how long ago this was. The only words I can remember from this time are *maquinaria agrícola* [agricultural machinery] which might have been more useful had I been studying the agrarian reforms of the immediate post-revolutionary period.



Principiante Spanish class on the main steps of the University of Havana, November 2009

The Faculty of Foreign Languages,³ sited in one of the impressive, neoclassical buildings that make up the main campus in Havana, is a meeting place for people from around the world keen to learn Spanish in Cuba. The faculty offers five courses – beginners, elementary, intermediate, advanced and superior – and the level of

entrants is established through a written test on the first Monday of every month. The following day, a list is hung on the faculty notice board, allocating students to teachers according to their level of study, and an appropriate text book is provided. Lessons take place every day from 9 am to 12:30 pm Monday to Friday with a half-hour break. The maximum length of each course is four weeks (80 hours), costing a little over £200, after which students are free to enrol for the following month of classes.

On the first Monday in November 2009, I was subjected to the ritual humiliation of filling in the simple test paper with virtually no knowledge of the language and, accordingly, began my studies at beginners' level. Over the subsequent three months (two hundred hours in total), I would progress, via elementary and intermediate, to advanced level, studying every morning and completing homework assignments every afternoon/evening. Depending on the teacher, deviations would be made from the standard text book to include exercises on paper and presentations or scenarios to be performed in front of the rest of the class. I also undertook a handful of private lessons with teachers from the university to go over the more complicated aspects of Spanish grammar.

Learning a new language as an adult is a humbling experience, immediately rendering one infantile, stumbling to construct sentences from an infinitely limited vocabulary. My research diary is peppered with despair about my slow progress, details of the searing pangs of failure at not being able to understand or make myself

3 Facultad de Lenguas Extranjeras, FLEX.

understood, and serious doubts about the wisdom of my choice of study, only overcome when documents in Spanish were sifted at my own pace back in the UK. The first use for these newly acquired linguistic skills would be in gaining access to relevant materials in the libraries and archives of Havana, which would soon present a daily challenge.

Researching the Cultural Figures of the Revolution

From the patchy literature that exists in the English-speaking world, a non-random sample of key informants was drawn up through a process of elimination that will be explained more fully in the next chapter. The chosen group was centred on figures who could be shown to have exerted an influence over the formation of cultural and institutional policy, centred on the visual arts where a choice had to be made (which inevitably excludes many influential intellectuals from other disciplines). This initially included Fidel Castro Ruz, Ernesto Guevara, Camilo Cienfuegos Gorriarán, Celia Sánchez Manduley, Carlos Franqui, Alfredo Guevara, Roberto Fernández Retamar, Haydée Santamaría Cuadrado, Armando Hart Dávalos, Carlos Rafael Rodríguez and Marcia Leiseca. The danger inherent in this approach is that the activities of a handful of individuals will never be truly representative of a groundswell of activity, especially one with a collective ethos. The reader is politely asked to bear in mind the contribution of very many other individuals and groups, some of which will be cited throughout the remaining chapters, with others regrettably escaping mention altogether.

Depending on the course they took after the Revolution, the protagonists considered in chapter four may loosely be described as governmental, institutional or creative (the latter category including artists, writers and other intellectuals). But, this picture is by no means clear cut, with creative practitioners occupying institutional roles and both creative and institutional figures sometimes having close links to the revolutionary government. The situation is further complicated by the fact that most of the people under discussion in the next chapter played an active part in the Revolution,

either directly in the fighting of the Sierra Maestra or indirectly as part of the urban resistance in Havana. Rather than it being a case of philistine revolutionaries seizing power and dictating the terms of subsequent debate to cultural practitioners, the Revolution was steered by culturally literate guerrillas, with culture being made integral to the vision of the new society for which they were fighting. Thus, the conventional, and often oppositional, categories of bureaucrats and artists, of top-down and bottom-up, may not be applied with conviction here. Similarly, the dividing line between the politico-cultural vanguards (responsible for decision-making in the cultural field) and the people of Cuba (undergoing cultural education *en masse*) is porous, with feedback loops being created via interactions that were actively encouraged, between artists, the people and the state. These factors will be borne in mind throughout and new methods of differentiation sought.

Once in Cuba, as much information as possible would be sought about these cultural figures, in libraries, archives and bookshops, with the aim of supplementing the literature review with as many indigenous sources as possible. This included publications authored by the subjects under investigation and interviews with them that had been published in newspapers and journals. The starting point for this phase of research was the Biblioteca Nacional José Martí, the national library, named after the nineteenth century hero and revolutionary poet, an oversized bust of whom greets visitors to the library. Although it was never explained to me, I deduced that visitors to the library were permitted to use a dusty card index, kept in heavy wooden drawers at the centre of the reading room, to search for publications by author or issuing institution.

There followed a very precise method of noting individual references from the aging cards onto small, manila *boletas* [slips of paper], interspersed with black carbon copy paper. Three requests were permitted at any given time, with vigilance



Reading room at Biblioteca Nacional José Martí, the national library, with bust of Martí visible behind the card filing system

required during a twenty minute wait lest the *boleta* be consigned to a large spike of rejections without explanation. At a certain point, it became clear that marking my slips with *Investigadora* [researcher] improved my chances of success, but still many requests were rejected – material could not be found or was too old to handle or off limits or formed part of an inventory that was perpetually being undertaken. The nature of the card index, with minimal information being given about each holding, beyond its author and title, meant that very many publications needed to be requested on the off-chance that they might yield something relevant. More than once, I left the library with tears of frustration stinging my eyes, unable to understand how I could find what I needed.

Staff at the issue desk were, for the most part, incredibly helpful, accommodating my innumerable requests with courtesy and good grace and making personal visits to my desk to solicit extra information or to try and decode my handwriting. Weeks were spent sneezing in the dusty reading room as an unseasonably cold wind forced its way between the warped aluminium slats that substituted for windows. Security at the library was another issue altogether, especially as I needed to take my laptop into the reading room with a view to copying material, preferably with an iris pen and/or camera. The laptop needed a special slip of paper from the information desk, which was signed and dated and shown to a uniformed security guard at the entrance to the library and to various elderly, plain-clothed guards who are a permanent fixture within the reading room. After a day of moderate scanning, I was apprehended and the director of the reading room summoned. I explained the situation to the best of my ability and asked whether she would need a letter from my university. As one staff member assured me in whispered tones, there was nothing dangerous about the material I was studying – on the contrary – and yet the process of reproducing this material in order to elucidate its progressive nature had been thwarted. I have subsequently discovered that this prohibition of scanning is in effect in certain libraries in the UK, including those on university campuses.

After a weekend hiatus, the *directora* relented and I was allowed to scan selected texts. Many of the library's holdings are in bad condition, consisting as they do of smudgy, typewritten letters on acid-rich, yellowed and crumbling paper, often held together with rusty staples, sometimes unpaginated or containing pages which begin renumbering in different sections. These conditions do not lend themselves to scanning; so, for example, a passage which should read as follows:

10. Analizar con vista a su aprobación, las propuestas de Instructores seleccionados como profesores-guías por la Dirección de Capacitación. Gestionar la contratación de profesores para las asignaturas que lo requieran. Enviar a la Dirección de Capacitación la lista definitiva de profesores-guías y contratados para efectuar la matrícula el Seminario Nacional.

scanned like this:

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'Sem - . . i?'::"C ::? .a? .

which necessitated much retyping of potentially irrelevant material. Although I had been permitted to scan documents, I had received no written confirmation of this and a lack of communication between various members of security staff meant that entirely new personnel could appear at any given moment to demand an explanation.

Added to this, my permission to copy documents did not extend to photography and, having initially been told that I could take photographs as long as I was prepared to pay for the privilege, this permission seemed to evaporate. I was keen to bring as much information as possible back to the UK in its original Spanish, preserving it for posterity and allowing for more leisurely translation, which meant that a prohibition against photographing whole pages would slow down my research process considerably. At this point, my research took on a surreptitious nature.

The bag in which my laptop and other valuables were carried also created varying levels of problems for different guards. As is the case in other parts of Latin

America, bags tend to arouse suspicion in Cuba and one is not normally permitted to enter a museum or even a supermarket without checking the smallest handbag into left luggage, which carries with it no guarantee of its secure return. This monitoring of people's behaviour cannot pass un-remarked upon in a society in which many people complain about being inhibited but appear simultaneously complicit – as state employees and citizens – in restricting the freedom of others. My observation about restricted freedom was by no means confined to library security – with suspicions being raised about a Spanish professor visiting my home to provide extra lessons or the simple process of buying a long-distance bus ticket taking eight hours (twice as long as the journey itself) – but this was the site at which it had the most detrimental impact upon my research.

The second use to which my nascent Spanish skills would be put – and one that was perpetually present in my mind, often inhibiting my fluency – was to attempt conversations with those protagonists I was researching. In the presence of revered intellectuals and cultural policy-makers, deployment of embarrassingly basic language skills does not serve to enhance one's credibility as a researcher. As outlined above, the final two months of 2009 were largely taken up with language classes. During the first two weeks of 2010, with the input of one of my university professors, I drafted a letter of introduction to colleagues (Appendix C). In this, I gave details of my educational background and previous research and writing experience. Where possible, the institutions relevant to each of the individuals under scrutiny were visited and an interview sought.

The precise method for conducting semi-structured interviews would adhere, in part, to McCracken's insistence that 'respondents should be perfect strangers (i.e. unknown to the interviewer)' (1988:37) as I had certainly never met them before. Yet, the Cuban cultural field is comprised of specialists who have been working together for five decades; it is not, therefore, possible for research undertaken there to conform to McCracken's subsequent clause that respondents should be unknown to each other

or that interviewees ‘should not have a special knowledge (or ignorance) of the topic under study’ (Ibid), since active participation was a pre-requisite for their inclusion. It also remained likely that protagonists other than those identified during the literature review would come to the fore through the snowball method (Winchester, 1999), and I maintained an openness to this possibility.

In advance of arriving in Cuba, I had received input into my study from four prominent Latin American scholars. At the International Institute for the Study of Cuba, then based at London Metropolitan University (LMU), Dr. Stephen Wilkinson kindly shared bibliographic information and arranged access to the LMU library with its substantial Cuban holdings, which aided in the compilation of subsequent chapters. My primary supervisor, David Miller, invited Mike Gonzalez, Professor of Latin American Studies, recently retired from the University of Glasgow, to be an advisor to this project during its initial phase. His recommendations influenced the general direction of my literature review, as has his suggestion that I try to meet others working in the field, notably Professor Antoni Kapcia, whose writing on Cuban culture has been influential to this study. Based at the University of Nottingham, Professor Kapcia was very helpful, providing further titles and access to the Hennessy Collection of Cuban material held in Nottingham, while outlining many of the libraries and archives in Havana that would prove crucial to this study and suggesting that, when in Cuba, I contact the art historian and critic, Adelaida de Juan, and the writer, Ambrosio Fornet (born in 1931 and 1932 respectively). I duly contacted the former, initially with a version of my letter of introduction and latterly by telephone, to arrange an interview.

Over the telephone, Adelaida de Juan is quite fearsome. The first time I called her, pitifully trying to articulate the intentions I had been rehearsing in pidgin Spanish, she barked at me ‘Why don’t you just speak English?’ I should have realised that her scholarly activities in London and the US conferred upon her a good command of the English language. I arrived at the house that De Juan shares with Roberto Fernández Retamar and their adult children, carrying the best box of chocolates I could lay my

hands on, and we sat in two rocking chairs in a shaded room at the front of the house, talking uninterruptedly except when her son put his head around the door to say hello. Having recorded our conversation, I thanked her effusively and left, later dropping in a postcard of renewed thanks and offering to take copies of her book, *Modern Cuban Art* (published in English), to the library collections of London. This prompted a kind response in acceptance and, when I went to collect three copies of her book, an offer of help with my research.

At the University of Essex, Professor Valerie Fraser, an art historian specialising in the art and architecture of Latin America, put me in contact with María Inigo Clavo, a researcher on an AHRC-funded project at Essex. María, in turn, mentioned Arien González Crespo, directora of the library at Casa de las Américas. Arien would be the only person I was able to establish contact with in advance of arriving in Cuba, and a key contact while there, not least through her ability to grant me permission to photograph books in the Casa library (which is normally prohibited). During a lunch together, I was able to glean hints that informed the direction my research would take and underlies many of the perspectives offered in subsequent chapters. Early in our communication, Arien recommended that I contact Ana Mayda Alvarez, Director of Cultural Programmes at MINCULT, who had written some articles about cultural policy. I tried in vain to contact Ana Mayda, before and after my arrival in Havana, eventually visiting the ministry to be informed that she had retired. Obtaining an email address from staff there, I had no luck in contacting her, email being an unreliable medium, hard to access by the sender (via expensive hotel terminals or one of two places offering WiFi) and rarely checked by the recipient.

González also re-emphasised the significance of the deceased founder of Casa de las Américas, Haydée Santamaría, to early post-revolutionary cultural histories alongside her successors, Roberto Fernández Retamar and Marcia Leiseca, and Haydée's widower, Armando Hart. Arien introduced me to both Retamar (as he is known locally) and to Marcia Leiseca, warning me of the latter's reticence in giving interviews, which

was reiterated by Leisesa's secretary in response to my initial request, with a follow-up letter failing to change her mind. Having interviewed his wife in their home, I had hoped that Fernández Retamar would have been forthcoming, but, despite Adelaida's intervention on my behalf, my request was met with a very polite refusal (on the pretext that he rarely consents to giving interviews) and with two texts being sent in lieu of a conversation. A follow-up email sent a year later, once relevant questions had been formulated in response to the material studied (see Appendix D), sadly elicited the same response.

This resistance to being interviewed on the part of cultural professionals was the source of much incomprehension and disappointment. Towards the end of my stay in Cuba, leaving Havana to travel around the island for two weeks, I was hurt by the string of refusals, as a diary note, from 16 March 2010, conveys:

I have been infuriated by this reluctance to engage on the part of the key protagonists. [...] Perhaps it is because they are old and have spoken about these things too many times in their lives. Perhaps they have something to hide. Perhaps they are (rightfully) suspicious of someone from Empire asking about the intricacies of their cultural revolution. Perhaps if I had been male, or older, or in a tenured position, or had a secretary, things would have been different. Whatever the case, I am genuinely disturbed and frustrated by it because I have come to Cuba with a macro perspective of the world, in the belief that here something new developed and the best way to understand this is through personal testimony.

Moore plausibly notes that 'This climate of distrust is the result of ongoing political antagonisms, covert and overt actions by the U.S. government, and the Cuban leadership's vilification of capitalist countries' (2006:xv).⁴ With the benefit of calm hindsight, it becomes clear that valid intellectual objections to the interview format exists. For example, Fernández Retamar had previously concluded a rare interview with the disclaimer that 'Sometimes [interviews] bother me, but I know that other times, as here, they are convenient forms of communication, especially if you can revise them to smooth out their rough edges. The interview, that hurried heir to the ancient dialogue, is a new journalistic genre that can't be more than a century old, and it's stuck

⁴ This is prefaced by the observation that 'Cubans on the island provide some of the best information on past events through interviews, yet many will not speak about them openly. Others do not wish their conversations to be taped, making retention difficult. Foreigners who ask penetrating questions may be accused of spying, as I myself have experienced' (Moore, 2006:xv).

around' (Saruský, 2005:41). Elsewhere, Fernández Retamar and his contemporaries have occasionally conceded to interviews, which I sourced and translated, where necessary, in advance of analysing their content in chapter four and beyond.

Also at the Casa de las Américas library, I met Adriana Urrea from Colombia, a fellow academic and the only person I ever felt comfortable addressing in the *tú* form.⁵ On the first day we worked together in the library, we drifted into each other over lunch at a nearby restaurant and it transpired that she was a friend of the family of Ambrosio Fornet (the writer mentioned by Kapcia). Through her, I was able to secure Fornet's consent to be interviewed by email and (through his daughter-in-law, Zaida Capote Cruz, with whom Adriana put me in contact), I obtained his email address. Fornet (a writer who has been particularly vocal about the detrimental effects of the 'five grey years' of 1971-6) was asked about the changing relationship between creative intellectuals and the revolutionary government (see Appendix D), but, despite having agreed to receive questions, he has thus far declined to comment.

Alongside Casa de las Américas, the other key post-revolutionary cultural institution to celebrate its fiftieth anniversary in 2009 was the film institute, ICAIC, which, in addition to its commissioning and distribution activities, hosts the International Festival of New Latin American Film every December. I was fortunate enough to attend the launch of the thirty-first edition of the festival and to hear its octogenarian director, Alfredo Guevara, making his inaugural speech in advance of ten days of superb quality Latin American and internationally-produced film. An edited transcript of Guevara's speech was reproduced in a subsequent copy of the daily paper published to coincide with the festival, the content of which will be contextualised in chapter four through consideration of other texts by and involving Guevara, notably a 2007 interview entitled 'The Worst Enemy of the Revolution is Ignorance'.⁶

A useful adjunct to my methodology was provided by the journal, *Temas*,⁷ which holds an annual essay prize. As permitted by the increasingly international guidelines, I

⁵ The informal version of 'you'.

⁶ In its original, 'El peor enemigo de la Revolución es la ignorancia', this text was recommended by Arien González. See <http://www.revistacaliban.cu/entrevista.php?numero=5> (accessed 5 July 2010).

⁷ Themes.

submitted an essay in English, contextualising my doctoral study and inviting people to contact me with information about the post-revolutionary period. My essay was awarded honourable mention by a panel of judges, which conferred upon it the right to be published in a forthcoming issue of the magazine, thereby introducing my research to a wider audience and soliciting contributions. This experience opened some doors and I was invited to their offices, within ICAIC headquarters, to receive my certificate.

After the death of his wife, Haydée Santamaría, Armando Hart left MINCULT for the Centre for Studies of Martí.⁸ It was here that I left my letter of introduction and, when this was met with stony silence, I contacted Hart's secretary for an email address in order that I might request an interview through this medium. A year later, having formulated pertinent questions based on extensive research and had my interview schedule professionally translated (see Appendix D), I attempted to contact Hart via email, to no avail. Ultimately, the lack of economic data, which Hart could have furnished, was the most frustrating in this regard.

During an earlier stage of my fieldwork, Michel Pérez Jacobs at the national library had shown me a copy of a book on the cultural polemics of the 1960s, edited by Graziella Pogolotti, which I had since been fruitlessly attempting to find. One day, visiting the National Union of Writers and Artists of Cuba (UNEAC)⁹ to use the library, I discovered that Pogolotti was president of the union, and this eventually led to an interview with her.

Graziella Pogolotti is not the statuesque Italian woman her name might suggest; nonetheless, she is formidable. Well into her seventies, she suffers from the same condition that brought the career of her father, the famous Cuban painter, Marcello, to a premature end by robbing him of his vision. Pogolotti's eyes have clouded over to the point of impenetrability; added to his, she wears a hearing aid. Her middle and index fingers are stained with nicotine from the cigarettes she keeps permanently within reach, together with a lighter in a snug leather pouch, which she toyed with during our

⁸ Centro de Estudios Martianos, set up in 1977 and 'challenging the image of a newly orthodox "Sovietised" Cuba after 1975' (Kapcia, 2008:107).

⁹ Unión Nacional de Escritores y Artistas de Cuba.

time together. Two or three times, she prised out its contents and lit up, reaching for the large, back rubber ashtray that remains anchored to her desk, sometimes offering a strong, tipped cigarette to the young, approachable assistant who remained by her side throughout our conversation. While a birth defect renders Pogolotti's words slightly slurred, the clarity of her views was in no way compromised.

The interviews conducted with cultural protagonists in Havana were geared to their particular areas of knowledge. So, for example, Pogolotti was asked about the working conditions of artists while De Juan (an art historian and board member of the National Museum of Fine Arts)¹⁰ was asked about aesthetics and ethics. Interviews carried out in person were recorded with an Olympus digital voice recorder, uploaded, transcribed and translated.¹¹ The data gathered in this way will be interwoven into subsequent sections.

Charting the Key Institutions of the Revolution

Before visiting Cuba, it was necessary to embark upon a desk-based mapping of significant cultural institutions and to consider the impact of this institutionalisation. Once in Havana, I would come to realise that the national library collection holds the archives of MINCULT (founded in 1976)¹² and its precursor, the National Council of Culture (CNC), alongside legislative documents and daily newspapers dating back to pre-revolutionary times. Over several weeks, I was able to gather various data pertaining to the establishment of new laws, institutions and initiatives. This attempt to better understand the institutional infrastructure was complemented by visits to several cultural institutions. Aside from the already-mentioned Casa de las Américas, ICAIC and UNEAC, I would spend time in both the Cuban and international sections of the National Museum of Fine Arts and Casas de Cultura around the island. Most spectacularly, I was also able to spend a day at the national art schools, experiencing

10 Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes.

11 Help was solicited for the transcription – from Elena Solá Simón for the Pogolotti interview (conducted in Spanish) and Annabel's Typing Services for the De Juan interview (conducted in English).

12 This realisation came after a visit to the Ministry during which I was informed that, fragmentary though they may be, all archives were held at the national library.

at first hand the ways in which the architecture had been specifically geared to the requirements of each art form.

As will be seen, this institutional mapping gave way to a detailed consideration of the ambitious programme that was launched to encourage cultural participation in the population as a whole. In order to assess the scale of this programme, I had recourse to official statistics which provided data on the number of teachers, assistants, students and outputs. Following the growing scepticism of sociologists towards official statistics since the late 1960s, Levitas and Guy (1996) outline both philosophical objections to the inadequacy of quantitative data in explaining human behaviour and political objections to the framing of questions about the world in order to generate such data (which disguise the value-laden nature of research). Political 'objections may be particularly strong in relation to official statistics, since it is argued that these necessarily reflect in their definitions the interests of the state. Because they are produced by government for government, they are unlikely to use categories and definitions which generate the kind of understanding of social life which sociologists themselves seek' (Ibid:2). Karol notes that 'Cubans have never had a taste for statistics, hence it is difficult to draw up a balance sheet showing what the Castroists inherited from their predecessors' (1970:212). Similarly, Moore asserts that 'Published statistics on the number of participants [in mass cultural programmes] are unreliable, as educators often exaggerated their numbers in order to impress provincial authorities' (2006:86). It is no doubt possible that data pertaining to the widespread acculturation of the Cuban people were inflated by the government in a bid to exaggerate their successes. However, as interpretations of the graphs plotted from these data demonstrate, their interest lies as much in their relative values, via fluctuations over time, as in their actual values. Similar data exist at a regional and provincial level to account for the number of activities undertaken by amateur and professional artists and the number of exhibitions mounted by art galleries and Casas de Cultura, which enables us to judge the revolutionary commitment to activity outside the capital.

Charting the Cultural Policy of the Revolution

In order to understand the development of cultural policy in Cuba, it is necessary to follow the discourse emerging from several congresses at which creative practitioners and functionaries assembled to discuss strategy. Notable among these gatherings are the First National Congress of Writers and Artists (August 1961) and the First National Congress on Education and Culture (April-May 1971), both of which took place in Havana. Visiting the modest library just off the entrance vestibule of UNEAC, the writers' and artists' union, I would find a book commemorating the 1961 congress from the perspective of the formation of the union, while in the Casa de las Américas library, I would find the official congress publication. In relation to the 1971 congress, I was able to consult the state-issued publication at the national library.

While in the national library, the three weekly meetings between artists, writers and functionaries to have been held there in June 1961,¹³ which had prefaced the earlier of the two national congresses, assumed new significance. As will be seen in chapter seven, these crisis talks had taken place in the wake of a decision not to screen on television a short film that was considered politically sensitive in the wake of the Bay of Pigs invasion. At the last of these three meetings, Fidel had delivered a speech that would become known as 'Words to the Intellectuals' and provide guidelines for the formation of cultural policy for a considerable time thereafter. This is the only speech from those three feverish sessions that has been reproduced in full (Castro, 1961) and in official translation (MINREX, 1962b), but I wanted to learn more about the context in which it had arisen. One of the more attentive counter clerks, Michel Pérez, responded to my insistence about documentation of the national library meetings by producing a copy of Lisandro Otero's personal account of the times (1997),¹⁴ which would provide another perspective on these events from that already contributed to the English-speaking world by Cuban dissident, Carlos Franqui (1983).

13 This will be discussed in much more detail in chapter five.

14 Called *Llover sobre Mojado*, literally to rain onto that which is already wet, this takes its name from a song by Joaquín Sabina and implies a lack of impact, or resistance to new ideas.

As already outlined, the 1961 and 1971 congresses generated their own publications, with many column inches in the two main national newspapers (*Granma* and *Juventud Rebelde*¹⁵) being dedicated to coverage of these landmark meetings. By and large, though, these documents represent the official conclusions of any given gathering, reprinting Fidel's speeches or the congress declarations, for example. In order to add texture to these accounts, it would be necessary to dig deeper into the archives.

After the fusty confines of the national library, entering the Casa de las Américas library, with its street level access and brightly graffitied walls, was a breath of fresh air. As soon as I arrived, the kindly librarian demonstrated how to use the digital(!) catalogue and I found a wealth of material in both the book library and the so-called 'vertical archive', held in a colonial building a few blocks away. On the first day, I glimpsed one of my research subjects, Casa director, Roberto Fernández Retamar, arriving by car; later, I would see him in the adjacent cafeteria at which all Casa workers enjoy a two-course lunch for one Cuban peso (approximately three pence), and I had the sense that I had come to the right place.

And so, for the next few weeks, I would spend my days in the vertical archive, happily (and openly) photographing documents pertaining to cultural discourse, as manifested in key journals

15 *Rebel Youth*, the paper of the Young Communist League.



Publication produced to commemorate the First National Congress of Writers and Artists, 1961, at which UNEAC was formed



José Antonio Echevarría library at Casa de las Américas



The vertical archive at Casa de las Américas



Roberto Fernández Retamar (in white cap) has lunch at Casa de las Américas

and in other documentation of meetings. In the evenings, I would return to a self-contained flat, twenty minutes' walk away, and upload the photographs from camera to laptop. Through a web-based bibliographic plug-in called Zotero, I was able to compile details about author, title, publication and date and attach images of documents and any corresponding notes. This lengthy process generated literally hundreds of digital copies of documents, in Spanish, which needed to be read and annotated for later comparison.

Retrospective evaluations of Cuban policy tend to dwell to a lesser extent on the cultural congress held in January 1968, which saw more than 400 international intellectuals convene in Havana. And, while the preparatory seminary, which took place the preceding October-November, generated its own publication, the main congress did not, which perhaps explains why it has not been covered in any great detail by commentators. In the Casa library and archive, I was able to access the events leading up to this congress and to read daily commentaries on the main altercations in newspaper and magazine cuttings. This was considered alongside reproductions of the main congress papers that were printed in three concurrent special issues of *Revolución y Cultura* (15 and 29 February and 15 March 1968). Back in the UK, I would source three lyrical accounts of the congress published in English – by Andrew Salkey, Susan Sherman and Arnold Wesker – all three conveying something of the atmosphere of the event. In this way, the details of the congress were painstakingly reconstructed from the available evidence. What emerged was an ethos and a sense of international solidarity rather than any concrete formulation of policy; as such, a decision was taken to excise this extensive chapter for reasons of space. Where possible, hints of the discussions that took place at this landmark event will be given in relevant sections and a fuller treatment will be reinstated in any eventual publication arising from this study.

In advance of my arrival in Cuba, I had identified several further gaps in the literature published in English, including copies of the rebels' manifestos in which, according to Kapcia, culture had 'figured large [...] since 1953' (2005:128). To see for myself the evidence to support this claim, I needed to visit the Office of Historical Matters of the Council of State.¹⁶ Located in a former bank, this collection holds

16 Oficina de Asuntos Historicos del Consejo de Estado.

documents pertaining to the Revolution. There, I was given copies of any rebel documents in which culture was mentioned, which will be discussed in chapter seven.

Often overlooked by commentators on Cuban cultural policy is the contribution of artists and intellectuals to its development. In advance of my visit to Cuba, I was aware of, but had never seen, a manifesto issued by artists and writers in November 1960. At UNEAC, I was able to take photographs of the unpublished manuscript of a book celebrating forty-five years of union activity, which included this document.

The fortuitous discovery of the book in which the manifesto was to be reprinted also provided some context surrounding its genesis, at the First National Meeting of Poets and Artists¹⁷ in Camagüey (27–30 October 1960), and a response to the manifesto by President Dorticós. Also laid out alongside notes pertaining to the Camagüey meeting were details of its pre-revolutionary precedents, specifically the cultural society, *Nuestro Tiempo*,¹⁸ to which many influential cultural figures had belonged. In chapter seven, these factors will be taken into account when charting a trajectory from *Nuestro Tiempo* – via Camagüey, the national library meetings and the First National Congress of Writers and Artists – to the formation of UNEAC and beyond.

In the introductory chapter, we saw how educational and cultural fields provided the ideological backdrop for hegemonic struggles. Weiss (1973) and Miller (1999) place particular emphasis on the significance of the intellectual review, and Claudia Gilman concurs that ‘Without doubt, one of the central spaces for the most important interventions of the epoch was the journals (which, in general terms, were designated “politico-cultural”)’ (2003:76). She describes how Cuba became the focal point for rousing the continent from its slumber, with its journals becoming ‘embassies’ (Ibid:81) for the island, in which shared ideas on contemporary affairs were perpetuated to a vast



The Office of Historical Matters of the Council of State with artwork by Asger Jorn (on pillar) and Raúl Martínez (on wall) and photograph of Fidel's confidant, Celia Sánchez Manduley

17 Primer Encuentro Nacional de Poetas y Artistas.

18 Our Time.

audience.¹⁹ With this in mind, Cuban intellectual reviews – including *Nuestro Tiempo*,²⁰ dating from before the Revolution, and *Casa de las Américas*,²¹ *Lunes de Revolución*,²² *Pensamiento Crítico*²³ and *Revolución y Cultura*,²⁴ all emerging after 1959 and available in the vertical archive – will be cited where they are indicative of revolutionary cultural policy.

During our aforementioned conversation, Adelaida de Juan had notified me of four meetings to have taken place between Latin American artists at Casa de las Américas in the 1970s. In the Casa archive, I was able to consult and copy, for later review, various documents and press coverage relating to these meetings. This adds valuable complexion to the consideration of cultural production during the five grey years in chapter ten.

In February 2010, the annual International Book Festival began in Havana prior to a tour around the island, offering thousands of books available to purchase at negligible cost. Together with the many excellent bookshops that exist throughout Cuba, this provided an opportunity for many indigenous sources to be obtained. Combined with my library findings, this consolidated my suspicion that many of the sources available in the English-speaking world represent an outside perspective on Cuba and, where possible, this contrast will be emphasised.²⁵

19 She also identifies the many journals as a nexus for reaching and, to some extent, creating a new public in a climate lacking a contemporary, living canon sanctioned by a reading public. According to Gilman, these journals combined a recuperation of modernist aesthetics and a space of consecration that provided an alternative to the traditional institutions, with the Uruguayan magazine, *Marcha*, pioneering the recognition of Cuba as the ‘first free territory of America’ (2003, *Ibid*:79). A reciprocal network was set up, with the collaboration between *Marcha* and the main Cuban journal, *Casa de las Américas*, being particularly fruitful.

20 The eponymous journal of the aforementioned cultural society.

21 The in-house journal of the cultural institution of the same name.

22 The Monday cultural supplement (March 1959–November 1961) of the daily newspaper, *Revolución*, which had been one of the main sources of news emerging from the Sierra Maestra. *Lunes* was founded by a group of young intellectuals, including Guillermo Cabrera Infante, Virgilio Piñera and Antón Arrufat. They had all participated in the breakaway magazine, *Ciclón*, and, according to some observers, continued its basic line, notably its dismissal of the group around the progenitor journal, *Orígenes*, on the basis of its perceived tendency to perpetuate that which the Revolution sought to eliminate (González, 2002). For a consideration of this rift, see Anderson, 2006.

23 This translates as Critical Thinking. Edited by Fernando Martínez Heredia, this was ‘a magazine for the postgraduate students and academics at Havana’ (Salkey, 1971:55) published by ‘an association of intellectuals and academics living in Havana [...] founded in February 1967’ (*Ibid*:56).

24 *Revolución and Culture*. The first issue, published on 1 October 1967, included in its editorial board the names of prominent writers and cultural figures that will recur throughout this study, among them Alejo Carpentier, Roberto Fernández Retamar, Ambrosio Fornet, Nicolás Guillén, Alfredo Guevara, Lisandro Otero and Jaime Sarusky.

25 One title that falls between these two categories is Adelaida de Juan’s book, *Modern Cuban Art*, which is published in English but sourced in Havana. As its contents pertain to the section about cultural modes of the Revolution, details from this title have been retrospectively introduced into Appendix B.

That said, book-buying in Cuba is not a precise science. The predominance of the literature festival is such that a large quantity of books tends to be produced for launch at, and distribution through, the festival as it travels around the island. Accordingly, scant stocks are kept in Havana and each year the entire content of bookshops is replaced by new festival stock. This means that titles of more than a year old are virtually impossible to find and my attempts were thwarted on several fronts. More than once, I visited the offices of publishers in a bid to locate elusive titles and, although I eventually found my way to staff that could help, they had not retained any copies of the books nor had they adequately archived the digital files in a way that could be accessed. Once back in the UK, this quest continued and, through inter-library loans, I was able to find everything that had been recommended to me.



The 2009 International Book Festival

Analysing the Ideology of Revolutionary Culture

During time spent in the libraries and archives of Havana, various documents cropped up which, although informing the process by which cultural policy had been formulated, related more to the prevalent ethos of the time than to any concrete developments. It was decided, therefore, to discuss the ideology underlying post-revolutionary cultural policy somewhat separately. This relies on an extensive analysis of overlapping documents, which will be presented as chapters six and eight of this thesis. One of the most interesting findings of this endeavour was evidence of the ongoing discussion that took place among intellectuals around their evolving revolutionary role. This provides a way of elucidating the bifurcation – along Bolivarist²⁶ and Soviet lines – that manifested itself in the 1960s to be writ large in 1971.

²⁶ The eighteenth century liberator, Simón Bolívar, has given his name to the anti-imperialist struggle in Latin America.

Remarks in Conclusion

The description given above inadvertently fails to convey the most time-consuming part of this project, which may somewhat inaccurately be described as data analysis. Since returning from Cuba on the first day of April 2010 and most intensively for a one-year period from June 2010, virtually every day has been spent undertaking longhand translations of the hundreds of photographed documents and longer texts sourced in Cuba, integrating any relevant findings into this report. This process generated a lever-arch file full of notes, above and beyond those already extracted during the literature review. And, while there has been plenty of room for slippages and losses in translation, my possession of copies of archival documents means that facts can easily be double-checked by anyone so inclined.

Through the piecing together of elusive details, the research method underlying this project resembles that which might be deployed by the protagonist of a detective novel. However, it is to be hoped that this account resists the temptation to construct fiction. In 1965, Fornet credited Don Ezequiel Martínez Estrada²⁷ with being the only foreigner who could write about the Revolution as Cubans could.²⁸ While accepting my limitations in this regard, every effort will be made to locate Cuba in her appropriate historical and geopolitical context in an attempt to shed light on the particularities of the cultural revolution.

27 An Argentinean essayist, poet and critic who served as director of the Centre for Latin American Studies at Casa de las Américas between 1960 and 1962.

28 Elsewhere, this author is lightly mocked for drawing of parallels between Thomas More's *Utopia* and 'the island of Cuba [...] almost to the point of rapture' (Fernández Retamar, 1977:6).

Chapter Four: Cultural Figures of the Revolution

Certain commentators on post-revolutionary Cuba emphasise the significance of a coterie of individuals (Farber, 2006), with the dynamics of power often portrayed as a three-part harmony between Fidel's pragmatism, Che's idealism and Raúl's militarism. Others describe how decision-making has, until recently, orbited around the omniscient figure of Fidel Castro. In the mid-1960s, the US photographer, Lee Lockwood, interviewed Fidel over an extended period, observing as they travelled around the island together that 'contemporary Cuban society is dominated in every conceivable way by Castro's mind and personality' (1967:xviii). In considering the implementation of policy a decade later, Domínguez would outline how, 'if the policy decision to be made is narrow in scope, it can be handled within one organization; if the policy is broad, then disputes ordinarily require Castro's intervention. Every dispute can be settled by him' (1978:382). Half a century after the events at the Moncada barracks that sparked the Revolution, Gilman (2003) would note that the words 'leader' and 'revolution' have become synonymous, uniting in one name and one person two concepts that have become inseparable. Four decades earlier, Lumsden had taken this state of affairs as evidence that 'Until now Cuba has had little success in combating the autocratic tendencies that appear in the politics of virtually every communist country. Decisions continue to be made from above and implemented below' (1969:535),¹ but it could equally be explained by Desmond Morris's (1969) contemporaneous observation that, as societies surpass their tribal condition to become impersonal super-tribes, they demand powerful, all-seeing leaders – drawn from the administrative, political, social, religious or military sphere as appropriate – which has been evident across the ideological spectrum.² Lending credibility to this latter argument, Karol notes that 'The July 26th

1 This continues: 'The revolutionary slogan "Comandante en Jefe ordene" [Commander in Chief order (me/us) – an imperative made to Fidel Castro] epitomizes Cuba's charismatic style of government [...] As a result, no public dialogue involving coherent alternatives takes place with regard to governmental policies. The masses are expected to take their cues only from the person of Fidel Castro' (Lumsden, 1969:535).

2 Lockwood cites Guillermo García, 'a hero of the Revolution, the first peasant to join Fidel's forces in the Sierra Maestra' (1967:22), asserting that 'We let Fidel do our thinking for us' (Ibid:23).

Movement was [...] the personal creation of Fidel Castro. It was he who helped to bind together brave men of differing views and to fire them, as well as the entire country, with new energy and the spirit of self-sacrifice. Castro alone could have smoothed the many cracks that disturbed the even facade of the movement' (Ibid:173). As a result of this, 'Some people have alleged that Fidel Castro has deliberately lulled Cuban political life to sleep; that he has introduced a vertical power structure for the sole purpose of assuaging his own political appetite. I, for my part, am convinced that the present situation has resulted from a process that completely escaped his control. Fidel is its victim, not its master' (Ibid:458).

In relation to the cultural field and in a twist on Che Guevara's 1965 invocation that 'there are no artists of great authority who also have great revolutionary authority', Kapcia contends that 'the political leadership included no figures with cultural authority' (2005:128). Significantly, in the context of this discussion, Pogolotti (2010) dismisses the Soviet concept of cultural *commissars* as an irrelevance in Cuba. In fact, the only time we see this appellation appearing in the literature is in relation to those responsible for the grey years (Anon, 2007) that befell culture in the 1970s to be discussed in chapter ten. Elaborating on the process of policy-making in post-revolutionary Cuba, Domínguez describes how:

Decisions on issues vital to the survival of the revolution – those determining economic policy, for example – are centralized and closely controlled; in such areas there is a reluctance even to accept information incompatible with elite goals. *In less vital areas, much more organizational and individual competition is allowed; such issues include decisions in the arts, literature, science, and religion, responses to consumer demands or personal complaints from individual citizens and small organizations or the local branches of large organizations. Here some lobbying is allowed and is often successful; it depends for its success on the lobbyists' positions in their organizations and on the level of their contacts with other organizations, including the press* (1978:382; i.a.).³

While attention will be paid to the position and successes of the protagonists depicted as competitive here, we shall see that Fidel often involved himself in matters of culture,

³ Prior to this, Lockwood had bemoaned how 'The problem of direct access to Castro would not be so crucial if ministers, heads of departments and other officials were able to make important decisions on their own authority or at least transmit requests to the top and report back the decisions. But such is the chaos and the insecurity in Cuba's ever-shifting administration that most officials [...] must reach Castro [...] sometimes for even the most minor requests' (1967:56).

which suggests that this field was perceived to be more vital to the survival of the Revolution than Domínguez concedes.

In interview, Pogolotti (2010) observes that the leaders of the revolutionary struggle maintained an idea of the importance of art and that, throughout his life, Fidel has had both a conception of the role of culture and a contact to the cultural world. Fidel would demarcate the limits of his knowledge in this area to assert, on behalf of the revolutionary government, that ‘We don’t suppose that all the political leaders should have an encyclopedic knowledge and be in a position to speak the last word on matters of culture and of art. I would not consider myself sufficiently skilled to make decisions in that realm without professional advice from really qualified people in whose sound and revolutionary judgment I could trust’ (Lockwood, 1967:111). Just who those qualified people might be provides the subject matter of this chapter, while bearing in mind Kapcia’s point that, within the creative community,⁴ there would seem to be a lack of ‘consensus, within either the community or the revolutionary vanguard, about who the cultural “leaders” should be, the established “giants” who were returning to Cuba [...] or members of the new generation’ (2005:131).

Espina offers a pluralistic conception of socialist transformation, reliant on a multiplicity of actors, in ‘contrast to the historically dominant view of socialism as a transformation propelled by one class that embodies the only possibility of progress and that always establishes partnerships with other classes and strata, but considers them to be subalterns or minor actors’ (2010:96). Accordingly, in outlining the main cultural figures of the Revolution, this chapter will look beyond the leadership to introduce the main participants to the debate that unfolds in these pages and consider the extent of their influence.

4 Kapcia describes how the notion of a singular ‘creative community’ is: [...] itself problematic, especially in its heterogeneity. For it combined the remnants of the old establishment who chose to remain and adapt (often with difficulty) or to wait until emigration became possible, the pre-1958 political activists with definite ideas about their role and the nature of a new culture, and the many who had returned from self-imposed exile in Europe, Latin America or the United States, enthusiastic but with different experiences, models and patterns of thinking (2005:128).

Fidel Castro Ruz (b. 1926)

In the 1980s, Carlos Franqui (to whom a section of this chapter will be dedicated) would claim from exile that Fidel had no interest in culture, very publicly preferring sport instead,⁵ because ‘There are in art, literature, and philosophy at least two things Fidel Castro cannot accept: all of them oblige the individual to think for himself, and all of them take the individual out of the present moment and insert him in a living and permanent tradition’



Fidel Castro Ruz

(1983:134). We shall return to this alleged negation of critical thought in chapter eight, but, for now, it is necessary to state that, at the very least, Fidel understood the instrumental value of culture,⁶ with an interviewer asserting that the ‘battle for cultural hegemony [...] is a field on which Fidel Castro has always fought’ (Ramonet, 2005-8:19).

In general, his perspective on culture might best be represented in his own words:

As a revolutionary, it is my understanding that one of our fundamental concerns must be that all the manifestations of culture be placed at the service of man, developing in him all the most positive feelings. For me, art is not an end in itself. Man is its end; making man happier, making man better. I do not conceive of any manifestations of culture, of science, of art, as purposes in themselves. I think that the purpose of science and culture is man (Lockwood, 1967:111).

Consistent with this approach, Fidel re-inscribed culture into the constitution and made

5 Fidel has made no secret of his love of sport, describing how ‘When I was in high school, I was, above all, a sportsman and a mountain climber. My main activities were sports and exploring’ (2006:67), which has been in evidence throughout his life, this in no way precludes his recognition of the value of culture to the Revolution. See also Lockwood, 1967.

6 Franqui somewhat contradictorily acknowledges this, in recounting how ‘the invitation to bring the Soviet exposition from Mexico to Cuba and [Russian Vice President] Mikoyan’s visit were timed perfectly by Alexander Alexayev (Russia’s representative in Cuba), Fidel, and Raúl’s henchmen in Havana, Mexico, and Moscow. The result was [...] that the Soviets would buy our sugar and we would buy their crude oil’ (1983:67). However, Karol contends that:

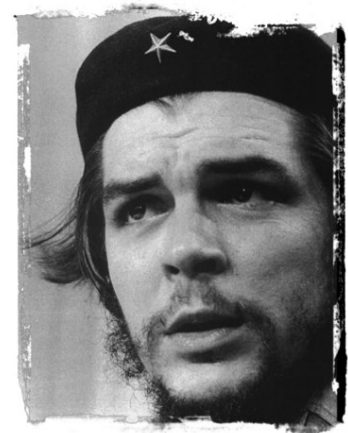
In truth, the Soviet Union was busily signing such agreements with many countries of the Third World, including pro-Western ones, as a token of her intention to make the Russian presence felt more widely. In Havana, Mikoyan was careful to say nothing even vaguely anti-American. Indeed, after his return the U.S.S.R. was in no hurry to re-establish diplomatic relations with Cuba, a gesture that would have alienated no one. Soviet ‘penetration’ of Cuba was clearly both modest and extremely discreet (1970:189).

Carlos Rafael Rodríguez (1969) details Che agreeing a loan of \$100 million in the early years in the name of the Revolution, which had been used to develop industry; he also alludes to several of the countries of Western Europe providing support. On the instrumental value of culture, Fidel has more recently acknowledged ‘We have discovered that there is an inverse relation between knowledge, culture and crime; for example, the greater the knowledge, culture and access to university education, the less crime’ (2006:230).

a number of impassioned speeches on the subject in a way that undermines Franqui's overall thesis. A fiercely intelligent man, described as a 'political creator, as others are creators in the field of painting or music' (Ramonet, 2005-8:12-3; i.i.o.), Fidel has shown himself to be both responsive to discussions within the cultural communities and susceptible to political forces, especially those from outside the country. A series of meetings around the theme of creative freedom in June 1961 would prove pivotal in this regard, and Gilman (2003) describes how diverse encounters between the leader of the Revolution and hundreds of intellectuals – during which he discussed with them, almost equal to equal – made writers think that their opinions and criteria found a favourable reception with the political leadership of Cuba. Following this exchange, the revolutionary government would come to rely for the implementation of cultural policy on various functionaries within state organisations, with detrimental results that will be discussed in chapters seven, nine and ten. The extent to which Fidel and the revolutionary government acted to cause or avert such negative tendencies will be borne in mind throughout.

Ernesto 'Che' Guevara de la Serna (1928–67)

As the 'moral conscience of the Cuban Revolution' (Lockwood, 1967:352),⁷ Che Guevara was knowledgeable about matters of art and culture to the point of preoccupation (Llanusa and Dorticós, 1967). He had read many books on art and society,⁸ including Lenin's *Literature and Revolution* and Fischer's *The Necessity of Art*,⁹ the latter



Ernesto 'Che' Guevara

⁷ Lockwood describes how 'Che's position was invariably to the left of Fidel's and in almost every case Castro himself ultimately came to take Che's position (e.g., intransigence toward the United States, moral vs. material incentives for workers, and, most important of all, the principle of armed struggle as the only road to revolution)' (1967:352).

⁸ For a more detailed consideration of Che's reading and cultural pursuits, see Kronenberg 2011.

⁹ This book, subtitled 'A Marxist Approach' and published in the same year as the triumph of the Revolution, speculated on the role of art as a social experience: 'Evidently man wants to be more than just himself. He wants to be a *whole* man. He is not satisfied with being a separate individual; [...] He wants to refer to something more than "I", something outside himself and yet essential to himself' (Fischer, 1959:8; i.i.o.). At the same time, Ernst Fischer's thesis permitted an 'element of entertainment and satisfaction which consists precisely in the fact that the onlooker does *not* identify himself with what is represented but *gains distance* from it, overcomes the direct power of reality through its deliberate

of which he considered both interesting and useful (Fernández Retamar, 1965a).¹⁰

In the aftermath of victory, ‘cultural questions [...] engaged a good part of Ernesto Che Guevara’s attention’ (Fernández Retamar, 1971:44). Within two weeks of Batista’s exodus, Che set up a school in the large fortress of La Cabaña (Chanan, 2005),¹¹ and Fidel asserts that ‘He wanted his first action as a military commander to be putting in place his literacy programme and teaching all combatants’ (2006:202). Further into this report, chapter nine considers how Che’s early ideas around education were extended into full cultural participation. There are even rumours that Che influenced Fidel’s landmark 1961 speech on cultural policy (Camnitzer, 1994), which will be discussed in due course.

Pogolotti (2006) describes how, while solving pressing strategic problems as president of the National Bank and the Ministry of the Interior, Che was one of the main instigators of polemic in the fertile 1960s, with his thinking grounded in the technical aspects of the law of value and a critique of the Soviet process. Throughout this study, we shall see how ‘All his writings evince an extraordinary faith in the ability of men to overcome their prejudices and their selfishness, a firm belief in mutual aid and the possibility of building a more just world’ (Karol, 1970:332-3), marking a ‘return to the humanitarian ideas of Karl Marx’ (Ibid:393). A 1965 letter to the editor of the Montevideo-based *Marcha* magazine, penned during his travels in Africa, which became known as ‘Socialism and Man in Cuba’, speculated on the role of creativity in

representation, and finds, in art, that happy freedom of which the burdens of everyday life deprive him’ (Ibid:9). For Fischer, the ‘tension and dialectical contradiction’ implied by these two approaches to reality are harnessed by artists through a ‘highly conscious, rational process at the end of which the work emerges as mastered reality – not at all a state of intoxicated inspiration’ (loc cit). This understanding of the necessity of art permits both change and continuity, which maintains the ‘magical residue of art’ while providing enlightenment and stimulating the action of ‘a class destined to change the world’ (Ibid:14). In chapter eight, we shall see how ideas like these entered Che’s understanding of the ‘new man’.

10 Fernández Retamar describes Che as ‘an intellectual, albeit one who had suffered the experience of that conversion, that purification, through contact with the people, their miseries, their sufferings, their struggles’ (1965:169). Engaging him on the question of quality among the early literary works of the Revolution, in which there might be a possible conflict between the man of action and the man of contemplation, Fernández Retamar (1965a) was surprised by his enthusiasm for Cuban works of the first generation, especially the poetry of Nicolás Guillén and the novels of Alejo Carpentier, the latter of whom, Desnoes’s protagonist in *Inconsolable Memories* notes, is ‘the only one who doesn’t need the revolution to show off’ (1968:68).

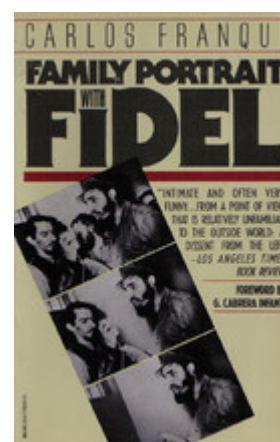
11 This was established under the leadership of Armando Acosta, with the participation of three revolutionary film-makers – Santiago Álvarez, Julio García Espinosa and José Massip (Kapcia, 2005), who had been involved with *Nuestro Tiempo* – and would give way to Schools of Revolutionary Instruction (Kapcia, 2008).

achieving un-alienated consciousness in the new man and will be considered more fully in chapter eight. Gilman describes how, in the wake of this text, Che seemed like the ‘promised land of writer-intellectuals’ (2003:200), by advocating a space full of open art institutions, and we shall see the extent to which these ideas came to fruition.

Having noted during his lifetime that Che made war into an art (Llanusa and Dorticós, 1967), Fidel posthumously conferred upon him the rank of artist (Maclean, 2003).¹² Yet, in the immediate post-revolutionary period, Che took the lead on agrarian reform, diversification of the economy and the provision of general moral guidance. It is, therefore, necessary to consider who his equivalent in the cultural field might be.

Carlos Franqui (1921–2010)

During the years in the Sierra Maestra, the aforementioned Franqui, ‘the self-taught son of a poor peasant from Las Villas province’ (Karol, 1970:40), had been responsible for running the broadcasting service, Radio Rebelde, and the rebel newspaper, *Revolución*, the two main vehicles through which the guerrillas were able to communicate with the Cuban people.¹³



A film aficionado during the 1950s (Chanan, 2003), Franqui appointed himself a ‘cultural guerrilla fighter’ (1983:10) in response to Fidel’s perceived disinterest in culture, and used *Lunes de Revolución* – the cultural supplement produced by the *Revolución* team every Monday – as his main weapon. As one of the poles of the ‘cultural revolution’,

Lunes:

12 At the Cultural Congress of Havana in 1968 shortly after Che’s death, Mario Benedetti would assert that ‘It is very evident that Che Guevara embodies the definite characteristics of both the man of action and the intellectual. Che is a unique example; for that reason, his trajectory should not be cheapened by using it gratuitously [...] The life and death of Che shall be, now and forever, fertile and never futile’ (1968:29).

13 Karol notes that ‘From the beginning of the anti-Batista struggle he distinguished himself as organizer of the underground press in Havana. Later he continued the struggle from his Costa Rican exile, before joining the Sierra Maestra at the end of 1957. Once there he ran Radio Rebelde and, in fact, took charge of the entire Castroist propaganda machine. He also set up the forerunner of *Revolución*, the organ of the July 26th Movement’ (1970:40). According to this account by a Franqui sympathiser, on 4 June 1963, Fidel ‘bitterly complained of the way *Revolución* had reported his visit to the Soviet Union. [...] it became clear soon afterwards that it was *Revolución* as a whole that Castro disliked for its independent approach and its continual harking back to the libertarian spirit of the 26th July Movement. For this, Carlos Franqui was peremptorily relieved of this post as editor in chief of the paper he founded’ (Ibid:285).

[...] grouped together [the] dynamic younger generation of individuals who saw themselves as the Revolution's cultural arbiters and 'first generation' [...] and since *Revolución* was (by its association with the rebels and the changes) the popular newspaper, *Lunes* gave an unprecedented opportunity to spread the cultural word to a captive and eager audience, and thus became the early Revolution's leading cultural organ, doing more than most to set a new cultural tone [...] Where Franqui gathered a disparate group of young, rebellious writers, artists and musicians [...] having mostly lived abroad before 1959, these responded with unbridled but occasionally unfocused enthusiasm to the new freedom. However, their criteria were by no means clear, other than a desire to rebel against their elders [...] and a didactic commitment to bringing Cuba up to date with the latest cultural ideas and movements, an explicit aim to be a [...] 'formidable means of bringing Cuban culture up to date' (Kapcia, 2005:131).¹⁴

As we shall see, this controversial and, at times, elitist approach of bringing high art to the people 'was increasingly challenged by the political leaders, by the evolving process of cultural democratisation, which was fundamentally altering Cuba's cultural landscape, and by at least two other alternative poles: the cultural activists gathering in the new CNC¹⁵ and the Instituto Cubano de Artes e Industrias Cinematográficas'¹⁶ (Ibid:132). These institutional rivals to *Lunes* will be considered in detail in the next chapter and some of the repercussions of the journal's approach will be touched upon in chapter seven. For now, it is worth noting that Alfredo Guevara (president-director of ICAIC, who will be discussed in the next section, to emerge as one of Franqui's major antagonists), gives a personalised account (2007) of the incipient tensions. Through him, we discover that Franqui had been mistreated and expelled by the PSP. Karol elaborates that, during his early work as a proofreader on the party newspaper, *Hoy* [Today], Franqui's 'tendency to discuss rather than obey earned him the censure of Aníbal Escalante,¹⁷ and led to his expulsion in 1947' (1970:40). This serves to explain Franqui's fear of the growing influence of the party and his subsequent actions.

During the Cultural Congress of Havana in January 1968, Franqui was still active in Cuba, leading a press conference for North American scientists and a writer

14 Kapcia describes how 'logically, the cultural elite or vanguard will usually be those with the means of communication or other resources to establish hierarchies that privilege their authority, enabling them to communicate their hegemony to other elites elsewhere who are seen to share their perspectives and tastes' (2005:16). Guevara (2007) asserts that the group around *Revolución* used culture to take possession of the means of the communication; activists from the PSP fully intended to seize power in this way, particularly Edith García Buchaca, who will be discussed at the end of this chapter.

15 Consejo Nacional de Cultura (National Council of Culture).

16 Cuban Institute of Cinematographic Arts and Industries (ICAIC).

17 Escalante was later removed from the ruling party's central committee, to the relief of many he had persecuted (Karol, 1970).

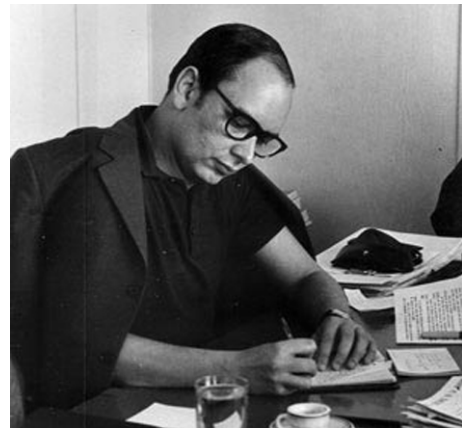
who had been denounced by the US State Department for their participation (Anon, 1968r). Later that same year, Franqui would see his own conduct being denounced as he sought exile. Guevara (2007) finds that ultimately:

Franqui did not believe in Fidel's talent and ability. Essentially he under-estimated it. Carlos Franqui was not predestined by history to be a counter-revolutionary. It was that he believed, or arrived at the conviction that, the PSP submerged Fidel in its positions and he could not accept this. He felt himself superior or more intelligent or able or more subtle than Fidel. Or more far-sighted. I don't know...

Nonetheless, Franqui was eventually unmasked as a 'visceral counter-revolutionary' (Fernández Retamar, 2001:297), which discounts him from having any lasting cultural influence.

Alfredo Guevara Valdés (b. 1925)

When consulted, Kapcia points to Alfredo Guevara as a leading cultural figure. In the aftermath of the Revolution, Guevara would become president-director of the cinematographic institute, ICAIC, one of the two most important



Alfredo Guevara Valdés

institutions on the island, to be described in the next chapter. Presiding over fifty years of the commissioning and distribution of Cuban film qualifies Guevara for further scrutiny.

With a bitterness that suggests he resented Guevara's proximity to the centre of power, Franqui tells of how he 'had been Raúl's buddy since their Prague days, that he had been Fidel's personal friend since their days at the university and later in Mexico and Bogota. He was always sent where the Party needed him. His specialities were espionage and dirty tricks' (1983:131). Written for a non-Cuban audience, this elision of Guevara and the Castro brothers with a party to which the latter had little connection until well after the Revolution seems designed to stir up anti-communist sympathies. By contrast, in an interview conducted in May 2007, which, his interlocutor concedes, functions

more like a testimony,¹⁸ Guevara asserts that researchers seeking to trace his ideological formation would have to understand that reality, people and society are not monolithic but full of conflict. Offering biographical details from which these paragraphs are constructed,¹⁹ he remembers that he had already embarked on a rapid path towards Marxism, via anarchism, by the time he met Fidel when they were both nineteen years old.²⁰ Between 1949 and 1951, Guevara spent time in Paris, Prague and Rome, where he developed his great love of cinema and expanded his cultural knowledge, becoming particularly interested in the cultural policy of the Soviet Union before the 1934 congress.

Returning from Europe, he was entrusted by the leader of the Young Communist League²¹ with selling *Hoy* on the streets. He also ran a branch of the radical student organisation²² that defended artists and organised exhibitions, but he makes clear that they acted in the capacity of cultural animators, rather than creative protagonists, and admits that, despite his political knowledge, he was lacking in experience of the intellectual movement. In the early 1950s, he became a member of the PSP and of the *Nuestro Tiempo* cultural society, which, as will be seen in chapters five and seven, were virtually synonymous. A long-time friend of Tomás ‘Titón’ Gutiérrez Alea – who would become one of the most influential film-makers of the Revolution – Guevara would collaborate with him in 1955 to produce, under the auspices of *Nuestro Tiempo*, a neorealist short film, called *El Mégano*, which would be banned by the dictatorship.²³

18 In ‘The Worst Enemy of the Revolution is Ignorance’ (2007), Guevara indicts his own generation – that which shaped the Revolution – for not having defended it as they should, for maintaining a silence and side-stepping polemic. And, while he considers his own influence to be significant yet limited, he acknowledges that Fidel has immense influence, within and outside Cuba, and hopes that he will provide a history of the Revolution.

19 In the process, we discover that his home is adorned with some of the most representative paintings of the Cuban Revolution, which he has collected with a passion.

20 Guevara mentions that, with rare exceptions, this was not the result of meeting influential people, pointing to various professors as influential in this regard, including María Zambrano, Fernando Ortiz and unnamed republicans. He also mentions having belonged to *la Alianza Revolucionaria* [The Revolutionary Alliance], an anarchist organisation in the harbour, which included black people and dock-workers, and to *la Juventud Auténtica* [the Authentic Youth], *la Juventud Ortodoxa* [the Orthodox Youth] and *la Juventud Socialista* [the Socialist Youth], thus straddling every youthful leftist affiliation of the day. In 2007, he would maintain that he did not find a contradiction between Marxism and the libertarian spirit, among other things because Marx did not dictate how socialism was going to be.

21 Unión de Jóvenes Comunistas (UJC).

22 Fundación Estudiantil Universitaria (FEU).

23 The other two collaborators on this film were Julio García Espinosa and José Massip. See <http://>

A number of factors would eventually lead Guevara to break with the PSP. In the first place, his group of friends around Fidel were not party members;²⁴ in the second place, he questioned the actions of the Hungarian leadership during the 1956 insurrection, which caused staunch Marxists, Mirta Aguirre and her brother, Sergio,²⁵ to demand his expulsion from the party (a decision that was blocked by Carlos Rafael Rodríguez, to whom consideration will be given shortly, on account of Guevara's links to many revolutionary individuals and organisations). While still a member of the party, he had taken part in training for the Moncada attacks,²⁶ in the wake of which he understood that the party's focus on the mass movement at the expense of insurrection was insufficient. Seeking his moment to leave (Guevara, 2007), he joined Fidel during his Mexican exile alongside others disenfranchised from the party (Karol, 1970). While continuing to consider himself a Marxist, he describes signing up to the 26 July Movement in order to take more risks,²⁷ and participated in the urban resistance from the basement of one of the richest houses of Cuba, during which time he was detained and tortured by Batista's henchmen (Guevara, 2007).

Apparently, when the Revolution triumphed, Fidel asked his older brother about Guevara's whereabouts, remembering him as the Habanero he could trust to get things done. Guevara's proximity to the Revolution becomes clear as he describes how, in those early days, he worked very closely with Fidel (not as equals but as friends of the same age), drawing up the Agrarian Reform Law with Che, Vilma Espin and others.²⁸ At that time, Guevara and others were too preoccupied with the path the Revolution

www.sjuannavarro.com/CubanCinema/details/1765.html (accessed 20 July 2011).

24 In this regard, he lists Pedro Míret, Léster Rodríguez, Melba Hernández and Haydée Santamaría (under whose command he would later find himself) plus Fidel and Raúl. On account of his Marxist leanings, the Castro brothers would privately call him 'Guarovski' and 'Alfredovski' (Guevara, 2007). In his biography, Fidel describes how the earliest group of approximately 1,200 revolutionaries, which he assembled around him in 1952, came, 'almost without exception, from the Orthodox Youth' (2006:91).

25 Guevara (2007) attests to not holding this against them, remaining friends with them until their deaths.

26 His role during the assault was to remove incriminating material from safe houses (Ibid).

27 He retrospectively describes this as serving Fidel, framing it in terms of the conviction that Fidel could not be manipulated by anyone, including the PSP (Ibid).

28 Vilma Espin was one of the central *guerrilleras*, serving as a driver to Frank País (who organised a small revolutionary movement) and communicating messages from País to the 26 July Movement (with which País's movement merged after Fidel's release from prison). Espin would marry Raúl Castro in January 1959.

would take to attend to intellectual work, but, as we shall see in the next chapter, Fidel eventually approached him to assume a role within cinema. Pledging to head ICAIC for an initial three years, with the intention of making films thereafter, the task of running the cinematographic institute would continue until his retirement in 2000,²⁹ with a brief hiatus from 1980 to 1991 when he worked for UNESCO.³⁰ He retrospectively describes the hardest part of the ICAIC role being the responsibility for judging which script would be made, and he has consistently expressed resistance to the imposition of aesthetic doctrine which, as we shall see, brought him into conflict with some of the more dogmatic forces that were emboldened in the 1960s. Guevara's thoughtful rhetoric is peppered with ideas of mutability, of the constant change that constitutes humanity and revolution, and a critical self-awareness of the revolutionary project in which he has been involved.³¹ In his opening speech to the thirty-first International Festival of New Latin American Film (2009), he would appeal to young film-makers to continue their ethical duty in resisting the horrors of inequality even as they eclipsed them with their creative work. The following summary, published online in May 2011, seems an accurate reflection of the esteem in which he is held in the cultural field and beyond:

A highly respected and controversial figure in Cuba to this day, his loyalty to the Revolution and its historic leaders is beyond question. Yet he has always been something of a free spirit with a reputation for speaking his mind, upsetting some people and delighting others. A fierce critic of bureaucracy and mediocrity in cultural and intellectual life, he has been able to preserve a youthful irreverence and passion into his ninth decade, qualities which allow him to 'connect' with Cuba's revolutionary youth (Sexto, 2011).

29 Guevara continues his involvement with ICAIC through the annual film festival. On being awarded the 2008 Latinidad Prize, it was said that 'He is the founder of the Latin American ICAIC News, the Movie Library of Cuba, the Grupo de Experimentación Sonora (Sound Experimentation Group), the label Ediciones ICAIC, among other contributions. He is also the founder and one of the intellectual members of the Movement of the New Latin American Cinema and of the Latin American Movie Festival, of which he is the president'. See 13 May 2008 post at <http://www.cubaheadlines.com> (accessed 8 January 2011).

30 Guevara (2007) mentions that Fidel sent him to Europe with instructions to persuade, neutralise and conquer. He also describes the feeling of liberation that accompanied his departure from ICAIC and his lack of intention to return, but a situation arose that required someone of his authority to tackle it.

31 In interview, he refers to 'our defects, our mistakes, the vacuums we still have in our society, that socialism has not been capable of being what we wanted' (Ibid).

Roberto Fernández Retamar (b. 1930)

'Now I understand that our history is History itself' ³²

In conversation, Mike Gonzalez nominates the poet, Roberto Fernández Retamar, as an influential figure in the cultural landscape. By the age of fifteen, Fernández Retamar had published his first text; by seventeen, he was press officer of a youth magazine and, by twenty, he was contributing to *Orígenes* magazine, an association



Roberto Fernández Retamar at the 1961 congress

that continued until it folded in 1956 (Saruský, 1995). In 1952, he was awarded the National Prize for Literature (Maclean, 2003) and, in the year of revolutionary victory, he co-founded a journal called *Nueva Revista Cubana*.³³ In the immediate aftermath of the Revolution, Fernández Retamar spent considerable time in Europe,³⁴ and Gilman describes as 'profoundly emblematic' the meeting in Paris in 1960 between Fernández Retamar and the sexagenarian editor of *Marcha*, Carlos Quijano,³⁵ who 'passed something like an Olympic torch to the young Cuban professor' (2003:105).³⁶

Returning to Havana in 1961, Fernández Retamar became secretary of the National Union of Cuban Writers and Artists (UNEAC), founding its in-house magazine, *Unión*, the following year, which he co-edited with Alejo Carpentier until 1964. At the same time, he resumed an association with Casa de las Américas, one of the key institutions to be considered in the next chapter, by serving as one of the jurors of its literary prize and contributing to its publications. In March 1965, the editor's post for the prestigious in-house journal was vacated and it was suggested that this 'teacher, [...] intelligent spokesman of the cultural needs of the Revolution, and [...]

³² Cited in Salkey, 1971:223.

³³ New Cuban Magazine.

³⁴ He took up diplomatic posts in Paris and spent time in Genoa with Latin American writers before travelling to Prague to teach twentieth century Hispanoamerican poetry and visiting Bratislava to lecture at the university (Maclean, 2003).

³⁵ To whom Che's letter, published as 'Socialism and Man in Cuba' was addressed.

³⁶ Gilman (2003) details Fernández Retamar's meeting with the poets, Octavio Paz and Pablo Neruda, in Paris and his links to Régis Debray and the Argentinean writer, Julio Cortázar, alongside the intimate form of 'letter-poems' he developed.

highly flexible and diplomatic contemporary of Fidel' (Weiss, 1973:81),³⁷ apply (Sarusk, 1995).³⁸ And so, since issue thirty (May–June 1965),³⁹ with one brief pause after becoming president of Casa in 1986,⁴⁰ Fernández Retamar has served as editor of *Casa de las Américas*, to become 'the visible face of Cuban literary culture and author of some of the key texts of the period' (Gilman, 2003:85).

The first six years of Fernández Retamar's editorship have been described as a time of 'dialectical struggle among the ranks of progressive intellectuals in Latin America – a period during which Cuba was recognized as a culture model and a period during which the most rigorous development of Marxist literary criticism was taking place' (Weiss, 1977:13). Having been quick to familiarise himself with Marxist-Leninist tenets, Fernández Retamar emerged as 'a personality whose weight in the intellectual history of the period is inestimable, undoubtedly contributing to the sociability' spawned in Havana (Gilman, 2003:113). Visiting Cuba in 1967-8, the London-based Trinidadian writer, Andrew Salkey, observed Fernández Retamar at first-hand during the latter's chairmanship of a congress commission, describing him as 'one of the coolest Cuban intellectuals in Havana' (1971:103), 'complete and self-effacing' (Ibid:198) and commending him for his 'coolth and sincerity' (Ibid:103).

In the 1960s, when material concerns came to the fore, many intellectuals retreated into the metaphorical and claimed writing to be an inherently revolutionary act that would inevitably lead to socio-political utopias with writers at the vanguard (Miller, 1999).⁴¹ In direct opposition to the stance assumed by those creative writers

37 In documenting *Casa de las Américas* journal, Weiss, describes Fernández Retamar as an 'outstanding poet and an astute intellectual. His ability to gauge the literary and intellectual climate of the moment can be traced back to his doctoral dissertation, a study of modern Cuban poetry, 1927–1953. He himself was counted amongst the most promising young lecturers and poets' (1973:82-3).

38 This suggestion was made by Calvert Casey, who was working at *Casa* (Sarusk, 1995). Fernández Retamar (2009) speaks of his delight when Haydée Santamaría offered him the post.

39 Fernández Retamar (Ibid) describes how most of the material for issue 30 had already been prepared by Manuel Galich and Jaime Sarusk when he assumed his editorship, which meant that the first issue edited by him in earnest was number 31.

40 Fernández Retamar resumed his editorship of *Casa* with issue 184 (Sarusk, 1995).

41 Gilman (2003) gives the examples of Vargas Llosa and Cortázar among the Latin American intelligentsia insisting on the inherently heroic properties of intellectuals. As the converse of this argument, Benedetti asserts that 'a counterrevolutionary does not cease being one because of the mere fact that he is a writer' (1969:517). He would expand on this in the conclusion of his essay to predict 'the stronger social pressure [that would come to be exerted] on intellectuals to participate in the revolution', observing:

Many of them had already done so, and to a considerable extent, thanks to their effort, the

who exempted themselves from militancy on the grounds of their presumed cultural radicalism, Fernández Retamar would advocate a proactive role for writers and artists as part of ‘the ineluctable and radical political, social and economic transformation of the Latin American continent’ (Gilman, 2003:205). Consistent with the example of Che – who had demonstrated that those intellectuals undergoing revolutionary transformation would be better able to serve the Revolution – Fernández Retamar considered that those who had made the historical transformation of the country possible had instigated an immense responsibility in intellectual workers: to be the contemporaries and, at times, collaborators of the most important revolutionaries of the time (1965a). In a 1966 essay, he would describe the difficulty of undergoing this transformation, stating that ‘It is not enough to adhere verbally to the Revolution to be a revolutionary intellectual. Nor is it enough to realise the actions of a revolutionary, from agricultural work to the defence of the country, although these are conditions *sine qua non*. The intellectual is also obliged to assume a *revolutionary intellectual position*. That is to say, inevitably problematising reality and tackling these problems’ (276; i.i.o.). We shall return to this definition of the revolutionary intellectual at the appropriate moment. In the meantime, let us give some credence to Fernández Retamar’s position that ‘The Revolution is not a thing already made, which we can accept or reject, but a process whose course is not exact but, at the same time, we are immersed in. In some way, as humble as we are, we contribute to modifying this process; in some way, we are the Revolution’ (Ibid:288).

As will be elaborated in chapter eight when the ideology of the Revolution is explored in more depth, the committed, anti-imperialist intellectual current evinced at Casa de las Américas would come to represent one of the two poles around which socialist culture was defined. For now, it is sufficient to note that, while Fernández Retamar would ascend to presidency of Casa and while he is described as being an

activity of organizations like ICAIC, House of the Americas, the National Cultural Council, the Institute of the Book and UNEAC itself takes place. For the most part they are artists who report voluntarily for agricultural work and who do their duty as citizen militia. On the other hand, others defended virtually the right to contemplate the work of others and nevertheless to live on it. But a revolution has, in its turn, the right not to put up with that kind of contemplative people and even to be unjust toward them. A revolutionary event is no parlor game, but rather a dilemma and tearing apart, breaking and impulse, but it is also the only opportunity [...] that a human being has for participating in a collective assumption of dignity (Ibid:525-6).

‘essayist who moves ideas, he is above all a poet [...] the vital intersection of this writer into the contents (better still than the forms) of the revolution make his poetry come not from a monolithic man but rather from a complex being’ (Benedetti, 1969:516).⁴² While it is worth bearing in mind that, in the debate that would erupt around definitions of the vanguard, Fernández Retamar was regarded in certain quarters as a representative of ‘deplorable official culture’ (Gilman, 2003:309)⁴³ or, worse, an instigator of intellectual repression (Cabrera Infante, 1968a), he remains a major creative and institutional figure and will be cited throughout.

Haydée Santamaría Cuadrado (1922–80)

*‘For me, being communist is not serving a party;
for me, being communist is an attitude about life’*⁴⁴

Upon assuming presidency of Casa, Fernández Retamar indirectly succeeded Haydée Santamaría,⁴⁵ one of a small number of prominent female revolutionaries,⁴⁶ who had occupied the military hospital in the 1953 Moncada assault. It



Haydée Santamaría Cuadrado

was after this failed attack that her brother, Abel, and fiancé, Boris Luis Santa Coloma, died under torture. This glib phrase hides the essence of Haydée, which Fidel would reveal in his courtroom defence, when describing, with maximum pathos, the atrocities perpetrated by Batista’s men in the wake of Moncada:

Frustrated by the valour of the men, they tried to break the spirit of our women. With a bleeding eye in their hands, a sergeant and several other men went to the cell where our comrades Melba Hernández and Haydée Santamaría were held. Addressing the latter, and showing her the eye, they said: ‘This eye belonged to your brother. If you will not tell us what he refused to say, we will tear out the other.’ She, who loved her valiant brother above all things, replied full of dignity: ‘If you tore out an eye and he did not speak, much less will I.’ Later they came back and burned their arms with lit cigarettes

⁴² This love of poetry led him to become a scholar of the national poet, José Martí, and, in 1977 to establish the Centre for Studies of Martí, where he served as director until he took over at Casa in 1986 (Maclean, 2003).

⁴³ Citing José Agustín comparing Fernández Retamar and Otero to Cabrera Infante in 1968.

⁴⁴ Cited in Santamaría, 1978:56.

⁴⁵ After Haydée’s tragic death in 1980, the painter, Mariano Rodríguez, assumed presidency of Casa for six years until his retirement; both he and Fernández Retamar had been vice presidents under Haydée (Fernández Retamar, 2009).

⁴⁶ Others being Vilma Espín, Melba Hernández and Celia Sánchez.

until at last, filled with spite, they told the young Haydée Santamaría: ‘You no longer have a fiancé because we have killed him too.’ But still imperturbable, she answered: ‘He is not dead, because to die for one’s country is to live forever.’ Never had the heroism and the dignity of Cuban womanhood reached such heights (Castro, 1953).⁴⁷

Imprisoned until May 1954 for her part in the assault, Haydée spent her time in captivity reading voraciously,⁴⁸ revisiting the complete works of Martí. Upon her release, she was entrusted with the clandestine circulation of the nascent movement’s manifesto, *Message to the Suffering Cuba*, closely followed by the dissemination of Fidel’s Moncada defence under the title of *History will Absolve Me*. When Fidel was released from prison and left for Mexico to plan the Revolution, Haydée went underground in Cuba under the *nom de guerre* of María. Pogolotti (2010) describes how, during the underground struggle in Havana, she made contact with some young intellectuals of the epoch, collaborators who would serve as a bridge to the world of culture. There, she would also meet and marry the young lawyer and fellow 26 July Movement activist, Armando Hart Dávalos, who will be discussed shortly.⁴⁹

When the next stage of the Revolution began, with the return of Fidel and his troops aboard the Granma yacht, it fell to Haydée and her comrades to organise an urban uprising intended to distract the authorities in Santiago de Cuba on 30 November 1956 (Fernández Retamar, 2003). Haydée would go on to fight in the Sierra Maestra as part of the female-only Mariana Grajales platoon.⁵⁰ When Hart



Haydée Santamaría with Fidel Castro upon the latter’s release from prison

47 For an English translation, see <http://www.marxists.org/history/cuba/archive/castro/1953/10/16.htm> (accessed 24 June 2009).

48 Fernández Retamar would later convey an image of ‘an unusual human being who never finished primary school but who never stopped reading, whose sparkling, intuitive and penetrating intelligence was unequalled’ (Saruský, 1995:36). This passion for reading was reflected in her work, for example her emphasis on the importance of books to the underdeveloped, Tricontinental axis of Asia, Africa and Latin America in a speech to inaugurate an exhibition about the role of books in Cuba, which included the first book produced in the country, in 1723, a compendium of medicine prices by Carlos Habre (Anon, 1968l).

49 Fernández Retamar describes their hazardous early married life: ‘Hart, who had led a spectacular escape from the hearing in Havana, was as much wanted by the police as she was. In the cities, they could only see each other for a few days in one house or another, between one mission and another. They also met up at times in the Sierra Maestra’ (2003:79).

50 Named after a nineteenth century heroine of the independence and abolitionist movement.

was arrested coming down from the mountains and imprisoned, Haydée was sent to Miami to carry out tasks beneficial to the Revolution, including fund-raising and arms trafficking, before returning to Cuba on 2 January 1959 (Maclean, 2003).

On being asked to share her experience of Moncada at the School of Political Sciences in the University of Havana,⁵¹ Haydée protested that she had little ability in the area of public speaking (1978). This reticence to put herself centre-stage is noted by Weiss, who describes her as:

[...] an intellectually neutral, modest person. (One of her favourite lines is an almost motherly protest to the effect that she never quite feels at ease talking about culture to writers and artists – What does she know about such things?, she was once reputed to ask with genuine surprise.) The impressions of Haydée relayed by her acquaintances stressed her kindness, her simple character, and her interest in giving every artist and writer a chance; there is no doubt that she is above all an intelligent, fair-minded administrator (1977:41-2).

While benign, this description seems to discount Haydée Santamaría from the same tenacity in the field of culture that she had shown on the battlefield. Yet, on the ground in Cuba, her centrality is continually reinforced. Otero (1997) refers to her combative disposition in times of peace, describing her as unshakeable, a woman of strange intensity, intransigent and impassioned. Similarly, Fernández Retamar has described her as ‘a guerrilla fighter twenty-four hours a night. Obviously, the revolution, with its inevitable violence, was for her [...] love and affection above all’ (Saruský, 1995:36). It seems appropriate to cite Salkey, revisiting what he calls his ‘unpopular generalization’, that women are the only ‘natural revolutionary’ in Caribbean society to include Haydée among their number (1971:91).

In an attempt to redress the balance in the literature of the English-speaking world, Betsy Maclean edited a collection of personal testimonies by and about Haydée for an Australian publisher.⁵² In an introduction, Maclean describes how, ‘With her

51 On 13 July 1967.

52 Maclean cites three main reasons for Haydée Santamaría being overlooked in the majority of literature about the Revolution of which modesty was only one:

First, Haydée’s own humility shunned the spotlight: she fulfilled her role in the Cuban Revolution as her duty to humanity, not for fame nor for glory [...]. Second, there is the obvious sexism plaguing all history – revolutionary or not – that habitually renders the contributions of women invisible. Finally, the circumstances of Haydée’s death may have most clouded the celebration of her life. For at the same moment in which she secured her place in history, the loss of her beloved brother, her lover and some 70 fellow combatants condemned her to death. Twenty-

internationalist vision in tow, Haydée transformed herself from *guerrillera* to cultural emissary, choosing to wield art and culture as powerful weapons for social change' (2003:6).⁵³ In the next chapter, we shall consider how this vision 'gave birth to Casa de las Américas, which evolved into the foremost cultural institution of all in Latin America' (loc cit). For now, let us linger a moment more on the unique person of Haydée Santamaría.

Benedetti describes Haydée's 'unusual sensibility for grasping art and enjoying it' (2003:97), with which she would concur:

I feel that I can communicate with artists, both those with whom I work and see every day and those with whom I have had working relations in one way or another. It has been easy for me. When I began to direct Casa de las Américas I maybe didn't have a very clear concept of what a writer or an artist was. I supposed that they had to be something of a snob, extravagant. And it has been here, in the Casa de las Américas, that I have learned to respect creators in the arts and literature and where, moreover, I do not allow any lack of respect for them, because I know that they are fighters, always restless (Santamaría and Sarusky, 1977:66).

The 2010 International Book Festival carried a book of letters to Haydée from her collaborators, which give a clearer idea about the esteem in which she was held by cultural practitioners and friends across Latin America; from Nicolás Guillén to Gabriel García Márquez, Che Guevara to Eduardo Galeano, these missives convey an atmosphere of amity and solidarity (Gil et al, 2009).

While Haydée turned down several posts within the revolutionary government (Otero, 1997), she would report to the National Directorate⁵⁴ and was in a position to be very effective culturally as 'a member of the Central Committee of the Cuban

seven years and two days after the bloody attack on the Moncada, Haydée Santamaría did what revolutionaries are not supposed to do: she laid down her revolutionary armor and took her own life (2003:2).

53 Maclean elaborates on Haydée's 'almost singular dedication to internationalism that set her apart. Her legacy is not only that of a woman who bravely fought for the liberation of her country but also that of a revolutionary whose heart and mind knew not national boundaries or ideological limitations' (Ibid:1).

54 Her proximity to the centre of power is attested to by the fact that buildings of Casa de las Américas are named after functionaries; for example, the book library, inaugurated on 7 September 1959, is dedicated to José Antonio Echeverría. A leading member of the 26 July Movement, Echeverría was co-author of a letter, drawn up in Mexico during Fidel's exile, which outlined the armed struggle that would be necessary for Cuba. In 1955, he had resuscitated the 1930s student-led Directorio Revolucionario [Revolutionary Directorate]. Described as 'The only other force that thought itself strong enough to take immediate advantage of Batista's growing weakness' (Karol, 1970:145), the Directorate attacked the Presidential Palace on 13 March 1957 and Echeverría seized control of Radio Reloj to announce the end of the dictatorship. Batista, who was resting in another part of the palace, escaped unscathed and gave orders for maximum retribution. Echeverría was killed in a shoot-out when the vehicle in which he was fleeing was intercepted.

Communist Party, and a trusted fidelista' (Weiss, 1977:41).⁵⁵ Tacitly acknowledging this, Haydée would allude to the aesthetic advice she received from her team in return for her leadership, her possession of 'more information and being more up to date in the political context and from moving in areas that are not specifically theirs' (1977:67). Indeed, this 'formidable cultural organiser' brought to all those 'who had the privilege of working under her, a profound link with the essence of the Cuban Revolution', to its 'beating pulse' (Fernández Retamar, 2009:u/p). For the last fifteen years of her life, she worked closely with Fernández Retamar, who has described the urgency and passion with which she ran the institution 'as if we were in the underground or in the mountains where a single mistake could be fatal' (Saruský, 1995:35). And, while others have accused her of political naïveté, for denying the ill-treatment of Russian artists (Cabrera Infante, 1968b), her revolutionary prestige would ensure the survival of her institution in difficult times (Saruský, 1995). Directorship of Casa conferred editorship of its eponymous journal on Haydée,⁵⁶ a role she oversaw for the first sixteen issues before delegating the task to an editorial council⁵⁷ and then to Fernández Retamar (2009),⁵⁸ who details how, even when day-to-day responsibility for running the journal became the responsibility of others, her input continued to be both decisive and incisive.

Likening her to Don Quixote, Fernández Retamar describes how 'She spent her life building things, attacking the air with her broadsword, attacking windmills and iron mills as well, suffering on others' behalf, freeing galley-slaves. Until her pain grew too much for her (the eternal pain her [sic] horrible executioners caused her after the

55 Created on 3 October 1965 (Macleán, 2003).

56 Neither Haydée nor her assistant director, Alberto Robaina, wrote for the magazine; this was initially the responsibility of Fausto Masó and Antón Arrufat, both of whom had worked with *Lunes* and *Ciclón*, the latter of whom would collaborate with *Mundo Nuevo* (Weiss, 1973).

57 An editorial council was in place from issue five onwards, which included Ezequiel Martínez Estrada, Manuel Galich, Julio Cortázar, Emmanuel Carballo, Ángel Rama and Sebastián Salazar Bondy (Fernández Retamar, 2009). The role of editor disappeared until issue nine, when Pablo Armando Fernández became involved until his departure for London as Cultural Attaché to Cuba, which would see Antón Arrufat returning as editor from issue 13-14 (July–October 1962) and Haydée relinquishing her directorship in favour of a place on the editorial committee (Gilman, 2003)..

58 Early during Fernández Retamar's editorship, a collaborative committee was set up – including Mario Benedetti, Roque Dalton, René Depestre, Mario Vargas Llosa, Edmundo Desnoes, Ambrosio Fornet, Lisandro Otero and Graziella Pogolotti – which met on three occasions, in 1967, 1969 and 1971, and put out important declarations, the third of which (January 1971) had raised the necessity of extending the committee. Fernández Retamar describes how open letters sent to Fidel in spring 1971 and particularly Vargas Llosa's posture caused the dissolution of the collaborative committee (Ibid). Weiss finds that this realignment 'resulted from open split between the pro- and anti-Padilla groups' (1973:261).

Moncada attack), her mind grew darkened, and she took her own life' (loc cit).⁵⁹ Juan Almeida⁶⁰ asserts that 'As revolutionaries, we cannot agree on principle with suicide. The life of a revolutionary belongs to his or her cause and people and should be devoted to serving them to the last ounce of energy and the last second of existence. But we cannot coldly judge comrade Haydée. That would not be just' (2003:88). Fernández Retamar also offers a comment on the taboo subject of revolutionary suicide, finding the cause of her eventual death in the horror of Moncada, 'From the shadows that were initially cast in 1953 emerged the hand that murdered her in 1980. Was it her own? Or was it not rather one of those bestial hands that castrated fiancés or pulled out the eyes of brothers, alive, and sowed in a valiant, pure, strong and fragile girl a seed that later sullied her reason?' (2003:84). Whether Haydée's death was hastened by emotional or physical pain (from an earlier illness and accident), we shall never know. Her legacy is to be found in the Revolution and in 'her original creation that is the Casa de las Américas, which is growing and spreading within the dream with which she created it; in that Casa where her rebellious, imaginative and ingenious spirit survives' (2003:85).

Armando Hart Dávalos (b. 1930)

*'To confuse art and politics is a political mistake. To separate art and politics is another mistake'*⁶¹



Armando Hart Dávalos with Fidel Castro at the 1971 congress

Another culturally significant figure from the Sierra Maestra days is Armando Hart, who

joined the 26 July Movement while Fidel was imprisoned on the Isle of Pines (Karol, 1970), fought alongside Camilo Cienfuegos in the Sierra (Gálvez, 1979) and married Haydée in 1956. Arrested many times and imprisoned in 1958, he would finally be released on 1 January 1959 (Maclean, 2003). Shortly afterwards, Hart would come to

⁵⁹ Haydée Santamaría died on 28 July 1980 (Maclean, 2003). Fernández Retamar (2009) notes that he never thought he would come to preside over Casa as Haydée had seemed to him immortal.

⁶⁰ Co-founder of the 26 July Movement, Moncada combatant, internee of the Isle of Pines prison, PCC political bureau member and vice president of the Council of State.

⁶¹ Cited in Craven, 1992:77.

occupy the top post at the Ministry of Education (MINED), which was responsible for immediate post-revolutionary cultural rebuilding. Becoming a member of the Central Committee of the PCC when it was formed in 1965,⁶² he is described by one US critic as ‘politically “moderate”’ (Dopico Black, 1989:110), and Domínguez elaborates that:

Armando Hart was the very youthful minister of education in 1959. In the fall of 1965, he entered the Political Bureau and became the party’s secretary of organization. In 1971 he was sent to carry out unspecified tasks in Oriente, reemerging in early 1974 as secretary general of the provincial party there. He was dropped from the Secretariat, but in 1976 he became a member of the Council of State and minister of culture (1978:310).

Pogolotti (2010) remembers that, in the early post-revolutionary years, Hart was a public figure within a political hierarchy and that his trajectory developed in relation to intellectuals, not least through the personal contacts of his wife.

The 1976 opening of MINCULT saw Hart being appointed minister, following a particularly turbulent period in the cultural field to be discussed in chapter ten. Moore describes how ‘He was not an artist or intellectual and never risked much independent leadership in the realm of creative expression. Nevertheless, he contributed to a diverse array of cultural activities in the ministry’s initial years’ (2006:84). According to Fornet (2007), Hart judged by different criteria than his forebears – less according to whether one had followed an impeccable revolutionary trajectory or possessed great intellectual merits and more by whether one was a decent person. Shortly after the opening of the new Ministry, Haydée would speak of the support she would need in order to expand her institutional role, commenting that ‘Everyone has his or her hopes placed on the Ministry of Culture, which must not let us down. But neither can we expect miracles and I’m not saying this because the Minister of Culture is my husband. And I can assure you that, from my own personal experience, he cannot work any miracles’ (1977:69).

62 Karol (1970) asserts that Hart, whose legal training was deployed during the Escalante trial, had equivalent status within the hierarchy to Che or Dorticós. An anecdote, recounted by Gilman (2003), demonstrates Hart’s commitment to revolutionary ideals. During 1969, when the country was mobilising around the ten-tonne sugar harvest, Fernández Retamar invited Hart to contribute to *Casa* on the occasion of Lenin’s centenary; on 3 January 1970, Hart replied from Santa Cruz that he would not be able to write on this or any other subject since he was in the midst of the battle of harvest.

Hart is credited with emphasising the links between culture and socio-political ideas (Craven, 1992; Kronenberg, 2011),⁶³ and, in interview, he locates culture firmly within its concrete social context, interwoven into the successes and problems of society, before considering the policy appropriate to that reading of culture (Sanchez, 1989). For him, the conception of Cuban culture promoted within institutions refers to ‘the historical and social process which generated that culture. It is the culture of our people, that which formed us in our political, patriotic and revolutionary principles’ (Ibid:9).⁶⁴ It is clear, then, ‘Cuba’s renowned Marxist-humanist philosopher and cultural strategist’ (Kronenberg, 2011:190) played an important part in developing the kind of cultural policy being considered here.

Carlos Rafael Rodríguez (1913–97)

Working alongside Armando Hart in MINCULT would be Carlos Rafael Rodríguez. A politician and dedicated communist, he had joined the Cuban Communist Party while still at university, to become a member of its Political Bureau and serve within Batista’s cabinet as a symptom of the collaboration between party and dictatorship.⁶⁵ Having denounced the Moncada assault, he would later attack the anti-Castroist line within the PSP and was sent to the Sierra in February 1958 to negotiate with Fidel on the party’s behalf (Karol, 1970).⁶⁶ Rafael was the first PSP member to join



Carlos Rafael Rodríguez

63 Kronenberg attributes to Hart the argument that ‘the breakdown of bonds between culture and politics [is] at the root of the failures encountered by many socialist communities, including and especially the Soviet Union’ (2001:190). Karol (1970) cites a speech by Hart to graduating sociology students on 24 September 1969 advocating serious study of the Soviet Union, specifically the collectivisation of the 1920s and ’30s, the focus of resources on industry and socialist development, rather than consumption, which provides a precedent for Cuban planning. In this, he would emphasise the elevation of cultural and technical level that was also desired in Cuba, citing Russian successes in departing from underdevelopment to becoming a forerunner in science and technology. This, in turn, echoed Fidel’s speech of 23 August 1968, which, for Karol, turned a blind eye to the Soviet ideological deviations he had previously been keen to highlight.

64 Further, Hart sees no contradiction between Marxism, Leninism and the foundation of Cuban culture to conclude that ‘we are not defending a fundamentally conservative culture. We are defending an ideology, a history, a political culture’ (Sanchez, 1989:5).

65 He had acted as a minister without portfolio (Ramonet, 2006).

66 Rafael Rodríguez has described how, on the eve of his departure for the Sierra, Escalante issued him with a series of authoritarian dictates about how the war – in which the PSP had played a negligible part –

the 26 July Movement, six months before the triumph of the Revolution, going on to fight in the Sierra Maestra and occupy various posts in the revolutionary government including the prestigious directorship of the National Institute of Agrarian Reform (INRA)⁶⁷ and Vice President of the Republic.⁶⁸ Fidel describes him as a ‘supremely honest man whom I remember with great affection’ (2006:88-9).

Alongside his political portfolio, Rafael Rodríguez was also a renowned writer,⁶⁹ journalist and economist, and he is cited as one of Che’s polemical contenders (Pogolotti, 2006). In the pre-revolutionary years, he was influential behind the scenes of the *Nuestro Tiempo* cultural society, to be discussed in chapters five and seven. Writing on the cultural situation in Cuba in 1958, he would argue that Batista’s regime impeded those who sought the free and true examination of national reality, recapping the moral and physical aggression demonstrated by its agents in the cultural field. In the name of communist intellectuals, he opposed those who suggested the closure of cultural centres in retaliation against the dictatorship, arguing that culture could serve as an irritant to all tyrannies, with cultural institutions forming centres of action for democratic forces, by bringing together the adversaries of despotism.

In his speeches, Rafael Rodríguez is remarkably urbane, confidently offering a range of cultural examples – from Picasso to Pop – to illustrate a 1967 presentation to students of the National Schools of Art. In this, he explains that art history has been characterised by the separation of the artist and society; by contrast, socialism provides both the possibility and necessity of integrating the creator with the social totality,

should be concluded; in the name of advancing discussions, Rafael Rodríguez chose to ignore these edicts and listen to Fidel’s expectations instead (Karol, 1970).

67 Having argued with Che about the economy, he was said to be ‘highly impressed by the reformist endeavors of Eastern Europe’ (1970:327). His leadership of the INRA – the ‘principal arm of social as well as economic reform in the *campo*’ (Kapcia, 2005:121) – lasted from 1962 to 1965. When he was eventually replaced by Fidel, the latter would say ‘I don’t think we were employing Carlos Rafael in the best way. Although he has unquestionable executive ability, his training and skill are superior in the field of economic planning, in which field he is now working and doing a very efficient job’ (Lockwood, 1967:176). Elsewhere, Lockwood refers to his having been ‘removed’ and Fidel does not contradict him (Ibid:177), emphasising his own particular interest in agriculture instead.

68 Before the Revolution, he acted as editor-in-chief of the party newspaper, *Hoy*. Among the many positions he held following the 1959 Revolution were director of the University of Havana Economics Faculty, president of the National Commission for Economic and Scientific and Technical Co-operation and Cuba’s permanent representative on the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (Maclean, 2003).

69 In 1957, he published a study entitled ‘The Welles Mission’ about US Ambassador, Benjamin Sumner Welles; in 1966, he also wrote *Cuba in Transition to Socialism 1959–63* (Fernández Retamar, 2004).

leading to a totally free art that represents the most profound expression of man's desire in the construction of a new world. In chapters six and eight, we shall see how these ideas were developed.

Remarks in Conclusion

Of the personnel characterised above, Haydée Santamaría, Alfredo Guevara, Armando Hart, Carlos Rafael Rodríguez and Roberto Fernández Retamar emerge as the most significant, representing a range of revolutionary experience and an anti-dogmatic attitude towards cultural production. Throughout this account, other influential figures will be encountered. In the visual art field, this will include Mariano Rodríguez (1912–90), a first generation painter who directed the Department of Visual Arts at Casa de las Américas and, together with Lesbia Vent Dumois (b. 1932), played an important part in bringing together the visual artists of Latin America in the 1970s. Graziella Pogolotti (b. 1932), current president of UNEAC,⁷⁰ and Adelaida de Juan (b. 1931), an art historian and critic, both of whom kindly consented to be interviewed for this study and will be cited throughout.⁷¹

From the world of literature, Nicolás Guillén⁷² (1902–89) was an outspoken participant of various congresses and his words will make themselves heard here, while the work of Ambrosio Fornet (b. 1932) – who claims to hail from the pre-revolutionary world (2007) but whose writing has done much to illuminate the conflicts of post-revolutionary society – will be relied upon for its candour. From the cinematic field,

⁷⁰ Graduating in journalism, Graziella Pogolotti worked as an instructor at the University of Havana during the early post-revolutionary years and as an advisor at the national library for ten years from 1959. From 1963 to 1971, she led the Department of Modern Language and Literature at the University of Havana and, from 1971 to 1976, she was assistant director of research at the School of Art and Letters at the university while serving as dean of the Scenic Arts at the Superior Art Institute (ISA) and leading a socio-cultural investigation in Escambray. Completing a doctorate in Philology at the university, as a prominent art critic and essayist she has served on the editorial committees of many journals including *Nueva Revista Cubana*, *Revista de Artes Plásticas*, *Gaceta de Cuba*, *Casa de Las Américas*, *Revista de la Universidad de la Habana*, *El Mundo*, *Revolución*, *Granma* and *Unión* and published several books. See http://www.cubaliteraria.cu/autor/graziella_pogolotti/biografia.htm (accessed 28 July 2011). In recognition of her work in this field, she received the National Prize for Art Criticism in 1999 and both the National Prize for Literature and the National Prize for Artistic Teaching in 2005 (Pogolotti, 2003).

⁷¹ Having studied at London University, Ecole du Louvre and Yale University, Adelaida de Juan is Professor Emerita at the University of Havana, where she completed her doctorate. Founding president of the Cuban chapter of the International Art Critics Association, she has authored more than ten books in the field of art history and lectures widely at home and abroad.

⁷² Who was said to confer aesthetic distinction on the nationalism and social concern of Cuban literature (Saruský and Mosquera, 1979:12).

Tomás ‘Titón’ Gutiérrez Alea (1928–96) and Julio García Espinosa (b. 1926), two filmmakers who studied at the Cinecittà in Rome (Pogolotti, 2010), were particularly vocal in the 1950s and ’60s in ways to be outlined.

Of course, for each of the figures described above, a handful of bureaucrats harboured other ideas about how culture should be developed in post-revolutionary Cuba. At the end of the 1960s, Wesker would assert that ‘like most great leaders Fidel and his cabinet are ten years ahead of everyone else and the people are left to the mercy of mediocre bureaucrats such as all states breed and who don’t always know how to interpret Fidel’s words’ (1969:20). This led him to wish that Cuba did not ‘have mediocre functionaries who unfortunately are left to carry out the instruction of a visionary leadership; it is perhaps this single factor alone that defeats all brave revolutions in the end’, and to ask ‘What is it about revolts to do with injustice, liberty and equality that attract the bigoted, the pompously self-righteous, the opportunist and the grey, grey men who end up inhabiting the countless desks of authority?’ (Ibid:21).⁷³ As will be seen, the poet, Luis Pavón Tamayo (b. 1930), spearheaded a clampdown on cultural policy that was exerted in the early to mid-1970s. Acceding to the role of president of the CNC in 1971, he oversaw the purging from cultural institutions of anyone suspected of ideological diversionism. A former army officer, he will be unmasked as the author of the late 1968 tirades against Padilla,⁷⁴ published under the pseudonym of Leopoldo Ávila⁷⁵ in *Verde Olivo*⁷⁶ under his editorship.⁷⁷

73 Wesker reports hearing Fidel joke that ‘my cabinet said they would shoot me if I started talking about Cuban communist bureaucracy’, asserting that ‘it’s necessary to record the frankness of such statements in order to understand the unique and attractive nature of Castro’s personality; he does not recognise normally accepted political discretions and frightens diplomats who fear he will reveal everything because he does not play at politics – you don’t play political games with people’s lives’ (1969:20).

74 Mentioned throughout this report, the poet, Heberto Padilla, also acted as the head of Cubarteimpex, travelling to and from Cuba to buy books for the island (Guevara, 2007).

75 This widely accepted (Gilman, 2003) and convincing association was made by Ángel Rama in 1971, by Padilla in his 1989 autobiography and reiterated by Fornet in 2007. For Casal (1971) and Ripoll (1985), the culprit was José Antonio Portuondo, who was vocal in his critique of the line followed by *Lunes* (González, 2002).

76 Olive Green, the magazine of FAR, founded by Che (Kronenberg, 2011).

77 Interestingly, Benedetti (1968) attributes more moderate views to an earlier Pavón, citing a news interview given upon the latter being awarded the *Granma* poetry prize in 1966:

[...] a poet expresses the revolution to the extent that he expresses his own life, in which he picks up in a poem the circumstances under which he is living, even though he does not intend to do that. The creator is a revolutionary. He works inside the revolution; he lives in it; he is not artificially encrusted in it; he is vitally identified with the revolutionary reality. I believe sincerely that a good book of poems, a good work of drama or a novel are contributions to the building

Others involved in the CNC ultimately emerge as repressive, including Edith García Buchaca, the first wife of Carlos Rafael Rodríguez. While she is credited with both the creation of the writers' and artists' union and the implementation of a programme for amateur artists (Moore, 2006) based on Che's ideas, to be elaborated in subsequent chapters, she was an activist of the PSP⁷⁸ and Camnitzer (1994) describes her as the most rigid functionary to occupy directorship of the CNC, who believed that critics should destroy any artist acting in the service of imperialism.⁷⁹ She was avowedly pro-Soviet in her approach to the threat of imperialism, which will be distinguished from less orthodox responses in subsequent chapters. We gain a great deal of insight from García Buchaca's pamphlet, *The Theory of the Superstructure*, published by the CNC under her directorship in 1961. In this, she argues that, as the superstructure – including political conceptions, philosophies, moral, religious and artistic laws – reflects changes in the economic base, and the creations of human thought – like art, science, literature and philosophy – are related in an indirect (and often unconscious) way to the economic structure, Engels's notion of the partial independence of the superstructure from the base could be reiterated while invoking the former as an active force in modifying the latter. In chapter two, we saw how this position was at odds with a Marxist-humanist understanding of culture, as will be elaborated throughout.

Until being relieved of her post in 1964,⁸⁰ García Buchaca was supported in her work at the CNC by the aforementioned Mirta Aguirre and Vincentina Antuña. Antuña was a poet and university professor, associated with the Orthodox Party favoured by leftist intelligentsia, who worked within the Cultural Directorate of MINED in the immediate post-revolutionary period (Pogolotti, 2010), before entering the

of socialism, even though they do not necessarily deal with the revolution as a topic in itself, although if they do treat it and do it well, the basis for our admiration is broader (1968:502).

78 Working alongside Guillén and Rafael Rodríguez, she had edited a monthly journal associated with the party called *Mediodía* that was published between 1936 and 1939 (Kapcia, 2005).

79 Who had been married to Carlos Rafael Rodríguez and Joaquín Ordoqui.

80 García Buchaca found herself embroiled in the public trial of Marcos Rodríguez, a communist student accused of surrendering to Batista the four surviving members of the attack on the Presidential Palace mounted by the Revolutionary Directorate, thereby condemning them to a brutal death. Suspicious firmly pointed to García Buchaca and her husband, Joaquín Ordoqui, as key PSP members who had offered protection to Rodríguez after he confessed to them; they were arrested and imprisoned in December of that year. While not denying the involvement of García Buchaca and Ordoqui, Karol alleges that 'they apparently played some minor part in this unfortunate affair and were made to pay for it, but in such a way that this crime could not be laid at the door of the party they once led' (1970:286).

CNC as Director of Culture in 1961. Guevara (2007) remembers García Buchaca and Aguirre as talented and cultured, while self-admittedly exaggerating that they were more Stalinist than Stalin.⁸¹ Reading their writing, one is reminded of a word that Desnoes introduces us to in his novella – ‘*sarampionado*: measles; a person intoxicated with too much Marxist-Leninist theory, a dogmatic revolutionary’ (1968:62). Railing against sectarianism, Fidel would assert that ‘dialectics teaches us, that what in a given moment is a correct method, later on may be incorrect. [...] Anything else is dogmatism’ (1962:16), while Che would argue that ‘scholasticism [...] has held back the development of Marxist philosophy’ (1965:u/p). Before long, we shall see how the dogmatic, scholastic contagion swept through the cultural ranks of the 1960s and ’70s but, for now, let us turn to a consideration of the institutional framework that was created for culture by the Revolution.

81 Guevara (2007) tells the story of how, in a meeting convened by the PSP and presided over by García Buchaca, she attempted to appoint Guevara a *commissar*, claiming that Fidel had delegated power to the party. Refusing the title, he brought the matter to the attention of Fidel and Celia, who were living in ICAIC quarters and easily refuted it. Guevara also asserts that García Buchaca told him that she wanted to create a ministry of culture and to be appointed minister.

Chapter Five: Cultural Infrastructure of the Revolution

*'We know that for any culturally impoverished country like Cuba this problem of establishing cultural institutions is a terribly important and perilous effort. We'd like to say too that we don't think anybody in the world has really solved the problem of establishing the best chances for art and literature and culture in general' – the Cuban people.*¹

Commenting on Fidel's regular and extended television appearances² – the purposes of which ranged from stimulating revolutionary consciousness to rebutting rumours – Mills noted his 'antibureaucratic personality and way of going about things, of getting things done, without red tape and without delay and in a thoroughly practical and immediate way' (1960:123).³ In considering the specifics of institutionalisation, Mills' extended paraphrase of the voice of Cuba continues: 'On the one hand, there's your capitalist way of doing it. [...] If it will sell, then it will be produced [...] But there's no real plan, no real establishment of cultural effort – except the commercial' (Mills, 1960:142).⁴ Rejecting this *modus operandi* on the grounds that 'We are too much in need of [culture], and we can't afford to be so wasteful of the talent and resources we do have', attention was turned to the Soviet way of doing things. While one US scholar suggests that 'In the euphoric and chaotic years that immediately followed the Cuban revolution [...] Some officials wanted to emulate the Soviet commissar Anatoly Lunacharsky in creating didactic cultural and educational institutions' (Howe, 2004:4), the Cubans generally perceived the Soviet method to involve 'state or party control of

1 Cited in Mills, 1960:142.

2 Lockwood notes that a:

[...] unique advantage which Castro inherited was Cuba's modern, fully developed, American-style mass communications system. Today in Havana alone there are still three TV and five radio stations, and every other large city has ample, well-equipped facilities. The per capita distribution of TV sets in Cuba is still higher than in any other socialist nation [...] Through the use of nationwide hookups Castro is able, in effect, to convene the entire populace whenever he has a report to make or a new idea to put across (1967:332).

3 An allergy to bureaucratism remains consistent throughout the rhetoric of the revolutionary government, leading to campaigns designed to stamp out this tendency; a photograph in Lockwood shows a billboard which reads 'To combat bureaucratism is to combat the idea that problems subjectively resolve themselves from an office' (1967:242). Craven describes *The Death of a Bureaucrat* (1967) [sic], a film by Tomás Gutiérrez Alea that satirized the debilitating consequences of Cuba's mushrooming bureaucracy. Significantly, the film was an immensely popular part of the critical debate within Cuba that ultimately spawned pronounced structural decentralization in the mid-1970s' (1992:89).

4 'This fits with Jameson's observation about the 'unsuitability of our cultural and institutional categories – developed in and for the market system – for the novelty of socialist institutions' (1989:ix).

all cultural activity, directly or indirectly. Perhaps that's all right in science and technology [...] but we don't think it has resulted in much good poetry' (Mills, 1961:142). Thus, new Marxist-humanist solutions would be needed, and this chapter seeks to elucidate the specifics of the Cuban cultural infrastructure.

As before, fruitful comparison relies on an understanding of the pre-revolutionary situation. Kapcia argues that the Batista era gave rise to new cultural institutions, which was paralleled by an increase in private patronage and prizes,⁵ a 'powerful form of ensuring that cultural production conformed to the elite's preferred norms' (2005:72). The cultural climate of the 1950s was perceived as stultifying and philistine, whereby 'the few cultural institutions catered only for the privileged élites' (Saruský and Mosquera, 1979:13) and 'most of the artists, lacking all social and economic support, lived on the fringe of society or were accepted only for the entertainment of minorities. Hundreds of talents were frustrated in this hostile environment. What was encouraged was sensationalism, glib entertainment and escapism in art' (Ibid:12-3). Those cultural practitioners remaining on the island who refused to comply with this model took steps to resist official culture and develop a language of their own. The main nexus for this activity was the cultural society *Nuestro Tiempo*, to be considered shortly, with its significance in shaping cultural policy elaborated in chapter seven.

In relation to the early post-revolutionary period, Kapcia contends that 'the Revolution was characterised by a relative, and even deliberate, lack of institutions, reflecting the constantly changing context [...] Hence, the only institutions to guide the cultural community for the first two years were either educational or politically oriented' (2005:129).⁶ As we shall see, this lack of institutions was not total, with Miller arguing that 'Cuba's revolutionary government initially proved ready to invest in cultural

5 Kapcia explains that the figure of the patron-mentor was essential to this system, 'responsible for leading, determining norms, conferring recognition and defining the community's boundaries' (2005:71), but they were outnumbered by a more entrepreneurial type of patron, who reinforced elite boundaries.

6 In the mid-1960s, Lockwood observed that, generally, 'the process of institutionalization has been lagging' (1967:55) and attributed institutionalisation to Fidel turning his attention to his own mortality. Domínguez emphasises the ways in which institutions would eventually 'harness and control the masses' political energies' (1978:7). While lacking autonomy from the government, 'organizations came to be valued by their members. They also became structurally more stable and complex, ideologically more coherent, and more readily adaptable to new tasks' (Ibid:6).

institutions, Castro having been persuaded that, in the context of increasing economic and political isolation, promoting cultural contacts was a policy that might reap dividends' (1999:75).⁷ This sowed the seeds for a robust culture infrastructure, which Pogolotti (2010) attributes to Fidel's proximity to culture. In this regard, the Cuban Institute of Cinematographic Arts and Industries (ICAIC) and Casa de las Américas (respectively founded in March and April 1959) stand as prominent examples of that period, and Gilman (2003) finds that these forward-thinking new institutions inspired confidence in the protagonism of intellectuals in transforming society.

Another significant step in the process of institutionalisation was the creation, during the implementation of the US embargo in January 1961, of the National Council of Culture (CNC). This organisation – which would operate at varying levels of autonomy from the state during different stages of its development – would be responsible for interpreting and implementing the cultural policy of the revolutionary government in ways that will be analysed throughout this report. In parallel to the council, creative intellectuals played a part in organising themselves and, in August 1961, this would lead to the formation of the National Union of Cuban Writers and Artists (UNEAC). These key cultural institutions and others of the post-revolutionary period will be introduced and analysed here.

In the 1990s, Eckstein conducted a largely anecdotal study of the different socio-economic phases to have followed the Revolution, which is peppered with tales of woe gleaned from disgruntled members of the Cuban population. Shrouded in claims about the 'democracy' underlying capitalism – which, for her, has proven itself 'the superior economic system' (1994:209) – and a vague feminism – which implies that women in the US are treated better than their Cuban counterparts, despite the latter occupying many key positions – she states that 'Cultural institutions [...] served both as instruments of sociopolitical control and of socialization to the New Order. Through these institutions Castro and the Party articulated their ideological, moral, and political

⁷ In considering the various waves that are taken to characterise post-revolutionary cultural policy (to be discussed in the chapters seven, nine and ten), Miller contends that 'policies of state control and repression have to be set in the context of five decades of investment in an extensive network of cultural activities and organisations' (2008:692).

points of view as well as any changes in interpretations over the years' (Ibid:24).⁸

With this in mind, the extent to which Fidel and the party (which would remain distinct entities for some time) aimed to exert socio-political control through cultural institutions will be considered throughout. In much the same way, Fernandes finds that 'the establishment of cultural institutions in Cuba was a process that involved struggle between political leaders, who were more interested in the propaganda uses of art, and artists and cultural directors, who wanted to define an independent but collaborative role for art within the revolutionary process' (2007:13). As such, it will be necessary to unravel the perceived opposition between political leaders and cultural directors in this and subsequent chapters.

Nuestro Tiempo

As has already been mentioned in passing, during Batista's regime, intellectuals covertly convened around *Nuestro Tiempo* cultural society, which 'exemplified one of the firmest, most learned, reformist, bold channels of the intelligentsia and of Cuban artists in the epoch of the Republic before 1959' (Hernández Otero, 2002:7).⁹ Formed in February 1951 under the presidency of a young musician, Harold Gramatges,¹⁰ the society emerged from a series of discussions between composers,¹¹ who sought to take their music beyond official institutions by organising concerts in neighbourhood locales. This nucleus soon made links with young painters, poets and playwrights, equally suffocated by the prevailing atmosphere and the impossibility of expressing themselves through existing channels, and they formulated a collective vision of disseminating less

8 Despite this, she concedes that 'the institutions operated with a modicum of administrative cultural autonomy – least during periods of political and economic crisis, and more during periods of major policy transition' (1994:24).

9 Hernández Otero (2002) describes how the roots of the society can be found in the nucleus of Grupo Minorista, which would also give rise to the *Revista de Avance* [Advance Magazine] between 1927 and 1930 and, later, collected around José Lezama Lima and the group known as *Orígenes* [Origins] which ran a magazine of the same name. These three cultural movements – Minorista, *Orígenes* and *Nuestro Tiempo* – with their continuities and convergences, formed three paradigmatic examples of Cuban cultural evolution, suitably integrating with the revolutionary cause. The split within *Orígenes* that gave rise to *Ciclón*, made it a sequel *Orígenes*, as compared to the rivalry embodied in *Nuestro Tiempo* (Kapcia, 2005).

10 Gramatges had recently returned from the US where he had studied music. One of the main inspirations of the new organisation was the musician José Ardévol (Hernández Otero, 2002). Kapcia (2005) cites Juan Blanco and Nico Rodríguez as co-founders and Fernández Retamar and Fornet as members.

11 These meetings were held in the Municipal Conservatory of Havana.

exclusive forms of art. The society was inscribed into provincial government, taking its name from the fact that it 'dealt with current art, our art in that moment' (Gramatges, 1974:283). Beyond this, it initially lacked a specific political orientation.

On 18 February 1951, an exhibition of paintings by Fidelio Ponce opened on the second anniversary of the artist's death,¹² and the press announced the recent birth of the society. But Gramatges traces the real inauguration of *Nuestro Tiempo* to 10 March of the same year – with the opening at 9pm of an exhibition by twenty Cuban artists, a speech by Raúl Roa,¹³ a programme of contemporary singing and a theatrical work by Strindberg¹⁴ – noting that 'from that moment on, our mobilisation never ceased' (Ibid:286). For the subsequent nine years, the society would organise an average of five or six cultural activities per month as a counterpart to the government programme.

A manifesto soon followed, which began: 'The creative eagerness implicit in man [...] has motivated us to concentrate our efforts on making a reality that which we as a new Cuban generation believe is our historic duty: the preservation of positive values and the dissemination of that which signals their vital importance' (Hernández Otero, 2002:19). This continued by defining the society's aesthetic as 'that of an American art,¹⁵ free from political and religious prejudices', while recapping its founding aim of bringing the people to art, bringing the people closer to the aesthetic and cultural concerns of the time, precisely when contemporaneous realities demanded the most rapid training and cultural maturity.¹⁶ This impassioned statement would conclude: 'We are the voice of a new generation that arises in a moment at which violence, desperation

12 This exhibition was the first time many people had had an opportunity to see Ponce's work. Gramatges describes him as 'one of our greatest painters, one of the precursors of contemporary Cuban painting' (1974:285).

13 Head of the Cultural Directorate who would become Foreign Minister in the revolutionary government.

14 The exhibition included the most renowned contemporary painters, including Servando Cabrera Moreno, Wifredo Lam, Raúl Martínez, René Portocarrero and Amelia Peláez and eight sculptors including Rita Longa. The singing programme for a mixed choir was conducted by Edmundo López, while the Strindberg play was directed by Francisco Morín (Ibid).

15 This refers to art of the American continent, rather than solely of the US.

16 In a statement entitled 'Purposes', dated April 1954, Gramatges would reflect on how the society had made good on its commitment to involving the people in artistic creation, overcoming the indifference of some and the inhibition of others, spreading their enthusiasm for multiple manifestations of the human spirit, often through collective work (Hernández Otero, 2002).

and death appear to be the only solutions' (loc cit). Among the twenty-eight signatories were names that will already be familiar – including Gutiérrez Alea, Otero and Fernández Retamar – alongside the two Cabrera Infante brothers, Guillermo and Sabá, of whom we shall hear more in chapter seven.

Chronicling the society, Ricardo Hernández Otero (2002), finds that its ethos was nationalist¹⁷ without being chauvinist,¹⁸ anti-imperialist (not only in the field of culture), universalist¹⁹ and anti-cosmopolitanist,²⁰ all of which would become watchwords for post-revolutionary cultural action. The society quickly achieved prestige through the growing recognition of the seriousness of its intellectual and artistic manifestations, its moral resolve, its absence of political or aesthetic extremism, its warm attitude, its open arms towards those concerning themselves with cultural matters and its valorisation of national content. United by an unselfish preoccupation with culture, members of the society overcame the 'artificial differences between distinct artistic and cultural sectors' (Gramatges, 1974:290) while maintaining independent sections, corresponding to different art forms, to ensure its smooth operation.

In April 1954, the society began to publish *Nuestro Tiempo* magazine, 'the most belligerent of the cultural publications of that period, an attitude determined in good measure by its existence under Batista's government' (Hernández Otero and Saínz, 2002:325). Edited by Gramatges and administered by fellow musician, Juan Blanco,²¹ the first issue had a drawing by Wifredo Lam on the front cover and a copy of the society's succinct manifesto within. Published every two months until 1960, this selection of text and image reflected the full range of interests within the group, and Hernández Otero refers to the magazine being 'critical, polemical, honestly preoccupied with the rescue of

17 Speaking on the thirtieth anniversary of the society, Rafael Rodríguez (1982) would locate national culture in its ability to express itself in ways that deepen the nation, intersected by all the currents of the epoch; we shall see how this became an important theme in the post-revolutionary era.

18 This understanding would be perpetuated within the Revolution, with Fidel asserting that 'Chauvinism is the bane of sincere internationalism, and without internationalism there is no salvation for humanity' (2006:89).

19 As discussed in chapter three.

20 As will be seen in chapter ten, cosmopolitanism became linked to the idea of chauvinistic bourgeois nationalism.

21 Among those involved with the editorial board were: Mirta Aguirre, Olga Andre, Fornarina Fornaris, García Espinosa, Guevara, Gutiérrez Alea, Massip, Amado Palenque, Portuondo, and Marta Santo Tomás (Hernández Otero, 2002).

culture, not only against North American penetration but also against bad taste and false and empty art' (2002:324).²² The fifth anniversary issue of the magazine would evince a commitment to eradicating illiteracy,²³ raising the educational level of the population and disseminating culture (on the basis that the free expression of thought constituted integral respect to human rights). Alongside its ever-expanding programme of activities, the society also published monographs and sought to create a library (Ibid).

In describing the society's precarious financial position – which, on occasion, saw the electrical supply being cut off – Gramatges (1974) remembers that its subsistence depended on the efforts of a team of activists, the majority of whom were young communists, organising touring productions and occasional raffles of artwork. After six months of activity, the group addressed a memorandum to the Minister of Education, detailing its achievements and articulating a desire to move from being a purely artistic society to becoming a national cultural movement. The members solicited an official grant that would constitute an effective stimulus for all those working in the diverse fields of art, but their request fell on deaf ears and only much later did the society receive a meagre contribution from Havana municipality, until which time they became practised in the art of generating advertising revenue via the magazine.

Looking back on *Nuestro Tiempo* more than two decades after its foundation, Gramatges describes how:

[...] some of the members of the new institution had close links with intellectual personalities from the Communist Party. In the foreground was Nicolás Guillén, for very obvious reasons: Nicolás Guillén is, for us musicians, another composer, because his poetry is all music. We also had a great link with Mirta Aguirre. For people of my generation, she was an admirable person, full of wisdom, a person with whom one spoke for half an hour and covered all that which had to do with the world of creation and the world of philosophy. Equally, we depended on Carlos Rafael Rodríguez, on José Antonio Portuondo²⁴ and many other communist intellectuals (1974:283-4).²⁵

22 Hernández Otero and Saíenz note that, like the society itself, the magazine 'contributed notably to the diffusion of new and recognised values and paid great attention to the visual arts and to cinema, and in no less measure to theatre, literature and music' (2002:324).

23 This commitment was originally expressed by the president of the Lyceum Tennis Club, described as a serene feminine cultural society. Massip (2001) also identifies the College of Architects, the University of Havana, the Studio Theatre, the Vision Film Club and the magazines, *Orígenes* and *Ciclón*, as contributing to elevating literary art and aesthetic possibilities.

24 A writer born in Santiago de Cuba, who served as Cuban Ambassador to Mexico 1960-62 and, as we shall see, was named as a vice president of UNEAC.

25 Gramatges (1974) also describes how the society maintained relations with others who would disagree with their ideological line, including Jorge Mañach, Francisco Ichaso and Gastón Baquero,

To the society's founding president, it seemed logical that those responsible for the ideological questions of the PSP would have a special interest in those young people who were using their creative efforts to denounce contemporaneous reality, who could become figures of intellectual importance in the country of the future. Specifically, he mentions Luis Más Martín, director of the rebel radio station that would broadcast from the Sierra Maestra, as the person who interested the society in orientating its activities towards a definite political purpose (Ibid). So it was that the society came to use the unoccupied office of the party-run Mil Diez (1010) radio station as its headquarters.²⁶ The Socialist Youth and PSP began helping to orientate the group into becoming a cutting-edge revolutionary cultural vehicle that surpassed its purely aesthetic work. As evidence of the proximity of the PSP to the society, Guevara (2007) refers to having attended a 'meeting of the party which was a meeting of Nuestro Tiempo'.

Gramatges (1974) describes how the centenary of Martí's birth was a decisive year for the society. The Moncada attack of 26 July 1953 had given the PSP the idea of deepening its synergy with Nuestro Tiempo, and this gave rise to the creation of the party's Commission for Intellectual Work, led by Carlos Rafael Rodríguez, Mirta Aguirre and Juan Marinello,²⁷ with Aguirre providing direct orientation. This saw the directorate of the society being restructured,²⁸ with film-makers taking prominent roles,²⁹ including Santiago Álvarez,³⁰ García Espinosa, Guevara, Gutiérrez Alea and Massip (Ibid).³¹ At the end of 1953, both the Commission for Intellectual Work and the society moved to the upper floor of a building at the corner of streets 23 and 4 in Vedado³² and opened

to name but a few; they formed the counterpart to Nuestro Tiempo, moving officially within national culture.

26 Its office was in Calle de la Reina [Queen Street].

27 Active during the 1933 Revolution, Marinello had been part of Batista's cabinet and was president of the United Revolutionary Party (PUR), participating in presidential elections as a PSP candidate in 1948. In 1962, he was made Rector of the University of Havana and, when the PCP was formed in 1965, he became a member of its central committee.

28 A Central Bureau was formed, comprised of those mentioned here, alongside Sergio Aguirre, Marta Arjona and Antonieta Henríquez (Hernández Otero, 2002).

29 The society had a pronounced commitment to film, with screenings of the best international productions being organised twice a month (Hernández Otero, 2002).

30 Rafael Rodríguez (1982) determines that Álvarez came from militant communism to his first encounter with art within the society, which led – through an overwhelming alliance of art and the Revolution – to his becoming the primary documentarist of those days.

31 Guevara (2007) confesses to being one of the instruments who helped the PSP to dominate Nuestro Tiempo, by providing a face to the outside, while emphasising that the most important were Carlos Rafael Rodríguez and Mirta Aguirre.

32 A region of New Havana surrounding the university.

a Permanent Gallery of Visual Arts,³³ with the intention of exhibiting all the greats of Cuban visual art, later described as one of the society's most important initiatives to date (Hernández Otero, 2002). In a message of support dating from that time, Rosario Novoa³⁴ would attest that 'To open an art gallery in Havana is still a risky business, but the animated enthusiasts of the Nuestro Tiempo Society have rushed to do so with the purpose of contributing to the creation of an indispensable atmosphere for the suitable appreciation of Cuban artistic production' (Ibid:225).³⁵ Centred on Havana, the society's example would radiate into the interior of the country, extending beyond its physical presence and giving rise to similar institutions.³⁶

In considering the specific type of resistance promoted by the society and its magazine from within the cultural field, Hernández Otero (2002) distinguishes its members from those promoting militant action.³⁷ Massip (2001) describes how the society necessarily defined itself in opposition to the cultural policy of Batista, alongside the other, more important, fronts of armed rebellion, clandestine struggle and popular mobilisation.³⁸ Fernández Retamar (1966) alludes to the personal contribution of its members to the growing insurrection, and Rafael Rodríguez (1982) finds that, during the anti-Communist epoch, an association with the society risked incurring a proscription of liberties and thus implied a certain amount of commitment on the part of its

33 In the gallery's catalogue, Gladys Lauderman wrote that one of the main insufficiencies of the artistic domain was its lack of a permanent place in which to exhibit the work of Cuban painters and sculptors; this meant that the gallery would occupy the role of a Museum of Painting and Sculpture, including all artists from Victor Manuel and the so-called School of Havana to the Los Once group; she asserted that, among the unmistakable quality and diverse tendencies of works exhibited in the gallery, common paths of expression could be found (Hernández Otero, 2002).

34 A pedagogue who founded the History of Art Department at the University of Havana where she remains active as a professor. See <http://www.cubarte.cult.cu/paginas/personalidades/quienesquien.detalles.php?pid=69> (accessed 6 August 2011).

35 The same statement referred to the conferences and talks aimed at orientation and training (Hernández Otero, 2002).

36 These included the Galería de Artes Plásticas [Gallery of Visual Arts] in Santiago de Cuba and the Grupo Tiempo Nuevo [New Time Group] in Camagüey, with their respective magazines, *Galería* and *Tiempo Nuevo* (Hernández Otero, 2002).

37 He attributes to its continuous public presentations the sustenance of a decisive battle against official culture in the service of insubstantial expressions of art and the interests of imperialist ideological penetration. Similarly, Lauderman finds that, not since the Republican era of the 1920s and '30s had such creative effort been united in struggle, cognisant of the need for solidarity of purpose and the firm cohesion of its members (Ibid).

38 In the personal and institutional acts of cultural resistance from that decade, Massip (2001) finds the influence of the Cuban combative tradition. The influences he cites are Caballero, Varela, Saco, Luz, Del Monte and, of course, Martí, manifested in the second half of the twentieth century in the Grupo Minorista, *La Revista de Avance* and figures who, in one moment or another, were linked with Nuestro Tiempo – such as Jorge Mañach, Emilio Roig de Leuchsenring, Don Fernando Ortiz and Nicolás Guillén.

members.³⁹ He describes how, in its ranks were youths who had said ‘no’ to imperialism and dictatorship, some of whom would give their lives at Moncada; at the same time, it was not merely a political group but a genuine cultural organisation (Ibid).⁴⁰ For him, this group of young intellectuals united around the idea of a committed culture, at once aesthetic and political, which included all the artistic tendencies of the epoch while acknowledging that certain essential human responsibilities inevitably become political duties.

At times, the bitter struggle against the dictatorship would declare itself publicly, the most obvious example of which was the response to a biennial proposed for Havana on the pretext of the centenary of Martí’s birth. In the first instance, the society issued a bulletin, entitled ‘The Hispanoamerican Biennial Insults the Memory of Martí’, which sought to explicate the actions of a number of Cuban visual artists.⁴¹ Their vehement objection was based on the fact that the exhibition was being organised by Franco’s fascistic government with Cuban state funding that had been earmarked for the centenary celebrations. Across genres, the most highly renowned artists of the day came together to sign a manifesto denouncing the biennial,⁴² spearheaded by the group, Los Once.⁴³ As a riposte, they proposed an International Martíán Exhibition of Art, which quickly became known as the anti-biennial and was planned to open on the same day, 28 January 1953. The official biennial had been organised for the sumptuous galleries of the National Museum of Fine Arts, while the anti-biennial took place in the Lyceum, a centre of lively cultural activities. The opening of the former was changed to 18 May,⁴⁴

39 Mario Rodríguez Alemán said that ‘to write for this publication was to commit oneself and commitment was to define oneself against Batista and his henchmen, against North American imperialism, in favour of the cause of oppressed peoples and the countries with popular democracies, with the USSR at its head’ (Ibid:319).

40 Rafael Rodríguez (1982) describes how, if the society had been the setting for militants already convinced of Marxist-Leninist ideology, its resonance would have been minimal because the direct influence of socialist ideas was still too limited. Nonetheless, dozens of artists and intellectuals decided not to capitulate, not to remain in silence, to express themselves by means of art, to get their fingers burned and, if necessary, to defy the dictatorship until death.

41 This protest was addressed to the National Commission of the Centenary of José Martí (Hernández Otero, 2002).

42 Signatories to the manifesto included Amelia Peláez, René Portocarrero, Mariano Rodríguez, Raúl Martínez, Fayad Jamís and Marcello Pogolotti among many others (Ibid).

43 The Eleven.

44 The night before the new opening date of the biennial, the FEU organised the First University Festival of Art, including forty-two artists and many other associated events. FEU Director of Culture, Luis de la Cuesta, stated that ‘we who know that art and dictatorship are as contradictory as democracy and tyranny’ (Ibid:255) regarded the biennial as a caricature and an invasion of the freedom of artists.

and, in an article published in *Bohemia* on 23 May 1954 and reproduced in Bulletin No. 2 (June 1954) under the title of 'Round Failure of the Francoist Biennial', the protesting artists claimed that silence and darkness had dominated the official venue while the success of its rival had repercussions as far away as Santiago de Cuba and Camagüey.⁴⁵ The protest also attracted the solidarity of many continental intellectuals and exiled Spaniards (Hernández Otero, 2002).

Three years later,⁴⁶ the leading visual artists enacted their refusal again, this time around the Eighth Salon of Painting, Sculpture and Ceramics, convened by Batista's National Institute of Culture (INC),⁴⁷ which was perceived as a nexus for the US recruitment of unscrupulous Cuban intellectuals (Rafael Rodríguez, 1974).⁴⁸ The national salon was rejected on the grounds that it failed in its role of developing an economy for artists, tending instead to distort public perception by exhibiting some of the country's more politically ambiguous artworks.⁴⁹ In their combined declaration, artists articulated the obligation of the state in fully disseminating Cuban visual art, within and beyond national territory, and in producing an economy that would liberate them from the functions of the market and from earning their subsistence from means other than art, permitting them to maintain their artistic dignity and freedom of aesthetic expression (Hernández Otero, 2002).⁵⁰

Such acts placed the society in danger, and Gramatges (1974) tells of their monitoring by the Military Intelligence Service (SIM)⁵¹ and the Office for the Repression of Communist Activities (BRAC),⁵² and the persecution and interrogation

45 Aside from the revulsion the original biennial created across the continent, it was considered a failure on account of its shamefully poor aesthetics, despite the prizes and promises of international fame being offered; in the second Bulletin, those addressing the biennial, including Jorge Mañach and others writing for the *Diario de la Marina*, were soundly denounced (Hernández Otero, 2002).

46 In the January 1956 issue of *Nuestro Tiempo*.

47 Instituto Nacional de Cultura.

48 A parallel text, authored by Mirta Aguirre (1956) for a Marxist journal, added complexion to the hostility of Cuban writers towards the INC, exposing the cultural policy of government to be based on violating universities, torturing students and ransacking libraries.

49 In September 1956, the society's stance was again in evidence in relation to the INC's treatment of the Cuban National Ballet. As issue 13 of the magazine went to press, it was decided to publish a supplement containing all the letters exchanged by the director of the Institute and prima ballerina, Alicia Alonso, alongside the unanimous protest of the country's cultural organisations (Hernández Otero, 2002).

50 In this, the artists confronted the conventional antagonism of the good life of some being pitted against the aesthetic evolution of the people (Ibid).

51 Servicio de Inteligencia Militar.

52 Buró de Represión de Actividades Comunistas.

of the society's leaders.⁵³ Despite denouncements of the society regularly being published in the press by vociferous supporters of US imperialism,⁵⁴ it was very difficult to prove that *Nuestro Tiempo* was led by the PSP; added to this, the prestige of the society impeded any Batistiano intentions to shut it down, which would have constituted an intellectual scandal of immeasurable proportions. In a final act of defiance on 15 March 1958, the society was one of the signatories to a statement authored by the Collective of Cuban Institutions, which demanded the immediate renunciation of power by the dictator (Hernández Otero, 2002).⁵⁵

Nuestro Tiempo would align itself with the Revolution,⁵⁶ making recommendations for the advancement of cultural policy that will be considered in chapter seven. In the January-February 1959 issue of the magazine, the society launched a retrospective tirade against the dictatorship, arguing that it was impossible to estimate the length of time by which culture had been arrested in its development; equally incalculable was the agony of writers, artists and film-makers who had been prevented from making their work, not forgetting those who were dead, tortured, imprisoned or exiled (Hernández Otero, 2002). In 1959, Gramatges would declare that *Nuestro Tiempo* had fulfilled its destiny but that, as a great ideological struggle was still being waged and would have an impact on the cultural sector, the magazine would continue for one more year (Rodríguez Manso, 2010). After that, revolutionary circumstances would make its existence unnecessary and, as we shall see, its most distinguished members would come to occupy leading roles in post-revolutionary society, developing their creative aptitudes to the maximum (Ibid).

53 José Massip (2001) recalls how agents from BRAC burst into his house in the early hours of the morning and confiscated *War and Peace* among other 'suspect' volumes. Gramatges documents that associates of the society were included on the black list at the visa department.

54 In May 1955, a cable from United Press appeared in diverse local newspapers, reproducing an article from *Christian Science Monitor*, in which its editor, Robert M. Hallet, a so-called specialist in Latin American affairs, referred to the infiltration by Cuban communists of all aspects of life, 'especially in the fields of education, communications, work and fine arts'; Hallet's impression, gained during ten days in Cuba, mentioned *Nuestro Tiempo* as one of the 'specific examples of communist infiltration' (1974:298). Before and after this, almost all its executives suffered the ignominy of detention (Hernández Otero, 2002).

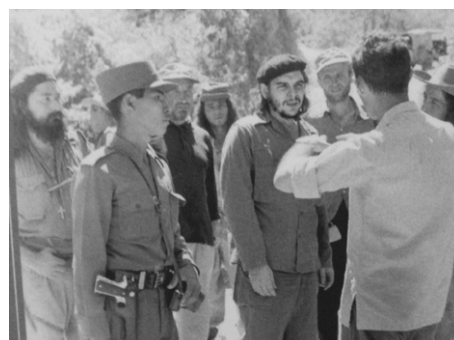
55 This collective statement to the people of Cuba on behalf of religious, fraternal, professional, civic and cultural organisations is available at <http://www.autentico.org/oa09039.php> (accessed 10 July 2011).

56 As evidence of this, Che would hold a conference in the salons of *Nuestro Tiempo* on 27 January 1959 (Rodríguez Manso, 2010). In the May-June 1959 issue of the magazine, following the enactment of the Agrarian Reform Law, the society would declare a vast expanse of faith in the triumph of the Revolution, which counted on an invincible army: the people (Hernández Otero, 2002).

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Before the Revolution, despite there being an enthusiastic audience, the film industry in Cuba had been practically non-existent (MINREX, 1976). Any film that was produced was perceived as market-driven, artistically insulting, vulgar and ethically questionable by virtue of reducing the island to its erotico-tropical elements (CNC, 1970). As we have seen, a group of nascent film-makers coalesced around *Nuestro Tiempo*. A conference, hosted by the society on 17 June 1954, provoked a treatise from Gutiérrez Alea on the realities of cinema in Cuba. In this, he outlined the shared objective of those assembled to create a cinema industry on firm bases, identifying it as an important source of work and wealth and a vehicle of national expression. In this effort, he emphasised, the support of the viewing public would be crucial, which would necessitate high-quality products. Expressing admiration for the Italian film industry in general and the neorealist attitude in particular, he predicted that, by directing their attention towards life and promoting sincerity over artifice, Cuban film-makers could discover their own language and profoundly local subject matter, thus finding ‘a Cuban means of expression with universal value, the source of which has to be the reality of our people’ (1954:117). Hampering them in this effort would be the fact that the Cuban market did not generate enough revenue to cover the cost of making films, which forced it to seek external markets. In order to overcome this situation, further learning would be needed, drawing on other branches of national culture, including the realist strain in literature and a strong critical tradition.⁵⁸

During the insurrection, Gutiérrez Alea would visit the Sierra Maestra, and there is



Tomás Gutiérrez Alea meets Che Guevara in the Sierra Maestra

⁵⁷ Cuban Institute of Cinematographic Arts and Industries.

⁵⁸ In the issue of *Nuestro Tiempo* published in January 1956, alarm was raised about the corrupt operations of the Bank for Fomenting National Industry and Agriculture (BANFIAC), a North American entity which had committed \$750,000 to making three feature films; rather than donating \$250,000 to each film, a mere \$30,000 was disbursed because the fund was run as a commercial operation, offering credit to those entities that offered guaranteed returns (Hernández Otero, 2002). The May–June 1957 issue of *Nuestro Tiempo* bemoaned the fact that, despite possessing the appropriate equipment, studios and artists, a cinematic industry did not exist (Ibid).

considerable evidence that the *comandantes* valued film as Lenin had done before them. When the Revolution triumphed, documentary and narrative films of varying lengths were actively encouraged, and the British documentarist and writer, Michael Chanan, describes how:

The Rebel Army had quickly gone in for making films. [...] García Espinosa was put in charge of producing two films for the Dirección de Cultura (Cultural Directorate) of the Rebel Army under Camilo Cienfuegos. One of them, *Esta tierra nuestra* ('This Land of Ours'), [...] dealt with the Agrarian Reform and gave an explanation of the legislation to be introduced in May and why it was necessary. The other, *La vivienda* ('Housing'), was directed by García himself, and dealt with urban reform (2005:89).⁵⁹

Alfredo Guevara (2007) recounts how, after having initially been told by Fidel that he would not be able to fulfil his vocation within cinema, the latter relented and asked him to draw up the necessary legislation. Guevara seized the opportunity and assembled a small advisory group around him, which included García Espinosa, Gutiérrez Alea and Humberto Ramos and applied itself to the task of inscribing the Cuban film industry into law.

According to documents available in Havana, ICAIC was created by Law 169 of the Revolutionary Government on 20 March 1959.⁶⁰ Guevara (2007) would state that the phrase within this document describing cinema as an art – making Cuba the first country in the world to record this connection – was the most important for him.⁶¹ This was also the first revolutionary law to refer to ideo-cultural activity, and it did so on the understanding that, 'By virtue of its characteristics, cinema constitutes an instrument of opinion and formation of individual and collective consciousness that can contribute to creating a more profound and clearer revolutionary spirit and to sustaining its creative breath' (Bell et al, 2008:151). Thus, the two main objectives of ICAIC became 1) to

59 Kapcia notes that early ICAIC 'productions generally followed a stark neo-realism arising from both the industry's pre-1959 Italian influences and the growing austerity, which demanded efficiency, sparseness and directness [...] The new cinema also looked elsewhere, to the French *nouvelle vague* [...] and, increasingly, to Eastern Europe' (2005:142-3).

60 This was enacted four days later, with the creation of ICAIC dated 24 March 1959 (Santana, 1977; PCC, 1976). On 28 March 1959, law 336 granted ICAIC exemption from taxes and, on 7 October of the same year, a commission was set up (under law 589) to oversee the study and classification of films. On 30 November 1976, responsibility for ICAIC would be transferred to the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Culture (under law 1323).

61 Kapcia describes how, 'by the 1950s, cinema was accepted by the cultural *vanguardia* as an art form' (2005:104). At the same time, the propaganda value of film was widely acknowledged by the various political factions throughout the decade.

enrich the field of Cuban culture (by incorporating a new medium of artistic expression, while adhering to artistic criteria inscribed within the Cuban cultural tradition and guaranteeing an atmosphere of free creation) and 2) to form a more knowledgeable, demanding, critical, and hence revolutionary, public (CNC, 1970). Maintaining its condition as art, cinema would augment the humanism underpinning the Revolution, dramatically representing the great conflicts of humanity and contributing to eradicating ignorance (with the explicit aim of unifying the politics of the revolutionary government with respect to cinema).⁶²

Echoing Gutiérrez Alea's earlier thoughts, it was recognised that an entirely new apparatus would be needed for the production and dissemination of film, which would demand creatively beneficial collaborations – between economists and film directors, educators, psychologists and sociologists, artists from all disciplines, the *comandantes* and specialist departments of the armed forces and the police – enabling public taste to be re-educated. Also prefacing Law 169 was an understanding of the well-defined characteristics of the country – its music, dance, customs and locations – which, it was imagined, would appeal to publics from all latitudes. The distribution of cinematic products was thus thought to constitute a permanent and progressive source of foreign income while having an extraordinary visual impact on the viewing public that would contribute to popularising the country and encouraging tourism (Bell et al., 2008).

ICAIC was created as an autonomous organism, with its own juridical identity, and the level of control that was devolved to the institution is noteworthy. It was charged with overseeing all aspects of cinematic production – from the financing of films (in collaboration with banks that would soon be nationalised) to the development of studios – and with securing the distribution of creative output, through cinema clubs and related educational



Foyer of the Instituto Cubano de Artes e Industrias Cinematográficas (ICAIC)

⁶² For the shortest time, it also assumed responsibility for television (Guevara, 2007).

and publishing activities. It would also be responsible for signing agreements with all relevant national and international institutions and for convening conferences and congresses. Law 169 also ordained that a president-director would be appointed by the Prime Minister of the Republic, as ratified by the Council of Ministers. The incumbent to this post would have control over the executive character of ICAIC and all aspects of its administration, overseeing the activities of a managing council, the members of which they could appoint and remove at will (Ibid). Alfredo Guevara, who was introduced in the previous chapter and had written ICAIC into existence, was appointed to this role.

Between 1959 and 1961, various films were made that illustrated the first steps of the Revolution, dealing with racial discrimination and literacy alongside considerations of the Bay of Pigs invasion. The institute became widely accepted as a 'prestigious forum, gathering film-makers and others who gravitated naturally towards ICAIC's more directed radicalism' (Kapcia, 2005:132), with its productions being described as 'the most striking cultural creations of the Revolution' (Gott, 2004:246-7). By the 1960s, ICAIC was producing award-winning films alongside 'the most avant-garde weekly newsreel in the world' (Lockwood, 1967:136). Salkey describes a meeting, towards the end of 1967, with Sara Gómez, who had made eight documentaries under the auspices of ICAIC, on subjects ranging from the literacy campaign to Afro-Cuban folk music. Salkey and his companion 'wondered if she wasn't just a little too imaginatively vital and aspiring for the confines of the cultural blockade and its aftermath in Havana [...] In her conversation we both spotted a mind and a talent about to "crash", if their wider concerns weren't allowed maximum room for exploration, comparative criticism and development' (1971:27). Later during his stay in Havana, Salkey discovered that ICAIC 'was providing just that scope for its directors' (loc cit). By this time, film production had declined, largely due to material shortages, but it would nonetheless give rise to 'some of the Revolution's acknowledged masterpieces' (Kapcia, 2005:143).

The burgeoning film industry would soon provoke experiments in distribution consistent with revolutionary objectives. In 1960, consistent with its role of forming, in the ambit of the Revolution, a new audience (and new man) capable of appreciating works of art, ICAIC created the Department of Cinematographic



Yara Cinema in Havana

Dissemination, with the function of engaging thousands of new spectators in the most dispersed parts of the island. All distribution mechanisms were nationalised, existing cinemas were commandeered and restored and a programme of travelling cinemas was set up. This would give rise to 620 cinemas with 16mm projection facilities, 480 of which were stationary, 112 pulled by lorry, twenty-two drawn by animals and two carried by boat around the coast (MINREX, 1976).⁶³ Centred on areas developing agriculture in which large numbers of *brigadistas* were concentrated, the mobile cinemas saw young projectionists travelling for twenty-five days every month around areas which otherwise lacked the means of cinematic diffusion; these youngsters would spend hours screening didactic documentaries in the countryside and in schools before returning to their point of departure to maintain, repair and renew the film stock. Benedetti commends ‘the remarkable communication with the spectator achieved by the producers of documentaries’ (1969:507), an experiment that would soon be extended to narrative productions.

The results surpassed all expectations, with *Las Aventuras de Juan Quin Quin*⁶⁴ being watched by around a million people.⁶⁵ Fornet mentions that ‘In the depths of

⁶³ Towards the end of 1965, ICAIC began a programme of construction and renovation of cinemas throughout the island, which mostly replaced those left in deplorable condition by their predecessors and were inaugurated within three or four months. Of nineteen such works, fourteen were new constructions and four renovations. In parallel to this, maintenance and repair of seventeen existing cinemas was undertaken (MINREX, 1976).

⁶⁴ *The Adventures of Juan Quin Quin*, a 1967 comedy by García Espinosa, tells the story of a young man’s involvement in revolutionary struggle.

⁶⁵ Rafael Rodríguez (1967) would identify film (apart from its most modern variants) as the most accessible art, emphasising that there is no need to orientate cinematographic productions to a level at which they are comprehensible to all. Gilman cites Fornet in *Casa 64* (Jan–Feb 1971) describing how

country houses in the hills, children and adults alike were doubled up in laughter in front of an improvised screen, seeing Chaplin act for the first time' (2004:9).⁶⁶ By 1970, the system of mobile cinemas had facilitated more than 363,000 screenings for forty million spectators as part of a concerted effort to dissolve discrepancies between urban and rural living, consistent with the overarching priorities of the revolutionary effort (CNC, 1970). At the end of the 1970s, it



ICAIC poster promoting mobile cinemas

was possible to say that 'By trucks and boats, on mule-back or with the aid of draught animals the cinema reached places in which it was completely unknown. The travelling cinemas have given more than 1.5 million shows to about 200 million spectators' (Saruský and Mosquera, 1979:17). Through its experiments in democratising culture, Cuban cinema considered itself a protagonist in the revolutionary process, seeking a lively inter-relationship between itself and its spectators that would inspire the continent.⁶⁷ The egalitarianism underlying cinematic production and distribution is reflected in the fact that, at the time of writing, admission to any cinema on the island costs two Cuban pesos, which is equivalent to the price of an egg.

In 1960, ICAIC established the magazine, *Cine Cubano*, to tackle Cuban cinema, art and contemporaneous culture from an informative and theoretical perspective (Guevara, 1963). In the mid-1960s, the Cuban Cinemateque⁶⁸ was created – with the accompanying journal, *La Cinemateca de Cuba* – with the aim of increasing knowledge of

the timidity of Cuban literature, corralled between the two fears of socialist realism and vanguardist hermeticism, found its opposite in the impetuosity of documentary film.

66 Such a scene is captured in an eight-minute film by Octavio Cortázar, called *Paloma de Oro* [Golden Dove], in which 'the reactions of children and adults are shown while viewing a Chaplin film, in a town in the middle of the mountains where no one had brought motion pictures up to that time. Needless to say, those virgin spectators went mad with amusement' (Benedetti, 1969:507).

67 Cinema was proposed as an arm of the revolution at the Festival of Viña del Mar in Chile in 1967 (Gilman, 2003:352).

68 Cinemateca de Cuba, under Héctor García Mesa (Kapcia, 2005).

cinematic culture among the people, through the acquisition and conservation of films of technical, artistic, historical or social merit alongside corresponding documentation. At the same time, a centre for cultural training was set up, which used exhibition halls and study centres in the capital and provinces alongside a centre for cinematic studies, which ran training courses for laboratory technicians, sound engineers and projectionists, developing the capacity to produce colour films on the island (MINREX, 1976).

ICAIC also assumed responsibility for importing foreign films, with mixed results. A letter by the institute's directors to *Revolución* newspaper, in December 1963, refers to the preceding two years of terrible cinematic tedium, and Domínguez would later observe that:

Lisandro Otero, vice president of the National Council of Culture, noted that it took a long time before the products of 'high culture' had a large audience. The government was trying to move public taste toward high culture, but to little avail. When it came to popular entertainment, politically suitable films had a hard time as well. Between forty-three and fifty-seven Soviet films were shown every year in Cuba from 1961 through 1964,⁶⁹ accounting for a fifth to a quarter of all films shown. When relations between the two countries cooled, the number fell to fifteen in 1967 and fourteen in 1968, a mere eighth of the offerings. By 1972 Cuban-Soviet relations were much improved, but the twenty-eight Soviet films were back up only to a fifth of the offerings; clearly the didactic Soviet style was not very popular. In the meantime, visitors report a continuing high demand for Hollywood films, as well as for programs on television featuring 1950s rock-and-roll and popular music – ideological criticisms from on high notwithstanding (1978:414).

The early 1960s coincided with a very public dispute around whether films by Buñuel, Fellini and Pasolini were suitable for a Cuban audience, requiring Guevara to take a stand against the respected columnist and PSP leader, Blas Roca Calderío,⁷⁰ which will be considered in depth in chapter nine.⁷¹

69 In addition to film, Fernández Retamar (1962) describes how cultural agreements had been signed with socialist countries – including the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia, Poland and China – which had provided access throughout the island to some excellent quality productions in dance, theatre and choral music.

70 The *nom de guerre* of Santiago Calderío, a union man and party loyalist (Kapcia, 2008).

71 By 1975, the greatest vigilance over the films being selected for import was advised by the party. This caution – which covered foreign works in all genres – formed paragraph nineteen of the resolutions on culture at the PCC congress (Comité Central del PCC, 1976).

ICAIC was also instrumental in fostering a new genre of public art through the film posters it commissioned from graphic designers and artists from 1960 onwards:

These new posters had a deliberately political purpose, seen initially as an artistic challenge to the hegemony [exerted by] the essentially commercial Hollywood poster, so prevalent before 1959 and still evident in Cuba [...]; hence, while posters had previously sold [...] ‘ninety minutes of evasion’⁷² [...] they now became an instrument of political education. However, the artists, supported by ICAIC, also sought to make posters innovative and attractive, challenging the banality of the ubiquitous political posters [...]. By the late-1960s, therefore, poster designers displayed an exciting virtuosity, using collage, montage, pop art, op art, psychedelic art and the more familiar styles of art nouveau, to create an art form in and of itself (Kapcia, 2005:143-4).⁷³

As part of a broader consideration of the visual forms of the post-revolutionary period, David Craven asserts that ‘The primary aim for which the Cuban poster is produced is *not* to address the viewer as an isolated figure, for whom free expression simply equals the license to buy whatever one wishes, but rather to initiate a dialogue with consciously interdependent subjects, whose free choices are continually replete with serious implications for humanity in general’ (1992:82). The extent of these combined successes caused Benedetti to conclude that ‘the two artistic products that have best been able to introduce themselves into the people’s yearning are the poster and the motion-picture documentary.’ (1969:507).⁷⁴ Reflecting on the activity of ICAIC in 2007, Enrique Colina⁷⁵ (2007) described the cultural policy cultivated by ICAIC as the most open, tolerant and anti-dogmatic, fostering conceptual profundity and artistic expression within the co-ordinates imposed by censors. Above all, the film institute signalled resistance to the errors of intolerance.

⁷² This is a citation of Pogolotti from a 1996 text on cinema.

⁷³ Kapcia (2005) mentions exhibitions of posters in 1966 (at Pabellón Cuba), in 1969 (at the First National Poster Salon) and in 1979 at the National Museum of Fine Arts, with collectors buying posters for decoration. To this day, it is still possible to purchase many of the iconic posters, their block colour and screen-printed texture immediately distinguishing them from their mass-produced US equivalents. Kronenberg (2011) distinguishes Cuban posters from those made in other socialist states on the basis of their design and content.

⁷⁴ One final area of innovation at ICAIC has been in the field of music, with Benedetti observing: ‘Most of the composers of serious music have collaborated with the ICAIC, especially with regard to matters concerning the documentaries. Electroacoustic experiments, both with regard to concrete music and to electronic music, have been started through the Institute’s laboratories’ (Ibid:509).

⁷⁵ For thirty-two years, Colina directed the programme *24 por Segundo* [24 per second] for TV Cubana.

Casa de las Américas⁷⁶

In considering the institutional development of various art forms, Kapcia notes that:

Casa de las Américas was established in an imposing modernist Vedado building⁷⁷ by the 26 July Movement leader Haydée Santamaría in April 1959, conceived of then as [...] ‘a dynamic centre of high intellectual quality, designed to promote Latin America’s living, young and combative cultures’⁷⁸ to inform Latin America and Cuba about each other’s cultures. [...] However, with no models from which to learn, Casa’s empirical development thereafter reflected three processes in the Revolution: its increasing radicalism, its regional purpose and its growing discovery of Cuba’s Latin American identity.

As Casa evolved, it became a leading determinant of evolving cultural policies in Cuba and one of Havana’s major cultural spaces, establishing new actors and bringing prestige and protection to hitherto marginalised genres and activities (2005:130).

Yet, in the literature outside Cuba, little consideration is given to Casa’s activities, which is partly compounded by its own policy against publishing in English. How it was that such an institution was capable of being founded so soon after revolutionary victory and how it came to occupy such a central cultural and political position will form part of the considerations of this section.

Established on 28 April 1959,⁷⁹ Casa de las Américas had a remit to sustain a free cultural centre for adults, specifically aimed at the working class. It was also charged with maintaining a library specialising in American affairs. And, perhaps most importantly, Casa was responsible for promoting the development of pan-American cultural exchanges, offering accommodation to organisations dedicated to fomenting relations between American countries and disseminating the Cuban Revolution in all its aspects throughout Latin America (CNC, 1963a).⁸⁰ In this way, it was anticipated, it would become a continental house of culture, lending itself to the creation of identical centres throughout the Republic. Envisaged as a meeting place for radical American intellectuals and artists, publicising their works and stimulating their creativity (Ibid),

⁷⁶ House of the Americas.

⁷⁷ Casa de las Américas is set a couple of blocks behind the sea wall, a little further round the bay than the US Special Interests Section, away from the main tourist areas of the city.

⁷⁸ This quotation is taken from an article about its history from 1960 to 1995 in *Casa* journal.

⁷⁹ Law 299 saw the creation of Casa under the auspices of the Ministry of Education; law 814 of 20 May 1960 oversaw the reorganisation of the Council of Directors. Overseen for a period by the CNC, Casa was transferred into the jurisdiction of the CNC’s successor, MINCULT, on 15 August 1978 (*Asesora Jurídica Nacional*, 1980).

⁸⁰ Looking back from the vantage point of 1970, an unpaginated CNC publication examining the cultural policy of Cuba notes the dual function of Casa, ‘to bring together a specialist team that would bring the people of our country knowledge of the works and authors of all Spanish America and, above all, to create a rapprochement between the Latin American peoples as part of a real cultural exchange’.



Casa de las Américas

Casa quickly became ‘the revolutionary centre of Latin American culture’ (Gilman, 2003:78) and remains a nexus for cultural visitors to the island.

Salkey (1971) reports that the idea to create Casa immediately after the Revolution was Che’s,⁸¹ and, in chapter four, we considered the persona of Haydée Santamaría, its founding director. In an interview with Jaime Sarusky,⁸² conducted in 1977, Haydée would describe how, in 1959, the building Casa would inhabit was being used by an organisation called the Panamerican Colombista Society,⁸³ which the incoming administration quickly realised was corrupt. Working within MINED immediately after the Revolution, it was suggested to Haydée, by her husband the minister, that she should take over the institution and explore the possibilities for how it could be run.⁸⁴ Upon occupying the building, Haydée began to consult intellectuals, taking up proposals that led to a gallery, magazine and conference centre.⁸⁵ The first to arrive offering practical help were Marcia Leiseca and Katia Álvarez, the latter of whom would have the idea of an annual literary prize for works written in Castilian, initially known as the Hispanoamerican Literary Competition, which changed its name in 1965 to the snappier Casa de las Américas Prize (Otero, 1997). This quickly became the ‘most prestigious prize of the continent’ (Gilman, 2003:113), in part due to its refusal to impose any theme, style or commitment to political positions, with quality being the only decisive factor for the winning book (Otero, 1997).⁸⁶

81 This assertion came from María Rosa, the Spanish-born Director of Information at Casa in the 1960s, who had been living in Cuba since 1949 and was the wife of the writer, Edmundo Desnoes. Similarly, Kronenberg refers to Casa as ‘Carrying Che’s official endorsement’ (2011:207).

82 A writer and 1970s representative of MINGULT.

83 Sociedad Colombista Panamericana. See <http://www.guije.com/cosas/cuba/colombista.htm> (accessed 6 July 2011).

84 A CNC document (1963c) alludes to a process of restructuring that would see Casa’s resources being rationalised and its objectives being defined in concrete form. This would involve increasing the information provided about different art forms outside the country and the initiation of a new publication, *Informativo Cultural de America Latina (ICAL)* [Cultural News from Latin America], which would bring the continent’s peoples closer together.

85 Pogolotti (2010) describes how ‘Casa de las Américas formed a team of artists and writers, which worked directly with them as collaborators who helped to design initial plans’.

86 The CNC would describe the Hispanoamerican Literary Contest being convened annually, with a jury deciding on the works to be published, initially centred on the categories of essays, plays, poetry, novels and stories with prize money of 1,000 pesos (CNC, 1963a). For an idea of the current prizes, see

At a meeting of the Organisation of American States (OAS) in Uruguay in January 1962, the US pressurised the other members into voting for Cuba's expulsion, a move that was only resisted by Mexico (Gott, 2004).⁸⁷ As diplomatic relations were severed between Cuba and the rest of the continent, the island found itself increasingly isolated (Pogolotti, 2006).⁸⁸ Notwithstanding, there was a hope that this governmental attitude did not extend to the Latin American peoples,⁸⁹ and Maclean describes how, 'with visionary insight', Haydée anticipated the isolation of Cuba to identify 'what she believed was the one crack in the ideological blockade being built around her island – culture' (2003:6). Connected to Latin America and the Caribbean through a history of struggle in the face of a common imperialist enemy, cultural exchange, based on research and understanding was felt to be beneficial (Comité Central del PCC, 1975).⁹⁰ Furthermore, it was felt that 'artistic and literary creation in Cuba should also contribute to [regional] struggles for the recovery of their national resources, for economic independence and political sovereignty, and to the protection of their national cultures, whose values form part of [Cuban] spiritual heritage' (Saruský and Mosquera, 1979:22). Thus, Casa defined itself as a cultural institution that aimed to serve all the peoples of the continent in their struggle for liberty (Gilman, 2003), and its efforts in bypassing the cultural embargo 'greatly contributed to countering the policy of isolation imposed on Cuba by imperialism' (Saruský and Mosquera, 1979:28). Benedetti describes how:

When, in 1961, the economic (and also cultural) U.S. blockade attempted to isolate Cuba from the other nations of Latin America, Haydée clearly understood that the Casa

<http://www.casa.cult.cu/premios/literario/index.php> (accessed 29 June 2011).

87 Rafael Rodríguez (1969) asserts that the Cuban government considers it no historical accident that the only country to maintain relations with the island was Mexico as they had realised their own revolution.

88 A 'Uruguayan Catholic worker-priest, Juan Carlos Zaffaroni' (1971:214), encountered by Salkey at the 1968 congress, 'mentioned the intolerant attitude to Cuba on the part of all the Latin American countries, perhaps, with the exception of Mexico [...] not only is Cuba discriminated against, he stressed, but her friends and sympathizers outside also are' (Ibid:215).

89 Mills' plea to US citizens contains the sentiment:

[...] we think, we hope, that many of the 180 million peoples of Latin America are with us. They may not like some things we've done and some things we may have to do; that's inevitable in any revolution [...] But in our economic contest with the Yankee corporations and the Yankee Government we think most of the people of Latin America are with us and against your monopolies and against your Government (1960:28).

90 Fernández Retamar discerns that 'Latin-American culture [...] has become a possibility *in the first place* because of the many who have struggled, the many who still struggle, for the existence of that "great people" that in 1881, Martí still referred to as Spanish America but that some years later he would prefer to name, more accurately, "Our America."' (1971:38).

de las Américas could win out – clearly not over the economic blockade, but certainly over the cultural one. And so, instead of trying to create links with official institutions that were evidently going to follow the attitude of their respective governments, she made connections with writers and artists as individuals, as well as being embedded in their communities. And the writers and artists responded to this Latin American calling and the daring proposal thus received a committed response (2003:98).

In addition to an anti-imperialist approach that will be discussed in more detail in chapter eight, Haydée's international outlook made Casa 'a kind of home away from home, a refuge for artists of all genres fleeing persecution in their own countries' (Maclean:7), and she comments that 'we here at Casa felt that, Cuba being the country that it is, we have the most appropriate conditions for bringing together the art of the peoples' (1977:64). In this way, Casa became the centre of a Latin American intellectual fraternity, and the consolidated reputation of the prize would see an increasing number of manuscripts being submitted and ever more prestigious jurors flouting the embargo (Otero, 1997).

At home, Casa would intervene into local political affairs when the situation called for it, making any discrepancies public but never joining in international hostility towards the Revolution (Ibid). A centre for conferences, courses and seminars, Casa became a house of dialogue and, as a testament to this, many of the most important disputes of the period covered by this study (and beyond) have had their origins in this discursive place. In chapter seven, we shall see how the screening of a modest, yet provocative, short film would detonate heated and well-documented debates around cultural policy. What is less well-known is that the prelude to this furore is to be found in a meeting of writers and artists at Casa who assembled to tackle the question of the film (Fernández Retamar, 2001).

Within the visual arts, Casa houses a gallery that hosts temporary exhibitions and showcases an extensive permanent collection of Latin American works,⁹¹ which

91 In 1977, Haydée spoke of there being more than 1,500 works in the collection from all parts of Latin America including the Amazon region. A statement to accompany the final Encuentro de Plástica Latinoamericana y del Caribe (1979) [Meeting of Latin American and Caribbean Visual Artists], to be discussed in more detail towards the end of this report, describes the visual arts department as one of the first to be founded at Casa and refers to the solidarity resulting in donations to collections comprised of more than 6,000 works, which was used as the basis of an annual exhibition of continental artwork, both individual and collective.

includes artworks commissioned *in situ* from artists spending time in Cuba.⁹² The annual Exhibition of Havana, organised by Casa throughout the 1960s, was deemed the most important visual art event in Latin America (CNC, 1970), while the thriving poster art movement to come out of the Revolution was also centred on Casa in its early years, through its continent-wide dissemination of posters produced by Cuba's institutions and its organisation of a competition for print-makers (CNC, 1963a).⁹³

Publishing forms one of the main strands of Casa activity, with the prize-winning novels, plays, essays, poems and testimonies being issued every year.⁹⁴ By the early 1960s, Casa was running an active programme of cultural extension that included the dissemination of: 1,000 copies of weekly bulletins, which synthesised what was deemed the most important news and events in Cuba; monthly social and artistic material; books to cultural institutions, student groups, workers' and cultural groups with an affinity to Cuba; and daily replies to those soliciting information about Cuba (Ibid). Another notable achievement in the field of publishing has been the bimonthly journal, *Casa de las Américas*, mentioned in the previous chapter, the first issue of which was edited by the writer, Antón Arrufat, and printed in an edition of 2,000 for May–June 1960. The journal was central to the Latin American literary boom of the 1960s and continues to occupy a most visible place among the continent's magazines (Gilman, 2003). Weiss, who conducted a doctoral analysis of *Casa* journal, observes that the 1965 change in editorship coincided with a deeper continent-wide politicisation, whereby

92 Casa's five-year plan, beginning in 1964, included the inauguration of a Gallery of Popular Art, organising exhibitions by Latin American artists; the organisation of a Latin American printmaking competition, editing portfolios of the winners and those attracting honourable mention by the judges; the coordination of a high-quality photography exhibition reflecting Cuban reality; the invitation of prestigious Latin American artists to visit Cuba and exhibit at Casa; the intensification of contacts between Latin American museums with the intention of exchanging exhibitions; securing the donation of works by important artists as a precursor to the inauguration of the first Museum of Latin American Art alongside the accumulation of monographs and illustrations of work by the various individual artists and schools of Latin America and the amassing of a collection of Pre-Columbian literature and folklore (CNC, 1963c).

93 The in-house journal demonstrated an eagerness 'to include a fair amount of information on the plastic arts, reporting on exhibitions and contests, as well as on the travels of Cuban artists abroad and foreign artists in Cuba' (Weiss, 1973:275).

94 The five prize-winning books have consistently been guaranteed publication alongside a further ten achieving special mention by the respective juries. By the early 1960s, Casa was publishing twenty-four literary titles per year of between 150 and 200 pages alongside six annual factual books based on the countries of Latin America of around 250 pages with photographs and maps (CNC, 1963a). In the CNC's five-year plan of 1964, Casa was seen seeking contacts with foreign publishers in socialist and capitalist countries to translate and publish its collections (CNC, 1963c).

‘Arrufat’s literary bimonthly was to become Fernández Retamar’s ideological bimonthly if it wanted to survive as a congruous part of international policy’ (1973:82).⁹⁵

Described as ‘a forum for Latin American writers, [which] functioned from the beginning as a collaborative effort of Cubans and writers from other Latin American countries’ (Weiss, 1977:11) and a ‘faithful mirror of Cuba’s relationship with Latin America and with the intellectuals of the world’ (Weiss,1973:286), *Casa* has consistently encompassed a range of themes reflecting the main artistic, political and social problems of Latin America (CNC, 1970:u/p) and the so-called Third World (Weiss, 1973).⁹⁶ Haydée would locate the journal as a key weapon in attaining communication across Latin America in an attempt to reconcile the region’s culture – being both a literary and political vehicle through which ‘the continent’s writers expressed themselves and explained what was happening from their points of view’ (1977:61) – while Fernández Retamar (2009) asserts that, at its most successful moments, the journal has been made from the ideological perspective of the Cuban Revolution. In parallel to its textual impact, the journal – with the cutting-edge graphics by Umberto Peña that accompanied Fernández Retamar’s editorship⁹⁷ – did the visual arts ‘a great service in Cuba by making available reproductions of works by Diego Rivera, Rufino Tamayo, Picasso, Matisse, Grosz, etc.’ (Weiss, 1977:38).

Through its periodical, *Casa* has been able to stake its autonomy and abiding editor, Fernández Retamar, claims that, ‘somewhat bloodied, *Casa* made it unbowed through what Ambrosio [Fornet] would baptize [...] the “Grey Five Years” (1971-1975); it published not a single one of the laudatory pieces of socialist realism that the Soviet

95 She argues that ‘some of the most relevant editorials are statements of faith in humanity [...] and opposition to U.S. aggressive actions, of an unequivocal commitment to freedom both political and literary, and above all to unity’ (1973:262).

96 Fernández Retamar (2009) describes how, when Haydée decided he would assume the editorship, she proposed that the good literary level of the magazine should be maintained and, if possible, surpassed. He proposed emphasising Martí’s concept of ‘Our America’ in the ideological aspect of the magazine. Among the very many examples of important articles he cites are considerations of the various independence struggles of the continent, the major literary developments, issues dedicated to structuralism, aesthetics and semiotics in relation to Marxism and postmodernism alongside a consideration of the activities of the institution that published it.

97 Fernández Retamar (Ibid) remembers that Peña had begun to design the journal before he was appointed editor, but the greatest developments were made during the twenty years in which they worked together.

press agencies based in Cuba showered us with' (Saruský, 1995:40). Yet, while Gilman cites *Casa* as an example of an institution that attempted to ensure an open space, free from party doctrine, in which unlimited aesthetic experiments could be undertaken, she notes that a 1961 article on cinema in *Casa* journal would make no reference to *PM*⁹⁸ and its aftermath and, between 1960 and 1962, *Casa* prizes were awarded to works of fiction 'with positive heroes which satisfied the demands of ideological health but were not, without doubt, that which the majority of artists hoped would be encouraged as an artistic programme' (2003:193-4).⁹⁹

When the dogmatic current, to be outlined in chapters seven, nine and ten, flared up in 1968, *Casa* would find itself in a difficult position.¹⁰⁰ Gilman (2003) details how, between November 1968 and February 1969, *Casa* responded in a unique way to the attacks launched by the Revolutionary Armed Forces (FAR) through its magazine; having contributed to the diffusion of the Revolution through the continent's intellectuals and invited some of the best artists to Cuba, the journal concurred with the ideological disqualification of certain artists on one point – that those whose vision of the Revolution was tainted by confusion, nihilism or scepticism had no right to comment on it.¹⁰¹

In spring 1969, the journal's collaborative committee would revise its 1967 declaration, to conclude that it would be necessary for revolutionary intellectuals to participate in direct action, thus carving a role for itself in revitalising the participation, elaboration and dissemination of thinking capable of incorporating the great popular

98 A film that had its cinema distribution delayed, which will be discussed in detail in the next chapter.

99 Gilman (2003) describes how, in 1960, the prize was granted to José Soler Puig for an epic, historical novel about the clandestine struggle against Batista; in 1961, it was awarded to Dora Alonso (correspondent during the Bay of Pigs invasion) for her novel about the pre-revolutionary Cuban past and, in 1962, it was given to Daura Olema, who recounted the story of a bourgeois girl during the Revolution who underwent a conversion to become one of the young teachers in the literacy campaign.

100 Gilman (Ibid) notes that the journal did not publish the most virulent presentations from the Cultural Congress of Havana that took place in January of that year. But these were reproduced across three issues of the CNC journal, *Revolución y Cultura*. Under the direction of Lisandro Otero, the editorial board initially included Fernández Retamar, Guevara, Guillén, Fornet and several other writers and artists vital to this study, including Carpentier, Desnoes, Mariano and Saruský.

101 That summer, in parallel to the mobilisation of the country around the ten million-tonne sugar harvest, *Casa* would eulogise its armed forces, grade its contributors by rank and publish an anthology of texts by military trainees. This was followed by a detailed analysis of the position and authority of a representative selection of writers and artists, measured according to their ability to polemicise (Ibid).

masses in the tasks of the Revolution.¹⁰² This ushered in an era of stifled creativity, to be discussed in chapter ten, which caused Casa to make explicit modifications in order to avoid confrontations with the political leadership; in the presence of the judges of the 1969 literary prize, Haydée confirmed that, while the current year's jurors had been chosen from the best in the field, from the following year they would all come from Latin America. Around the time that the second instalment of the Padilla case erupted in 1971, Casa detected a disastrous campaign being conducted against Cuba in the capitalist press and opted to represent favourable views of conditions at home. Gilman argues that this shift on behalf of one of the institutions with the most integrity 'explained the fears with respect to the artistic leadership manifested by the great majority of Cuban writers and artists' (2003:193). She asserts that, by 1972, faced with a search for ideological legitimacy, *Casa* had adopted a new role – that of the valorisation of theory, including analysis of the minutiae of Marx and the study of 'Our America'. While this will be expanded upon in chapter eight, it is necessary to mention here that Casa has remained one of the most anti-dogmatic of the post-revolutionary institutions. As we shall see, during the grey years, it provided a vital forum from which the continent's artists could consider their revolutionary role.

Consejo Nacional de Cultura (CNC)¹⁰³

As already mentioned, the main agency for promoting culture during Batista's dictatorship was the National Institute of Culture (INC), a repressive organisation that politically committed artists were destined to avoid.¹⁰⁴ Under the direction of a 'pseudo-Martían essayist' (Hernández Otero, 2002:296),¹⁰⁵ the council would strive to create the illusion of neutrality on the part of the government in relation to culture, but it was perceived that its 'real purpose was to subjugate all the cultural organisations of the

102 Misunderstood by 'progressive' Europe, the second declaration was published in the same issue of the journal as an announcement of the UNEAC publication of Padilla and Arrufat, which cited fragments of the arguments against them (Ibid).

103 National Council of Culture.

104 Cuban journalist, Mario Rodríguez Alemán, described how this pompous institution attempted to cajole intellectuals, seeking their support and unconditional submission (Hernández Otero, 2002).

105 Guillermo de Zéndegui (Ibid).

country to the position of the dictatorship through direct or indirect incorporation and bribing or coercively subduing the cultural creators who demonstrated reluctance to collaborate with this organisation' (loc cit).¹⁰⁶

For two full years after revolutionary triumph, the major official entity to promote culture was the Cultural Directorate of MINED. A 1976 publication by the Ministry of Foreign Relations (MINREX) describes the initial popular, anti-imperialist phase of the Revolution being followed by the beginnings of socialist construction, characterised by the perfection of a new educational system and an act of 'extraordinary meaning and transcendence' (1976:10) – the creation of the National Council of Culture. Spawned as an organ of MINED by Law 926 of 4 January 1961, the council initially operated under a president, vice president, secretary and five members designated by the President of the Republic, meeting twice a year with the directors of its various departments (loc cit). For the following fifteen years, all tasks of an artistic and literary nature would be delegated to the CNC, which was overseen in its first incarnation by the aforementioned PSP activists, García Buchaca, Aguirre and Antuña.¹⁰⁷ Analysing the composition of the council, Moore observes that:

As opposed to other areas of government, members of Castro's 26th of July movement did not figure prominently in the CNC. [The 26 July members] chose to take charge of military, economic, and financial sectors, leaving what were perceived as less vital interests such as culture to 'old-guard' Communist leaders. When the revolution triumphed, the PSP [...] was one of the few viable political groups from the past with a national infrastructure and a codified ideology. Castro took advantage of this by affiliating himself with its members. Among other things, he charged it with the formulation of a cultural agenda (2006:83).

Miller asserts that the majority of cultural producers initially identified with the CNC's aim to 'work on the recovery of [their] traditions and the dignifying of artistic and literary work' (2008:686). But, within six months of its creation, tension between

106 In January 1956, its first informative bulletin revealed the gulf that existed between the institute and contemporary practitioners. The issue of *Nuestro Tiempo* published in the same month contemptuously referred to the book festival that had been organised to exhibit books dating back a thousand years before Christ (Ibid).

107 Moore (2006) cites Marinello and Rafael Rodríguez as having been influential in the CNC during its early years. García Buchaca's husband, Joaquín Ordoqui, was also involved and the contribution of PSP activists is said to have overshadowed that of the more moderate writers, such as Carpentier and Lezama Lima (Kapcia, 2005).

the CNC and the country's intellectuals was already in evidence. In an address to intellectuals of June 1961 (to be considered more fully in chapter seven), Fidel probed fears that the CNC sought to inhibit creative expression, finding them to be unfounded and concluding that 'our comrades in the National Council of Culture are as concerned as all of you about the bringing about of the best conditions for the creative endeavours of artists and intellectuals. It is the duty of the Revolution and the Revolutionary Government to see that there is a highly qualified organization that can be relied upon to stimulate, encourage, develop, and guide, yes, guide, that creative spirit' (1961:21).¹⁰⁸ Explicitly exempting Carpentier, Lezama Lima and Antuña, Otero (1997) asserts that early CNC personnel attempted to use the council as a device for implementing the theories of socialism in relation to culture. Guevara (2007) notes that, as the dominant president of the CNC from its foundation, García Buchaca was culpable for the emergence of cultural 'councillors', which drove a wedge between intellectuals and the Revolution.

Defining its own *raison d'être* in the wake of Fidel's vote of confidence, a 1962 report (held in the General Archive of the CNC) describes how the revolutionary process made necessary the existence of an organisation that would orientate and lead the cultural activities being planned by official organisations in response to the cultural policy traced according to the objectives and character of the Revolution (MINREX, 1976). This hints at the centrality and inviolability of an organisation charged with creating the indispensable conditions for the development of an art and literature that would form an integral part of the new social reality (CNC, 1963a). While the precise policy and ideology arising from the CNC will be discussed at length in subsequent chapters, it is useful to map its overall ethos here.

In the beginning, the council concerned itself with ironing out some of the organisational anarchy that existed in the administration of cultural affairs, to achieve

¹⁰⁸ Fidel (1962) expands on the suitability of the CNC in securing the best conditions for artists and intellectuals by invoking its publishing activities, its securing of foreign currency to import books and its purchase of materials for visual artists.

the integration of national, provincial and municipal activities;¹⁰⁹ by the last trimester of 1961, assemblies had taken place in each of the six provinces,¹¹⁰ with full delegations from each municipality representing the mass organisations and participating in determining budgets (MINREX, 1976). By the end of 1962, the CNC had crafted a Preliminary Plan that would define policy for the following year. As will be seen in chapter nine, this was predicated on the proximity of culture and politics under socialism, with cultural activities being harnessed to the most urgent political aims of the revolutionary government in any given period, which, it was anticipated, may include defence, political development and increasing production. In the early years, policy was based on the cultural necessities of the people, and a call would be made to mass organisations to use the strengths of each locality in a bid to increase the interest of workers, farmers and students in cultural activities. At the same time, attention would be given to specialist disciplines and the training of professional artists and professors (1963a).

Of relevance to this study, the idea of a national salon was reinvigorated, with the objective of attracting the participation of all artists in the Republic (CNC, 1963a).¹¹¹ This would provide an occasion for the state to buy works of art, as recommended by jurors, which would expand museum collections (CNC, 1970). A Directorate of Visual Arts was created within the CNC, which was largely centred on the reorganisation of existing museums and the creation of new ones (to be considered shortly).¹¹² This would run alongside departments dealing with exhibitions organised outside museums and galleries¹¹³ and those centred on professional and amateur education (CNC,

109 This included establishing relations with the national commissions of social circles and extra-scholarly activities and with the ministries of education, public works, foreign relations and the Revolutionary Armed Forces as well as all other relevant state institutions and mass organisations and the National Commission of UNESCO (MINREX, 1976).

110 Until 1976, these were Pinar del Río, La Habana, Matanzas, Las Villas, Camagüey and Oriente.

111 This alternated each year between painting/sculpture and printmaking.

112 The revolutionary government had recovered and restored various collections amassed through exploitation, including furniture and weapons, and the CNC set about ensuring they would be exhibited in provincial museums and galleries. In painting, more than 350 works were being restored by the National Museum of Fine Arts in the early 1960s, in advance of an exhibition in November 1962, while a further 500 works of art in diverse media were restored for future exhibitions (CNC, 1963a).

113 A promotion section within the Directorate of Visual Arts organised visits to work centres and coordinated an extension activity aimed at those who would not habitually visit exhibitions (CNC, 1970). Supported by a mounting department, this would be reorganised to cope with national demand

1963a).¹¹⁴ While a reorganised Casa de las Américas was taken under the CNC umbrella, ICAIC retained its juridical autonomy; nonetheless, the film institute's activities were reported on by the council within the broader ambit of revolutionary cultural policy and ICAIC representatives participated in meetings at which CNC policy was decided (CNC, 1970). Pogolotti (2006) retrospectively finds that subordination under this hierarchical organisation ended the possibility of these well-defined institutions determining their own cultural policy.¹¹⁵ For her, bringing diverse entities, with very specific roles, under one official arm and promoting dialogue between distinct intellectual families made latent discrepancies visible; as we shall see, this did not always have positive consequences.

In July 1963, it was decided that, as the central cultural planning organisation, the CNC needed its autonomy from the state, which led to it being detached from MINED and taken directly under the Council of Ministers.¹¹⁶ This independence lasted for four years and, in 1966, the process of taking the CNC back under the auspices of MINED was initiated, which concluded in April 1967.¹¹⁷ In the meantime, García Buchaca had been disgraced and replaced by the diplomat and journalist, Carlos Lechuga, and psychiatrist, Dr. Eduardo Muzio, working alongside Lisandro Otero, with Gramatges as an advisor (Moore, 2006).

In 1971, the CNC would again be transformed, when Luis Pavón – former FAR officer and editor of its magazine, *Verde Olivo* – was appointed as president. This led to a situation in which none of the leadership 'had organic relations with the vanguard. The nexi of continuity had been carefully broken or reduced to a minimum' (Fornet, 2007:394). Coinciding with a new phase of autonomy for the CNC, the council was

for multifarious exhibitions, via work centres, student groups, farms, the Ministry of the Revolutionary Armed Forces and mass organisations (CNC, 1963a).

114 A Department of Education was created to lend greater attention to the public, by organising courses and conferences directed at scholars and by preparing graphics and reproductions of artworks for dissemination in schools. This department conceived of museums as living centres of study (Ibid).

115 At the CNC's First National Congress of Culture, held in December 1962, which will be discussed in the next chapter, Che defended ICAIC's autonomy 'against PSP criticism, while ICAIC criticised the CNC's "populism" and defended artistic experimentation' (Kacía, 2005:135).

116 Under Law 1117 of 18 July 1963 (Asesora Jurídica Nacional, 1980).

117 On 27 April 1967, it was ascribed to MINED under law 1202 (loc cit). The October following re-assimilation coincided with publication of the first issue of the CNC journal *Revolución y Cultura*.

reorganised, with the president overseeing all the areas detailed in the diagram below, in addition to representing the organisation within the Popular Council of Education, Culture and Sport, UNESCO and all international organisations. The president and vice president also dictated all directives, resolutions, instructions and circulars¹¹⁸ related to cultural policy, general organisation of the CNC, plans of work, naming of leadership personnel and more besides. The next five years would witness a bleak and treacherous period for cultural policy, characterised by dogmatism and mediocrity, which will be expanded upon in chapter ten. In March 1974, the CNC was restored as a central organisation under the Vice Minister for Education, Culture and Science, governed and administered by a president and one or more vice presidents, who could be designated and removed by the President of the Republic and Prime Minister upon the recommendation of the Minister. With this, the CNC began a new stage of institutional development (MINREX, 1976).¹¹⁹

At the first congress of the PCC in December 1975, material reinforcement of the CNC was announced as part of a generalised need to strengthen cultural institutions in their ideological aspect as much as in their artistic and technical facets (Comité Central del PCC, 1976). In the event, what transpired was the dissolution of the council

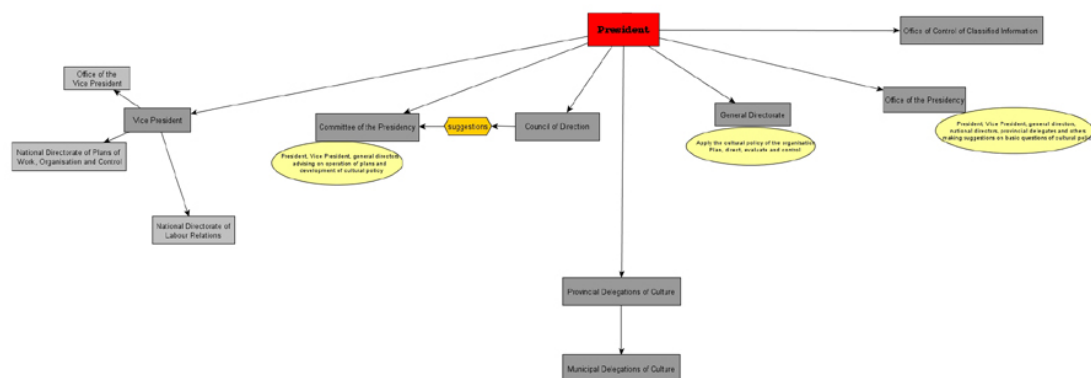


Diagram showing the omnipotence of the CNC president between 1971 and 1976

118 Directives dealt with the most important general dispositions; resolutions dealt with the general organisation of the CNC, naming of leadership and other personnel; instructions and circulars dealt with operative questions, clarifications and orientations of a general type or concrete character related to application of a directive or resolution (MINREX, 1976).

119 On 8 March 1974, Law 1266 re-established the CNC as a central organisation (MINREX, 1976).

on 31 November 1976 and its replacement with MINCULT. And, while a retrospective consideration of the CNC, undertaken in the same year, concluded that it had remained loyal to its first objective – of being the instrument of orientation and leadership, in co-ordination with other state and mass organisations, in relation to the tasks of the party and government in attaining a culture for the masses and by the masses (MINREX, 1976) – considerable damage was done to professional development during this period as will be considered in the remainder of this study.

The Ministry of Culture (MINCULT)

In 1976, a National Assembly was set up and the Council of Ministers established a new Ministry of Culture (Pogolotti, 2010). Created under Law 1323,¹²⁰ the ministry became the ‘lead agency for implementing and monitoring cultural policy, art and literature of the state and government’ (Garrudo Marañón and Hart Dávalos, 1978). As such, it is necessary to note its existence as a key cultural institution within this chapter. Complementing the activities of regional organisations, the ministry was intended to oversee culture at a national level, focusing on ‘guidance, technique and methodology’ (Sarusky and Mosquera, 1979:23), fostering cultural development and administering policy in relation to artistic education.¹²¹ As we shall see in chapter ten, despite being established ‘along Soviet lines at the same time as the refurbished Communist Party’ (Gott, 2004:248), it engendered a less dogmatic outlook than that perpetuated by the CNC.¹²²

120 This law of 30 November 1976 related more generally to state administration. On 4 August 1977, the Ministry was entrusted with the protection of cultural patrimony (under law 1).

121 In the first full year of its operation, Hart outlined the task ahead. For him, the first thing that needed to be clarified was that, while art and literature were forms through which culture could be expressed, the content of culture was much fuller and more profound. In order for art and literature to be developed, the essence of this problem needed to be understood – in other words, the phenomenon of culture and its social content needed to be analysed, which, in the Cuban case, entailed an analysis of its popular roots (Santana, 1977).

122 While Hart presided over moderate improvements, Miller argues that the work of MINCULT ‘improved dramatically when Hart was replaced by Abel Prieto in 1997’ (2008:679). A former president of UNEAC and a writer himself, Prieto had played an important role in defending Cuban intellectuals from PSP accusations. From the late 1990s, he advocated the creation of controlled spaces for critical debate (Fernandes, 2007).

Unión Nacional de Escritores y Artistas de Cuba (UNEAC)¹²³

From the scant information that exists in English scholarship, it is possible to discern that the National Union of Cuban Writers and Artists was founded as a direct consequence of the August 1961 First National Congress of Writers and Artists (to be discussed in chapter seven), with leading writers at its head (Kapcia, 2005),¹²⁴ and that the union was organised over different creative disciplines, with members grouped according to the art form in which they worked.¹²⁵ In its genesis, Kumaraswami finds that the ‘new association would allow both the CNC to be more effective and, importantly, for this sector to manage its own creative practices, as long as these fell broadly within the definition of revolution’ (2009:535). In order to understand more about this, we must turn to Cuban sources.

According to a publication detailing forty-five years of UNEAC history (Rodríguez Manso, 2010), artists and writers had made a proposal for an association with similar ends as early as the 1930s. Presided over by leftist intellectuals, including Guillén, the intended union was to have been a way of defending the work of its members, without conforming to typical trade union models (Pogolotti 2010). The group met several times, but the initiative was never finalised (Rodríguez Manso, 2010). Despite parallels with the Soviet processes (to be discussed in the next chapter), Pogolotti (2010), the current president of the union, describes how, in the early 1960s, nobody thought it a bad idea to have an organisation in which artists could come together and exchange, which would give them a voice and allow them to pursue their own projects. After much debate, it was agreed that UNEAC would be an autonomous organisation, with its own juridical character and legal capacity, which should group together writers and artists interested in contributing, through their work, to the success of the Cuban Revolution (Rodríguez Manso, 2010).

123 National Union of Cuban Writers and Artists.

124 The creation of a union was one of the stated aims of this congress, forming one of the three discussion points on the programme and being alluded to by name in an early speech by the director of the CNC (UNEAC, 1961).

125 Otero describes how the union aimed to encourage the creation of literature and art, promote conditions favourable to the intellectual work of its members and mesh the work of artists and writers to revolutionary tasks, ‘procuring the latter’s reflection and promotion by such works’ (1972:37).

The union was created with a sixty-strong national committee, which included the most influential protagonists from all disciplines (with twelve plastic artists among them). From this was drawn a thirteen-member executive committee, with Guillén as president and, among others, Carpentier, Lezama Lima,¹²⁶ Portuondo, Guillermo Cabrera Infante and Alicia Alonso as vice presidents and the thirty-one-year-old Fernández Retamar as secretary.¹²⁷ Reading out the union's statutes at its formative congress,¹²⁸ Fernández Retamar would point to UNEAC as an organisation of the Revolution, a tool through which artists and writers could participate in the realisation of the Revolution, united through their specific labour and exercise of their vocation. As such, the union eschewed passive, beautifying approaches and strict adherence to any particular tendency, with variety and quality being paramount. On this latter point, Fernández Retamar was emphatic; the union would not tolerate, and much less sponsor, any narrow-mindedness that sought to limit the rich plurality of forms and tendencies (UNEAC, 1961).¹²⁹

From the outset, the aims of the organisation were: to favour the creation of literary and artistic works; to promote beneficial conditions for the intellectual work of its members; to link the works of writers and artists to the great tasks of the Cuban Revolution, reflecting that encounter in said works; to organise free discussions on the problems of literary and artistic creation; to stimulate new tendencies; to enhance the study of traditions and to define national Cuban characteristics, examined in a critical manner; to fortify links with the literature and art of the fraternal nations of Latin America; to increase cultural relations with all the countries of the world, especially

¹²⁶ Author of *Paradiso*, a novel rich in homosexual content.

¹²⁷ Others on the secretariat – notably José A. Baragaño and Lisandro Otero – were both twenty-nine (Fernández Retamar, 2001), and the average age of the membership was also very low (Fernández Retamar, 1995). Voting on the national committee and presidency would take place every three years (UNEAC, 1961). By the second half of the 1970s, the organisational structure was described as being comprised of one president and eight vice presidents (representing diverse disciplines), a secretary coordinator, a secretary of cultural activities, a secretary of public relations and an administrative secretary, with five provincial affiliates with their own secretaries (MINREX, 1976).

¹²⁸ The statutes, which were presented in draft form, in advance of enrichment and ratification, had arisen from studies of similar documents in other countries, applied to the specific circumstances of Cuba at that moment (UNEAC, 1961).

¹²⁹ The concrete finalities of the union would incorporate the interlinked aims of utility and bettering the material conditions of artists and writers. Criteria for admission would be identification with the Revolution (UNEAC, 1961) and the creation of literary-artistic work and/or the participation in activities of this nature which demonstrated high technical capacity, quality and originality (MINREX, 1976).

those which have socialist experience; to favour the formation of literary and artistic talents, orientating their forces and contributing to the distribution of their works (CNC, 1970). It would achieve this by executing projects in parallel with those made by governmental institutions, including the organisation of art exhibitions and publishing, which continues today. The Cuban state assigned the union a budget and determined resources to enable the development of its work; members also paid a nominal subscription of two pesos per month (Pogolotti, 2010).

Mirroring the structure of *Nuestro Tiempo*,¹³⁰ members were grouped into sections representing literature, visual arts, music, theatre, cinema, ballet and dance.¹³¹ In turn, the sections were subdivided into different genres and responsible for deciding on their individual membership (MINREX, 1976). In 1967, Salkey would observe UNEAC to be:

[...] housed in once-fashionable Vedado, in a large elegant family residence: spacious [sic] reception hall, lounge with well-stocked bar, esplanade-veranda with colonial-style garden furniture, meeting rooms, exhibition areas and offices; in the buildings off the house, very impressive club library, bookshop, studios and workshops. We saw many writers' books on show, and tasteful displays of lithographic and lino-cut work, posters and book illustrations. All-round excellent atmosphere for encouraging young unestablished writers and artists. Union altogether enviable (no P.E.N. Club gloom here) (Ibid:36-7).

Pogolotti (2010) describes how the union initially functioned as a club, being a place with few offices but an excellent café in which people could meet and, very rapidly, it had shops where it was possible to acquire artists' materials, books and magazines; it also had a library and many similar spaces but, over time, some of these were lost to the growing and unique organisation.

Interestingly, at the founding congress, Fidel would distinguish UNEAC – which was orientated towards creative ends – from workers' unions, or syndicates, on the basis that UNEAC would represent the efforts of many who were not members of a syndicate. In this, Fidel drew a rather unflattering comparison between UNEAC

130 Massip (2001) notes that it is instructive to see that, in Article 41 of its constitution, UNEAC adopted the five-part organisational structure that *Nuestro Tiempo* had introduced twenty years earlier.
131 Pogolotti (2010) describes how the sections initially included visual arts, music and literature, with theatre being included shortly afterwards and, many years later, a section for cinema, radio and television being included.

members and non-partisan housewives who might not belong to a union, playing an active part in the Committees for the Defence of the Revolution instead. By this rationale, UNEAC was not conceived of as a party organisation (Rodríguez Manso, 2010); by the time of the first PCC congress in 1975, it was being considered alongside the National Union of Arts and Spectacles and the Union of Press and Freedom, with co-operation between these organisations being encouraged in elevating the cultural level of the people as a defence against imperialism (Comité Central del PCC, 1976).¹³²

During a debacle around *Lunes de Revolución* two months prior to the foundation of UNEAC (to be considered in chapter seven), Fidel (1961) had expressed the wish that writers and artists should have a magazine that was accessible to all in their cohort; rather than putting resources into the hands of a particular group, he argued, these resources should be mobilised through a union. On 15 April 1962, this offer was realised with the foundation by the union of not one but two journals – *La Gaceta de Cuba*¹³³ and *Unión*.¹³⁴ Both were overseen by Guillén on the proviso that the reactionary and counter-revolutionary would be excluded; the former had input from Otero,¹³⁵ the latter from Carpentier and Fernández Retamar.¹³⁶ Published six times a year in an edition of 5,000, the 64-page *Gaceta* is described as having passed through several distinct phases, reflecting on the most vivid happenings in Cuban culture throughout the 1960s (always encompassing provincial practice), becoming a more theoretical space

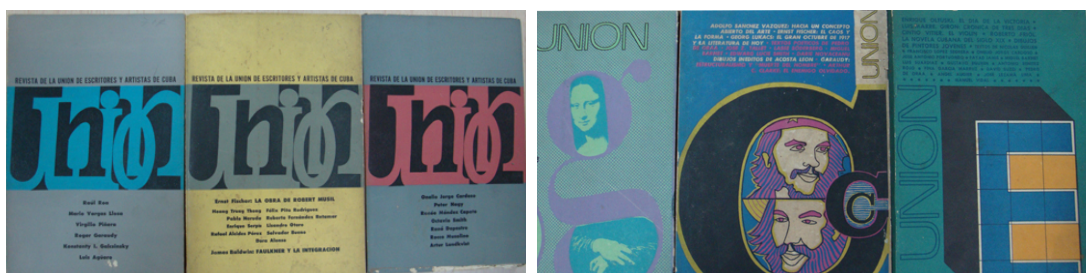
132 All workers' organisations were charged with orientating their activities to ideological training and moral and aesthetic development within a Marxist-Leninist framework. UNEAC's need for autonomy was reinforced, in accordance with its socio-political commitment, and its activity was grounded in collective direction, democratic election and the initiative of its members (Comité Central del PCC, 1976).

133 This journal took its name from *La Gaceta del Caribe*, a monthly magazine published from March to December 1944, which had Guillén, Portuondo, Ángel Augier, Mirta Aguirre and Félix Pita Rodríguez on its editorial board (Rodríguez Manso, 2010). Associated with the PSP, it 'provided space for Havana's cultural radicals and [...] defended committed literature, advocated public art and publicised Cuban writers' (Kapcia, 2005:95).

134 Contrary to this perspective, Karol – a sympathiser of Franqui, whose journal, *Lunes*, was folded to make way for the UNEAC publications – attests that the union has 'never produced a journal – it does, however, put out a run-of-the-mill magazine called *Unión*, whose small circulation is a measure of their lack of originality' (1970:241). The unfavourable comparison to *Lunes*'s circulation of 250,000 is unfair as the latter was a supplement to the most popular daily newspaper. By contrast, the UNEAC publications are geared towards a specialist readership throughout the island and their quality attested to by the composition of their editorial personnel.

135 Over the years, directors included Otero, Sarusky and Luis Marré, with Norberto Codina serving for twenty years (Ibid).

136 In 1981, the *Revista de Literatura Cubana* [Magazine of Cuban Literature] would be added to the union's publishing repertoire.



Covers of the UNEAC journal, *Unión*

in the 1970s and, from the late 1980s and early 1990s onwards, serving as a place for the exchange of ideas which began to include the Cuban diaspora in Spain, the US and beyond (Rodríguez Manso, 2010). In chapter nine, we shall see that, in 1963–4, this would provide a vital platform from which film-makers and their allies could defend a pluralistic notion of culture.

Initiated at the same time, *Unión* had a different responsibility to its members as a place ‘where cultural policies were outlined, defended and expressed’ (Kapcia, 2005:134). Led by prominent figures from Cuban culture and published four times a year in an edition of 2,000, the magazine was more international in its focus. Apart from publishing authors and artists from Cuba, it dedicated a good part of its pages to essays and works of fiction from foreign writers and organised monographic issues around writers from Europe (including the Eastern bloc) and Vietnam (Rodríguez Manso, 2010). In addition to this, the UNEAC literary prize formed the national equivalent of Casa’s continental honours (Pogolotti, 2006), and was accompanied in 1966 by the David prize for novelists (MINREX, 1976). With reference to the visual arts, UNEAC ran an annual salon, and an artistic bulletin was published, discussing issues of concern to the sector and introducing materials of interest to artists (CNC, 1970). Through the Hermanos Saíz Brigade,¹³⁷ UNEAC would channel its creative concerns to a young audience, with a visual arts branch being initiated with ninety-two members at the end of April 1974, swelling to 160 within two years and collaborating with the CNC for resources and venues (MINREX, 1976).

¹³⁷ Named after the brothers Luis Rodolfo and Sergio Enrique Saíz – members of the Revolutionary Directorate who would join the 26 July Movement – this group would fuse, in 1968, with the Raúl Gómez García Brigade and the Movimiento de la Nueva Trova [New Trova Movement], with the intention of stimulating literary and artistic creation. See <http://www.ahs.cu> (accessed 5 December 2011).

In 1969, Fornet asserted that the creation of UNEAC led to a paradoxical situation in which all writers and intellectuals were subsumed, by giving them private ownership of the terrain of high culture in the midst of a Revolution which did not believe in private property (Dalton et al, 1969). Having publicly expelled Guillermo Cabrera Infante and refuted Padilla's prize-winning poetry (see chapter ten), the union began to stagnate, by virtue of its ageing membership and the relatively complicated admissions process.¹³⁸ At its 1988 congress, Fidel, Armando Hart and Carlos Rafael Rodríguez all 'stressed the need for youth, the evils of dogmatic approaches, and the importance of freedom in form and content' (Camnitzer, 1994:xxviii). On being asked to reflect on the formation of UNEAC thirty-five years later,¹³⁹ Fernández Retamar (1995) referred back to the pronouncements that were made during the founding congress. Among the general aims outlined above, he finds much candour and an expression of love for the Revolution, then very new, with its essential wish for justice. Reflecting on the early years of struggle and contradiction and, above all, of enthusiasm, creation, diversity and youth, he regrets that the intensity of the early years was not possible to sustain. Yet, he finds that, in the rejuvenated UNEAC of the 1990s, the fire of the early years, instigated by Guillén and his compañeros, has not been extinguished. Two years later, Fernández Retamar would go on to consider that this 'fabulous new institution' had been founded with the 'sense of unity, the amplitude of aesthetic criteria, the rejection of all dogmatism or sectarianism, the multi-generational character' (2001:301) that had been advocated by Fidel.

While Kapcia (2005) considers ICAIC, the CNC and *Lunes* to have been central in determining policy from the bottom up, Linda S. Howe (2004) details varying levels of commitment in relation to the implementation of cultural policy within post-revolutionary institutions, with Casa de las Américas demonstrating flexibility towards

138 Kapcia discerns that, for years, UNEAC was 'regarded as the place where the "official" elite gathered and defined itself, with a certain hierarchy of credibility' (2005:190). Camnitzer also describes how the youngest generation of artists regarded the union as stuffy and part of the establishment. Further, he explains, 'Membership in the UNEAC is not easy (presentation of potential members by two current members, and eight months waiting for acceptance after a careful evaluation of the candidate's work), nor is exiting, which explains the predominance of older members' (1994:193).

139 This invitation came from Abel Prieto, who had replaced Hart as Minister of Culture and met with an estimated 450 writers and artists to discuss the issue.

iconoclastic artists and UNEAC showing relative intransigence. Nonetheless, the union was seemingly a major driving force in representing the interests of its members. From the official perspective at the end of the 1970s, the achievement of UNEAC was regarded as having been ‘to unite creative artists in pursuit of a fundamental objective: to produce work of artistic quality and to build up a revolutionary society’ (Saruský and Mosquera, 1979:33). In conversation in 2010, De Juan attests that membership of UNEAC remains a stamp of professionalism, whereby artists and writers are assessed every five years and must continue to prove themselves by producing exhibitions and books.

Museums and Galleries

In 1972, Otero drew up a retrospective inventory of cultural institutions before the Revolution and found that there had been six museums centred on Havana, the most important of which was the palatial National Museum of Fine Arts, which was in slightly better condition than others, although much of the building was used for storage.¹⁴⁰ In the first post-revolutionary gesture towards museums, Law 110 of 27 February 1959 brought about a swift reform of the National Museum’s board of trustees and, in October of the same year, an exceptional grant was made for its restoration (Asesora Jurídica Nacional, 1980).¹⁴¹

From 1961, the CNC was made responsible for preserving and operating museums, and, as we have seen, a National Museums Commission was formed under the Visual Arts Directorate. This necessitated the creation of a team capable of managing



The National Museum of Fine Arts
(international section)

¹⁴⁰ Otero’s report was published in English by UNESCO and seems largely drawn from CNC data. A 1970 CNC document on the cultural policy of Cuba describes the pre-revolutionary concentration of museums in Havana and their occasional organisation in provincial capitals alongside some private institutions.

¹⁴¹ This *crédito extraordinario* was granted under law 592 of 7 October 1959 (Asesora Jurídica Nacional, 1980). A museum summary, conducted by the CNC in 1962, gives details of the third floor of the National Museum of Fine Arts being adapted for the installation of a Cuban collection of paintings and other art objects (CNC, 1963a).

permanent collections and orientating them to the museums and galleries being constructed in different provinces.¹⁴² In 1963, a Commission of Museums and Monuments was set up (MINREX, 1976), making a further ten museums and four galleries operational. By 1964, five more museums had been created in other key places, hosting permanent exhibitions of painting, sculpture and printmaking (CNC, 1963c). These enabled the people to become familiar with the country's artists while serving as a platform for the sale of artworks to the state. During a second stage, eleven new museums were built,¹⁴³ making a total of thirty new cultural centres by 1972, with many of the museums aimed at restoring the lost traditions of Cuban folk art (Sarusky and Mosquera, 1979).



The National Museum of Fine Arts (national section)

While fourteen exhibitions had been staged in 1962, 100 were planned for 1963 (CNC, 1963a) and, by 1965, 1,800 exhibitions of Cuban and foreign artists were being toured around the island (MININD, 1966).¹⁴⁴ By the time MINCULT was established 'In 1976, Cuban museums were visited by 1.5 million people, which is a very high figure, if it is borne in mind that Cuba is a developing country and that the people were formerly not accustomed to visiting museums' (Ibid:26). By 1979, fifty-eight museums were in operation in twelve of the fourteen provinces,¹⁴⁵ six of which were art museums (Sarusky and Mosquera, 1979). Resolution 38/81 of 1981 ordained the creation of ten basic cultural institutions in each municipality, which provoked an unexpected growth in cultural organisations (MINCULT, 1983).¹⁴⁶



The Centre for the Development of Visual Arts

142 The Museums Directorate was run by a committee, made up of members of the academies of science and history alongside specialists of the visual arts and architecture, which would study conditions local to the museums earmarked for renovation or construction (Ibid).

143 Including the Museum of Decorative Arts; the Napoleon Museum; Hemingway Museum; Colonial Museum; Sancti-Spiritus-Frank País ('the martyr of our revolution') and memorial museums (Ibid).

144 In Havana and its environs, thirty-four institutions were ascribed to MINCULT (1983), including the National Museum of Fine Arts, UNEAC, the national school for training arts instructors and the professional art schools mentioned at the end of this chapter.

145 In 1976, fourteen provinces were created from the original six.

146 Working with the Local Organs of People's Power and the Cultural Directorates.

A similar pattern is evident in the gallery infrastructure. In 1962, large galleries were created in each of the six provincial capitals as part of a plan to foster the conditions necessary for the development of painters and sculptors throughout the island, which paved the way for touring exhibitions between thirteen galleries and



The Wifredo Lam Contemporary Art Centre

numerous exhibition halls.¹⁴⁷ From a situation in 1961 in which artists had to compete to exhibit in the few state- or private-run institutions, a network of twenty-five galleries was set up, twenty of which still existed by 1972; between 1963 and 1975, these galleries attracted 900,000 visitors to see a range of national, provincial, international and touring exhibitions organised by the CNC (Sarusky and Mosquera, 1979).¹⁴⁸ In detailing the infrastructure for the plastic arts, Kapcia goes on to describe how:

[...] other spaces opened up, notably the influential 1963 exhibition of *Expresión Abstracta*¹⁴⁹ at the Galería de La Habana, and the new and influential Club Cubano de Bellas Artes¹⁵⁰ and its bi-monthly *Gaceta de Bellas Artes*. Meanwhile, the old Grupo de los Once continued, under Raúl Martínez, stressing the importance of both public and socially useful art [...]

The outcome was a refreshing vitality and sense of innovation, although, as with film, the growing shortages affected styles, notably the reliance on silk-screen painting [sic] and the tendency to use limited colours and tones, making a virtue out of necessity in the exaltation of simplicity and even blank spaces (Kapcia, 2005:144).¹⁵¹

According to official figures, the 1960s saw a massive upsurge in attendance at cultural events, with nearly two million exhibitions being staged (CNC, 1970).¹⁵² By the end

147 Including the Bacardi Museum (Santiago de Cuba); Agramonte Museum (Camagüey); Remedios Museum; Cárdenos Museum and the museum in the house where José Martí was born (Otero, 1972).

148 As the central organisation, the CNC sent exhibitions touring around the island, with twenty-four being sent to the provinces in 1964 and thirty-six being staged in Havana (CNC, 1963c).

149 Abstract Expression.

150 Cuban Club of Fine Arts.

151 It was stated that:

In terms of concrete measures for the immediate future, the people, State and Communist Party of Cuba have set themselves the following tasks: (a) the consistent and harmonious growth of the cultural infrastructure, particularly cultural facilities: *casas de cultura*, library network, theatres, cinemas, lecture halls and reading rooms, art galleries, etc.; (b) the extension of publishing and printing activities, aiming at greater quantity, better quality and wider variety; (c) the improvement of radio and television programmes; (d) the development of film studios and raising the quality of their production; (e) the incorporation of aesthetics into the education system, with emphasis on the establishment and development of art schools and workshops, and on artistic education as part of the curriculum of basic education; (f) the strengthening of the cultural institutions and professional organizations of writers and artists (Sarusky and Mosquera, 1979:49-50).

152 Of these, 1,852,304 were urban and 107,114 were rural (CNC, 1970).

of the 1970s, a commitment to building a cultural infrastructure was evinced by the revolutionary government. By 1991, the visual arts would boast a total of 117 galleries, attracting around 500,000 visitors per year (MINCULT, 1991). Beyond the conventional infrastructure, the CNC also toured exhibitions to workplaces, such as trade unions, military units and student organisations (MININD, 1966).

Casas de Cultura¹⁵³

Since the emergence of the Cuban working class in the middle of the nineteenth century, the Casas de Cultura had played an important role as a meeting place for the proletariat, operating alongside workers' clubs throughout the country and making a significant contribution to raising political consciousness (Garrudo Marañón and Hart Dávalos, 1978). While, under the CNC, priority was given to the development of museums and galleries, the Casas remained active in stimulating cultural activities amongst the population, alongside work and student centres and mass organisations, with 131 exhibitions being programmed in such venues for 1964 (CNC, 1963c).

The opening of MINCULT caused a significant change within the institutional landscape, via the creation of a national system of Casas de Cultura, to cope with the growing demand for cultural enjoyment and rising education levels.¹⁵⁴ The overall aim of the Casa network was to stimulate and develop the creative propensity, ability and taste of the population, and Sarusky and Mosquera describe how the object of an initial fifty Casas was 'to bring the people into direct contact with art, to disseminate culture, to raise the educational level of the population and to provide it with opportunities for leisure and recreation' (1979:25). Their role was 'to acquaint the masses with the different forms of artistic expression, so that people will in this way learn to appreciate works of art and have the opportunity to pursue their own artistic interests' (Ibid:26).

153 Houses of Culture.

154 Under Resolution 8 of 24 January 1978, the national system of Casas de Cultura was linked to the Ministry of Culture, the Directorate of Cultural Orientation and Extension and the Directorate of Amateur Artists (Ibid).

More specifically, the Casas aimed to contribute to: the integral formation of the population, especially the young and children, principally in the field of artistic and literary culture, according to Marxist-Leninist principles and consistent with the PCC; the enjoyment and participation of the people in various cultural and artistic events, through activities planned for their free time; the quality of artistic and literary development and the skills of their creators and performers; the enrichment of the cultural heritage of communities, encouraging its expansion by incorporating the best of national and universal culture (Garrudo Marañón and Hart Dávalos, 1978). In achieving this objective, collaboration was encouraged between the Casas and all the other cultural organisations within and beyond a given locality, including museums, libraries, cinemas, galleries, theatres and universities. The priorities advanced by the cultural institutions of the community included cultural orientation and artistic education (Hart Dávalos, 1978).¹⁵⁵ A specially created Directorate of Cultural Orientation and Extension ensured that each municipality ‘would minimally have a library, a museum and a Casa de Cultura [...] although many already existed’ (Kapcia, 2005:156).¹⁵⁶



The Casa de Cultura in Trinidad de Cuba

The founding structure of these new model organisations was inherently hierarchical, with a director having maximum authority over each Casa and overseeing departments of artistic technique, activities and administration. It was further prescribed that the directorate would have collective responsibility for a governing council, a technical council, a committee of users and a board of directors. While having a right to access Casas, the population was informed of its responsibility to recognise

¹⁵⁵ This was elaborated in Resolution 8/78 of 24 January 1978.

¹⁵⁶ Eligio Fernández notes that the 1970s were ‘marked by the institutional, by ambitious and sometimes delirious cultural programs aimed at socializing the production of artists – like when they tried and almost succeeded in opening an art gallery in every municipality in the country’ (1999:41). Kapcia explains that, rather than following any pre-ordained, or Soviet, model, this was ‘clearly a formalisation of a more organic process’ (2005:156).

the maximum authority of the director while maintaining a collective attitude and strictly preserving the requisites established with respect to socialist ownership (Hart Dávalos, 1979). Strict co-ordination with mass political organisations, including People's Power,¹⁵⁷ was also emphasised, with vigilance over the rules, norms, instructions and methodologies emanating from superior levels being urged. The first function outlined for this new network of organisations was 'To favour the development of activities of a patriotic character which contribute to the political and ideological formation of our people' (Ibid:2).¹⁵⁸ The Casas would become the headquarters of the burgeoning *aficionados* movement of amateur artists, to be discussed in more detail in chapter nine. As a counterpoint to this, an explicit link was made between the Casas and the professional artists and writers of the community – who were said to be contributing to this 'valuable cultural work and throw[ing] themselves wholeheartedly into the search for genuinely Cuban artistic values' (Saruský and Mosquera, 1979:26).

In the 1990s, the decentralisation of culture to specialist local organisations was centred on popular councils in the smallest communities, with a view to their 'germinating and multiplying in infinite experiences which are finally converting culture into the patrimony of all' (MINCULT, 1991:6).¹⁵⁹ This saw the Casas being relegated to considering expanded forms of culture, such as homeopathy and organic gardening, which sought 'to use the Casa to foment a new culture of basic survival' (Kapcia, 2005:201), compelling them to morph from being top-down institutions into those adopting a more participatory approach.

157 Set up in 1976, Kapcia describes this as a 'new Soviet-style pyramidal structure' (2005:123), operating as the 'first national system or representation (as opposed to grass-roots participation)' (2008:38). By the 1970s, the Casas de Cultura, cinemas, theatres and libraries were being controlled locally by People's Power. 'This decentralized system means that basic decisions in cultural matters rest with the community' (Saruský and Mosquera, 1979:23).

158 Article 41 gives priority to discussions on cinema, short courses on history and the appreciation of the arts, with patriotic-revolutionary education listed after cultural orientation and artistic education in the priorities for the new organisations (Hart Dávalos, 1979).

159 Fidel had earlier described centralisation as 'damaging and negative [...] because it weakens local activities, the entire local life; it obstructs the possibility of overcoming many small faults; it impeded the initiative and action of communities for the solution of problems that are peculiar to each one of them. Once we became aware of this, we began the development of new local institutions, more decentralized forms of public administration' (Lockwood, 1967:152).

Educational Institutions

No consideration of post-revolutionary cultural institutions would be complete without addressing the changes undergone within art education. Having been modelled after European *conservatoires*, Cuban art schools were slower to develop during the years of Spanish colonisation than those for theatre, music or literature. A boost for painting would be provided through the influence of Jean Baptiste Vermay, ‘who founded the Escuela de Arte de San Alejandro in the Convento de San Agustin in 1819. [...] This academy followed European models under successive directors [...] and, from the late 1820s, [developed] two strands: aesthetic education and more applied art’ (Ibid:49).

While the revolutionary approach to aesthetics will be dealt with in more detail in the sixth chapter of this report, it is necessary to state here that the French model presumed that skills could be taught and that likeness, or mimesis, was paramount. European avant-garde movements in the first third of the twentieth century, such as the Bauhaus, which suggested otherwise, had little impact in Cuba and, while some reforms were made in the teaching of architecture, little changed in the mainstream art schools in advance of the Revolution (Camnitzer, 1994).

This grounding in the French bourgeois tradition inevitably created some conflicts with the post-revolutionary situation. But, even before then, the conservatism of San Alejandro (where Cuba’s famous surrealist, Wifredo Lam, and others studied)¹⁶⁰ had given rise to several alternatives, including non-academic exhibition spaces and open-air schools in rural areas, which came to fruition in artist, Eduardo Abela’s Estudio Libre.¹⁶¹ In 1936, Estudio Libre offered free tuition, materials and technical assistance to eighty of an initial 200 applicants, using surplus Ministry of Education funding and Abela’s personal resources. The avant-garde presence lacking across disciplines was fully realised in the plastic arts, ‘with exhibitions, lectures and discussions on the latest developments [...]. Here, the divisions evident in literature did not seem to apply; instead, *vanguardismo*, political commitment and the search for *lo cubano* fused easily’

¹⁶⁰ After the Revolution, San Alejandro ‘tried to rejuvenate itself but still retains the old academic spirit’ (Benedetti, 1969:506).

¹⁶¹ Free Studio. This began life as the Escuela Libre de Artes Plásticas [Free School of Plastic Arts].

(Kapcia, 2005:99-100).¹⁶² This experiment culminated in a landmark salon exhibition in 1937,¹⁶³ and, while Estudio Libre lasted little over a year, it continues to be referred to as a model.

During the dictatorship, Batista's Minister of Education announced plans to reform teaching in San Alejandro and contemplated building a new school of visual arts (Hernández Otero, 2002). After the triumph of the Revolution, legend has it that Fidel and Che were playing golf at a former country club at Cubanacán on the outskirts of Havana, discussing ways in which the momentum of the literacy campaign could be extended into the promotion of cultural activities. Surrounded by rolling hills on all sides, they decided to use this unique site as a centre for education across the creative disciplines, and thus the National Schools of Art (ENA)¹⁶⁴ were born (Loomis, 1999). The revolutionary government quickly formed a board of schools to draw up a programme:

[...] that would serve Cubans as a center for the education of artists and instructors from which to disseminate cultural literacy throughout the island. But in response to Che Guevara's internationalist interests, the program would extend beyond that and serve as an international center, primarily drawing from the Third World, granting full scholarships to some three thousand students from Africa, Asia and Latin America in the service of the creation of a 'new culture' for the 'new man.' The political objective of the schools would be to educate those artists who would give socialism in both Cuba and the Third World its aesthetic representations. Moreover, the schools were conceived as an experimental center for intercultural education and exchange (Ibid:20).

The five national schools – of music, plastic arts, dramatic art, ballet and modern/folkloric dance – were soon accompanied by six provincial schools, for the teaching of all the arts, and a number of schools in different regions/cities, leading to a total of twenty-four schools for the arts (Otero, 1972).¹⁶⁵

While the Revolution saw the exodus of many established architects, several political exiles returned



A bird's-eye view of the National School of Plastic Arts

162 Kapcia defines *lo cubano* as 'Cuban-ness' (2005:97).

163 Exposición del Salón de Dependientes [Exhibition of the Salon of Dependants].

164 Escuelas Nacionales de Arte.

165 By 1991, forty-nine centres existed around the country (twenty-six elementary, twenty-two intermediate level and one superior) (MINCULT, 1991).

to contribute to revolutionary culture, and Ricardo Porro¹⁶⁶ was urged to come to Cuba from Venezuela by Minister of Construction, Osmany Cienfuegos. In January 1961, it would be Osmany's first wife, Selma Díaz, who would arrive uninvited to a party at Porro's house, bringing news that Fidel would like him to convert the country club into an art school within two months. Accepting this impossible challenge, Porro was appointed lead architect of the national schools and implemented an organic design that was specifically tailored to each art form (Loomis, 1999).¹⁶⁷ In relation to the visual arts, Mosquera describes how the architects worked according to the logic of symbolism. 'In this way, the School of Plastic Arts is practically an inhabitable sculpture, more for its symbolic discourse than for its formal emphasis' (Ibid:xxx). With the aim of training professional artists with the highest qualifications in each branch of the arts, it was anticipated that the expense of the schools would be offset against the results that would be obtained. While the buildings were being completed, requisitioned houses of the haute bourgeoisie conveniently served as lodgings for students from all over the country (CNC, 1963a).



Main facade of the National Schools of Art



The National School of Dance (still in use)



The National School of Ballet (abandoned)



166 Porro had worked in the Movement of Civic Resistance [Movimiento de Resistencia Cívica] against Batista, offering a safe house to Hart and Rafael Rodríguez, and was exiled in 1958.

167 Working together with Vittorio Garatti and Roberto Gottardi, two Italian architects Porro had met in Venezuela.

During the congress at which UNEAC was formed in August 1961, Fidel alluded to the fact that the ENA was already under construction, and that it would start functioning the following year with capacity for 3,000 youths (Rodríguez Manso, 2010). Beginning its activities in February 1962, the School of Plastic Arts would accept thirty new students in 1963,¹⁶⁸ taking the total in this discipline to seventy-one of a total of 600 students across the five schools (CNC, 1963c).¹⁶⁹ The existence of the ENA encouraged the involvement of an older generation of artists that had previously lacked any inclination towards curricular matters.¹⁷⁰ Teaching was centred on figuration, without renouncing the formal liberties conquered by the arts (Camnitzer, 1994), and technique remained a primary factor of Cuban arts education, with training centred on drawing from primary school onwards (Otero, 1972) and specialisation in media required at the age of fifteen.¹⁷¹ From the early 1960s until the formation of MINCULT in 1976, ENA was jointly directed by the CNC¹⁷² and MINED (MININD, 1966) and, in 1962, the CNC described ENA as ‘one of the most important initiatives of the Revolutionary Government in the field of culture’ (1963a:16). Producing graduates from 1967, the

168 These entrants were distributed across sculpture (7), printmaking (5) and painting (18) (CNC, 1963c).

169 From the outset, it was acknowledged that ENA would train professional artists, rather than being a national school for the masses; with this in mind, 600 was considered a not inconsiderable number of artists within a population of 6 million. The duration of courses depended on the discipline, with piano, dance and ballet requiring eight years of study and visual arts tending to need only six (CNC, 1963c).

170 Camnitzer describes how ‘The Escuela Nacional de Arte tried to change art education into what had been practiced [sic] at both Abela’s Estudio Libre and the Bauhaus. Prominent Cuban artists such as Raúl Martínez, Servando Cabrera, Martínez Pedro, and Antonia Eiriz, as well as many foreign artists, were hired to teach’ (1994:156).

171 Entry to the School of Plastic Arts required students to have undertaken secondary basic training and passed a vocational exam or promotion to the school by an Elementary School of Plastic Arts or an intermediate level Plastic Arts School-Workshop. At a provincial and municipal level, two types of visual art schools were established. Elementary Schools of the Plastic Arts were centred on professional training over two years of study in painting, sculpture and theory following secondary basic education. By contrast, School-Workshops, operational from 1962, were tailored to those with a vocation for studying art in cases where their age, work or conditions of life had previously prevented them from studying in this area. Study plans included painting, sculpture and printmaking alongside ceramics and industrial design, and timetables were adjusted to suit those working at the same time as studying (CNC, 1963a). By the mid-1960s, eight such centres were in operation with 1,240 students and 93 staff in the 1964–5 academic year (MININD, 1966). Kronenberg notes that ‘Marxist schools [...] promote that artists should not ignore the technical side of art, as the best art can only be created by those who have the greatest technical grasp over all its resources (2011:202-3).

172 The CNC (1963a) aimed to create a new intelligentsia from the worker-farmer masses as well as promoting the cultural improvement of the great majority, through cultural activities, good art and the reading of books of literary and scientific value in a bid to eradicate the inequalities that persisted between the capital and other parts of the country. In order to achieve this, free teaching was organised at a national, provincial and municipal level, with some students boarding and others attending during the day, depending on the proximity of their home to the nearest school. Schools would be open for applications once a year, which would be widely advertised in the press.

ENA has ‘shaped most of Havana’s subsequent generations, creating opportunities but also establishing the parameters, criteria and principles to guide Havana’s and Cuba’s youngest and newest artists’ (Kapcia, 2005:144).¹⁷³

In a 1999 publication for Princeton Architectural Press, John Loomis argues that the missile crisis of October 1962 redirected workers away from the project and construction began to stagnate. He asserts that the schools were inaugurated in an incomplete state on 26 July 1965 and were neglected thereafter ‘not merely [as] the result of redirected national priorities necessitated by economic concerns. In the increasingly doctrinaire political environment, the schools became subject to a series of ideologically framed attacks that resulted in their repudiation’ (1999:111). Ascribing this hiatus to anti-US sentiment and growing Soviet influence, Loomis gives the impression that the schools were abandoned for political reasons.¹⁷⁴ Yet, while the schools of music and dramatic arts remain unfinished, in part due to the prohibitive cost of bringing the necessary brick and terracotta from Italy, the theatre school had to be evacuated when water from the river running through the country club forced its way through the skylights of the stunning subterranean rehearsal rooms. To this day, mildew on the russet walls of its amphitheatres is a testament to rising water levels and to the prosaic reasons for ceasing to use this part of the school. Meanwhile, the schools of modern dance and plastic arts remain fully functional, standing as evidence of the architects’ sensitivity to acoustics and light.

As with other institutions, the schools were eventually affected by international and ideological pressures, which had an impact on teaching that will be considered more fully in chapter six. In 1994, Camnitzer observed that:

Around 1970, as a reaction to the U.S. blockade and as a consequence of the failure of the ten-million-ton sugar drive, tendencies toward isolationism and dogmatism became more pervasive. Cuban pro-Soviet sectors became more influential in cultural policy, and the combination of these factors finally reached the ENA. The curriculum was

173 The schools quickly became a focal point for visiting artists and, when Lam brought the Paris Salon to Havana in 1967, accompanied by many of the exhibiting artists, ENA students acted as guides (Camnitzer, 1994).

174 The documentary, *Unfinished Spaces*, by two young film-makers from the US, Alys Nahmias and Ben Murray, seems to follow Loomis’s line in portraying the schools as the death of a dream. See <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eAKrsBwUNxc> (accessed 23 June 2011).

changed in 1974 to reflect the combination of these ideas and in an effort to unify curricula all over the country. The ENA is still functioning today with this conservative approach (159).

In 1976, this retrenchment was bypassed through the creation of a new school under MINCULT, which 'made it possible to broaden [ENA's] sphere of activity and, with the support of the Soviet Union, to meet some of Cuba's own requirements' (Saruský and Mosquera, 1979:14):

Named the 'Instituto Superior de Arte' (Graduate Institute of Art) and known by its acronym ISA, it groups visual arts, theatre, and music, has a faculty:student ratio of one to seven, and provides the final degree in the arts after five years of study. Since 1981 it has been undergoing increasingly progressive curricular reforms. A complete art education from entrance to the basic art curriculum until graduation from the ISA presently takes twelve years (Camnitzer, 1994:159).

Housed within the ENA buildings, ISA provides training to licentiate and doctorate level in all art forms including the plastic arts. Acceptance requires a university entrance exam and a 'professional quality test'. Students are regarded as professionals from the moment they begin their studies and are expected to play an active part in the art scene, including taking part in exhibitions. At this school of advanced study and in contrast to the early years, 'content is absent from the curriculum. Instead, there is a stress on logical thinking, articulation of ideas, objective evaluation, the development of a system of aesthetic concepts and criteria to guide the search for and adoption of a personal language, and on stimulating imagination and creative talent using a maximum diversity of expressive means' (Ibid:170). This highly exceptional method, centred on independent thought (as advocated by Simón Rodríguez),¹⁷⁵ was quick to yield results:

Since the Revolution, free education and excellent art schools made art available across the social spectrum. Art schools such as the Instituto Superior de Arte (ISA) flourished without an overriding 'school' or single leader, encouraging experimentation and a wide range of art practice. International movements were influential, but none were imposed as dogma. The blending of 'high' and 'low' art reflected international contemporary strategies, but was also born from the cultural pluralism of Cuban culture. Vernacular culture was not an exotic 'other,' but represented lived and integrated experience (Oliver-Smith, 2007:21).

¹⁷⁵ Native of Venezuela (1769–1854), notable for being the tutor and mentor of Simón Bolívar (1783–1830), revolutionary and founder of the first union of independent nations in Latin America, in whose name the current Bolivarian Revolution – of which Cuba, Venezuela and Bolivia form a part – is being conducted in Latin America.

In 2001, Kirk and Padura Fuentes published a series of interviews with established cultural practitioners, many hailing from poor and/or rural backgrounds and retaining links with their specific roots and with the people of Cuba. The majority attribute their professional trajectory to the education they received. Elsewhere, it is noted that:

The education system has been a guarantee for highly trained generations of artists who are able to defend and argue their creative positions convincingly. The ISA itself has been a training ground for conceptual thought and for arguing what you do. It has proved to be a highly useful exercise that is now paying dividends across the world, where many of us are left speechless before the barrage of polished rhetoric that spills out such glittering results (Power, 1999:24).

Continuing in the pioneering tradition of post-revolutionary pedagogy, graduates from ISA are invited to contribute to the education of future artists, thus feeding back into the system while securing themselves a livelihood and playing a productive part in society. Camnitzer (1994) emphasises the importance of this feedback loop, finding freedom of expression to be perpetuated during the elongated immersion of students in this environment. In this way:

The gradual introduction of young graduates into the faculty of visual art within the cloisters of the ISA (set up within the faculty of visual arts) played a decisive role in implanting new pedagogic criteria in the span of approximately five years. These young teachers and criteria would have a strong influence on the training of artists and on the construction of a renewed framework of theoretical and reflexive demands. These changes were timely and helped to bring about a dialogue between art and society. In practice, one small (although not that small) pedagogic revolution took place [...] (Eligio Fernández, 1999:41).¹⁷⁶

Alongside the education of professional artists, ENA and ISA continue to play an expanded role in the cultural education of society and, by 1991, offered 265 courses to workers (MINCULT, 1991).

¹⁷⁶ According to Camnitzer, the success of the ISA model has generated too many artists for the Cuban 'market', which may lead to their reorientation into applied arts:

Because of the unusual length of the art education process, this goal requires an even higher investment by the Cuban economy than is necessary in other countries where education is also free. Compensatory moves, such as shortening the course of studies and commercializing the gallery system even more, designed to alleviate the economic problems, seem to evade the responsibility of finding more interesting alternatives for the application of art. At least, however, they are respectful of the artistic persona. This respect, coupled with the full support of the artist at a time when there is a constant threat of having to regress to the stage of considering art a luxury, make a mixture that signals the fragility of this hybrid construction (Ibid:299).

Remarks in Conclusion

In 1991, MINCULT issued a pamphlet, entitled *Some Data on the Development of Current Culture*, which outlined how Cuban culture had passed through three distinct stages in the post-revolutionary period. The first of these saw the creation of key institutions, like ICAIC, Casa de las Américas and the CNC alongside the strengthening of existing institutions in other disciplines. Marginalised until then, writers and artists came to occupy social space by virtue of the dissemination of their works and the operation of recently founded polycentric institutions, and Pogolotti (2006) describes how this meant that the nascent film industry, the magazines and publishing houses, the museums and galleries and the centres dedicated to national and international art and the promotion of culture fell into the hands of intellectuals. Kapcia describes how, by 1970, 'Havana's elite/vanguard cultural community had undergone profound changes; it had broadened (beyond the would-be gatekeepers of *Lunes*, Casa or ICAIC) and it had deepened and popularised in ways that promised (or threatened) to open up definitions of culture in revolutionary directions, threatening the stability and self-regard of elite groups and vanguards' (2005-148-9). The early phase identified by MINCULT also encompassed the era, to be discussed in chapter ten, during which certain dogmatic restrictions were imposed on creative expression. Asked about relations between creative intellectuals and the revolutionary government during this period, Pogolotti (2010) emphasises that the application of policy was not uniform and that it was applied most rigidly to those which depended on the CNC, whereas ambits like Casa de las Américas benefited from greater tolerance. Relatively autonomous institutions with prestigious leaders, such as Casa and ICAIC, which survived, albeit with significantly reduced facilities (Fornet, 2007), and Camnitzer notes that:

The activities of many institutions, particularly the ICAIC and Casa de las Américas, never changed their openness, and many tendencies coexisted during the whole of the revolutionary process. Both Alfredo Guevara, head of the ICAIC, and Haydée Santamaría, who directed Casa de las Américas, had a revolutionary stature that made them untouchable. Though often targets of criticism by the army publication *Verde Olivo*, their institutions became havens for those artists whose normal market had been affected negatively (1994:128).¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁷ To this list, Navarro (2001) adds UNEAC and MINCULT as examples of institutions that, while

The second phase, during the 1980s, was characterised by the growth of community institutions throughout the country, notably the Casas de Cultura, which offered access to diverse expressions of culture to the whole population. The third phase was embarked upon as the European socialist bloc crumbled (MINCULT, 1991).

Having relied for two decades on the alternative economic system of the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance,¹⁷⁸ the collapse of the Soviet Union combined with the hardening of the US embargo caused serious problems for Cuba's decentralised bureaucratic state capitalism (Carmona Báez, 2004). Thus, the Special Period in Time of Peace¹⁷⁹ was implemented, which wrought dramatic changes to the material base of culture, diminishing both hard currency (through cultural exports undertaken by MINCULT)¹⁸⁰ and supplies of equipment (which formerly came mainly from the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia). This had a profound effect on cultural institutions; so, for example, the estimated income of ICAIC in 1991 was \$2.04 million but, by October, it had only earned \$1.35 million (MINCULT, 1991).

The Special Period brought about the aforementioned conversion of national and provincial directorates into networks of specialist local institutions, which was perceived to strengthen the links between the processes of creation and dissemination and between artists, writers and the population.¹⁸¹ Thus, the smallest communities were urged to develop their own material bases for culture, and institutions were faced with three options – to remain totally or partially state-financed or to become self-financing

sometimes being party to administrative measures, permitted the appearance and survival of critical intellectual spaces.

178 The CMEA, also known as COMECON.

179 'Período especial en tiempo de paz' in its original. Carmona Báez (2004) describes how, during the Special Period, previously inconceivable measures were introduced, including foreign direct investment (up to 100 percent after 1995), the legalisation of citizens' use of hard currency (dollars) to buy imported products and the formalisation of self-employment.

180 An estimated \$4 million was lost from the capitalist world during this period. In 1990, the total budget assigned to culture was 138.7 thousand million pesos, which was a reduction of 10.5 thousand million pesos (MINCULT, 1991).

181 This saw the existing central institutions – ICAIC, the institutes of books and music and the national councils of visual arts and scenery – supplemented in 1989 by a National Centre of Aficionados and Casas de Cultura, the Grand Theatre in Havana and the National Centre of Art Schools. In 1990, this saw the creation of provincial centres corresponding to the national institutions. A study, conducted in October 1991, demonstrated the possibility of reducing staff at a national level and increasing them at a provincial level. Between July 1990 and June 1991, a total of 1,878 workers were lost in the cultural field (Ibid).

(Ibid). In 1991, economic difficulties saw the amount of students accepted to ISA fall by a half, and Power highlights how ‘the dark shadows cast by the Periodo Especial have involved a massive gnawing away at the educational budgets and the gradual exodus of many of the best teachers. The ISA, however diminished, partially resists and has somehow developed its own strategies of survival’ (1999:31). In many ways, the Special Period exposed the earlier successes of the Revolution, by revealing the continued necessity of valuable state institutions.

In 1970, Karol urged the creation of social institutions in Cuba on the basis that ‘The innovation all Cubans so fervently desire is the complete reorganization, from top to bottom, of their social system, a reorganization that will give workers a greater say over their lives and will no longer leave them at the mercy of the errors of remote planners, however well-intentioned’ (549). From the considerations of this chapter, it would seem that the creation of institutions was of paramount importance within the cultural field of the immediate post-revolutionary period. As soon as the vital Agrarian Reform Law had been drafted and its consequences documented on film, one of its authors was deployed in developing a cinematic industry out of the abandoned resources of the old regime and a wealth of national talent. Through the revolutionary institute that arose, film-makers would be supported in orchestrating documentary and narrative adventures that utilised the most contemporary cinematic language. Of an equally high quality, the exhibitions, conferences and publications emerging from Casa de las Américas during the early period of this study would be central in creating and disseminating an image of the Cuban Revolution throughout Latin America and beyond. At the same time, the trans-national friendships of its personnel would cause it to surpass expectations of the ability of culture to overcome sanctions. While all the post-revolutionary cultural institutions deployed a hierarchical structure, the level of ownership among the creative communities is noteworthy, and, for a time at least, this relieved them from the ‘errors of remote planners’.

While ICAIC and Casa made advances at the forefronts of their respective fields, the abiding legacy of the CNC is its efforts in extending the cultural infrastructure into the many museums and galleries of the country and in broadening cultural activities beyond the confines of the infrastructure. This dissemination continued through the work of MINCULT and the decentralisation of the 1990s, and the profound consequences of this programme in bridging the gap between art and the people will be addressed in chapter nine.

In 2010, Cuban sociologist, Mayra Espina Prieto, noted an ‘absence of a real vocation of service by public institutions, and the lack of popular democratic control over them and of systematic, transparent and reliable information about their operations and their actual impacts, their inefficiency and their irregular dealings’ (101). From the account given above, it seems clear that this generalisation cannot be applied to cultural institutions in Cuba, where the vocational level is unsurpassed in the Latin American continent and continues to generate cultural works of exceptionally high quality. One reason for this has to be the involvement of practitioners in some of the key institutions, notably the former film-maker, Alfredo Guevara, at ICAIC and the poet, Roberto Fernández Retamar, at Casa and those creative intellectuals who advised on the creation and operations of these two organisations. This agency has been evident since pre-revolutionary times and forms a continuum through *Nuestro Tiempo* and UNEAC, providing a contribution to the Revolution that will continue to be analysed. The involvement of artists and writers in the inception and operation of cultural institutions marks an important distinction from the advanced capitalist countries in which practitioners have been systematically excised from decision-making in their field. Nonetheless, when a crisis occurred in the ranks of revolutionary intellectuals, precipitated by attempts to rehabilitate repressive personnel (to be discussed in chapter ten), a certain ‘inactivity or inoperability’ (Navarro, 2007a:u/p) was noted in the spaces for expression or debate that was as much intra-institutional as it was public and compensated for through the use of electronic communication.

It is necessary to make one final point about the intersection of the protagonists outlined in the previous chapter with the institutions described here. As may already be evident, pre-revolutionary affiliations would have a large part to play in post-revolutionary actions. Karol explains how, realising that industrialisation would have to be a collective effort, the 26 July men:

[...] deferred to their comrades in the PSP, those experts in Marxism who knew better than anyone how to mobilize the workers and track down counterrevolutionaries. This meant that the great industrialization project went hand in hand with a rise in sectarianism and the rapid disillusionment of the masses. A year later, in 1962, when shortages were severe and discontent rife, Fidel and his men at last realized that they had taken the wrong route, and called a sudden halt. Aníbal Escalante was denounced for his methods and promptly dispatched to Moscow, while the nation breathed a great sigh of relief (1970:540).

Various commentators have observed Fidel's willingness to delegate the implementation of cultural policy to members of the PSP, some perceiving this as evidence of his disinterest in culture. However, his actions in the cultural field would have seemed logical at the time, given the party's early fomentation of cultural activism around *Nuestro Tiempo*. Guevara (2007) notes that there were two wings within the PSP and his associates formed its youthful part. This makes it necessary to distinguish the approach of, for example, Carlos Rafael Rodríguez and communist intellectuals like Nicolás Guillén from the *sarampionados* who were allowed to thrive at the CNC such as García Buchaca, Aguirre and, later, Pavón. In turn, the dogmatists of the PSP must be distinguished from their Marxist-humanist counterparts, who would occupy equally responsible positions in the cultural field, not least Armando Hart, who would oversee the euphoric first two years of cultural rebuilding from his position in MINED and signal cultural salvation as the country emerged from the grey years.

Chapter Six: The Emancipatory Potential of Culture under Socialism

In order to describe a new socialist culture for Cuba, it was first necessary to scrutinise the conditions for cultural production under capitalism, and, while it was consistently conceded that ‘in the West there also exists a progressive and democratic culture which represents a praiseworthy force that should be taken into account’ (CPC, 1961:2),¹ this was not thought to prevail. By the time of the first PCC congress in 1975, it would be asserted that the hostility of capitalism towards art and literature was evident in its subordination of artworks to the laws of supply and demand and to the interests of the dominant class, depriving the wider population of the full enjoyment of culture and spreading false cultural products to ideologically disarm the masses (Comité Central del PCC, 1976).

Far from being a remote western phenomenon, however, the revolutionary government had inherited a capitalist system of cultural production, and attention was soon turned to the effects of centuries of colonial and neo-colonial rule. But, consistent with the ideas of both Marx and Lenin, outlined in chapter two, this would not imply the wholesale rejection of bourgeois culture, with creative practitioners and government functionaries agreed on the need to preserve works with universal appeal. Accordingly, at the First National Congress of Writers and Artists, Guillén insisted that:

It is a grave error to deny the important part played by the bourgeoisie in the birth and development of socialist culture. Ambitious as our forces may be, despite everything the Revolution may be able to do – and it can do much – it would be impossible to endow Cuba with a proletarian culture, as if by prescription, without taking into consideration the former culture in its most developed and progressive forms (1961:55).

Similarly, the CNC’s Preliminary Plan would dedicate a section to cultural inheritance, affirming that, ‘for Marxists, the cultural past, assimilated by the development of humanity over the years, constitutes an active and influential element [...] of the cultural

¹ This recognition of certain advanced, progressive elements within capitalist culture was reiterated at the first PCC congress in 1975 and by Armando Hart in 1989. However, it was felt that the capitalist system discriminated against the production of humanist works.

life of society' (1963a:3). Decades later, Hart (1989), would continue reminding younger artists to ground their work in history and tradition on the basis that neither Marx nor Lenin had dogmatically refuted previous cultures. However, while conceding to the idea that art contains elements of the absolute, enabling it to be enjoyed centuries after its creation, García Buchaca permitted only that the purest essence of cultural heritage should be preserved in order to guarantee continuity, and prescribed that a new form of art should arise in classless society that would contain values relative to its historical moment. As we shall continue to see, this would lead to her firmly advocating a Soviet approach to culture, which consistently erred towards socialist realism.

By contrast to the perceived effects of capitalism, Prieto points out that 'Socialism should be thought of as a comprehensive transformation. It is not limited to a particular area (economics, politics, culture, etc.), but rather occurs as an articulation and interaction among them. Within this holistic perspective, the role of the cultural dimension is recognized as a synthesis, a space for values, for the symbolic, and for meanings' (2010:95). Thus, while capitalism was seen as alienating artistic creation from both its producers and the society in which it was made – thereby diminishing its possible contribution to the betterment of humanity and the achievement of social justice – socialism recognises the real value of art and literature, re-vindicating its social role and giving freedom and material stability to artists (Comité Central del PCC, 1976), in ways that will be considered in due course.

Already we have a hint at the ideological complexities of forging a new culture from the ruins of the old. In this chapter, we shall see how culture was released from mercantile constraints, leaving artists free to perform their revolutionary duty. We shall also see how culture was mobilised as a tool of class struggle and how the emancipatory aims assigned to it found their way into discussions on aesthetics and prompted questions about freedom of expression.

Art as a Form of Social Production

Before 1959, Cuban artists were dependent on the whims of entrepreneurs commissioning work on the basis of private sales (CNC, 1970). But Hernández reminds us that ‘the political economy of culture cannot be reduced to the market’ (2003:51), and, in post-revolutionary Cuba, this sensibility was linked to a generalised ‘rejection of the market as a planning device’ (Lumsden, 1969:539). In this way, it could be claimed that ‘Socialism is the first social regime that emancipates culture from the oppression of money, which means the artist can create not to satisfy the depraved tastes of a handful of gluttons but for the great mass of the people’ (CPC, 1961:4).²

Consistent with pre-revolutionary demands, cultural producers were declared free from economic insecurity, allowing them to pursue their art instead of having to rely on sales or earn a living from work other than their creative practice (Otero, 1972). To this end, it was decided that creative practitioners should have a fixed income equal to other workers in order to guarantee the satisfaction of their needs. At the congress during which UNEAC was created (to be discussed in the next chapter), Antuña alluded to numerous grants being awarded to young artists and writers. At the same event, Fernández Retamar announced the creation of a Literary and Artistic Fund as one of the schemes of the union; cautioning that this should not be envisaged as a total solution to the material problems facing artists and writers, he commented on the recent trend of paying writers and articulated a hope that intellectual work would shortly be considered akin to manual work, worthy of remuneration, which, in turn, would bring about a commitment to the profession of arts and letters (UNEAC, 1961). According to a CNC publication, 1969 saw the implementation of a progressive plan of paying visual artists a salary and costs to cover their materials, as part of a mutual agreement between the artist and the state (1970),³ and Fernet describes how, in the 1960s,

2 The introduction of a market for Cuban art in the 1990s starkly illustrates the inequities that quickly result from such a system, posing the ‘serious danger, if not of artistic corruption, then of artistic alienation’ (Camnitzer, 1994:164).

3 Pogolotti (2010) describes how, after the triumph of the Revolution, actors and those engaged in audio-visual work (including cinema directors) were paid a salary by the state for their creative work; for writers, this was more difficult as very few of them were publishing enough books to sustain themselves.

intellectuals ‘were able to create with total autonomy thanks to autonomous institutions and a type of patronage – state subsidy – free from the exigencies of bureaucracy like that of servitude to the market’ (2004:12).⁴ Artworks shed their commodity character by forming part of the national collection or serving as a means of dissemination, a prime example of which is the silk-screen posters mentioned in the previous chapter (CNC, 1970).⁵ In this way, artists were professionalised, with the state acting as both sponsor and customer (Otero, 1997).

As we have seen, most professional artists in Cuba pass through six to eight years of undergraduate education. Armed with a comprehensive grounding in the arts, artists graduating during the era under consideration had ‘a guaranteed place in society and [were] able to devote themselves to creative activities without any concerns or difficulties’ (Saruský and Mosquera, 1979:40). In return, many artists repaid the state through their work as temporary instructors and professors in the art schools or as industrial designers of books and posters. At the 1971 Congress, it was declared that ‘The Revolution frees art and literature from the inflexible mechanisms of supply and demand that rule over bourgeois society. Art and literature will cease to be merchandise, and all possibilities will be offered for aesthetic expression and experimentation in its most diverse manifestations’ (Instituto del Libro, 1971). And, while the receipt of support would be politicised in the wake of the congress, it is argued that ‘There has been no tradition of attaching strings to stipends’ as happens in many other countries (Camnitzer, 1994:133).⁶

4 This formed part of a broader plan to eliminate money and, in a speech of 13 March 1968, Fidel paved the way for this once communism was reached, pointing to the tens of thousands of scholarship students who had ceased to rely on money (Castro Ruz, 1968e). A rough English translation of this speech is at <http://lanic.utexas.edu/project/castro/db/1968/19680314.html> (accessed 23 April 2012).

5 While the posters themselves have a value greater than their cost of production (being sold for anything up to \$10), as was mentioned in the previous chapter the films they advertise are not screened for profit.

6 Into the 1990s, it could be said that, ‘Despite the varied style and the individual tendencies prevailing in the arts in Cuba, the Cuban government continues to view art production as one dimension of social productivity and accords the artist an integral place in the social system. As a result, art is promoted and criticized like any other means of production’ (Camnitzer, 1994:125). In turn, art ‘becomes a career as serious as any other course of studies, and market pressures are removed to a great extent. While this security is being increasingly challenged, by the end of 1990 the arts appeared to be more protected from unemployment than other fields’ (Ibid:163).

By the time of the 1975 PCC congress, it could be said that the Revolution had eradicated the conditions of penury and humiliation in which art had been maintained (1976:482), a sentiment that was repeated four years later in a report to UNESCO which described Cuba as the only country in Latin America to accept art as a form of social production.⁷ This not only implied freedom from material constraints on the part of artists; it also entailed a contribution to the process of forging the new society. Alongside the liberation of creators and their works, creativity was recognised as playing an essential part in the struggle for full dignity, and creative production was reconceived as the cultural heritage of all humanity. In his closing speech to the 1961 congress, Fidel affirmed that, like any other workers, writers and artists would have to create wealth, which in their case would be measured in terms of the infinite happiness their work produced (UNEAC, 1961).⁸ On 2 May 1969, six male writers from the collaborative committee of *Casa* – the aforementioned Desnoes, Fornet and Fernández Retamar alongside Roque Dalton,⁹ René Depestre¹⁰ and Carlos Maria Gutiérrez¹¹ – met in Mariano’s painting studio to discuss the first ten years of the Revolution in the field of culture and politics, specifically whether it was possible to be an intellectual without being revolutionary (Dalton et al, 1969). The ensuing debate demonstrates the integration of these creative intellectuals into the Revolution and concludes that their former division from the Cuban people had been overcome (Dalton et al, 1969). Accordingly, Miller notes that ‘Cuban intellectuals enacted what José Mariátegui envisaged, but was unable to achieve in Peru, namely a lasting political relationship between intellectuals and the masses’ (2008:683).

7 In November 1963, García Espinosa added some provisos to this debate, advising that the concept of productivity in art could not be applied mechanically, lest artists be judged for the quantity of works produced in a given period, which would fail to take account of less productive artists or recognise the quality of their work. The quantitative path, he warned, could easily lead to opportunism and mediocrity rather than the increased spiritual and ethical wealth with which the Revolution sought to eradicate exploitation. Similarly, productivity might come to be measured in terms of the success of artworks, which would fail to recognise the need for experimental work that might not find public favour.

8 At the same congress, the CTC reiterated the aspiration of seeing intellectual and manual labourers united into one class (UNEAC, 1961).

9 A Salvadorian poet and journalist who sought sanctuary at Casa in 1961 and undertook revolutionary training in Cuba.

10 Described by Salkey as ‘an exiled Haitian poet, living in Havana and contributing meaningfully and unobtrusively to the Revolution’ (1971:152).

11 A Uruguayan poet, journalist and occasional novelist, who had been consistently involved in revolutionary activity in Cuba.

In 1961, the process of guaranteeing artists and writers a decent income would bring about reorganisation of the Copyrights Institute (Castro Ruz, 1961), which would eventually see a decision being taken to revise copyright laws. Prior to the Revolution, laws governing intellectual property – drawn up in 1879¹² and amended in the 1930s – covered scientific, literary, artistic, dramatic and musical works.¹³ On 29 April 1967, while inaugurating the projects of female scholarship students in Guane,¹⁴ Fidel contemplated the private property claims that had previously shrouded intellectual work, preventing the people from accessing useful information. Proclaiming the necessity to cultural development of reproducing printed works – from North American technical manuals to universal works of literature – he declared the abolition of copyright. At the same time, he internationally renounced any intellectual property accrued in Cuba while making provision to compensate those who relied for their survival on royalties from their creative work.¹⁵ In October of the same year, this theme would be taken up at the preparatory seminar for the 1968 Cultural Congress of Havana. Convinced of the national and international significance of this stance, the artists and writers present at the seminar renounced commercial rights to their work – in favour of the value inherent in the creative act and the social recognition of the Cuban people – and a resolution on the subject of artists’ rights was issued (Sánchez Vásquez, 1970). Pogolotti (2010) describes how this decision signalled the Cuban intention to access the world’s knowledge and elevate their condition accordingly.

At a stroke, the floodgates were open for the liberal reproduction of the works of classic literature, sociology, anthropology and economy, freely disseminated around

12 Specifically, on 10 January 1879.

13 A revision of 3 September 1880 explicitly includes writing, works in print, paintings, photographs, lithographs etc., and the understanding was that those who breached these laws would have their illegal publications seized. During the colonial era, this legislation had political ramifications, demonstrating the battle for control of Cuba waged between Spain and the US. So, for example, on 17 November 1903, an amendment laid down the reciprocity between Cuba and Spain, whereby all works in Spanish, including those of Cuban authors would be entered into the general register of the intellectual property of Spain, which persisted until 1928. This overlapped with a law enacted by Roosevelt in 1891 which compelled colonised states to permit their intellectual property to be used for the benefit of the US.

14 In Pinar del Rio province.

15 A rough English translation of this speech is at <http://lanic.utexas.edu/project/castro/db/1967/19670430.html> (accessed 30 August 2011).

the island in Castilian editions of multiple thousands.¹⁶ Kapcia notes that this move was ‘partly a revolutionary challenge to capitalism’s control of intellectual freedom and partly allowing Cuba to publish non-Cuban authors, [which] also eliminated any possibility of royalties to individual writers, making them even more dependent on the Revolution’s benefices and employment’ (2005:137). On this latter point, Casal would describe how:

Authors receive no royalties for their works, thus eliminating the possibility of an author’s earning an independent income. However, the importance of such a change can be easily overestimated abroad, where royalties are an essential part of the writer’s incentive system. In Cuba, even after the new publishing structures eliminated the need (and later even the opportunity) for self-financed editions, royalties did not represent a significant income for most authors (1971:457).

For Dalton (1969), the elimination of the remunerable character of creative work – based on the eradication of copyright, combined with nationalisation of the publishing industry – compelled the personal-social responsibility of each creator. But, rather than ‘creativity colonies’ being constructed, as had happened in other socialist countries, writers and artists immersed themselves in social life.

In 1975, in recognition of the need to adequately reward creators for the fruits of their labours, the PCC would re-establish intellectual property rights in paragraph sixteen of the first congress’s resolutions on culture (Comité Central del PCC, 1976). Accordingly, Law 14,¹⁷ ratified at the National Assembly of People’s Power in 1977, made provision for the moral recognition and juridical protection of copyright on the basis that this would stimulate the development of artistic, literary and scientific creation,¹⁸ legislating for the remuneration of intellectual work according to guidelines

16 A precursor to this was the Ediciones Revolucionarias [Revolutionary Editions], which saw the Philosophy Department of the University of Havana acquiring foreign books that were translated and disseminated among the student body (Kapcia, 2008). Pogolotti (2010) remembers Fidel’s perspective on this being that the people deserved access to the accumulated knowledge of the world and this meant that they ought to publish the most important books from other countries without having to pay royalties.

17 Law 14, drawn up by MINCULT and enacted by the Council of Ministers, was intended to cover all branches of creative work and any derivatives of an original artwork.

18 According to this law, the author’s right to be recognised in relation to a particular work would last for twenty-five years beyond their natural life or, in the case of the works of unknown authors, twenty-five years after first publication. Where the descendants of the author were still resident in Cuba, these rights would pass to them; where the rights of authors passed to those outside the country, these works may be declared state patrimony by the Council of Ministers. Under this provision, the right to represent a Cuban author abroad, and the transfer by a Cuban author of any right to use one of his works abroad, could only be formalised through the relevant official entity.

drawn up by MINCULT in dialogue with the social agencies representing cultural producers. Significantly, it also prescribed that, following the sale of any work of art, ownership alone would pass to the purchaser with the author retaining copyright (MINCULT, 1982).¹⁹ Consistent with the democratising aims of post-revolutionary cultural policy, protection of these rights was made subordinate to the social need to disseminate cultural works as widely as possible (CNC, 1970).²⁰

Culture as a Tool of Class Struggle

In chapter two, we touched upon the class status of intellectuals; let us turn now to a consideration of the class character of cultural production itself. In the early years of cultural policy formulation, it was declared that ‘Artistic creation cannot remain at the margins of class struggle, outside politics, for the simple reason that all writers or artists – whether they want it or not – express and bring together in their work the interests of one or other of the classes’ (CPC, 1961:3).²¹ Embracing this position, Fornet would expand that ‘To write is to direct oneself to someone, to exert influence; the carrier of words is also a carrier of a determined ideological content, of a determined vision of the world, of a determined class position’ (Dalton et al, 1969). Further, the CNC would state that ‘We aspire for our creators and critics to operate as the first ranks of combatants for a classless society’ (1963a:2). Champion of the

19 This contradicts the standard practice of the capitalist world, particularly the US (with the exception of California), which has historically afforded artists no rights to their work after its sale. To overcome this, the Artist’s Reserved Rights Transfer and Sale Agreement was drawn up in 1971: ‘Devised by the art agent Seth Siegelau in collaboration with a New York lawyer [Robert Projansky], it is a model contract, reserving certain rights to the artists, such as entitlement to fifteen per cent of subsequent sales, and the right to borrow the work for exhibitions at certain intervals and to veto loans to exhibitions in which the artist did not want it to be shown’ (Grasskamp, 2004:56). By contrast, the nineteenth century French concept of *droit de suite* [right to follow] gives artists rights over their work as it passes between the hands of successive owners. On 27 September 2001, EU directive 2001/84/EC attempted to impose resale rights in favour of artists across the European Union, which remains controversial in the UK. See <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=CELEX:32001L0084:EN:html> (accessed 13 September 2011).

20 So, for reasons of social interest, where any work is considered necessary for scientific, technical or educational development or professional improvement, a licence can be granted for its reproduction and nationwide distribution, freely and without acrimony about money. Extracts of cultural products may be used without the consent of the author, either with or without remuneration, providing the author is recognised as the originator of the work.

21 The theoretical basis for this was that ‘The idea of unbreakable bonds between art and literature and the struggle of social classes – and, within socialism, with the life of all the people – was theoretically argued by Lenin, who expounded on the principle of the spirit on the part of literature’ (CPC, 1961:3). At the 1968 congress, Portuondo’s paper, entitled ‘Classes in the Cuban Cultural Process’, would reassert that, consciously or not, all culture reflects a class position.

Revolution, Régis Debray, would write ‘Militant is he who in his own intellectual work ideologically combats the class enemy, he, who in his work as an artist, roots out the privilege of beauty from the ruling class’ (Benedetti, 1968:29),²² and, at the Cultural Congress of Havana, the media writer, Pío Baldelli (1968), would invoke intellectuals and their cultural works in class struggle, both during and after the conquest of power. Accordingly, the curriculum at ISA advocates an analysis of ‘the development of capitalism and socialism [...] from the vantage point of the working class’ (Camnitzer, 1994:169).

As we shall see, adherence to the position that cultural work could not remain detached from class struggle became more vehement after the 1971 congress, with the declaration being made that ‘Culture, like education, is not, nor can it be, either impartial or apolitical. It is a social and historic phenomenon conditioned by the needs of social classes and their struggles and interests throughout time. Apolitical thought is nothing more than a shameful and reactionary point of view regarding cultural concepts and expression’ (Instituto del Libro, 1971:u/p). Thus, writers and artists were charged with a duty to contribute to the broader emancipatory aims of the Revolution, whereby:

Cuba encourages class-conscious forms of artistic and literary expression in conformity with the principles of Marxism-Leninism which, in this respect, comprises the following features: the assimilation of the finest traditions of the national culture; the critical appropriation, redefinition and development of universal culture; the use of the most varied and creative forms of artistic expression; the genuine reflection of the world in which we live and the stimulation of a creative outlook towards the future; the association of art and literature with the lives of the masses and their most vital interests; the rejection of obsolete and anti-humanist forms of artistic and literary expression; and the upbringing of man with feelings of solidarity with all progressive and revolutionary movements (Sarusky and Mosquera, 1979:22).

In chapter eight, we shall explore the specific contribution of intellectuals to developing national culture and advancing the cause of humanity, and, in chapter nine, we shall see how the class character of cultural works would be called into question. For now, let us consider how the freedom of culture from mercantile constraints permitted more spiritual aims to be pursued.

²² Debray wrote this in a letter to Enrique de la Osa, which was published in *Bohemia* on 22 July 1966.

Culture as a Means of Enhancing Spiritual Growth

Socialism, Espina argues, 'should be seen as an emancipatory process, as a change and reconstruction of economic, political, social, and cultural relations with the intention of eliminating alienation by means of social inclusion and decentralisation of power' (2010:96-7). In this, she attributes a role to culture of satisfying some of humankind's basic needs, creating values that distinguish worker from consumer, citizen from client, real person from instrumental one. In chapter nine, consideration will be given to the massive effort that was made to provide all the people of Cuba, not only artists, with access to a creative education. In the meantime, this section will explore something of the rationale underlying this approach.

In chapter one, we saw how, in 1961, Fidel had sought improvements to people's lives not only in the material sense but also in their spiritual aspect. By the mid-1960s, he would elaborate that 'The Revolution is not made for the sake of revolution itself; it is made in order to create the best conditions for the development of the material and spiritual activities of the human being. That is, revolutions are only made with the postulate of creating a happier man' (Lockwood, 1967:187). But this did not mean that popular enjoyment of art should be confined to vulgar, mediocre forms; rather, the population of Cuba 'which has developed its Revolution at the cost of immeasurable sacrifices, has the right to true art' (Comité Central del PCC, 1976:487).²³ In this regard, President Dorticós would consistently argue that artists and writers had a duty to elevate the cultural level of society. In opening the First National Congress of Writers and Artists, he urged delegates to take the highest quality artistic and literary weapons to the people, with the proviso that, as art and literature are the products of societies, great artistic quality would only be possible if artists and writers understood the society in which they lived:

[...] artistic and literary quality and the desire to communicate with the people are not enough. Deep understanding is required. It is not enough to speak the same language. To actually understand his people, a man has to be aware of the whole social and

23 At the 1968 congress, Portuondo would cite Mao on the ineffectual and potentially damaging nature of artworks of poor quality (UNEAC, 1961).

economic process under way in his country. May I ask, then, with due respect, that all Cuban writers and artists do their best to improve their cultural and artistic standards as much as possible.

It is not enough to possess literary erudition and high artistic quality to achieve complete communication with the people. [...] Our writers and artists, if they wish to be considered men and women of culture, should not confine themselves to the creation of novels or poems, paintings or sculptures. They must attain political culture too, which is to say, they must achieve understanding of our socio-economic processes (UNEAC, 1961:75-6).

This approach stood in stark contrast to the pre-revolutionary situation, during which it was felt that there had been practised ‘an art of evasion in which man did not confront his problems’ (CNC, 1970).

Che argued that increased acculturation would be the key to both economic growth and self-realisation:

It is still necessary to deepen conscious participation, individual and collective, in all the structures of management and production, and to link this to the idea of the need for technical and ideological education, so that the individual will realise that these processes are closely interdependent and their advancement is parallel. In this way, the individual will reach total consciousness as a social being, which is equivalent to the full realisation as a human creature, once the chains of alienation are broken. This will be translated concretely into the re-conquering of one’s true nature, through liberated labour and the expression of one’s own human condition through culture and art (1965:u/p).

This took as its basis the idea that when unique creative work is forced to become a monopolistic product through market valuation, its character was lost along with its potential for mass enjoyment. At the same time, the law of value inherent in capitalism alienates intellectual work from its originating scientist, artist or writer. At the 1968 congress, the influential British poet and critic, Herbert Read,²⁴ would describe how ‘Alienation is a problem of industrialization, of dehumanized modes of production. It is a disease of the uncreative mind, of the mind divorced from sensuous contact with primary materials, and the disease is inescapable unless at some stage in production the shaping spirit of the imagination intervenes and guides the process of production into forms pleasing to the senses’ (1968:4).²⁵ The 1971 congress grounded the true history

24 Read had earlier insisted that ‘The logic of the facts – the economic facts: war, poverty amidst plenty, social injustice – that logic cannot be denied. But so long as the bourgeois mind has its bourgeois ideology, it will deny the facts; it will construct an elaborate rationalization which effectively ignores them’ (1935:505).

25 Salkey’s 1967–8 guide, a medical student, would assert that ‘Alienation’s dead and forgotten in our society now. [...] You may have wondered about the all-round emphasis we put on the arts here in Havana, and right throughout Cuba. Well, apart from the obvious artistic results, we also achieve a great

of humanity in revolutionary struggle, prophesying that man would become master of his own destiny, free from alienation (Santana, 1977).²⁶

By the end of the 1970s, it was agreed that ‘Only in a society free of exploitation, whose fundamental objectives are to satisfy the ever-growing material and spiritual needs of the human being and to develop a new form of social relations, can culture attain its finest flowering and raise human life itself to aesthetic levels’ (Saruský and Mosquera, 1979:20). In unravelling the conception of spiritual emancipation and the elevation of human life to aesthetic levels, it was argued that:

The future of Cuban culture is determined not merely by advances in specifically cultural fields but also by the parallel economic and social development and the building of a socialist society. The march towards communism is in itself a movement towards the reign of culture, towards the conversion of every aspect of human life into an aesthetic experience. The premises of this evolution are: (a) the elimination of the class struggle and an all-round approach to education and culture thanks to which all human beings can become recipients and creators of art; (b) the dissemination of general education and artistic education; (c) the constant growth of artistic output and aesthetic needs; and (d) the emergence of aesthetic behaviour as a higher form of relationship between man and nature, between the individual and society (Ibid:49).

We have already seen how culture was harnessed to the elimination of class struggle.

While the idea of an all-round approach to education and culture will be dealt with more thoroughly in due course, let us turn now to a consideration of this transformative conception of aesthetic behaviour.

The Revolution and Aesthetics

As we saw in chapter two, the question of aesthetics has a fraught history throughout the world. In Cuba, the situation is no less complicated, and Kapcia (2005) describes how, in the 1920 and 1930s, two distinct visual arts communities could be defined according to whether they believed in an art for art’s sake or in a more committed form of artistic activity. In the first camp, ‘united in the belief that the 1933 revolution had been betrayed, the generation that reached maturity in the early 1930s rejected politics in favour of a retreat into aestheticism’ (Miller, 1999:74). This caused ‘some Cubans, deal in our fight against alienation by letting the arts loose for all the people’ (1971:96).

²⁶ An untitled pamphlet, issued by the Cuban Workers’ Confederation, develops the category of work to include not only active participation in material production but also the participation of workers in the construction of a new society, which manifests itself creatively by enhancing the spiritual development of the people through the full expression of their artistic and literary capabilities (CTC, 1984).

perhaps concluding that the mission of a truly independent *Cuba Libre* of which they could be proud was an unrealisable chimera, to seek “escape” either in art, in hedonism or in exile’ (Kapcia, 2005:64).²⁷ Conversely, when the more politically-orientated Grupo Nacional de Acción de Arte²⁸ ‘began, neither the Communist Party nor APRA²⁹ existed and, in that vacuum, their political position was somewhere between “proto-communist” and indeterminately radical, meaning an intellectual rejection of Positivism, a cultural embrace of the European avant-garde, and the popularisation of all art, seeing itself as the [...] “crucible of the Cuban avant-garde”’ (Ibid:77).

The dialectic between formal experimentation and political commitment would recur in the post-revolutionary period.³⁰ At one end of the rhetorical spectrum, *Lunes* would advocate maximum aesthetic freedom in an attempt to bring the best of universal art to the people of Cuba:

Our thesis was that we had to break down the barriers that separated elite culture from mass culture. We wanted to bring the highest quality of culture to hundreds of thousands of readers. We were motivated by a motto we got directly from Jose Marti: ‘Culture brings freedom.’ So we published huge editions with pictures and texts by Marx, Borges, Sartre, Neruda, Faulkner, Lezama Lima, Martí, Breton, Picasso, Miró, Virginia Woolf, Trotsky, Bernanos, and Brecht. We also published protest issues on cultural colonialism in Puerto Rico, Latin America, and Asia (Franqui, 1983:129).

Thus, the focus of *Lunes* ‘was less on Cuban culture (as Cuba’s leaders and many Cubans increasingly expected) but more on educating Cubans in world culture’ (Kapcia, 2005:132). In a retrospective analysis of the supplement, Ariel González (2002) describes the seemingly irreconcilable predicament of advocating both intellectual commitment and creative freedom. While notions of commitment contained the potential to resolve the Marxist paradox of art in its semi-autonomous position

27 Yet, while those pursuing artistic quality and aestheticism were accused of escapism, Kapcia asserts that:

[...] they sought Cuba’s ‘soul’ not in writing about topical issues or addressing Cuba’s history but in a commitment to artistic principles that might ultimately produce an art to equal those they admired, whom the Havana community had long copied with a sense of inferiority. They were also equally in search of *lo cubano* (“Cuban-ness”), as they saw no value in a Cuban culture that was artistically poor, arguing that Cuba deserved better (2005:97).

28 National Group of Art Action.

29 Alianza Popular Revolucionaria Americana, or Popular Revolutionary American Alliance, a centre-left political party founded in Mexico City on 7 May 1924 with aspirations of becoming continent-wide.

30 Giving a detailed overview of the formation of colonial hegemony and reactions against it, Portuondo (1968) identified a dialectical collision between cosmopolitan formalism and a nationalism and internationalism orientated towards socialism. Faced with the dictates of imperialism, the first tended towards aesthetic evasion, the latter towards denouncement and revolutionary combat.

(by bringing creative practice close to the political, social and economic phenomena of society), this required a political response, which González sets against the abiding ideo-aesthetic approach of *Lunes*. This couched a moral response in politicised language, emphasising the freedom of the intellectual and leaving commitment to be determined by individual conscience.



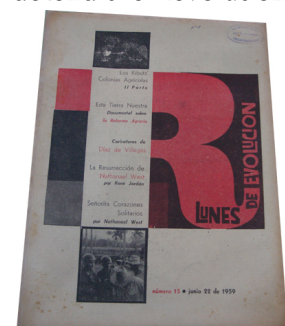
It is easy to understand how this position would find itself at odds with a revolutionary process in which cultural producers were being urged to play an active part in the generation of works that demonstrated a thoroughgoing understanding of the process of change, and Che would recount that, while

‘Artistic inquiry experienced a new impulse [...] the escapist concept hid itself behind the word “freedom”’. We shall return to a consideration of artistic freedom shortly; for now, it is sufficient to note that, at the 1961 congress to be discussed in the next chapter, José A Baragaño, the existential surrealist writer



closely associated with *Lunes*, would assert that the submission of intellectuals to the revolutionary project was more important than aesthetic pursuit of the marvellous, via language and abstractions, when the Revolution itself provided a full transformation of reality. This in no way implied a diminution of quality and, in a reversal of the abiding slogan that gives this study its title, Baragaño would argue that to defend creative work of the highest and clearest quality was to defend the Revolution (UNEAC, 1961).³¹

In relation to historical precedents for discussions around aesthetics, Pogolotti (2006) reflects broader Cuban understanding when she describes how the dawn of the October Revolution had coincided with the expansion of



Covers of *Lunes de Revolución*

31 Similarly, Mariano described how, when confronted with a reality distinct from that which had been experienced up until then, painters would be provided with plenty of new material (UNEAC, 1961:20).

thought in Russia, giving rise to new manifestations in visual art, poetry, architecture and cinema and leading to a revolutionary convergence of art and politics.³² However, after this initial blossoming, the dramatic circumstances of the economy of war caused the experimental adventure of art to be cancelled in favour of propagandistic immediacy, which led to the consecration of socialist realism during the 1934 congress attributed to the chief ideologist in the Soviet Union, Andrei Zhdanov.³³ In May 1934, in his role as secretary of the Central Committee, Zhdanov was appointed to chair the committee preparing for the First Congress of Soviet Writers, scheduled to run for two weeks from 17 August of that year, at which he would make the opening speech. His biographer reminds us that, while the enormous attention he received around this event meant that ‘In the mind of the Soviet public and of foreign observers, he remained associated ever after with culture’ (Boterbloem, 2004:116),³⁴ his connection to culture is often overstated.³⁵ Nonetheless:

The Congress itself became notorious for its acceptance of the official writing style known as ‘Socialist Realism’ [which] heralded an attack on most literary experiments and the suppression of any genuine creativity and inspiration. A typical Socialist Realist work depicts supposedly true-to-life protagonists in wooden language, positive people’s heroes inspired and guided by the Communist party, who always triumph over reactionary or counterrevolutionary opponents and class enemies. [...] Its didactic aim is to raise the masses to enlightenment and civilization, selfless sacrifice, and loyalty to the party and state (loc cit).³⁶

Following the ‘Congress, a Writer’s Union was formed. It guaranteed its members a comfortable life with all kind [sic] of perquisites. But many delegates came to a tragic end in the next few years. Ultimately, 180 of the total of 597 delegates were persecuted

32 This understanding was centred on the ‘cultural revolution’ of 1928–30 (Fitzpatrick, 1978).

33 Zhdanov’s biographer describes him as ‘a believer in the abstract ideal of supreme social justice and ultimate human dignity’ who ‘manipulated the Party’s blood purge of 1937–8 to promote his stature, afterwards becoming head of the Party’s agitation-and-propaganda [agit-prop] section’ (Boterbloem, 2004:5 & 8).

34 Apparently, ‘Zhdanov’s speech at the Congress, which had been carefully edited by Stalin, emphasized the boundless virile optimism that has been part of the official discourse permeating Soviet society since late 1929. In Zhdanov’s subsequent meetings with writers, he continued to stress the necessity of portraying “socialist realism” in a positive light’ (Ibid:116).

35 Gramsci would note that the two Russian *commissars* working in the field of public education were ‘an extremely fine judge of art, Lunacharsky, and a great poet, Maxim Gorky’ (1919:38)

36 Boterbloem observes that ‘Because writers and artists were confused about what fell within its guidelines and what did not, they repeatedly crossed the vague boundaries ordained by Socialist Realism. Their transgression led to several rebukes by the Party’s cultural bosses, including Stalin himself, from the early 1930s until 1953 and beyond’ (Ibid:280).

in the Great Terror, including one-third of the Union bosses elected at the Congress' (loc cit).³⁷ Having tamed Soviet writers through the congress and concomitant union, Stalin became 'obsessed with all forms of art by the mid-1930s. [He] saw "formalism," which was how most surviving experimentation – from symbolism to cubism to futurism – in the plastic arts, literature, or theatre was now labelled, could be construed as criticism of his rigorously ordered socialist society' (Ibid:135).³⁸ Thus, a war was launched against deviant culture that was to flare up in 1940 and again, in a more sustained way, in 1946.

Cubans were as aware of this history as they were of the artistic and literary productions circulated by the USSR outside its territory. Fernández Retamar (1966) describes how, in the first half of the 1960s, socialism was perceived as often having frozen into a monolith that had inhibited politics, pluralism and thinking more generally, turning Marxism from an orthodoxy without windows into a heterodoxy without sense. In the process of its reinvention in Cuba, it would need adequate aesthetics and corresponding ethics. 'However, for numerous writers and artists of the left, not only in Cuba but all over the world, a phantom was abreast: that of a monstrous deformation incarnate in socialist realism, which caused incalculable damage in countries called socialist' (Fernández Retamar, 2001:298). Considering post-revolutionary praxis, Guillén found that 'everything [...] which constitutes life in these dramatic days, and which belongs to our struggle for liberty, must be experienced by us and expressed in print, stone, music, color' (1961:59). But, he cautioned, this must be done without subscribing

37 In October 1940, Zhdanov and the agit-prop team drew up a decree on the flawed operation of the union presidency. Although this was scrapped, the union lost its literary fund, from which writers were paid for their work (Ibid).

38 At this point, 'Stalin designated Platon Kerzhentsev as his watchdog. Zhdanov was then only tangentially involved in All-Union cultural issues' (Ibid:135). The 'drive to attain monolithic cultural conformity resumed during the last week of August 1940' (Ibid:201), with Zhdanov being added to the board of film censors. Zhdanov would return to his position as ideological leader in 1945, and:

The cultural campaigns of the immediate postwar period have been labelled *Zhdanovsbchina* [...] A pejorative term, it [...] is analogous to the use of *Ezhorshchina* for the years of the Great Terror from 1936–38 [...] It usually connotes renewed pressure upon artists to adhere faithfully to the socialist-realist tenets [...] The postwar campaigns reiterated the condemnation of experimentation with form [...] Zhdanov's utterances in 1946, too, show a pathological sensitivity to any criticism in literature or film of Soviet society by the Soviets themselves (Ibid:254).

It is, however, suggested that Stalin, rather than Zhdanov, was responsible for the campaigns, which were accompanied by attempts to bring literary criticism in line with the former's expectations (Ibid).

to didacticism, tendentiousness or socialist realism, which he described as '[...] those aggressive paintings and sculptures in which men with unpleasant faces appear with their fists raised, their lips tightly drawn, their eyes fiery, presumably due to their anger, even when the eyes are made of stone' (Ibid:62). Otero (1997) would later dismiss socialist realism for its unrealistic positive heroes, absence of critique, negation of contradiction and simplistic Manichaeism, which led functionaries to establish aesthetic goals with lamentable consequences,³⁹ while Fornet would make the distinction that:

Socialist realism was not 'intrinsically perverse'; what was perverse was the *imposition* of that formula in the USSR, where what could have been a school or a literary and artistic current was quickly converted into an *official* doctrine, of obligatory compliance. From the distinct functions that literature and art elucidate or are able to elucidate – the aesthetic, the recreational, the informative, the didactic – the commissars focused on the latter, to the detriment of the others; that which the people, in particular the working class, needed was not simply to *read* – to open themselves to new horizons of expectations – but to *educate themselves*, to assimilate through reading the norms and values of the new society (2007:384-5; i.i.o.).

Bonachea and Valdés locate 1961–2 as the period in which 'the regime tried to impose socialist realism' (1972:497), and a sectarian tendency was reinforced into 1963, to re-emerge in dogmatic form in the late-1960s, although not at the instigation of the regime *per se*. As we shall see in chapter nine, the CNC managed to convince young writers that 'socialist realism was the aesthetic of the Revolution, an aesthetic that dare not speak its name, among other things because it was never officially adopted in any instance by the Party or the government' (Fornet, 2007:399). Alfredo Guevara (2007) has detailed a meeting with García Buchaca in May 1963, which provided evidence of the biased attitude affecting the CNC. She spoke to him about a recent trip to Santiago de Cuba, where she had seen an exhibition by two abstract painters, claiming that opinions given in the comments book were very unfavourable. Many agreed, she said, that she should not spend state money on a type of art that did not

39 Similarly, Fornet describes how socialist realism found its way into 'literature as pedagogy and hagiography, methodologically orientated towards the creation of "positive heroes" and the strategic absence of antagonistic conflicts in the "bosom of the people" which produced in us [writers], our petit-bourgeois friends and I, the same reaction as in those who find a mosquito in a glass of milk' (2007:384). As was understood by many of Cuba's intellectuals, Craven notes that 'The privileging of a Eurocentric style such as "socialist realism" would ultimately lead to another form of cultural domination' (1992:92).

express the Revolution. In a final missive on this hot topic as part of a broader debate later that year, Guevara would dismiss the ‘Marxism of fear’, to assert that ‘What we are is Marxists, and for that reason we don’t accept dogmatic distortions [...] that static, copyist, routine Marxism which desperately seeks formulae to synthesise solutions that should be applied to the most tormenting problems’ (Pogolotti, 2006:239).

Grounded in the fundamental materialist law that social existence determines social consciousness, García Buchaca’s *Theory of the Superstructure* unequivocally rejects the idealist interpretation of history which she found lurking in aesthetic theory from Plato to Hegel via Kant and into existentialism, permitting art to be evaluated on the basis of a subjective response to its formal properties. Invoking the age-old polemic between those who believe that art should not have a social function and those who maintain that it could contribute to the betterment of humanity, García Buchaca harnessed art to the project of transforming social reality, accelerating the disintegration of the capitalist world and easing the transition to socialism. After Mao, she urged political criteria to displace aesthetic ones, in the process attributing a specific consciousness-raising function to art. In this, she argued that artists who demolished the values of the previous society without understanding them politically could only reflect on internal life, reinforcing individualism and isolation and blocking an understanding of social life. Those dissociating the form and content of artistic production, proclaiming its autonomy and advocating abstract, formal art would confine it to the domain of ‘pure’ intelligentsia.⁴⁰ In turn, she asserted that this kind of minority art aligned itself with depravity, ‘preoccupied with describing the reactions and psychological abnormalities of drug addicts, homosexuals, prostitutes and the mentally ill’ (1961:30). It is clear that this approach prohibits paths to ‘the curious dialectic of the negation of the negation, to an affirmation of man’s creative power, which is precisely the negation of a decadent outlook in life’ (Sánchez Vásquez, 1965:28).

⁴⁰ Of this kind of approach, Sánchez Vásquez would note that ‘Everything in our times that does not fit into a narrow rubric of realism – futurism, cubism, expressionism, surrealism, etc. – is here lumped under the rubric of formalism. This sectarian and dogmatic position is indefensible, for it narrows the sphere of art, ignoring its specific nature in order to apply exclusively ideological criteria to it’ (1965:35).

This growing influence was manifested in newspapers, theoretical journals and manuals which translated Soviet theses on culture and national doctrine.⁴¹ Fornet (2007) remembers that dogmatic elements – whose only merit lay in the fact that they had introduced a certain scholastic form of Marxism to the island, through the re-publication of these famous manuals – were able to dictate discourse for a while.⁴² Pogolotti (2006) describes how these manuals (which committed inevitable simplifications and opened the door to dogmatism) were well disseminated amongst the new actors of society. During these times, didactic expectations found their way into creative output, with forms such as political novels and literature for children and adolescents being prioritised (Fornet, 2007) and aesthetic criteria being imposed, with the expectation that the message of cultural production would transmit itself with the minimum of political ambiguity. This diminished the possibility for experimentation, games and formal risk-taking (Ibid) and gave free reign to ‘prolific mediocrity’ (Fernández Retamar, 1962). These negative forces took ‘root in the idea of “educative art”’ (Fornet, 2004:10). An exact reproduction of reality was expected of artists by certain functionaries, and, although ‘Mimesis can be a good defensive tactic [...] it was lamentable that it was adopted as a trope at the moments in which the Revolution initiated the greatest process of cultural decolonisation remembered in the history of Cuba’ (loc cit). This caused Fornet to invoke Gramsci’s authority on the matter and remind a 1962 audience that ‘Art is educative in so far as it is art, but not so far as it is “educative art” because in the latter case it is nothing and nothing cannot educate’ (1931-5:107).⁴³

This meant that young writers and artists were faced with two equally unpalatable choices – to turn to the past or to concede to the normative aesthetic of

41 Karol notes, with dismay, the presence certain Soviet manuals in a rural brigade, asking ‘to what possible use could these young people, thirsty for knowledge, put the *Rudiments of Marxist Philosophy* by academician Konstantinov, the works of academician Mitin, or those of the unfortunately renowned academician Lysenko? What was the point of filling their heads with these typically Stalinist works which the Russians themselves [...] looked upon with embarrassment?’ (1970:38).

42 Fornet argues that the magazine *Pensamiento Crítico* [Critical Thought] and the social science publications issued by the Book Institute ultimately played a more important role in the ‘decolonisation’ process than any of the famous manuals imported from the USSR (2007:390).

43 In considering the didactic function of art at a 1962 critics’ forum in the national library, Fornet would appeal to a defence of Croce’s (cited by Gramsci), to explain that, ‘In the first instance, that which art *teaches* us is to sharpen the senses; that which art *educates* is our sensibility (2004:12; i.i.o.).

Konstantinov – which prompted many to ask whether this was all that art could and should be (Ibid). Earlier, Gramsci had observed that:

When a politician puts pressure on the art of his time to express a particular cultural world, his activity is one of politics, not of artistic criticism. If the cultural world for which one is fighting is a living and necessary fact, its expansiveness will be irresistible and it will find its artists. Yet if, despite pressure, this irreversibility does not appear and is not effective, it means that the world in question was artificial and fictitious, a cardboard lucubration of mediocre men who complain that those of major stature do not agree with them (1931-5:109).

Otero (1997) details the pressures mounted against those who wanted to avoid repeating the mistakes of the Soviet Union. Intellectuals were presumed to be uninterested in the Revolution due to its scarcity in their creative expression in a situation that would see ‘artists and writers facing absurd prejudices and being marginalised, while mediocrity inhabited abandoned terrain and partly debilitated the creative impulse’ (Fernández Retamar, 2001:303).

In his unmasking of ‘sectarianism’ within the Revolution on 26 March 1962, Fidel had described this as ‘the tendency to mistrust everyone who could not claim a long record of revolutionary militancy, who had not been an old Marxist activist’ (1962:12).⁴⁴ This fits with the thesis being elaborated here, that the sectarian tendency was predominant within the orthodox Marxist wing of the PSP and actively opposed by those espousing a more humane version of socialism. But scepticism towards aesthetic experimentation was not confined to orthodox circles, and Pogolotti (2006) describes how even Marinello – whose conversations with abstract artists would be circulated clandestinely under Batista and re-edited for post-revolutionary times – had retained reservations about abstraction. Similarly, Roberto Fandiño⁴⁵ would attempt to establish links between non-figurative expression and the cultural policy of the overthrown regime in an article in one of the final issues of *Nuestro Tiempo*, which would be rapidly counteracted. Nonetheless, important exhibitions of abstract art were staged in the 1960s and received a favourable critical response. Aptly conveying the mood of the times, Craven reminds us that, ‘In the early 1960s, when Eastern Bloc leaders were

44 Fidel would assert that ‘We have been unyielding in our criticism of all those who espoused [...] sectarianism’ (1962:34).

45 A Cuban film-maker, theatre director and scenographer who died in Miami in 2009.

continuing to denounce modernist art, Fidel Castro declared instead: “Our enemies are capitalists and imperialists, not abstract art.” (1992:80).⁴⁶

Despite the best efforts of the defenders of freedom of expression, concerns about socialist realism being imposed on Cuban art did not disappear, and Fernández Retamar notes that:

Dogmatism would predominate one moment and recede, defeated, the next, but it was an evil that lay in wait for the Revolution, supported by comfort and ignorance, because it dispensed with the need to think and furnished apparently easy solutions to intricate problems. Anti-dogmatism, for its part, justified its vigilant presence by the measure to which dogmatism was a threat; but its sympathetic mask could cover for those who prefer to say that they are combating dogmatism who cannot openly say that they are combating the Revolution (1966:280).

In contradistinction to Zhdanov, Che Guevara is posited as chief ideologue of the Cuban Revolution (Kronenberg, 2011).⁴⁷ Having asserted in 1961 that ‘Every revolution, like it or not, inevitably has its share of Stalinism, simply because every revolution faces capitalist encirclement’ (Karol, 1970:47),⁴⁸ Che would rail against the rigid prescriptions of Soviet-style socialist realism which sought:

[...] simplification, something everyone can understand, something functionaries understand. True artistic experimentation ends, and the problem of general culture is reduced to assimilating the socialist present and the dead (therefore, not dangerous) past. Thus socialist realism arises upon the foundations of the art of the last century. [...] But why try to find the only valid prescription in the frozen forms of socialist realism? We cannot counterpose ‘freedom’ to socialist realism, because the former does not yet exist and will not exist until the complete development of the new society. We must not, from the pontifical throne of realism-at-all-costs, condemn all art forms since the first half of the 19th century, for we would then fall into the Proudhonian mistake of going back to the past, of putting a strait-jacket on the artistic expression of the people who are being born and are in the process of making themselves. What is needed is the development of an ideological-cultural mechanism that permits both free inquiry and the uprooting of the weeds that multiply so easily in the fertilized soil of state subsidies (1965:u/p).

Defenders of creative freedom took these words – permanently decoupling Cuban artists and writers from the errors of socialist realism – to be of extraordinary

46 Fidel uttered these words in an interview with Claude Julien in February 1963 (Karol, 1970).

47 Karol asserts that Che’s ‘Latin American experiences made him better suited than anyone else to becoming the theorist of the guerrilla war, an expert on relations between the guerrillas and the peasantry and on the repercussions of the war on the nature of the Revolution’ (1970:42).

48 At the same time, Che distinguished Cuba from the USSR on the basis that the latter had to build its sustainability from within, whereas Cuba could count on the socialist bloc for support, concluding that ‘conditions for Stalinist developments do not exist in Cuba; that phenomenon simply cannot be repeated here’ (Ibid:48).

importance (Fernández Retamar, 1965a). Notwithstanding, ideas from the 1934 congress persisted in orthodox circles, including Gorki's conception of writers as 'engineers of the human soul' (Boterbloem, 2004:441); by the CNC and its outposts, it was deemed that 'Literature and art do not limit themselves to reflecting the life of the people but model the human soul' (CPC, 1961:3), thus consolidating the field of culture as a nexus for action.

Gilman (2003) describes how, in the early years of defining socialist aesthetic regimes distinct from those being perpetuated by the Soviet Union, a handful of European critical intellectuals – including Jean-Paul Sartre, Ernst Fischer⁴⁹ and Roger Garaudy⁵⁰ – were influential in Latin America. From 1962, *Casa de las Américas* stimulated a discussion of aesthetic questions in professional circles based on the new lectures of Sánchez Vásquez. A non-dogmatic, committed approach was favoured at ENA and ISA, where courses were initially content-orientated, within a Marxist-Leninist framework, with little treatment of aesthetic questions (Camnitzer, 1994). As a testament to the primacy of content, aesthetics did not become a separate discipline within professional art education until 1987 and, rather than attempting an exhaustive history of Marxist aesthetics, eclectic teaching was centred on, amongst others, Fredric Jameson, Néstor García Canclini and Umberto Eco.⁵¹ Despite the presence of various Soviet advisers in the schools, especially between 1976 and 1980, Camnitzer asserts that

49 Whose book, *The Necessity of Art: A Marxist Approach*, is cited by Fernández Retamar (1966) as having influenced both himself and Che.

50 Whose 1963 book, *Towards a Realism without Frontiers*, translated into Castilian by a member of the Communist Party of Argentina, advocated realism as a value applicable to all artistic manifestations at a time when realism had certain prescribed connotations (Gilman, 2003).

51 Camnitzer notes that:

Art history and aesthetics are taught in the ISA from a Marxist-Leninist point of view, seeing Western artistic expressions in the context of a bourgeois-capitalist socioeconomic structure. Thus, while Western methods of creation are respected, they are always seen with the distance of social criticism. The internalization of Western values – such as individual success and competitiveness and the generation of mimetic attitudes – is therefore minimized. It should also be noted that the use of these Marxist-Leninist approaches by instructors is far from homogenous or guided by unifying directives. Instructors study in different places and use different sources as references, mostly gathered through individual research. Their work, not unlike the artists making art, reflects a theoretical eclecticism that introduces an unexpected richness and complexity in their teaching (1994:124).

At a postgraduate level, this resulted in a curriculum unimaginable under capitalism which had: [...] among its objectives an application of Marxist-Leninist economic theory to the interpretation of practical problems derived from the construction of socialism. The bourgeois economic concepts about the development of capitalism and socialism are to be criticized from the vantage point of the working class. The dialectical relation is to be established between culture and the social class that conditions it, and a scientific understanding of the Cuban historical process is to be developed to achieve a correct interpretation of the traditions in artistic research, creation, and criticism. (Ibid:169-70).

‘Cuban art remained relatively open, even during the most doctrinaire periods and in those times when the West felt that Cuba had a Soviet dependent culture. While some limits were set during the late 1960s and early 1970s [...] these restrictions were not based on a rigid aesthetic credo’ (1994:10). While aesthetic prescription was resisted at a professional level, ‘aesthetic training [was] considered to be an indispensable part of the formation of the personality’ (Sarusky and Mosquera, 1979:14) from primary school onwards, with and a fifth ‘aesthetic’ year being added to the studies of future teachers, to enable the teaching of aesthetics to children as a ‘byproduct of a continual rethinking process applied to education and of a conception of art as a part of social production’ (Camnitzer, 1994:166).⁵²

Karol takes the July 1967 incarnation of the Parisian May Salon as an indication of the mood of the times, observing that:

Socialist realism on the Russian model had never had many followers in Cuba; however, by inviting the *Salon* and by widely publicizing their tour, the Castroists were giving official blessing to the kind of art on which other socialist countries had resolutely turned their backs. Worse still, the Cubans now declared that the only truly revolutionary and progressive art was art that did not allow itself to be fettered by petrified Marxism. Apart from the *Salon* they had also invited surrealists and members of other schools abhorrent to the U.S.S.R. (1970:309).

Visiting an exhibition organised around the 1968 cultural congress, Salkey would note that ‘Socialist Realism never seemed to have got past the José Martí airport’⁵³ (1971:189),⁵⁴ and, at a January 1969 meeting of the *Casa* collaborative committee, it was reaffirmed that the leaders demarcated an ideological line, not an aesthetic one (Otero, 1997). This attitude would prevail in the rhetoric of the revolutionary government and, on the threshold of the grey years, ‘The Declaration of the [1971] congress, even in this loaded atmosphere, did not give direct aesthetic directives but laid out a socialist artistic aim of a different kind, which could be subscribed to by everybody in Cuba’ (Camnitzer,

⁵² Similarly, sociology and philosophy graduates teach aesthetics at FORMATUR, the school for tourism sector training (Carmona Báez, 2004).

⁵³ Havana’s international airport.

⁵⁴ This has led to a situation in which:

What strikes most foreign viewers as surprising – that the politically explicit content of Cuban art today is minimal and that its products look much closer to the Western mainstream than what one would usually attribute to a ‘socialist country’ – is therefore a logical consequence of Cuban policy. Still, even sympathizers of Cuba, upon first contact with Cuban contemporary art, have difficulty in believing that it is an art encouraged by the state. This makes Cuban art less easy to deal with than if it were clearly nationalistic or ‘typical’ in its expression and separate from transnational trends (Ibid:100-1).

1994:126). At the same congress, Fidel would link aesthetics to the emancipatory and humanistic aims of the Revolution to state that ‘There can be no aesthetic value without human content. There can be no aesthetic value opposed to man. There can be no aesthetic value opposed to justice, opposed to well being, opposed to freedom, opposed to man’s happiness’ (Instituto del Libro, 1971:u/p). By the time of the 1975 PCC Congress, which signalled the beginning of the end of the grey years, aesthetics were harnessed to the task of representing reality, but through a lateral expression of life rather than absolute mimesis:

On art it was decided that there is a nexus between socialist art and reality. Art should apprehend the essences of this reality and define its aesthetic expression to this effect by means of the most appropriate formal structures. What matters is not the simple copy of reality but that the quality of life and knowledge lead, in art, to the ‘intimate truth of objective processes through the corresponding aesthetic languages.’ This position is totally removed from Soviet socialist realism and, if anything, it links up with the positions represented in the Soviet Union somewhat by Lenin and much by Lunacharsky during the early 1920s (Camnitzer, 1994:10).

With the benefit of four decades of hindsight, Fornet realises that Cuba in the 1960s witnessed a blurring of the line between art, pedagogy, propaganda and publicity. More specifically, ‘these aesthetic disputes formed part of the struggle for cultural power, for the control of certain zones of influence’ (2007:386). For him, it is deeply regrettable that culture ‘had become a battlefield, a symbolic space, in which all types of discrepancies were aired by distinct groups disputing the hegemony’ (2004:11) in a way that transcended aesthetic disputes and personal phobias. But, he explains, it was somewhat inevitable that defenders of freedom of expression would find themselves in a difficult position, given that post-revolutionary culture was forged in a climate of violent confrontation, in spaces fortified against the constant threat of terrorism, in which it was not possible to engage in the noble exercise of ideological coexistence. Through ignorance, bad faith or cowardice, combined with a lack of true revolutionary spirit, the opposing camps of dogmatism and liberalism succeeded in freezing intellectual debate and, as it is not possible to lay the blame with anyone in particular, Fornet (2007a) indicts everyone as culpable.

Freedom of Expression

David Harvey has observed that the founders of neoliberal thought chose freedom as one of its central tenets, perceiving liberty to be ‘threatened not only by fascism, dictatorships, and communism, but by all forms of state intervention that substituted collective judgements for those of individuals free to choose’ (2005:5). Early in its existence, the Provincial Council of Culture noted furious attempts by Lenin’s detractors to ‘demonstrate that those who serve the interests of a particular class and conscientiously maintain particular political lines are incapable of free artistic expression’ (1961:3). This echoes Gramsci’s observation that ‘among the so-called intellectuals runs the widely held prejudice that the workers’ movement and communism are enemies of beauty and art, and that the friend to art in favour of creation and the disinterested contemplation of beauty is supposedly the present regime of merchants greedy for wealth and exploitation, who perform their essential activity by barbarously destroying life and beauty’ (1919:37).

In the post-revolutionary situation, which saw artists involved in class struggle and the building of socialism, it was inevitable that creative freedom would be called into question. Writing on literature, Casal declared that ‘it is obvious that “freedom of expression” does not exist in Cuba’ before conceding that ‘it is also obvious that, given the scope and variety of the works that have been produced, there has been considerable leeway given to literary words during the first ten years of the Revolution’ (1971:458). Similarly, Dopico Black emphasises that ‘outright limitations of intellectual freedom have existed to some degree in Cuba since the earliest days of the Revolution (and, indeed, well before then)’ (1989:118), while being compelled to admit that:

[...] it was not until the institutionalization period of the early seventies that repressive acts were more consistently, if less frequently, applied. The artistic policy that has operated since these years has made it exceedingly clear that certain themes and ideas could not and would not be tolerated by the regime. Official declarations have broadly defined what these themes are. Whereas there have been significant variations over time in the extent to which this policy has been exercised, the official criteria for what is inadmissible have nonetheless remained relatively stable (*loc cit*).

Nowhere does Dopico Black specify what these criteria are and how they might relate

to visual art, and she hesitates to admit that restrictions eased after 1976 and certainly into the late 1980s when her text was written. In addition to this, her words are at odds with broader rhetoric, which explicitly avoided prescribing official themes.



Intervention by Critical Art Ensemble

As we have seen, preconceptions about the mutual exclusivity of politicised praxis and freedom were not confined to ideological opponents of Lenin, and a tendency towards aestheticism was at times dismissed as escapist at the expense of revolutionary commitment. In the next chapter, she shall consider how the insistence of *Lunes* on freedom of expression led to accusations of counter-revolutionary activity at a politically sensitive time. In 1960, Mills confessed that his greatest fear for Cuba lay in her cultural development.⁵⁵ For him, a lack of personnel with knowledge and sensibility ran the risk of combining with the ‘menace of counterrevolution and with the fact of a generally uneducated population. This combination *could* lead to the easy way out: the absolute control of all means of expression and the laying down of a Line to be followed’ (1960:186; i.i.o.). Such uncertainties about art were palpable at the heart of the Revolution and, in summer 1960, the revolutionary leadership worried aloud that, if art ‘might hurt the revolution [...] maybe we just have to limit artistic expression’ (Mills, 1960:143). On the other hand, there was an idea that art could reflect the ‘human tragedy and glory of the revolution, and the essential humanity of our struggle [...] Why should not art, through its many different forms of expression, gather all that up for the present and for the future generations? [...] Must not art pay a tribute to the revolution?’ In which case, ‘we ask ourselves too, must not the revolution, especially our Cuban revolution, pay a tribute to art? [...] We want an absolutely free manifestation of the human spirit. This is our goal. We want a great and absolutely free intelligentsia’ (loc cit). In considering the practicalities of how this might be achieved in the face of

⁵⁵ Mills took culture to include not only art and literature but ‘all those institutions of the mass media of communication and of higher and lower education by which the character and the mentality of men and women are formed’ (1960:186).

internal and external enemies, it was argued that ‘it is difficult to see the conditions for an absolutely free culture [...] The less the revolution feels menaced, the more chemically pure will be the liberty of expression in Cuba. When we no longer feel that we must fight to exist, [...] we will be able to think about the freedom of culture and expression’ (Ibid:144). Thus, a fragile equilibrium was established between the security of the Revolution and creative freedom that would echo down the years.

Post-revolutionary developments in the cultural field permitted the creation of new types of relations. In 1960, the Cubans believed that ‘The intellectual searches for truth; all that is artificial the real intellectual is against. The revolution, too, smashes whatever is mere artifice. So it is only, we think, in a revolutionary epoch that intellectuals can do their real work, and it is only by intellectual effort that revolutionaries can be truly successful’ (Ibid:133). As will be evident in the next chapter, Fidel would consistently speak of the creative freedom that existed within the Revolution while acknowledging the serious responsibility borne by producers of culture. In the mid-1960s, he foresaw a day when there would be no limitation on the publication of universal literature:

Why? Because I believe in the free man, I believe in the well-educated man, I believe in the man able to think, in the man who acts always out of conviction, without fear of any kind. And I believe that ideas must be able to defend themselves. I am opposed to the blacklists of books, prohibited films and all such things. What is my personal ideal of the kind of people that we wish to have in the future? People sufficiently cultivated and educated to be capable of making a correct judgment about anything without fear of coming into contact with ideas that could confound or deflect them [who] could read any book or see any film, about any theme, without changing our fundamental beliefs; and if there is in a book a solid argument about something that could be useful, that we are capable of analyzing and evaluating it. [...] If we did not think like that, we would be men with no faith in our own convictions, in our own philosophy (Lockwood, 1967:112).⁵⁶

Interviewing Che in May 1961, Karol questioned the relevance of the Stalinist pamphlets to which the young were being exposed:

At this question, he became furious. He spoke scathingly of ‘liberals’ who wanted the Revolution to remain ideologically neutral, and to give everyone perfect freedom to

⁵⁶ This approach would be extended to ‘the children now in elementary school and who are going to be the future intellectuals, the future citizens of our country, [who] should not be educated in a dogmatic way, but should develop their capacity to think and to judge for themselves’ (Lockwood, 1967:116).

choose between a host of social philosophies and doctrines. “We reject such ‘freedom’ precisely because our view is that the first duty and most urgent need of the Revolution is the political and ideological education of our people. In a country which has to face death every day, which has to tackle tasks without equal in the history of this continent, it would be nothing less than criminal to give the people the privilege of hesitating between true and false ideologies.” (1970:46)

In this way, the freedom to vacillate was curtailed in an attempt to re-educate the people in socialist mores. At the same time, creative practitioners would continue to embrace their revolutionary duty while asserting their aesthetic freedom. At the first national congress, Baragaño cautioned that, in developing a socialist cultural revolution, the theme of liberty should not be a pretext for the negation of the supreme freedom of artists – that of putting their work at the service of the people and the Revolution (UNEAC, 1961). At the same event, Guillén argued that, ‘under socialism the intellectual serves the people, and the people serve him, respecting and exalting his human nature, securing him a livelihood and means of creation, surrounding him, in short, with the affection of the masses, without impairing his personal freedom and creative genius’ (1961:55). Echoing this sentiment at the end of the decade,⁵⁷ the then Minister of Education, José Llanusa,⁵⁸ asserted that ‘It will be necessary to discuss with those who are concerned about freedom of expression and to ask them to what freedom they are referring. Our revolution defines a line. There is no discussion on esthetic expression, but rather on how art serves the people, their happiness, their cultural development. There is complete freedom to do this’ (Benedetti, 1969:525). In a similar vein, Hart would define social responsibility, moral exigency and patriotic conscience as the basis of the fullest creative freedom (Sanchez, 1989:8). What this came to mean was that those artists and writers fully immersed in the processes of creating a new society, familiarising themselves at first hand with the necessities that this entailed, would communicate these realities through whichever formal means they saw fit.

In 1967, Dorticós would assert that, at a time when problems around freedom of literary and artistic expression were again stirring up polemics, demanding definitions

⁵⁷ At the first graduation ceremony of the National Art Schools.

⁵⁸ In this role, he was also a member of the Central Committee of the PCC. Salkey (1971) partly dedicates his book to the charismatic minister, described by Karol as ‘a former basketball and tennis champion, a man of impressive build [...] one of Fidel’s closest collaborators’ (1970:382).

and creation confusion, this issue had transcended the polemical in Cuba, not through coercion nor because the cultural climate had favoured ideological disorientation but through an exceptional conciliation between freedom of expression and the revolutionary duty of writers and artists, an observation which gained the applause of those writers and artists to whom he referred (Llanusa and Dorticós, 1967).⁵⁹ Even as the grey years took hold, a CNC publication would assert that 'Each creator chooses tendencies, manners and styles according to their need for expression which guarantees a diversity and spontaneity in their manifestations. It is hoped that the responsibility of each artist will lead to an intimate resolution between their freedom of expression and their revolutionary obligations' (CNC, 1970). Similarly, the 1971 congress was at pains to highlight the commitment to freedom at the heart of 'Socialism [which] creates the objective and subjective conditions that make feasible authentic creative freedom' (Santana, 1977).⁶⁰ This again translated into a situation in which 'the State relies on each artist's sense of responsibility for a close reconciliation of his freedom of expression and his revolutionary duty, setting a barrier against the subtle ideological infiltration whose final goal is the destruction of the institutions that guarantee and promote his freedom' (Otero, 1972:14). Despite all of the above, it is common for commentators from the capitalist world to interpret the Cuban dilemma as one of inhibited freedom:

To be an intellectual, the Cubans argue, one must be a revolutionary. And to be a revolutionary one must not be concerned with aesthetic questions, or matters surrounding artistic freedom. The function of the intellectual is to contribute his work toward the development of the Revolution. Literature and art are the arms of combat against all weaknesses and problems that interfere in any way with revolutionary objectives. A revolutionary intellectual provides unconditional support to the men of power and aid them in the mobilization of the masses, in transmitting objectives to them while exalting the accomplished achievements (Bonachea and Valdés, 1972:498-9).

As we have seen, the pursuit of revolutionary praxis was by no means inimical to experimentation. Nonetheless, the two fundamental themes of post-revolutionary

59 Expanding on this, Dorticós (1967) noted that not one voice had felt the need to bring this up in order to reclaim freedom of literary or artistic expression, which served as proof of the incorporation of writers and artists in the revolutionary task.

60 However, this presumes that 'those tendencies are rendered contemptible and unacceptable which are based in licentiousness with the purpose of masking the counter-revolutionary poison of works that conspire against revolutionary ideology in which our construction of socialism and communism is based and to which our people are today irrevocably committed and in whose spirit the new generations are educated' (Santana, 1977).

thought would remain freedom of expression and the function of art and literature in a socialist society (Fornet, 2004).

Visiting Havana in 1968, Salkey would note that ‘the artist and the intellectual are free in Revolutionary Cuba. [...] The artist is *not* dictated to in any way’ (1971:27, i.i.o.). In Desnoes’s expression of ambivalence towards Fidel and the Revolution in his novella, *Inconsolable Memories*, he would find that ‘The literary freedom Edmundo was enjoying was clearly a tribute to the quality of the Revolution’ (Ibid:128).⁶¹ Interestingly, the following year, Desnoes (Dalton et al, 1969) would implicate himself and his fellow writers in creating the illusion for visiting foreigners that, in Cuba, there existed an absolute freedom to express oneself without recognising the demands of a society in revolution. While Fornet disagreed that the impression of absolute freedom was illusory,⁶² Gutiérrez argued that, from the outside, the eclecticism of styles and diversity of genres was perceived by some as unconditional freedom, which distinguished Cuba from the cultural rigidity of other socialist societies. For him, the construction of socialism required ideological solidity and the total integration of individuals, which would necessitate a certain renunciation of the freedom to manoeuvre within predefined limits and a recognition of subordination to the objectives and methods established by the leadership; one of the rules of the game accepted by Cuban intellectuals was to sacrifice aesthetics if it became necessary to do so in the face of mortal urgency (Dalton et al, 1969).⁶³ Similarly, Otero (1997) vowed to himself that, if the moment ever came when he was forced to choose between literature and social justice, he would

61 Among the excerpts Salkey cites to validate this opinion are those when the protagonist calls Fidel mad when considering his gung-ho attitude during the missile crisis. Salkey met the editorial team of *Pensamiento Crítico* and was told that editorial policy was free as they worked within the terms of the Revolution: ‘Articles encouraging disagreement and debate and refutation are fairly often included in *Pensamiento Crítico*; even articles of a counter-Revolutionary nature may be published in order to let our readers know what the other side is thinking and saying outside Cuba against the Revolution’s theory and practice’ (1971:58). Salkey also met the playwright, Roberto Blanco, after enjoying one of his dramatic works, to be told: ‘I can’t imagine censorship or political interference, ever, in the society or in the theatre. If a director wants to put on an American play, he does so; a play critical of Communism, yes; something written without an overt ideological appeal, the same thing [...] any period, any message, any critical attitude, any playwright’s play; anything worth doing, theatrically, goes’ (Ibid:145).

62 He argues that freedom had a concrete sense; it was practical freedom not only of creation and experimentation but also freedom to exhibit, to publish, to use the means of diffusion that the state put in their hands (Dalton et al, 1969).

63 For Gilman (2003), this discussion signifies the zenith of the anti-intellectual current, with the superiority of the political leadership being affirmed alongside the subordination of revolutionary intellectuals to that leadership and to the state and its institutions.

take the latter, for, in war, there could be no hesitation. Freedom, Desnoes concurred, did not exist in the abstract but was conditioned by the Revolution; rather than being a capricious freedom that responded to the desires of individuals, it related to the reality that embraced, and was participated in by, intellectuals.⁶⁴ Within the Revolution, he argued, writers and artists should not be afraid to express their vision of the process, including their doubts (Dalton et al, 1969). This approach had earlier led a *Times* reviewer to describe *Inconsolable Memories* as ‘Intelligent, intimate and honest, the novel of a man who believes that doubt is not treason in his country’ (Desnoes, 1968:3).

In a significant departure from this approach, a Provincial Council of Culture pamphlet pontificated on the specific character of freedom. Wondering whether harnessing culture to revolutionary aims would limit artistic freedom, the answer came: ‘In some way’ (1961:4). And not for the last time as we have seen, this train of thought would segue into the idea that ‘The principal postulate of socialist realism is that it imposes the necessity of representing reality as it advances’ (loc cit). Distinguishing the Revolution from restrictive interpretations of Marxism that had befallen other parts of the world, Fidel would assert at the 1968 cultural congress that ‘there is nothing more anti-Marxist than dogma’ and expand upon the idea that Marxism needed to interpret present realities more dialectically in order to behave like a revolutionary force (Anon, 1968b).⁶⁵ Wesker describes how ‘the left wing artists from 70 different countries, many of whom are weary of left wing dogma, rise to their feet as Castro confirms at last what they’ve always wanted to believe: that real communism and free intellectual enquiry are not merely compatible but essential to each other [...] And the United States is frightened because Cuba proves their one excuse for armed intervention in Vietnam is

64 While all those practitioners interviewed by Kirk and Padura Fuentes at the start of the twenty-first century would demand greater freedom of expression and faith from the government, Afro-Cuban poet, Nancy Morejón, argued that:

We are a country that is still under siege and one that has never been alone. We must always remember the hostility to which we have been subjected. [...] I feel that Cuban writers today are demanding things that simply cannot be conceded in a period like this, since we are facing difficulties as critical as the Bay of Pigs invasion or the Missile Crisis. This country has to survive. Moreover, ‘freedom’ has many facets, and many people think that they have to make demands on the state for their freedom. I think that there are, in fact, several ‘freedoms’ and not just ‘freedom’ in absolute terms (2001:117).

65 In presenting a revolutionary schema to the congress, Antone Makdissi (1968) also identified the very real danger of dogma setting in if the socialist method was allowed to petrify and depart from dialectics.

false – namely that the west must protect itself against communism because it denies intellectual and spiritual freedom’ (1969:17). At the same time, Karol would observe that ‘It was refreshing that this small country, so exposed, so threatened, felt at liberty to prove to the whole world that socialism was not synonymous with intolerance and obscurantism’ (1970:394-5). Considering the Soviet-influenced years that followed, Camnitzer argues that ‘The latitude permitted artists has remained fairly constant, even during this period, ensuring an enormous diversity not dissimilar to any other Western country, with fashion dictated through different channels’ (1994:129).

Wesker’s allusion to the hierarchical nature of the relationship between the US and Cuba and the need of the latter to maintain credibility reminds us to probe the absolute freedom claimed by certain nation states. In his analysis of the cultural activities of the CIA-funded Congress for Cultural Freedom, Lasch observes that:

It is a serious mistake to confuse academic freedom with cultural freedom. [North] American intellectuals are not subject to political control, but the very conditions which have brought about this result have at the same time undermined their capacity for independent thought. The American press is free but censors itself. The university is free, but they use their freedom to propagandize for the state. What has led to this curious state of affairs? The very freedom of [North] American intellectuals blinds them to their unfreedom. It leads them to confuse the political interests of intellectuals as an official minority with the progress of intellect. Their freedom from overt political control [...] blinds them to the way in which the ‘knowledge industry’ has been incorporated into the state and the military-industrial complex. Since the state exerts so little censorship over the cultural enterprises it subsidizes [...] intellectuals do not see that these activities serve the interests of the state, not the interests of intellect. All that they can see is the absence of censorship; that and that alone proves to their satisfaction (Ibid:347).

Since these lines were written, implicit political control of the knowledge and culture industries has increased not only in the US but also in its satellites throughout the capitalist world. In considering freedom of expression under capitalism, Che had earlier observed that ‘A school of artistic experimentation is invented, which is said to be the definition of freedom; but this “experimentation” has its limits, imperceptible until there is a clash, that is, until the real problems of individual alienation arise. Meaningless anguish or vulgar amusement thus become convenient safety valves for human anxiety. The idea of using art as a weapon of protest is combated’ (1965). By implication, then,

dissent should be tolerated in the formation of a new society, and Weiss assigns a critical role to creative practitioners which means that ‘it should not be impossible for the intellectual to remain objective both in the face of political pressure and in the face of the dogma that often contaminates certain stages of scientific socialism’ (1977:50-1). As this report progresses, we shall see how this critique was enacted.

Remarks in Conclusion

In this chapter, revolutionary ideas began to crystallise around the main tenets of cultural work. In the first place, we saw how culture was liberated from the uselessness that defines its existence under capitalism and firmly endowed with a social role. Embraced by the Revolution, creative practice was released from the law of value through a system of state bursaries and sales to the national collection. These subsidies replaced the derided system of private sales and royalties, and intellectuals willingly relinquished their intellectual property rights, understanding the need to bolster the island’s reserves of the best universal literature. In return, it was understood that artists would contribute to society by gaining the fullest possible understanding of the seismic shifts being undergone and communicating them via the most appropriate (but not necessarily the most didactic) means. At the same time, professional artists would disseminate their skills to future generations of graduates in the immersive environment of the National Schools of Art, with a focus on critical thinking and a lack of aesthetic restraints.

As asserted throughout this study, the post-revolutionary cultural climate was underwritten by a humanist understanding of the emancipatory potential of cultural participation. Tied up with the material renovation of the country would be an understanding that the people needed to develop their spiritual lives via access to culture. Only then would freedom from alienation be achieved, and we shall continue considering the efforts made to create new alliances that would engender creative development among the organic intellectuals of Cuba. This compels us to further unravel the role of intellectuals in the transformation of social reality (a topic that will

be resumed in chapter eight), and to delve deeper into the democratisation of culture through active participation (in chapter nine).

We have also observed the ways in which the revolutionary unification of diverse currents exacerbated the persistent dialectic between aesthetic experimentation and political commitment. As has been hinted here and will become clearer in the next chapter, the poles of this debate were hardened by the reluctance of those at the aesthetic vanguard to relinquish their hard-won terrain. At the opposite pole, the orthodox Marxists who held sway in the cultural field, notably García Buchaca and her cronies at the CNC, would espouse narrow formulae that sought to delimit creative practice by eschewing certain formal paths. This introduced a language of prescription and proscription that was inappropriate to an otherwise highly charged and experimental atmosphere. It is regrettable, but perhaps inevitable, that dogmatists at the CNC were permitted to thrive in the post-revolutionary climate. While we may struggle to take any positives from such a regressive atmosphere, the Cuban case seems to prove beyond doubt that socialist realism is far from being the only aesthetic mode applicable to a revolutionary situation.

Nonetheless, the majority of creative intellectuals working in Cuba accommodated themselves to a revolutionary position that combined political commitment with formal experimentation in which criteria of quality remained paramount. In the process, the relative nature of freedom, in Cuba and elsewhere, was both acknowledged and accepted by those who chose to remain in the country.⁶⁶ In this effort, creative intellectuals accepted the uniqueness and fragility of the revolutionary process and aligned their work to supporting, rather than undermining, it, thereby fully embracing their social role.

⁶⁶ This is affirmed in a tenth anniversary issue of *Casa* in which forty-four writers and critics were asked to respond to a questionnaire about the impact of the Revolution on their work, which, Weiss concludes, showed that 'the Cuban intellectual is favourable to the aims of the Revolution, and reflects a willingness to compromise for the sake of unity, though writers may realize that there should be no demands made of their creative imagination in the environment of relative freedom that exists' (Weiss, 1973:243).

Chapter Seven: Cultural Policy of the Revolution Part One

'The best cultural policy was that cultural policy didn't exist' – Ambrosio Fornet, 1969.

Having introduced some of the main conceptions of culture in post-revolutionary Cuba, let us turn our attention to the specific policies that were developed in the field. As outlined in the initial chapter of this report, the revolutionary alignment of politics and culture was underscored by an uncertainty about the direction cultural policy should take. Pogolotti (2010) describes the first few months of 1959 as quite a confused stage. The following year, this would be elaborated on by those interviewed by Mills:

We're starting out with all the disorder we've inherited, and with what amounts to No Culture in Cuba. To bring about real cultural and intellectual establishments is one of our biggest and most difficult tasks. Of course, it's linked [...] with our need for administrators and technicians in Cuba. But we want so much more than that. We want poetry as well as physics. And we know you can't plan for poets as you can for engineers. You can only plan and construct cultural institutions, and then hope that poets, as well as engineers, will grow in them and do great work' (1960:140-1).

We have already seen how institutions sprang up much more rapidly in the cultural field than they did in other sectors of society. This first of three chapters to chart the precise evolution of cultural planning will consider the two-and-a-half years (and beyond) that predated its official inscription.

While Camnitzer (1994) contends that Cuba has consistently avoided a rigid course of cultural action, Kapcia reminds that it was 'always likely that any cultural policy would either follow the priorities and perspectives of the political vanguard or emerge organically' (2005:128). If we take the political vanguard to include Fidel, Che and Camilo, working alongside Armando Hart and Carlos Rafael Rodríguez, then a more organic evolution might take account of the approaches of some of the pioneering institutional and cultural figures outlined in chapter five, supported by sizeable creative communities. In 1962, Fernández Retamar would attest that, rather than being mere passive subjects of rhetoric or believing themselves to be theoreticians or intellectuals of revolutions, writers and artists played an important part at those

meetings during which revolutionary management was undertaken. Thus, in an inversion of the primacy given to the political vanguard in other areas of Cuban policy, this account prioritises the contribution made by practitioners to the organic emergence of cultural policy, before considering the responsibilities that this would come to entail.

Cultural Discussions before the Revolution

Consulting documents pertaining to the insurrection, Kapcia's assertion that culture had 'figured large in the rebels' manifestos since 1953' (2005:128) reads like something of an overstatement. Nonetheless, Fidel's 1953 'History will Absolve Me' speech makes reference to education, and Pogolotti (2010) is keen to note his inclusion of the unemployed students of the San Alejandro art academy in his definition of 'the people'. Similarly, clause seven of fifteen in the first manifesto issued by the 26 July Movement – while the Castro brothers were exiled in Mexico – pointed to the essential 'Extension of culture, preceded by reform of all methods of teaching to the furthest corner of the country in such a way that every Cuban has the possibility of developing their mental and physical aptitudes' (Castro Ruz, 1955). But, when the rebel forces disembarked in Cuba to launch the next phase of the struggle, they were too preoccupied with fighting to discuss political ideology (Lockwood, 1967), let alone cultural policy.¹

By contrast, as we have seen, members of the PSP-dominated *Nuestro Tiempo* society speculated on the cultural future of the country throughout the 1950s, developing lines which, for Pogolotti (2010), foreshadowed the cultural policy that would be adopted by the revolutionary government. Grounding this genesis in the party, Rafael Rodríguez (1982) cites the elaboration of this policy as one of the reasons for the synergy between the young communists, who were the nucleus of the society, and the young writers and artists who were its members. Hernández Otero and Saínz (2002)

¹ This perspective was reasserted by members of staff working at the Office of Historical Matters of the Council of State who, upon being asked for all the early statements and manifestoes pertaining to culture, produced the cited manifesto, a copy of Fidel's 'History will Absolve Me', an address by Fidel to the people from the Isle of Pines prison in December 1953 and a note from him to the rebels at Las Villas, which added no more to the cultural debate. Similarly, the Sierra Maestra Manifesto of 12 July 1957 contains no mention of culture.

mention a Department of Culture within the PSP, and Guevara (2007) refers to the Cultural Commission of the PSP as the hand behind *Nuestro Tiempo*. He outlines how, after the Revolution, all the parties entering into alliance as the Integrated Revolutionary Organisations (ORI) agreed to dissolve their internal structures, but the PSP failed to disband its commissions, including that for culture managed by García Buchaca and Aguirre, which led to much turbulence and insecurity in the post-revolutionary climate.²

When Batista's regime collapsed, *Nuestro Tiempo* issued a salute to the triumphant Revolution. Dated 2 January 1959 and entitled 'Free Culture in Free Cuba', this declaration proposed the consolidation of revolutionary conquests in all aspects of Cuban existence, including culture. Acknowledging the enormity and complexity of compelling an artistic and intellectual programme in the country, via appropriate organisations, the society advised the convocation of a great National Congress for Culture and outlined a handful of approaches that would be indispensable in the coming years. Significant in this regard were proposals for: complete reorganisation of the INC at the hands of the most responsible exponents of art, science and letters; close linkage of the highest cultural manifestations with the intensive dissemination of popular education; full respect for the free distribution of thought in all its creative manifestations; moral and material support from the state for the work of artistic and cultural organisations, with strict respect for independence of criteria and action; free international cultural exchange; channelling Cuban culture from the best liberal traditions, while preserving its national character; and battling against the cosmopolitanism that could harm national cultural heritage (Hernández Otero, 2002). We have already seen how the INC would morph into the CNC and noted the autonomy that was written into key cultural institutions that benefited from state support for work grounded in non-chauvinistic nationalism and an international outlook. As we shall see throughout this chapter and beyond, the idea of a great cultural congress was revisited several times, with the development of an authentic Cuban

² Guevara (2007) describes how he, Raúl, Che and Ramiro Valdés were aware of this; Fidel also knew but he was dedicated to other things.

culture remaining paramount and the connection between high culture and popular education becoming inextricable. Thus, *Nuestro Tiempo*'s commitment to prolonging the best of Cuba's past and embarking on work towards the future reaffirms a sense of continuity in both theory and practice.

Words from the Intellectuals (October–November 1960)

Camnitzer reminds us that 'The kind of culture dreamt of at the beginning of the Revolution could not be simply and single-handedly achieved by one or a group of visual artists, no matter how enlightened' (1994:113). However, Cuban artists and writers were by no means passive within the Revolution. On 19 November 1960, in the wake of the expropriation of US-owned property on the island and the enactment of the Urban Reform Law, they published a manifesto called 'Towards a National Culture Serving the Revolution'. In a rare mention of this document in English,³ the unsigned foreword of a MINREX publication hints at the immediate programme of activity that was outlined by creative practitioners 'conscious of the need to participate' who 'proclaimed their irrevocable commitment to the Revolution and to the people' (1962:6). Following a brief summary of the manifesto's main points, the trail in the literature available outside Cuba runs cold. However, research undertaken in Havana reveals that the manifesto was drafted during the First National Meeting of Poets and Artists, held in Camagüey between 27 and 30 October 1960, at which creative intellectuals discussed unifying and co-ordinating their efforts with those of the revolutionary government (Rodríguez Manso, 2010).⁴ In recognition of the relevance of the manifesto to this thesis, the full text has been included in Appendix E and its evolution and content are analysed here.

In October 1960, Nicolás Guillén, Rolando Escardó⁵ and other intellectuals convened a meeting of practitioners from around the country.⁶ A letter, signed by

3 As will become clear in the concluding remarks of this chapter, Del Duca (1972) also mentions the manifesto in a text written in English, but nowhere is it cited in full.

4 There is evidence of this commitment elsewhere. In March 1959, the playwright, Virgilio Piñera, had addressed a public message to Fidel, in which he stated the desire of writers to cooperate shoulder to shoulder with the Revolution (Fornet, 2007).

5 A poet and member of the Revolutionary Armed Forces (FAR).

6 In this effort, they had no economic resources beyond their own meagre personal funds (Rodríguez Manso, 2010).

Escardó, was sent out with the following proposals:

1. To raise funds for 'poetic flights' through the sale of bonds valued at one peso each.
2. To support the Revolution and its laws in the conviction that they contain the principles of liberty, equality and social justice.
3. To demonstrate to the world the solidarity of all artists, writers and intellectuals with all the peoples who struggle to achieve their economic, political, social and cultural liberation.
4. To support the Declaration of Havana⁷ in all its points (Ibid:16).⁸

As Escardó was tragically killed in a car accident before the meeting,⁹ it was addressed by Guillén, who would emphasise its importance in the revolutionary process to the future of artists and writers.¹⁰ Following diverse interventions, the upshot of discussions was the aforementioned manifesto, which begins 'Cuban intellectuals, writers and artists hereby wish to affirm our public creative responsibility to the Revolution and the people of Cuba, in a period in which the deep sense is that of united struggle to achieve the complete independence of our country as a nation' (Ibid:17). Inciting artistic unity in developing a national and revolutionary culture, this proposed (in brief):

- a. Recovery and development of the Cuban cultural tradition.¹¹
- b. The preservation and encouragement of folklore, conceived as the spiritual wealth of the Cuban people.
- c. Sincere and honest criticism as indispensable to the work of artists and intellectuals.
- d. Full identification between creative work and the needs of the advancing Revolution: "The purpose is to bring the people close to the intellectual and

7 The First Declaration of Havana (2 September 1960) condemned US imperialist actions and asserted the right to national sovereignty throughout Latin America. It also maintained 'that the spontaneous offer of the Soviet Union to help Cuba if our country is attacked by imperialist military forces cannot be considered an act of intervention, but rather an open act of solidarity' (Castro Ruz, 1960:81) and denied 'absolutely that there has existed on the part of the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China any aim "to make use of the economic, political and social situation in Cuba [...] in order to break continental unity and to engender hemispheric unity"' (loc cit). Railing against every form of inequality, it affirmed 'the duty of workers, peasants, students, intellectuals, Negroes, Indians, youth, women, and the aged to fight for their economic, political and social rights' (Ibid:84).

8 The same letter described a programme of cultural activities that would be arranged alongside the meeting, including a National Theatre presentation of works by Cuban playwrights and exhibitions of Cuban painting, sculpture and archaeology (Ibid).

9 His funeral took place on 18 October 1960, just nine days before the meeting began. Fernández Retamar would later remind the assembled company of the 1961 First National Congress of Writers and Artists (which came out of the October 1960 meeting and its manifesto, to be discussed in the next section) about Escardó, describing his life as a commentary on the miserable and de-professionalised situation confronted by artists and writers before the Revolution (Rodríguez Manso, 2010).

10 This description of events in Camagüey is based on the reminiscences of Carilda Oliver Labra, cited in Ibid.

11 For a full discussion of limitations to Cuban cultural tradition see Kapcia 2005, particularly the tendency of pre-revolutionary writers to exoticise 'Cuba through European eyes, finding a "primitive" subject in their own backyard, without absorbing the truths of Cuban racism, social structures or black culture' (Ibid:80).

the intellectual close to the people, which does not necessarily imply that the artistic quality of our work must thereby suffer' (Ibid:18).

- e. Exchange, contact and cooperation among Latin American writers, intellectuals and artists, vital for the destiny of our America.
- f. Mankind is one. Our national heritage is part of world culture, and world culture contributes to our national aspirations.

In summing up, the manifesto retained the right of artists to express themselves in effective ways of their own choosing and summoned 'all Cuban artists, writers and intellectuals to a forthcoming National Congress which unites us in the work of culture, of serving the people and the Revolution'. Three weeks after the meeting, the congress would be formally announced and the manifesto reproduced in the press. The overwhelming sentiment of the meeting – that 'The fate of the revolution depends on the fate of Cuban culture' (Ibid:19) – would not be lost and the concluding phrase of the manifesto would reverberate as a slogan at the eventual congress: 'TO DEFEND THE REVOLUTION IS TO DEFEND CULTURE' (loc cit).¹²

An organising committee of thirty-four intellectuals was assembled,¹³ eleven of whom would form an executive, which included Guillén, Fernández Retamar and Carpentier as president and vice presidents respectively. The congress had originally been scheduled for April 1961, and, at a committee meeting on the fourteenth day of that month, Guillén had urged that it should happen no later than May or June because it was painful for intellectuals to remain dispersed while other Cubans were dedicated to organising their creative work within the growing Revolution (UNEAC, 1961). The day after the committee meeting, an air raid was launched from Nicaragua as a precursor to the Bay of Pigs invasion and, the following day, at the funeral for those killed, Fidel announced the socialist character of the Revolution. For a time, political exigencies would take over and plans for the congress were necessarily delayed.

12 Among the messages of support this manifesto garnered, Dorticós acknowledged the passionate commitment of the majority of artists and men of letters to the Revolution, which would necessitate militant action and clarification of the questions most pertinent to Cuban culture. Heralding the forthcoming congress and its resonance on a world stage, he recognised artists and writers as an integral part of the Cuban people and urged them to define their immediate and future roles, with defence of the Revolution and love of the people as their main preoccupation (Ibid).

13 Notably including Mirta Aguirre, Alicia Alonso, Guillermo Cabrera Infante, Alfredo Guevara, Lisandro Otero and Ricardo Porro (Ibid).

***PM* and its Aftermath (May–June 1961)**

As we saw in the introductory chapter, mid-1961 is widely regarded as the moment at which the revolutionary government consolidated its position on culture. Here, Casal (1971) finds an end to earlier post-revolutionary vitality in a debacle centred on the banning of a film about Havana's nightlife:

[a] fifteen-minute film, *PM*,¹⁴ which (without comment but with a free camera style) portrayed Havana's 'lower depths', depicting an array of drunks and prostitutes in a bacchanalian cabaret culture of drugs and alcohol. It was offered first to Havana's only private cinema, whose request for a licence was refused; ICAIC then delayed distribution, but, after protests, organised a screening and discussion of the film at Casa de las Américas to an invited audience (Kapcia, 2005:133).

Fornet describes *PM* as a 'modest essay of *free-cinema*, a documentary short by Sabá Cabrera Infante and Orlando Jiménez Leal which [in May 1961] had passed without pain or glory on television on a programme sponsored by *Lunes de Revolución*, that is to say by Carlos Franqui and Guillermo Cabrera Infante' (2007:386-7). But it was the reluctance of ICAIC to put it on general release through cinemas which allegedly:

[...] triggered a crisis that had been brewing since 1960. This crisis was induced by the intolerance of dogmatic elements (militants of the PSP, which was rapidly rising in influence due to Cuba's closer ties to the USSR) and their mistrust of *Lunes de Revolución*, which sponsored the television program on which the film was seen, and its director, Guillermo Cabrera Infante.¹⁵ The crisis was also fuelled by existing rivalries between the leadership of the Cuban Institute of Cinema Arts [ICAIC], in particular, its director Alfredo Guevara, and the leadership of *Lunes de Revolución*, particularly Cabrera Infante (Casal, 1971:458).

There is much to unravel in Casal's account, and again we need to turn to sources within Cuba to establish more accurately how emerging factions responded. Regarding the incipient nature of the crisis, there would seem to be some merit in the argument that tensions between PSP *sarampionados* and the artistic vanguard were escalating during this period. In interview (see Appendix D), De Juan (2010) alludes to 'people that had

14 To watch the film in two parts, see: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I0-8gfWzBa8> and <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8C8FWGQi4x8&NR=1> (accessed 15 March 2011). Gilman (2003) gives further detail about this film, describing it as lasting approximately twenty-five minutes, inspired by the English school (particularly the Maisles brothers), shot with a primitive hand-held camera on 16mm stock for a cost of \$500; it was a kind of political documentary without a linear argument, which followed the diversions of a group of Habaneros one day at the end of 1960 as they went drinking, dancing and fighting; the film had considerable success in Cuba and abroad and was the first work of art subdued in Cuba by accusations of a political nature, condemned for being counter-revolutionary.

15 By 'its director', Casal must be referring to the director-editor of *Lunes*, Guillermo Cabrera Infante as the director of the film was his brother, Sabá.

belonged, or that believed or that continued the line of the old communist party in Cuba, that were very close to the Soviet journey, whereas the real government sources – that came not from that party but from the 26 July [Movement] – did not have that close ideological following of the Soviet Union and we kept on with our own history and our own historical values’.

Elaborating on this factionalism, Guevara (2007) asserts that the old PSP followed the lines of the communist International, which was more or less Stalinist. Also in interview, Pogolotti (2010) reminds us that ‘as in every process of this type, within the Revolution there were distinct tendencies [...] within the intellectual realm was an area which came from an orthodox Marxist tradition and another very important tradition which came from the left, in some cases Marxist, but which understood what Stalinism had meant for art and literature’. As we shall see, this nuance would underlie individual responses, with Kapcia advising against monolithic interpretations of a crisis that was:

[...] the tip of the iceberg of tensions between alternative cultural poles and perspectives, rather than, as often argued, between artistic freedom and Stalinism. For the PSP did not then have a monolithically restrictive approach to art, as its pre-1959 record showed, and the apparent ‘hardening’ of attitudes was as evident among the 26 July leaders as within the PSP and CNC. The fact was that all of them increasingly felt that Cuba’s new situation and the process of radicalisation demanded greater responsibility and commitment from everyone, including the cultural community (2005:133).

Nonetheless, it remains significant that control of culture had passed from MINED’s Cultural Directorate to the PSP-infused CNC in January 1961, which exacerbated the perception that battle lines were being drawn.

For Otero (1997), ICAIC’s objections to *PM* were centred on its partial account of Cubans as marginal and lumpen,¹⁶ while those on the liberal side feared that suppressing general release of the film was ‘a threat to freedom of expression [...] which insinuated that the ghost of Stalinism had begun to project its ominous shadow over the island’ (Fornet, 2004:10);¹⁷ daily meetings exaggerated these latter

¹⁶ According to Otero’s account (1997), this was voiced by ‘Titon’ Gutiérrez Alea at the library meetings that followed.

¹⁷ A precedent for this is to be found in Stalin and Zhdanov’s condemnation of the second part of

speculations,¹⁸ at times bordering on hysteria and concluding that culture would disappear altogether (Otero, 1997). González (2002) notes that this threat was particularly acute for *Lunes*, which had been explicitly critical of the processes used against artists by the state in the USSR from 1929 onwards.¹⁹ For the Latin American intelligentsia more broadly, any threatened subordination to the directives of communist parties was more important in aesthetic than political terms, given that they considered Soviet cultural policy unsustainable and indefensible (Gilman, 2003).²⁰ But, Fornet contends, ‘This was an unjustified fear, or at least disproportionate, as was demonstrated later, but it is true that it wasn’t far from us – in secret meetings of mediocre writers, known non-partisan opportunists and cultural bureaucrats suddenly established as zealous guardians of the doctrine’ (2004:10).²¹

Guevara (2007) notes that this period can only be understood through a political analysis that also considers how the Revolution was historically constituted, describing how those who had taken an active part in the struggle remained on ‘combative alert’. Others are keen to emphasise that the screening of the film a matter of weeks after the Bay of Pigs invasion caused some to question the wisdom of its recirculation in a country that understood the propagandistic value of film.²² Otero (1997), for example, asserts that, had the film been shot in another moment of history, it would

Leonid Lukov’s *The Great Life* in August 1948, a film depicting the:

[...] postwar reconstruction of a Donbas mine by manual labour, portraying the workers as crude fellows who like their drink. Zhdanov said that the film distorted the role of the Party and the state, which seemed to hinder rather than help the mine’s effort to rebuild, giving the Soviet people the wrong impression. Lukov was further censured for paying exaggerated attention to a private life that included a desire for orgiastic abandonment (Botenbloem, 2004:279).

18 Gilman (2003) mentions one such debate in the aftermath of the confrontation around *PM*, held between various writers associated with *Lunes* – including Fornet, Padilla, Piñera and Sarusky, pondering how they could best serve the Revolution as men of letters – during which a certain amount of uncertainty was expressed.

19 The 6 April 1959 issue of *Lunes* had included a manifesto, entitled ‘For an Independent Revolutionary Art’, signed by André Breton, Diego Rivera and Leon Trotsky in Mexico, stating that, if the Revolution had to choose a socialist regime for centralised planning, it ought to secure an anarchist regime of individual liberty for creative intellectuals (González, 2002).

20 Gilman (2003) reminds us that the Third Congress of Soviet Writers, which took place in 1959, began the process of emerging from subordination to socialist realism and that the 1961 XXII Congress of the Communist Part of the Soviet Union renewed critiques of Stalinism. By contrast, in 1962, the Soviet President [Nikita Khrushchev] violently dismissed abstract art during a visit to an exhibition, wondering loudly whether the artists responsible were paedophiles.

21 Karol (1970) reminds us that the official guardians of Marxist-Leninist orthodoxy in Cuba were the members of the PSP.

22 It is interesting to note that law 739, passed on 19 February 1960, had prohibited the screening of short films and documentaries made outside Cuba, which hints at the heightened role ascribed to indigenous film-makers in the aftermath of revolution (Asesora Jurídica Nacional, 1980).

have been forgotten the following week, but it was born in a time of confrontation. Fernández Retamar argues that ‘To exaggerate that incident, as has been done almost always with bad blood, is not appropriate, but neither is it to tone it down’ (2001:294). Differentiating between the state and revolutionary civil society, Kapcia notes of the siege mentality this implies that, ‘while one can often detect manipulation and political capital in the use of the “siege” to justify greater internal pressure, one can also correlate the actual use of coercion to the level of external threat posed or perceived, identifying a pattern whereby the moments of greater external pressure or intra-regime tensions [...] have generated increased pressure for political conformity’ (2008:134).

The personal dimension of this conflict is also worth considering, rendering Casal’s suggestion that this was centred on Guevara and Guillermo Cabrera Infante misplaced. In an autobiographical account that reminds his readers there were not only two but many diverse groups, the former (2007) admits the latter to his early circle of friends, while Carlos Franqui emerges as the *Lunes* editor with whom Guevara had open confrontations.²³ In chapter four, we saw how Guevara attributed Franqui’s fear of rising PSP influence to the latter’s ill treatment at the hands of a party that he regarded as a carrier of Stalinism. And, while Fornet (2007) commends Cabrera Infante and Franqui for their modern and dynamic vision of art, literature and journalism (as evinced in their editorial work), he cautions that both also had the great defect, in the circumstances, of being visceral anti-communists who hated anything coming from the Soviet Union or the PSP.

On another personal note, in the mud-slinging that would happen at the end of 1963, to be discussed in chapter nine, former PSP leader, Blas Roca would accuse Guevara of having concretely proposed prohibition of the film, alleging that, rather

23 In a 1961 letter summarising the *PM* conflict that was addressed to Fidel and Dorticós, Guevara (2007) took exception to the aesthetic being perpetuated by *Lunes*. He would later confess that he had under-estimated the extent to which the confrontation between himself and *Lunes* had been centred on the treatment of some of the paradigmatic figures of national culture, making it an ethical, rather than merely aesthetic, problem. In the process of revisiting this history, Guevara alludes to the pre-revolutionary confrontation at *Orígenes* that had given rise to *Ciclón*, prefacing the provocative approach of, and providing personnel for, *Lunes*. Guevara explains that this earlier fissure closed certain avenues to Alicia Alonso, Carpentier and Lezama Lima specifically, and created barriers for the *Orígenes* and Catholic groups more generally. This treatment prompted Guevara to dismiss the ‘intellectual terrorists’ of *Lunes* (and to mention that Franqui had aspirations to control ICAIC).

than taking personal responsibility for the decision, Guevara invited members of the CNC to watch it, which led to its suppression and the concomitant uproar (20 December). Guevara's (2007) self-professed anti-dogmatism would seem to suggest that any reaction of his was underwritten by political concerns, and he states categorically 'I did not prohibit the film. That is a lie. They brought the film and submitted it. I refused to play a part in that film, to distribute it through ICAIC. They could have put it wherever they liked'. On the contrary, he argues that, when a meeting was convened at Casa to discuss the fate of *PM*, Guevara himself was absent but Mirta Aguirre and her PSP team attended.²⁴ In the event, the government's Board of Censors took advice from the President of the Republic and various CNC personnel and exercised what Fidel (1961) would refer to as its indisputable right not to allow the film to be disseminated.

Otero describes how, for a month, nobody could speak about anything else; yet, a cultural congress had been called which threatened to be overshadowed by the debate about artistic freedom. Guevara (2007) finds that Fidel well understood his role as arbiter and knew he had to act to reconcile the differences that had emerged. In a bid to clear the air, a meeting was called at the national library on Friday 16 June 1961. Echoing Franqui's account (given below) and detaching this denouement from any mention of *PM* to claim that it was the heterodox nature of *Lunes* that had attracted opprobrium, Karol describes how:

Franqui and his protégés were invited to a discussion at the National Library in Havana. They were told nothing about the purpose of the meeting and they expected a small, friendly gathering to discuss certain minor differences between them and their country's cultural leaders. Instead, they found themselves in a large hall, at a meeting attended by almost all the country's intellectuals, great and small. They had to face a board of inquiry chaired by Mrs. Garcia Buchacha [sic] and made up chiefly of PSP leaders; and they were addressed in a manner far more suited to a court of law than an intellectual debate. They were accused of splitting the ranks of the Revolution, a serious crime at a time when unity had become a matter of life and death. They were accused of lack a proper socialist perspective, of hankering after Western culture, and, more generally, of upholding dubious cultural trends. A terrible indictment, all told (1970:140).

²⁴ Nonetheless, Guevara describes how the film-makers arrived at his office of the fifth floor of ICAIC and called him a fascist. He notes that all the main personnel involved in the film would remain in Cuba for many years, acting as functionaries in various capacities and travelling to and from the island before deciding to martyr themselves by emigrating (Ibid).

As no resolution was reached after the first meeting, the group reconvened on two successive Fridays – 23 and 30 June 1961. Franqui, would later describe the second meeting:

The library was like a courtroom: above, the presidential tribunal, with Fidel, [Joaquín] Ordoquí,²⁵ Carlos Rafael Rodríguez, Edith Buchaca, Dorticós, Hart, Alfredo Guevara, and a few comandantes and lawyers; below, the artists and writers. Someone up above suggested I join them, but I said I liked it fine where I was. We were a mixed bag – the *Lunes* team, [José] Lezama Lima, some Catholic writers sympathetic to the revolution, some old, some young.

Alfredo Guevara took the floor: 'I accuse *Lunes* and *Revolución* of trying to split the revolution from within; of being enemies of the Soviet Union; of revisionism; of sowing ideological confusion; of having introduced Polish and Yugoslavian ideas; of having praised Czech and Polish films; of being the spokesmen for existentialism, surrealism, U.S. literature, bourgeois decadence, elitism; of refusing to see the accomplishments of the revolution; of not praising the armed forces.' We were, it seemed, a big internal threat, the Trojan Horse of the counterrevolution. Guevara went on to say that *P.M.*, the film seized and censored by ICAIC [...] and defended by us, was counterrevolutionary, showed decadence instead of the armed forces and their struggle, that Sabá Cabrera [...] and Orlando Jiménez, who made the film, embodied the antirevolutionary ideology of *Lunes* and *Revolución* (1983:131).

Otero (1997) provides a less personalised account, describing how the playwright, Virgilio Piñera,²⁶ began the discussion, professing his fear that the 26 July Movement sought to delimit culture. In this version of events, *Lunes* associate, Baragaño, is depicted as an orthodox Marxist, while Heberto Padilla (about whom we shall be hearing more later) is seen to advocate increased acculturation of the population, which attracted accusations of elitism. Some argued for tolerance of all forms of culture while others objected to the particularities of *PM*. Fernández Retamar invoked intellectuals as part of the Revolution, while Otero himself defended art as a means through which humanity could confront its problems and contradictions, which required the full range of creative expression. Interestingly, Fidel would assert that, although this discussion had been accelerated by the *PM* incident, it was already in the minds of the government (Fernández Retamar, 2001); laying 'his perennial pistol on the table' (Cabrera Infante, 1968b:40), it would fall to him to conclude discussions.

25 A leader of the PSP during the time the party was accused by Batista of carrying out the Moncada assault; apparently, the party strenuously denied the charge and Ordoquí 'distinguished himself above all the rest by the intemperance of his vituperations' (Karol, 1970:139).

26 Attached to *Orígenes*, he 'had always been a maverick, engaged in different groups, magazines, genres and activities' (Kapcia, 2005:98).

Words to the Intellectuals (30 June 1961)

Now that Cuba was officially a socialist country, questions began to be asked about the destiny of intellectual life, specifically within the arts. Would artists be able to enjoy the same freedom they had in earlier years or, on the contrary, would certain norms be imposed that would narrow artistic expression? It was to questions like these that Fidel addressed himself at the final library meeting. The MINREX pamphlet alluding to the November manifesto describes how, like so many of the capitalist class who had fled the island,²⁷ those intellectuals representing the official culture of the previous period had turned their back on the Revolution. At the same time, many of those artists and writers who had initially supported the Revolution had been disconcerted by its rapid momentum into unfamiliar territory,²⁸ and the library meetings were partly aimed at defining their revolutionary role (discussion of which will be resumed in the next chapter).²⁹ Further into the pamphlet sits the transcript of Fidel's infamous closing speech, which subsequently became known as 'Words to the Intellectuals'.³⁰

Lockwood describes Fidel's tendency to 'unfold his thoughts in long, repetitious, convoluted sentences of baroque syntax whose meaning is carried forward almost as much by the cadence of the phrases as by the connotations of the words' (1967:68). In this particular soliloquy, he would assert that the ensuing 'economic and social Revolution must inevitably produce a cultural revolution in turn in our country' (1961:10). Identifying the problem created by *PM* as one of 'freedom for artistic

27 Kacpia (2008) refers to 56,000 political refugees leaving the island in 1959 and 110,000 by the end of 1960.

28 Drawing on indigenous sources, Mills details how, as the Revolution took hold, the 'Cuban intelligentsia as a whole was split. Many intellectuals were with the tyranny; many others, after some education, just wanted to forget Cuba and they left the country' (1960:42). In 1965, Che would assert that 'when the revolution took power there was an exodus of those who had been completely housebroken. The rest – whether they were revolutionaries or not – saw a new road'.

29 Kumaraswami notes the uncertainty surrounding the role of intellectuals at a time of 'emphasis on practical action at a popular level [...] participation in the original insurrection, in the self-defence militias of 1959–1961 or in the Literacy Campaign' (2009:530). Bonachea and Valdés find in this the positive result that 'Artists and writers were considered revolutionary not because they wrote didactic works or painted pedagogical murals, but because they supported the Revolution and worked, as private citizens, in its behalf. Hence, a sort of peaceful coexistence bloomed between intellectuals and the state. Intellectuals were not immersed in political criticism, nor did the state enter the realms of making cultural policy' (1972:497).

30 'Palabras a los intelectuales' in its original. In the same booklet are printed translations of the speeches of Dorticós and Guillén to the First National Congress of Writers and Artists (which will be considered in the next section), but Fidel's speech remains the only official record of the library meetings, despite the fact Cabrera Infante's (1968) claim that Alfredo Guevara ensured that all the presentations were recorded.

creation’ – with a particular emphasis on content rather than form – Fidel addressed the concern that the Revolution would try to stifle, or suffocate, that freedom. The initial tone of this speech, when read more than fifty years after it was delivered, might be described as indignant; the leader of the Cuban Revolution asserts that ‘the Revolution defends freedom; that the Revolution has brought the country a very high degree of freedom; that the Revolution cannot by its very nature be an enemy of freedoms; that if some are worried about whether the Revolution is going to stifle their creative spirit, that worry is unnecessary, that worry has no reason to exist’ (Ibid:14). Turning his attention to those who might harbour such a fear, Fidel finds that the revolutionary artist – for whom a concern for the people is paramount, ‘who puts something above even his own creative spirit; [who] puts the Revolution above everything else [with] the most revolutionary artist [being] ready to sacrifice even his own artistic calling for the Revolution’ (loc cit) – would not suffer this problem. Identifying his ambivalent subject as that honest artist or writer who is neither counter-revolutionary nor revolutionary, he acknowledges that such non-revolutionary artists have pledged welcome assistance to the Revolution.³¹

Commenting on Fidel’s words the year after they were delivered, Fernández Retamar (1962) isolates two main groups of artists and writers – the large majority, fervently on the side of the Revolution, who had done nothing but make works in the new spirit, and a minority who had not yet developed the full political consciousness of their contemporaries. For him, this latter group could be further split into those who had been profoundly shaken by the experience of the Revolution and sought a high quality artistic form in which to express it, and those who were suspicious and opportunistic, stubbornly persisting in their old ways, perhaps to demonstrate their fidelity to certain forms and the expressive freedom that they were able to enjoy in a socialist revolution, despite slander to the contrary.

31 Fernández Retamar makes a distinction between Gramsci’s more inclusive definition of intellectuals and the group addressed by Fidel as ‘the field of intellectuals formed by writers and artists [...], adding much later a distinction between “all the revolutionary writers and artists or [...] all the writers and artists who understand and justify the Revolution” and “the writers and artists who without being counter-revolutionaries do not feel themselves to be revolutionaries either” (2001:291). He makes the further point that ‘if some time [Fidel] mentions “an artist or intellectual” or “a mercenary artist or intellectual [...] a dishonest artist or intellectual”, he does not seem to treat these cases as synonymous’ (loc cit).

Rooting out the counter-revolutionary and reactionary in 1961, Fidel would go on to say that the Revolution ‘should therefore act in such a manner that the whole group of artists and intellectuals who are not genuinely revolutionaries can find within the Revolution a place to work and create, a place where their creative spirit, even though they are not revolutionary writers or artists, has the opportunity and freedom to be expressed’ (1961:18). As the survival of the Revolution was paramount, this would mean: ‘within the Revolution, everything; against the Revolution, nothing. Against the Revolution, nothing, because the Revolution has the right to exist, and no one shall oppose the right of the Revolution to exist. Inasmuch as the Revolution understands the interests of the people, inasmuch as the Revolution signifies the interests of the whole nation, no one can justly claim a right in opposition to the Revolution’ (loc cit).

Gilman (2003) notes that, although their concerns did not disappear instantaneously, those artists and writers fearing the imposition of socialist realism appeared relatively calm in the face of the reassurances that the Revolution would leave the criteria of artistic production alone. Yet, in certain quarters, the key phrase of this speech has become shorthand for an intention to menace and control dissenting intellectuals, and Franqui writes from exile of ‘Fidel’s words – ambiguous outside of Cuba, all too clear inside – “With the revolution, everything; against the revolution, nothing.” The problem was that the revolution was Fidel and his personal tastes in art, literature, and politics’ (1983:134). While the notion of Fidel’s centrality in dictating cultural matters has already been debunked, Gilman (2003) finds that the amorphousness of his central phrase could be bent to the will of aesthetic leaders, conferring upon them the absolute freedom to prescribe the kind of work they would like to see being made, which was favourable to the recipe of socialist realism in ways that will continue to be explored.

Various commentators have offered other interpretations of Fidel’s words, with Gemma Del Duca conceding within a University of Miami publication that this ‘was a statement intended to safeguard the Revolution, to protect its right to exist; it

was not intended to limit the creative freedom of intellectuals' (1972:96). Similarly, Camnitzer considers that 'Fidel Castro's famous statement in 1961, "Within the Revolution everything; outside the Revolution, nothing," can be seen as [...] less ominous than it has generally been portrayed outside of Cuba by those unsympathetic to the revolutionary process' (1994:129).³² Whereas 'To Cuba's critics, the statement has represented a succinct recipe for totalitarianism and tyranny' (loc cit), Weiss finds it to be more consensual than coercive:

Fidel Castro's famous statement 'dentro de la revolución, todo, fuera de la revolución, ningún derecho,' was an inclusive, centripetal statement which sought the support of intellectuals. This was not necessarily prompted by a pressing need for this support, in order to cement the Revolution, but he appeared determined to make Cuba a showcase and not to risk the criticism of those same intellectuals, both Cuban and foreign, who constituted an important lobby of favorable sentiment (1977:27).

However, both these authors are guilty of misquoting Fidel, a common phenomenon as Kapcia points out:

Those [...] words have subsequently been taken by critical commentators to have established strictures determining control of artistic freedom, or at best to have left ambiguity. However, this understanding has arisen especially from misquoting *contra* ('against') as *fuera* ('outside') [...], thus changing the meaning of what Castro was actually saying. For his statement indicated not 'if you are not with us, you are against us' (which the use of *fuera* would have meant) but the more inclusive 'if you are not against us, you are with us'. This is not mere semantics, for one characteristic of the Revolution's processes subsequently has, indeed, been its 'argumentalism' [...], its willingness to allow and even encourage internal debate, within clear parameters and behind metaphorically closed doors, which has allowed writers, artists and intellectuals to know and even define the bounds of the acceptable; apart from moments of crisis or of exaggerated internal tensions, exclusion and a 'hard line' have tended to be applied only to those publicly going beyond those 'doors' and those parameters (2005:134).³³

Par Kumaraswami reprises the various interpretations of Fidel's monologue, distinguishing it as an example of cultural politics, rather than cultural policy, in the context of the dispute between the CNC and Cuba's intellectuals, undertaking an analysis that establishes a hierarchical relationship between politics and culture and an emphasis on active participation at the expense of intellectual contemplation. In the central phrase, she finds 'Castro pressing intellectuals to commit to a position, within

³² Fernández Retamar (1962), for example, finds that the fullest freedom of expression was firmly established in Fidel's 'Words'.

³³ This mistranslation is also to be found in the English edition of Fernández Retamar's seminal 1971 text, 'Caliban'.

or against, and therefore to leave behind the middle ground, the terrain of doubt that seemed to be afflicting many of them' (2009:532). More damningly, she asserts that, 'as the speech progressed, the cumulative list of their implied weaknesses became greater: in contrast to their political counterparts, some artists and intellectuals were not only fearful, self-centred, destructive and pessimistic, but also impractical and immature' (Ibid:535). In this subtle mockery of intellectuals, Kumaraswami projects a lineage that would become progressively more adamant – via Che's 'Socialism and Man' of 1965 and the 1971 Congress (to be discussed in chapter ten) – to be 'distorted, intensified and used as a basis for the marginalisation, exclusion and mistreatment of individual writers throughout the *quinquenio gris* [...] and beyond' (Ibid:538). This makes it necessary for us to continue charting the evolution of cultural policy to see how this would be played out.

Common to all texts analysing Fidel's speech from a bourgeois perspective is their failure to grasp the connotations of a social revolution for artistic and intellectual practice. Taking the western intellectual as their implicit starting point, such analyses consider the social role being advocated for artists as more of a loss than a gain. In the process, they negate the potential for reconciling art and society that was central to the revolutionary process. By contrast, Fornet describes how Fidel's words verified the principle of the Revolution, making it obvious that unlimited perspectives for creative work were opened up for the vast majority of artistic and literary intellectuals, leading to the possibility of an authentic cultural rebirth; for him, the pending problem facing intellectuals in the 1960s was 'who drew the line between *inside* and *against*?' (2004:10).

Just as there exists ambiguity in the perceived meaning of Fidel's 'Words', there is a divergence of opinion about their outcome. As we have seen, Casal and Franqui are dismissive about their impact. However, Camnitzer finds that the speech had a favourable result, 'Particularly for the visual arts, policy and practice in Cuba then mostly conformed to the more liberal interpretation of the statement. It is more a vague synthesis of patriotism and an attempt to make the common good sacred than a restrictive dictum' (1994:130). Similarly, Kaptcia (2005) finds that this mid-1961

clarification of uncertainties permitted a nine-year burst of radicalisation. Karol reflects Franqui's demonisation of the PSP to conclude that:

[...] the meetings at the National Library ended in compromise. The intellectuals had won a certain respite, but lost one of their main weapons in the cultural field [*Lunes*]. The PSP was content as well, for it had no wish to capture *Lunes* or to set up its own cultural and political journal. However, it was determined to prevent intellectuals from having anything to do with politics and ideological questions; in a pinch, they might be permitted to paint abstract paintings or write esoteric novels, but no more (1970:242-3).

Within Cuba, Rafael Rodríguez (1982) finds a precursor in *Nuestro Tiempo* for Fidel's embrace of any art form which lacked a tangible counter-revolutionary position, to assert that the excellence of art has never been measured by its proximity to realism.³⁴ Returning to the 'Words' in 1971, Fernández Retamar attempts to reclaim Fidel's commitment to culture from his detractors by considering the Revolution's proven achievements in the educational field, through the democratisation of universities and the access of the masses to high culture. Forty-five years after it was delivered, Hart recalls the impact of the speech in shaping cultural policy over the next three decades, opening up unexpected paths and providing the political elucidation necessary for the art and literature of the country to reach higher levels, becoming an example in the Americas and beyond (Rodríguez Manso, 2010). Notwithstanding, Fernández Retamar (2001) describes how the first consequences of the June 1961 meetings were the convocation of a full and stormy congress in August and the cessation of *Lunes* in November of that same year.

The First National Congress of Writers and Artists (18–22 August 1961)

Two months after Fidel delivered his 'Words', the long-awaited First National Congress of Writers and Artists was convened in Havana. As little documentation of this congress is provided in the English literature, it is necessary to refer to documents within Cuba, particularly two publications produced by UNEAC – one published immediately after the congress and one looking back on its history forty-five years later.

³⁴ Rafael Rodríguez (1982) also finds *a posteriori* evidence of *Nuestro Tiempo*'s defence of the country's creators during a critical epoch of decisive battle to lie in the qualified inscription of creative freedom into article 38 of the (1976) Constitution of the Socialist Republic to be discussed in chapter ten.

From these sources, it becomes clear that, as president of the organising committee, Guillén made an extensive tour around the republic in June 1961, meeting with artists and writers and taking part in public discussions.³⁵ As a result of his trip, several provincial organising committees were established, with their coordinators joining the national committee.³⁶ Upon his return to Havana, Guillén expressed his satisfaction with the favourable reaction with which he had been met, not only from artists and writers but also from the people at large (Rodríguez Manso, 2010).³⁷



Publication produced to commemorate the First National Congress of Writers and Artists, of 1961, which includes the slogan 'To Defend the Revolution is to Defend Culture'

At the aforementioned April meeting of the organising committee, Guillén had pondered the role intellectuals should assume within the Revolution. Reprising the history of Cuban cultural formation, he concluded that their great task lay in rescuing culture from bourgeois influence for the benefit of the great majority of Cuban people, in which effort the purest values of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries would be salvaged.³⁸ At this event, Guillén invited the participation of all those active in literary or artistic work who had signed up to the November manifesto. He also took the opportunity to outline the organisational framework for the congress, reading out the twenty rules that had been drawn up to oversee its operation before (UNEAC, 1961).³⁹ The full plenary assembly of delegates was cited as the supreme authority of

35 Conferences were organised in Santiago and Camagüey; in the latter city, Guillén was interrogated by a panel of journalists for local television (Rodríguez Manso, 2010).

36 This included Samuel Feijóo for Las Villas province, Luis Suardíaz for Camagüey and Jesús Sabourín for Oriente (Ibid).

37 To keep information flowing about the congress, three bulletins were circulated in May, June and August 1961 (Ibid).

38 Entitled 'A Great Task', this speech considered the emergence of the Cuban nation in the nineteenth century and the splendid movement of arts and letters that had emerged in spite, rather than because, of the European influence that had exerted a subtle dictatorship over the Cuban intelligentsia. While the preceding century had ended badly, with North American intervention being installed from 1898, the Revolution had given birth to writers and artists prepared to work and struggle at its side (UNEAC, 1961). Blanco (1963) would later invoke those revolutionary artists who appreciated and respected their predecessors not only from the nineteenth but also from the twentieth century, including Picasso and Klee, Stravinsky and Mayakovski.

39 Those wishing to take part needed to complete an application form and return it, by the last day of July, to the national organising committee or one of its provincial equivalents, which would generate credentials to be collected from national headquarters on 16 or 17 August. The address given for the national committee is the House of Writers and Artists at number 351 17th Street in Havana (Rodríguez

the congress, which would be overseen by a collective presidency of fifteen delegates elected to office, presiding over individual sessions on a rotating basis and facilitated by two secretaries. Resolutions approved by each of three working commissions would be forwarded to the collective presidency for approval by the full plenary assembly, with all accredited delegates having full rights to voice and vote and voting calculated according to simple majority. In the event of disagreement, the collective presidency reserved the right to appeal to the plenary assembly (Rodríguez Manso, 2010), giving Cuban artists and writers full powers of self-determination.

Similarly, the agenda was 'based on the program set forth in the November Declaration' (MINREX, 1962:8), with the work of the congress split between the following commissions:

1. The creative responsibility of writers and artists to the people of Cuba.
 - a. Recovery and development of the Cuban cultural tradition and its integration into universal culture.
 - b. Conservation, refinement and advancement of folklore.
 - c. Sincere and honest critique as a means of situating the work of writers and artists.
 - d. Mutual reconciliation between writers, artists and the people.
 - e. Diverse forms of artistic expression.
2. Exchanges, contact and co-operation between Cuban intellectuals and artists and those of Latin America and all the countries of the world, in defence of popular culture, national sovereignty and universal peace.
3. Problems of organising an Association of Cuban Writers and Artists (UNEAC, 1961:10).

In this way, the agenda determined by the country's intellectuals nine months previously was supplemented by a desire to create an association representing their interests. We have already seen how this would give rise to UNEAC, but the broader discussion is of interest when considering the formulation of cultural policy.

Before the congress began in earnest, Carlos Rafael Rodríguez and José A Baragaño would make presentations. The former echoed 'Words to the Intellectuals', distinguishing between those artists and writers who had been engaging militantly on behalf of the Revolution and those who maintained a separation between their civic activities and their artistic postures, preoccupied with the latter at the expense of their

Manso, 2010).

other great responsibility – the task of communicating with the masses, which the Revolution now compelled everyone to address.⁴⁰ Alongside considerations of artistic freedom, this reconciliation of intellectual praxis with the people would form the main theme of the congress. Speaking as a practitioner, Baragaño refuted the Romantic conception of the artist or writer as socially useless, to site the intellectual as a practical and intellectual link between the profoundest aspects of life and advocate that artists and writers join the ranks of the Revolution. Having overcome imperialist incursions into their territory, he urged the destruction of bourgeois thought in the ideological order, and invoked the congress as a testament of the unity between the people and their artists and writers (UNEAC, 1961).

In other preliminary submissions, Mariano expressed the hope that solutions to cultural problems would be found through a revolutionary unity of intellectuals with the people of Cuba. In considering why Cuban artists and writers had not yet been called to the task of organising, José Massip proffered three reasons – firstly, in quantitative terms, intellectuals constituted a small minority; secondly, from a qualitative perspective, they had not yet reached the highest level of historical necessity with respect to national culture; thirdly, intellectuals had fallen behind other sectors in organising themselves.⁴¹ The first congress would provide a serious step towards their incorporation into the powerful revolutionary current, and Manet found that it signalled the conversion of an ineffectual and marginal group into a conscious group of citizens, poised to discuss affairs of interest to themselves and the nation. With the literacy campaign creating millions of new readers and the government producing editions of books in the tens of thousands, the responsibility of writers would be to an entire reading public. Lezama Lima argued that creative works had previously lacked the power to stimulate or irritate an audience, but the Revolution changed all that. Yet, there were those who

40 Similarly, Otero (1997) alludes to the derision at the congress of those producing the hermetic art of evasion.

41 Also attesting to the fact that intellectuals had been late to this process, Fernández Retamar would refer during the congress to Fidel's first 26 July speech – which called on the people to organise themselves, through all popular organisations, including workers' unions, Committees for the Defence of the Revolution and cultural associations – and his later assertion that every man and woman was organised in the service of the Revolution (UNEAC, 1961).



Starting line-up of the First National Congress of Writers and Artists, August 1961

were not yet making work that reflected this new situation and, for him, the purpose of the congress would be to unite with workers and search for ways in which artists and writers could be useful to the first socialist revolution of the Americas, which, in turn, had provided them with the liberty to follow their chosen path. To this notion of utility, PSP representative, Marinello, added that it would be misguided to call for any kind of uniformity of aesthetic criteria (Ibid).

On the evening of 17 August, Hart opened an exhibition of Cuban culture at the National Museum of Fine Arts, and, the following day, sessions began in the Ambassadors' Suite of the Hotel Habana Libre.⁴² The contributions of several of the main speakers are reproduced in full in the congress publication,⁴³ including a brief opening speech and later extrapolation by Dorticós, lyrical contributions from many of the assembled artists and writers, a report and summing up by Guillén and a closing speech from Fidel. Pablo Armando Fernández announced the official opening of the congress.⁴⁴ He was followed by one of the few female speakers, Vincentina Antuña, who made a presentation on behalf of the CNC, outlining the two main directions that had thus far been pursued by the revolutionary government in the field of culture – the development of a national culture and the extension of educational and cultural goods to the people (UNEAC, 1961).

42 The Free Havana Hotel, a commandeered Hilton, which had provided offices for the revolutionary government in the months after the triumph.

43 Many of these were subsequently reproduced in the publication celebrating forty-five years of UNEAC (Rodríguez Manso, 2010).

44 Presidency of the initial session was collectively held by Antuña, Carpentier, Dorticós, Guillén, Hart, Marinello and Fernández Retamar (Ibid).

Paying homage to the Spanish writer, Federico García Lorca,⁴⁵ Guillén was followed by Dorticós (1961), who expressed the revolutionary government's enthusiasm for the congress and the duty that had been embraced by those assembled.⁴⁶ As fundamental changes in the economic, political and juridical superstructure of the country had not yet made themselves felt to such a direct and immediate extent in the fields of art and literature, he argued, this made the congress all the more urgent. It would provide an opportunity for all the writers and artists of Cuba to define future attitudes and outline individual and collective tasks, reconciling the responsibilities of their office with their duties to the people while forging a creative path that embraced the best of universal culture and national tradition. Having contextualised the revolutionary task of intellectuals, Dorticós commended the congress themes, thereby providing evidence of the relative autonomy of artists and writers in determining their programme.



President Dorticós at the First National Congress of Writers and Artists, 1961

Tellingly, in relation to this thesis in general and this chapter in particular, Dorticós acknowledged that cultural policy was yet to be formulated, and that the revolutionary government had recently announced it would be addressing itself to this task in a way that would not diminish formal liberty in art:

Your work is not to be done without the concern and help of the Cuban Revolutionary Government. First of all, we must state that, while you have your duties towards the Revolution and the people, the Revolutionary Government knows what its duties are towards all of you.

It must, first of all, formulate a cultural policy. We cannot escape this duty, it is something we must do.

And when we announce the Revolutionary Government's decision to formulate and implement a cultural policy, let no one be surprised or frightened. Let me make it clear that the Revolutionary Government, in formulating its cultural policy, will not in the least restrain or impair the practice of freedom of form in literature or the arts (1961:74).

45 This commemorated the twenty-fifth anniversary of his assassination in Granada by fascist hordes (Ibid).

46 The President of the Republic addressed his comments to the presidency of the congress, ministers, members of the diplomatic corps, invited foreigners, Cuban writers and artists (Ibid).

While, in other revolutions, the development of culture had been postponed and the formulation of cultural policy disdained in certain literary and artistic circles,⁴⁷ Dorticós implicated everyone present in this process, asserting that ‘when speaking about formulating a cultural policy we do so realizing that it is a governmental function which must be developed, not away from you, but with yourselves as protagonists, collaborators and executors of that policy’ (loc cit), thus signalling the intention to integrate creative intellectuals into the policy-making process and distinguishing Cuba from societies in which practitioners are systematically excluded from the decisions that affect them.

Over four intense days, much discussion took place around the various themes of the congress, of which a handful of contributions give the general flavour. In considering the first theme, of recovering cultural tradition, Guillén undertook an exhaustive analysis of Cuban culture in the period before revolutionary triumph, urging writers and artists to go forth, united, in the battle to create a socialist culture, delivering to the man in the street that which nineteenth century colonialists had treasured as the exclusive privilege of the dominant class (UNEAC, 1961). Consideration of sincere and honest critique as a means of situating the work of writers and artists fell to Portuondo and will be described in more detail in the next chapter. Carpentier read an introduction to the second congress theme – regarding exchanges between intellectuals and artists from Cuba, Latin America⁴⁸ and the rest the world – and Fernández Retamar presented the statutes of the newly created union of artists and writers, the outcomes of which were discussed in chapter five. In the context of the union, the professionalisation of artists and writers was a key issue, and the English socialist writer, Cedric Belfrage, addressed the congress on this subject. Pogolotti (2010) takes it as a sign of the epoch that events proceeded with much spontaneity and that the statutes of the union were defined by intellectuals rather than government committees; in this regard, she recalls

47 In his speech to the congress, Rafael Rodríguez mused about whether the moment for such a congress was right when it took the Soviet Union sixteen years after the installation of socialism to consider cultural matters in such a way (Ibid).

48 At the national congress, it was announced that, on 28 January 1962, a Latin American Congress of Writers and Artists would reunite local cultural producers with their continental colleagues (Rodríguez Manso, 2010).

one of the hottest topics being the criteria according to which members would be selected. Guevara (2007) mentions having been involved in the organising committee of the congress and being in favour of opening up opportunities to young artists and writers, providing they had talent, an emphasis on quality to which we have already seen Fernández Retamar adhere. After messages of support were heard from various distinguished foreign guests, voting on the national committee and directorate of UNEAC took place, which saw Guillén unanimously elected president (Rodríguez Manso, 2010).⁴⁹ Notable among the executive is the name of Guillermo Cabrera Infante, which would seem to suggest that, temporarily at least, differences of opinion were being put aside.⁵⁰

Guillén's report to the congress is charged with immediacy in the wake of renewed imperialist aggression, which compelled those assembled to transcend artistic tendencies in defence of their homeland. Having been embedded in the process of realising the congress and determining its content, he spoke of its historic realisation in the midst of dramatic circumstances. Trusting his colleagues to consider their revolutionary role in line with the expectations of the Cuban people, he read out the resolutions that had been agreed, centred on: adoption of the Declaration of Havana; acceptance of the rights and responsibilities of writers and artists to struggle for a better world through their work; pursuit of peace between nations and the full dignity of man; dedication to rescuing the best of Cuban cultural tradition; and considering popular participation essential to their creative task, irrespective of aesthetic position (UNEAC, 1961).

At the Chaplin Theatre on 22 August 1961, Fidel pronounced his closing speech, expressing his great admiration for writers and artists and acknowledging the fraternal and democratic spirit in which the congress had proceeded, with the full involvement of the people of Cuba. For him, this implied a unity of purpose

49 The same publication lists both the national committee and its executive in full; Guevara is notable on the first and Fernández Retamar on the second (Ibid).

50 On this note, it is significant that Franqui sent a message to Guillén, which was reproduced in the commemorative publication, expressing the hope that organisation of the congress and the resulting contribution to the development of culture would enable the country to reject imperialist influences (UNEAC, 1961).

and dedication to the revolutionary cause, working for all the people in a way that transcended egotism and personal ambition. Acknowledging that those writers and artists present were the ones who had already shown loyalty to their homeland by staying and joining the fight, he urged them to work harder in the essential task of forging future generations, compensating for those who had left. In this, he implicated everyone in a teaching role, which, in the case of writers and artists, would involve going into the countryside to disseminate their skills. Using the metaphor of seeds that needed to be sown, Fidel reminded his audience that from each person present countless artists would arise (Ibid).

Pogolotti remembers how ‘Words to the Intellectuals’ formed something of an obligatory topic of conversation, with artistic and literary creativity being discussed alongside the dangers inherent in socialist realism (Rodríguez Manso, 2010). In his closing speech, Fidel was at pains to dismiss those who found that the congress sought to silence the aesthetic spirit or coerce artists and writers – those whose insurmountable prejudice led them to distort everything through the lens of chronic pessimism. In outlining the founding aims of the writers’ and artists’ union, Fernández Retamar asserted that there would be no place for the exclusion of those who did not accept certain aesthetic credos; in order to guarantee this, free discussion would be the only valid means of clarifying postures and defending works (UNEAC, 1961). A year after the event, he would describe how the congress firmly established the adhesion of creators to the revolutionary process and the necessity of Cuban artists working with the fullest political lucidity and absolute formal liberty, concluding that, ‘without doubt, the cultural reform to which the country is committed carries responsibilities for [cultural] workers’ (1962:73).⁵¹

51 Significantly, the congress was also addressed by representatives of diverse workers’ organisations. A message from the General Federation of Workers from Oriente (FGTO), reproduced on the same page of the commemorative publication as Dorticós’s address, finds synergy between the congress and the cultural plans of the Cuban Workers’ Confederation (CTC), which included the integration of cultural commissions in every union and the participation of delegated workers in municipal, provincial and national councils of culture, explicitly affirming the connection between writers, artists and the working class. Later, the CTC would offer fraternal greetings to the congress on behalf of the Cuban proletariat, convinced that the deliberations realised in the various commissions would bring about the great advance in the cultural and artistic order of the Revolution that was being eagerly awaited by the people. In a similar vein, the Association of Rebel Youth asked the assembled writers and artists to contribute their works to the young working masses, prioritising collective efforts over personal interests and enabling

Remarks in Conclusion

This chapter demonstrates the marked continuity of priorities within the cultural field from *Nuestro Tiempo* to the First National Congress of Writers and Artists, via the Camagüey meeting and November manifesto. It also sheds light on the proactive stance of the PSP with regard to the development of cultural policy before the Revolution and the problematic persistence of its Cultural Directorate thereafter. Throughout the late-1950s and early-1960s, emphasis remained on rescuing and developing national culture while preserving the best universal gains, on reconciling art with the people and on maintaining an internationalist stance. The bringing together of art and the people gives rise to one of the fundamental misunderstandings of Cuban cultural formation from outside the island. This is evident in Del Duca's account of the cultural dimension of the Revolution, published in Miami in 1972, which completely excises the fourth point of the November manifesto – that aiming for full identification between creative work and the needs of the advancing Revolution, the purpose of which was to bring the people close to the intellectual and the intellectual close to the people, without implying that artistic quality must suffer. The collection of perspectives assembled above demonstrates the inextricability of these aims and the willingness of all but a minority to embrace them. A desire for the people of Cuba to participate in cultural activity is also consistent across internal documents, and all the central speeches to the 1961 national congress addressed this theme, which formed the first in its programme (UNEAC, 1961). Notably, Dorticós (1961) emphasised the duty of all writers and artists to the people of Cuba, citing Cervantes, Shakespeare and Tolstoy as writers of the people and urging an internationalist approach that involved a rejection of the hermeticism that had previously characterised intellectual life.

As has been observed elsewhere, the phase outlined here, which spans the 1950s to mid-1961, is characterised by a manifest lack of official cultural policy. Dorticós's words to the 1961 congress categorically prove not only that the revolutionary

farmers and students alike to find in their works a vision of the new society that everyone was working to create, using their intelligence to light a path to the construction of socialism (UNEAC, 1961).

government had not yet formulated its policy on culture by August 1961 but also that creative practitioners were implicated in its development, which began with their definition of the UNEAC statutes. Of the two possible routes anticipated by Kapcia at the beginning of this chapter, this suggests that, rather than policy being dictated from on high, an organic approach was adopted. Indeed, consideration of the various discussions to have taken place during this crucial formative stage reveals the centrality of practitioners in determining the policy that would frame their practice, with Guillén emerging as a red thread through the most important convergences of the epoch. These same practitioners would increasingly be prevailed upon to embed themselves within revolutionary society and to develop their understanding of political culture in order to convey it to an expectant public.

This chapter also reminds us of the plurality of currents that were brought together within the Revolution. As we have seen, incipient tensions erupted with dramatic results in the wake of the socialist character of the Revolution being made explicit in the spring of 1961. From the course of events reconstructed above, it is clear, that, rather than this conflict being explicable in simple Manichean terms – of good versus bad, freedom versus Stalinism – it may be understood as the result of a clash between youthful personalities and their disparate histories and beliefs about how culture should be developed. And, while Fidel's 'Words to the Intellectuals' seem designed to instil freedom of aesthetic experimentation and to banish the ominous shadow of socialist realism, we shall see that this palpable threat would continue to darken discussions for some years to come.

Chapter Eight: The Role of Artists and Writers in Post-revolutionary Cuba

In surveying the Latin American intelligentsia, Miller (1999) details a nineteenth century schism between intellectual and political life, brought about by increased professional specialisation.¹ She outlines how, until the Second World War, the category of intellectuals was confined to writers; in the 1950s, some social scientists and economists were included, followed later by creative practitioners. In the case of Cuba, Fernet attests that, at the time of the rebellion, writers may have been considered intellectuals, but artists, scientists and politicians less so (Dalton et al, 1969).

Reinforcing the separation between intellectual and political life, Gilman (2003) describes how, when the continent's governments underwent an epochal shift during the 1960s and '70s, they held political, military, religious and economic power but did not exert a particularly powerful influence over intellectual activity. Along similar lines, Guevara (2007) notes that, ideologically speaking, Fidel's 26 July Movement had little structural influence on the intelligentsia at the moment of revolutionary victory and counted no activist artists among its ranks.² Nonetheless, in interview, Pogolotti (2010) attributes to Cuban intellectuals a role in the urban movement, while De Juan (2010) itemises the activities undertaken by intellectuals in a civilian capacity to include 'writing, distributing newspapers, clandestine newspapers, taking up money that would later be sent to the Sierra'.

In chapter six, we saw how, when the Revolution triumphed, culture began to be thought of as part of the social totality, and Weiss notes that 'Under socialism there exists a somewhat clearer recognition of the intellectual's and the artist's value, in terms of the contribution they can make to the education of the masses, the formation of

1 Miller notes that 'those who aspired to fulfil the modern role of "intellectual" found themselves confronting a market offering only highly restricted opportunities while at the same time being displaced from political office in a newly emerging type of state committed to modernization' (1999:3).

2 According to Miller (Ibid), while the use of the term 'intellectual' had arisen in nineteenth century France as a move against specialisation and towards universalism (in an ethos dating back to Enlightenment), in Latin America, the transition was from *pensador* – the consummate man of letters and thought, who was also a man of action – to intellectual, which suggested a more passive man of culture.

a new culture with distinct national roots and of cadres to broaden the educational scope of the state, and paradoxically, the eventual elimination of the cultural elite' (1973:11-12). Marx and Engels had earlier given specific attention to the role of artists in society, inextricably linking them both to their socio-economic surroundings and to previous technical advances in the field. In 'Socialism and Man in Cuba', Che would implicate artists in forming part of the scaffolding around the law of value in bourgeois society.³ This supposed of the cultural field that "The superstructure imposes a kind of art in which the artist must be educated. Rebels are subdued by the machine, and only exceptional talents may create their own work. The rest become shamefaced hirelings or are crushed [...] In the field of culture, capitalism has given all that it had to give, and nothing remains but the stench of a corpse, today's decadence in art".⁴

We have already considered the ultimately limited relevance to Cuba of Gramsci's distinction between traditional intellectuals – whose mental labour is encouraged by capitalist society – and organic intellectuals, operating within every social class. In this chapter, we shall explore the evolving functions assigned to, and adopted by, Cuba's intellectuals, but first they would have to consolidate their place in post-revolutionary society, since Weiss notes that 'the survival of the intellectual as a carry-over of bourgeois standards and ethics is not a crucial factor in the Revolution' (1977:27-8). And, while there are those who choose to frame the post-revolutionary situation as a clash between 'Cubans for whom revolution is an art and Cubans for whom art is a revolution' (Del Duca, 1972:95), the reality is likely to be more complex.

In 1965, Che publicly derided the possibility that the generation of artists and intellectuals formed under the old regime could ever completely achieve a revolutionary

3 In this, Che would echo the opinion of the CNC and its provincial corollary: The writer or artist who encounters domination by bourgeois ideology does not have anywhere from which to take a positive ideal [...] often, life appears as something gloomy and absurd and men as small and miserable. There is no way out of the situation and frequently the process of showing the infamies of the bourgeois world leads to justifying it, by considering it to be typical of human existence and, as such, of life. That vision of things fits perfectly with the desires of reactionaries who seek to separate them from the majority of people struggling to change the inhuman conditions of capitalist life (Ibid:2).

4 Expanding on this to consider the class bias of the artworks produced under capitalism, Che (1965) would deem nineteenth century realism 'more purely capitalist perhaps than the decadent art of the twentieth century which reveals the anguish of the alienated individual'.

consciousness:

[...] the fault of many of our artists and intellectuals lies in their original sin: they are not true revolutionaries. We can try to graft the elm tree so that it will bear pears, but at the same time we must plant pear trees. New generations will come that will be free of original sin. *The probability that great artists will appear will be greater to the degree that the field of culture and the possibilities for expression are broadened.* Our task is to prevent the current generation, torn asunder by its conflicts, from becoming perverted and from perverting new generations (u/p; i.a.).

In a reply to Che's letter a few months after its publication, Fernández Retamar (1965b) finds solace in Che's reference to *many* intellectuals and artists, which – rather than dismissing an entire generation – implied *others* who were authentic revolutionaries. Disputing the applicability of the Judeo-Christian concept of original sin to Marxists and isolating the revolutionary character of intellectuals, he launched a compelling defence:

Of *compañeros* who have formed their personal lives with that of the Revolution, and who want to fulfil their destiny; of *compañeros* who, as activists, were where they were ordered to be when the Bay of Pigs was invaded and the missile crisis occurred; of *compañeros* who serve not only their artistic work but also other work towards the construction of socialism (when, many times, they could have shut themselves away in their houses to write fiction or to paint); of those *compañeros* who took part with satisfaction in voluntary labour; of those many *compañeros* who would be able to live comfortably outside the country but who always prefer to live in their revolutionary homeland; of *compañeros* whose intellectual and artistic work, through its unshakeable conviction, serves the Revolution, which is presented sometimes by enemies and unenthusiastic friends as simple repetition of orders but which in reality is experiences that they have lived and continue to live deeply; of *compañeros* who feel pride in serving in the ranks of the Cuban Revolution, which they believe they have the right to call it *our* Revolution; of those *compañeros*, Commander Guevara, able to say of themselves something more than that 'they are not authentically revolutionary' (Ibid:187-8; i.i.o.).

While it seems clear that Che's metaphor about grafting and growing pear trees points to the simultaneous transformation of existing intellectuals and the nurturing of new ones, his words would give credence to the prejudice that artists and writers practising before the Revolution presented a problem. In late 1962, while acknowledging that the majority of intellectuals had remained loyal to the Revolution, the CNC discussed the difficulty for intellectuals, formed in the old society, adjusting to the changes brought about by the advent of a new one (1963a). By the time of Che's missive, the negative side of this formulation had gained ground, and, by the end of the decade, Fornet would highlight

the CNC's stigmatisation of the extant generation as 'intellectuals of transition' – who, it was announced, would quickly be dispelled by a 'true' revolutionary intelligentsia (Dalton et al, 1969).⁵ This 'myth of transition', Gilman (2003) argues, served for a limited time to mark the transition from writer to intellectual, before being displaced by an emphasis on the defective class perspective of pre-revolutionary intellectuals.⁶

By the time of the 1968 Cultural Congress of Havana, when dogmatism had been forced into remission, Gramsci was taken as a starting point for defining the intellectual function in conjunction with other social relations (Dalton et al, 1968), and Che was taken as its emblem. During the preparatory seminar held in 1967, Llanusa (1967) would describe how Fidel had identified a need to broaden the definition of intellectual to include researchers, technicians and scientists, a move that was enthusiastically embraced by the artists and writers present, and Pogolotti (2010) recalls that many of the participants at the eventual congress were not artists in the traditional sense of men of letters.⁷ There are those who argue that the elevation of several categories of society to the status of intellectual effectively downgraded artists and writers. So, for example, Weiss asserts that:

Artists consider themselves a unique breed of intellectual, but this definition was unconditionally rejected after the [1968] Cultural Congress, where a broadened definition gained general acceptance. Political functionaries were intellectuals, cadres were intellectuals; intellectuals were consecrated by a very concrete social function. Artists and writers who wasted their time either chasing after pure ideal forms or attacking one another with dogma and rhetoric could hardly qualify as intellectuals; they continued to exist outside the mainstream, intellectuals in name alone (1973:246).

While this account accurately emphasises the social role that intellectuals were increasingly expected to play, it erroneously suggests that they became subordinate to a political class that sought to subdue them.⁸ In studying Cuban sources, it

5 Combined with the spectre of Stalinism, Fonet argues, this atmosphere meant that the ensuing struggle was not merely a fight for creative freedom but a fight for survival (Dalton et al, 1969).

6 Gilman cites a poem by Fernández Retamar, 'Ud. tenía razón Tallet... somos hombres de transición' [You had reason Tallet... we are men of transition] as the most emblematic expression of this position (2003:151). While Tallet was a poet, editor and 'radical patron' (Kapcia, 2005:76), Guillermo Cabrera Infante scoffs that the shrewd Fernández Retamar is known as a 'man of *transaction* if ever there was one' (1968b:39, i.i.o.).

7 Pogolotti (2010) remembers the presence of an important group of highly qualified ethnologists, specialists in African culture.

8 It is necessary to state here that the views Weiss (1973) paraphrases, to convey a negative atmosphere at the congress, represent, in a highly condensed form, the views expressed by delegates, rather than from on high. However, as will be discussed in chapter ten, the 1968 congress prioritised an

seems that, rather than implying a devaluation of artists and writers, their inclusion (or consolidation, in the case of writers) into the intellectual pantheon alongside scientists and technicians (many of whom were still in training) may be regarded as acknowledgement of the part they could play in shaping revolutionary society alongside thinkers from other fields. At the preparatory seminar for the 1968 congress, Dorticós (1967) elaborated that, in the underdeveloped countries of the world, particularly those in Latin America, the soubriquet ‘intellectual’ tended only to be applied to men given to the task of artistic and literary creation. In a country undergoing profound revolutionary transformation, dedicated to pulling its people out of their underdeveloped condition, scientists and technicians deserved to be considered part of this category in recognition of the deep inter-relations that exist between different types of thinkers and the shared task of finding revolutionary solutions to the problems being faced.⁹ And, while commentators outside Cuba would later identify an initial “honeymoon” period in which many writers who had been living abroad during the fifties returned to Cuba [generating] many signs of effervescence and vitality’ (Casal, 1971:458), Llanusa contended that the notion of a honeymoon implied a separation of two things – intellectuals and the revolutionary government – which were, in fact, one and the same thing; ‘the Revolution knows that the intellectuals are those who construct and create the revolutionary process because they are the Revolution, they feel and live with the people and because, for eight and a half years of Revolution, they have suffered in their own flesh the attacks by enemies of the people’ (Llanusa and Dorticós, 1967:8). Mistakenly framing this recalibration as a 1971 novelty,¹⁰ Miller notes that Fidel’s expansion of the category of intellectuals at the First National Congress of Education and Culture represented ‘a specific attempt to shatter the aura surrounding those literary luminaries who had turned against Cuba’ (1999:27), arguing that the appropriation by state leaders of cultural symbols, specifically José Martí, had the effect of further undermining intellectuals. However, Martí, the apostle of Cuban independence, had

understanding of the Revolution as a cultural act.

9 Rafael Rodríguez (1969) attributes protagonism at the congress to all those who feel the anguish of man, irrespective of the aesthetic criteria or expressive methods they use.

10 As has already been seen, the idea of cultivating organic intellectuals dates back to ‘History will Absolve Me’. As will become clear in the next chapter, the inclusion of scientists into the intellectual pantheon can be traced back to policy documents of the early 1960s.

been named by Fidel as the intellectual author of the Moncada attack as early as 1953 (Fernández Retamar, 1971) and had consistently underwritten the 1959 Revolution. Miller further argues that ‘Although he mocked the affectation of art-for-art’s sake dandyism, and dedicated himself to the cause of Cuban nationalism, Martí helped to advance the emergence of a distinct creative sphere by insisting that politics should be kept out of art. Advising against the mixture of art and politics, Martí always emphasized that, morally, the struggle for social justice should prevail over any dedication to art’ (1999:101).¹¹ While it may be the case that Cuba’s revolutionary poet prioritised social justice over art, as did his twentieth century successors, later in this chapter we shall see how he also acknowledged the political value of culture and the centrality of creativity in building the continent under the rubric of ‘Our America’. We shall also continue to see that Miller’s insistence on separating art and politics is symptomatic of a particular perspective.

In the Formation of the New Man

Early during the Cuban process, it became clear that the Revolution would have to consolidate itself in cultural transformation. In this regard, Che was taken to be exemplary of a new breed of subject, reconciling theory and praxis, and Karol outlines how he:

[...] had come to suspect that building the material foundations of socialism might not be the chief priority, that socialism could never be built without the prior transformation of the political consciousness of the workers. [...] Moreover, Cubans had come to see – however vaguely – that it was recourse to moral initiatives which had enabled China to transform the social attitudes of her entire working population, thus paving the way for a society, much fairer, more dynamic, and much more revolutionary than the Russian (1970:541-2).

On 13 August 1967, Fidel would say ‘Ideally, revolutions should be made when the objective and subjective conditions are perfectly balanced. Unfortunately, this happens too rarely; all we can say is that when the objective conditions are ripe but the revolutionary will is lacking, there will be no revolution. On the other hand, when the objective factors are not quite perfect, but the subjective will is there the revolution has

¹¹ Miller posits that Martí ‘was the first Cuban intellectual to present himself as a mediator between the people and the nation, elaborating a concept of *cubanidad*. Throughout his work, he claimed to speak on behalf of “the Cuban”, elaborating “our” qualities and “our” values’ (1999:113).

every chance of success' (Ibid:383). In chapter two, attention was given to the timing of subjective transformation as variously predicted by Marx and Lenin. In considering the consciousness-raising impetus in Cuba, Karol notes that:

Fidel knew that he could not give the moon to those who asked for it, nor even satisfy their much more real needs here and now. All he wanted was to make them conscious of these needs, and to persuade them to join him in seeking a fair solution. Fidel and his small group of *barbudos*¹² thus set themselves a task after the Revolution which Lenin had long ago assigned to the Communist Party in order to make the revolution: to infuse the masses with class consciousness from without (Ibid:453).

This retrospective consideration identified a need for the creation of 'new kinds of men and women. And that is where the problem of culture comes into it. The revolution must create a social order that is not menaced by the old reactionary views. And those old views [...] *have* often been served by art and culture' (Mills, 1960:142; i.i.o.). Thus, culture was urged to depart from its repressive moorings and to participate in the process of creating a new consciousness, on which Fidel would elaborate:

I don't think there has ever existed a society in which all the manifestations of culture have not been at the service of some cause or concept. Our duty is to see that the whole is at the service of the kind of man we wish to create. [...] I believe that the content of any artistic work of any kind – *its very quality for its own sake, without its necessarily having to carry a message* – can give rise to a beneficial and noble feeling in the human being (Lockwood, 1967:111, i.a.).

In 1965, Che had articulated the need for an entirely new instrument 'for mobilizing the masses. Basically, this instrument must be moral in character, without neglecting, however, a correct use of the material incentive – especially of a social character' (u/p).

In interview, Fidel would expand upon this idea:

Material incentives, though important as stimulus [sic], are not the most important factor. Most important is the moral incentive being felt by the people. These are the first fruits of socialism here. People used to think, before the Revolution, that work such as cutting sugar cane was dirty – let others do it. But now they are beginning to understand and feel the true value of work itself. They are making their own future, and they see the results. With this has also come perhaps our most important accomplishment – the instillation in the people of a revolutionary consciousness (Lockwood, 1967:24).

Just a few months after Che's death, the integral formation of man would form the second of five themes at the 1968 congress. As a prelude to this discussion Wesker would observe that:

12 Bearded men.

In Cuba they talk only about what Che Guevara called the ‘new man’ who will be for them, simply, the man whose personal and social incentives will be moral rather than material. Man will work not because his pay will increase but because his fulfillment [sic] as a human being is complete in knowing the degree to which he has contributed to the well being of his society; and this fulfillment [sic] will affect his personal relationships with his neighbour, making them richer; it will affect his need and capacity for education and the enjoyment of art, making them natural and inevitable [...] they are actually looking at the acquisitive and competitive nature of man as we have believed it must always be and saying: he is like this only from centuries of conditioning and we are now going to completely change that conditioning (1969:15).¹³

Prefacing days of deliberation, Dorticós (1968) would emphasise the role of writers and artists in the development of the personality of the new revolutionary man to which the country aspired. In this way, the Revolution embraced the function of intellectuals in heightening spiritual development and priming the people to meet their revolutionary duty. In advocating creative participation at the same congress, Sherman (1968) would assert that the new man would have to gain both objective and experiential knowledge of himself, while the French poet and artist, Alain Jouffroy (1968), would affirm that freedom of thought and mobility of the imagination would be required methods in the new man, as discipline and rigour were in the militant revolutionary. Félix Sautié¹⁴ took care to delineate what the term ‘new man’ concretely expressed – prioritisation of collective over individual interest; motivation being found in the intimate satisfaction of participating in social work; the barriers between intellectual and manual work being erased and aesthetic and cultural development being considered equal to physical development. In his closing speech to the congress, Fidel would assert that the development of consciousness, of social and general cultural development, would be a prerequisite for economic and industrial development and that imperialist powers reacting to growing inequality with ever-more repressive wars would serve only to galvanise universal revolutionary consciousness. And, while the revolutionary government in no way believed that the congress solved, or even clarified,

13 Without having taken part in the relevant commission, Wesker was critical of the lack of analysis with respect to definitions of the new man: ‘What “new man”? Surely there is and only ever was – man? And its [sic] because we have glimpsed at him, seen hints of him and guessed at his potential that we persist in trying to create societies where his true nature can emerge, can be revealed. Revealing is the operative word. There can be no “new man” only the slow revealing of what man was always intended to be’ (1969:18). This demonstrates a basic misunderstanding of the essential concept, defined by Gramsci and explained in chapter two, in which the ‘new man’ was a synonym for ‘new social relations’.

14 A pre-revolutionary Cuban writer and member of the Catholic Youth.

all the problems at stake, it was considered to have made a significant advance in, and contribution to, the revolutionary movement; above all, these problems related to the new man, with Che as the man for the twenty-first century (Anon, 1968b).

At the end of the decade, Lumsden would note that ‘Every domestic policy implemented by the Castro regime is ideologically linked to the creation of this new socialist consciousness’ (1969:539).¹⁵ Consistent with the moral impetus invoked by Che, the Revolution was attempting ‘to build a new generation of socialists that will identify itself with the plight of the underdeveloped world in general, and which will commit itself to a long and arduous revolutionary struggle as the only means of freeing the underdeveloped world from its present dependency upon the developed world’ (Ibid:540). By the time of the 1971 congress, the full formation of man – through the development of all the capacities which society is able to promote in him – was hailed as imperative, with education being advocated through participation in all manifestations of art and literature (Santana, 1977).¹⁶ By 1975, it was categorically stated that ‘Cultural level profoundly influences man, helping to determine conduct and having repercussions in forms of speech and customs. A high cultural level is absolutely necessary for our youth, especially in creating an unblemished love of our socialist cause’ (Comité Central del PCC, 1976:492). In this way, it was maintained that culture ‘would prepare the ideological terrain for the transformation of society’ (Ibid:96).

The extent to which retrospective transformation was possible remains a moot point. In the matter of cultural consciousness, Farber asserts that:

Castro’s politics are inextricably bound with his *caudillismo*, by which I mean, among other things, the politics of blindly following the leader. This constitutes a major obstacle to raising the Cuban people’s political consciousness and increasing their

15 Like Lenin before him, Fidel would marvel at the perceived increase in voluntary labour during the 1960s, attributing it to raised consciousness: ‘If only you could see for yourself the magnificent effort of hundreds of thousands of volunteers, ready to go wherever the Revolution needs them. Nothing like this has ever happened before, nor was it even conceivable. How can we explain this new phenomenon, if not by an extraordinary increase in the level of political consciousness of our people, and of our young people in particular?’ (Karol, 1970:484-5). Moreover, ‘Cuba, he told us, had risen to unprecedented heights, her youth was extraordinary; in 1959, or even one or two years ago, he would never have believed that the people would respond so magnificently to the call for collective endeavor. “Yes, *hombre nuevo* [new man] is no longer an empty phrase, no longer a pipe dream! We have many *hombres nuevos* in this country! And it is thanks to them that we shall clear our hurdles, thanks to them that we have nothing to fear”’ (Ibid:486).

16 Socialist school, together with all the other organised forces of society, would form a nexus for this holistic training, with artistic activity from primary grade onwards being upheld as one of the essential elements of the multi-lateral training of man (Santana, 1977).

organizational autonomy. Consciousness and autonomy cannot by definition depend on all-knowing leaders keeping their secret political aims to themselves, so when the time is ripe to defeat the opposition, the leader carries out the aims he has hitherto kept to himself. But these aims do not necessarily correspond to the political consciousness and explicit desires of those he is supposed to lead and represent (2006:68).

Elsewhere, it has been argued that this situation arose as much by accident as by design and that Fidel was its victim as much as its protagonist (Karol, 1970). What remains indisputable is that, during the period under consideration, the creation of new social relations through the combined agency of morally motivated men and women remained uppermost in the minds of the revolutionary leaders and the country's intellectuals.

In the Formation of National Culture

The two main commentators on Cuban cultural policy within UK academia are divided as to whether intellectuals contributed to the formation of either a national or cultural identity. In attempting a thoroughgoing analysis of the former, Miller (1999) points to the defining role of those intellectuals who coalesced against the status quo in the aftermath of the 1920s sugar crash.¹⁷ Preferring to consider the role of intellectuals in the construction of cultural identity, Kapcia asserts that:

[...] if the construction of a national identity is a real experience for those participating, then it follows that the creation of a cultural identity lies at the heart of that process of nation-building [...] the leadership of the search for a national identity must include not only the political or military, but, necessarily, the cultural interpreters, whose education gives them the tools and the space to communicate [...] such interpreters often achieve this status, home and abroad, as intellectuals, thinkers and essayists, but it also follows that, as interpreters and encoders, they are likely to be poets, painters and musicians, since these three professions are able to find the necessary space and forms in ways less immediately comprehensible to the authorities (2005:8).¹⁸

17 Notably Julio Antonio Mella, who founded the Cuban Communist Party, and lawyer-poet, Rubén Martínez Villena, who was influential in the party as the sole intellectual from 1927 (after Mella had been exiled and assassinated), and Ramón Grau San Martín, university professor of physiology, who organised against Batista's attempts to secure the abrogation of the Platt Amendment in a bid to undermine radical opposition, which had led to the vanguard being marginalised (Miller, 1999). In the process, Miller advocates a conception of national identity that takes account of both 'The perennialists' emphasis on ethnicity and the modernists' emphasis on the state' (Ibid:40), which was complicated in the case of Cuba by the hostility that was felt towards the constraints on ethnicity engendered by its colonial past.

18 Kapcia describes the two-step process of forming cultural identity to include, firstly, an increasingly conscious process – through which people see themselves as belonging to a particular culture, which includes both popular and traditional cultural forms, and, secondly:

[...] the development, usually conscious, of an artistic and literary culture, which is more formal and widely recognised and which enjoys some prestige according to the established criteria of 'art' – produced or performed by identified and trained writers, composers and artists, whose role (or profession) is recognised in these terms. Clearly this refers to a conscious cultural elite, although 'cultural vanguard' is perhaps more appropriate when a national identity is being formed (2005:8-9).

While we shall return to a consideration of the avoidance of official scrutiny at the end of this chapter, at the risk of too literal an interpretation, it seems significant to note here that a study of post-revolutionary documents shows the formation of *national culture* to be a prevalent task to which artists and writers were assigned a significant part.

Predicated on an understanding that Cuban national identity was formed in the nineteenth century, through a fusion of well-defined Spanish and African cultures,¹⁹ colonialism was perceived to have conquered the philosophical, educational, scientific and aesthetic orders to establish a cultural monopoly. Access to the most legitimate forms of culture was blocked as collections were pillaged and the thinking of distinguished intellectuals distorted to serve imperialist ends. The resulting diminution of autochthonous culture led to a mystification of art and a separation of art from the people. The triumph of the Revolution would see the revalidation of cultural forms, including the readmission of African tropes and a revival of interest in folklore without recourse to obscurantism and superstition (CNC, 1963a).²⁰ In 1996, the Minister of Culture, Abel Prieto would describe how:

With the Revolution [...] for the first time Cubans had access to the whole of their historical and artistic inheritance. Not only was there an intensive process of rescuing and promoting the art and literature produced by intellectual minorities throughout our history, but also the popular traditions were trawled through by researchers, and the authentic crucible of *cubanía*,²¹ in its many and varied nutrients, was placed at the disposal of the great masses (Miller, 2008:695).

19 In considering this synthesis, Fernández Retamar (1971) invokes the Mexican, Alfonso Reyes, on the union of hydrogen and oxygen becoming greater than the sum of its parts as water.

20 At the 1968 congress, the Haitian poet, René Depestre described how:

[...] the decolonization process is an uninterrupted social creation, an extraordinary living organism which unceasingly generates powerful anti-bodies that render it capable of successfully resisting the neo-colonial epidemic. In Cuba, as in Vietnam, cultural values are allied, united, and the social being of the people, raised to its highest level of creative tension, possesses the necessary dynamism for progressively diminishing the distance that in the underdeveloped countries exists between the technological initiative and the restoration of national culture. [...] There can be no decolonization without a true Revolution. There can be no possible development of the national culture without a radical, violent, disalienating rupture with the colonial past. In those countries where such a decisive operation has not taken place the cultural life, unfortunately, is reduced to an exhibitionism and a narcissism that embrace within its tired arms the senile impotence of the neo-colonial West (Salkey, 1971:154).

21 All those cultural practitioners interviewed by Kirk and Padura Fuentes demonstrate *cubanía* '(poorly translated as "profound pride in being Cuban") [...] Perhaps one of the greatest achievements of the Cuban Revolution is precisely the result of having developed this sense of identity, and these widely held patriotic values, throughout the country' (2001:xix). Nevertheless, slight disagreement exists over whether residence in Cuba is a necessary prerequisite for *cubanía*, with Kapcia arguing that 'artists and writers have often had to leave Cuba to create their art, so production within Cuba cannot be a sine qua non of such a culture' (2005:18-9) and ISA professor of aesthetics, Lupe Álvarez, testifying to the embeddedness of *cubanía*, to note that 'art made in Cuba possessed a strength and an authenticity that could not be found in Cuban art made in other places, and foreign promoters realized that the art that reflected the daily experience of living in Cuba turned out to be the most interesting' (1999:68).

We have begun to see how artists and writers contributed to the formation of cultural policy through their strenuous participation in congresses and through a dedicated consideration of their revolutionary role. In the process of forming a culture with national roots, artists and writers took the lead in dictating the terms of the debate from *Nuestro Tiempo* to the November manifesto and beyond. By the end of the 1970s, an official report on the cultural policy of Cuba would explain how:

The expressions of artistic culture, which emerged with certain specific historical or social peculiarities, possess a specific national character that was acquired in the course of centuries of development. Culture is an integral aspect of nationhood and is nourished by the roots from which the nation has sprung. The people, State and Communist Party of Cuba, defending the national character of culture, reaffirm its patriotic and anti-colonial values and declare themselves in favour of works of art which provide an insight into the material and spiritual transformations of society (Saruský and Mosquera, 1979:22).

Consistent with this revolutionary aim, a national strain developed in post-revolutionary culture that reflected Cuba's history and traditions (Otero, 1972),²² and Saruský and Mosquera describe how 'Cuban painters, while operating with a great variety of artistic idioms and kinds of artistic expression, and aware of the latest theories about form, tend to focus attention on the rich veins of the national tradition and to give expression to the new realities' (1979:41). Artists were implicated in the visual construction of national culture, through the recovery of lost symbols and the representation of changing reality; the present would reconstitute past traditions and visual art salons would evoke contemporaneity alongside retrospectives recognising the validity of earlier modernist movements (Pogolotti, 2006). This led an outside commentator to note that 'Although artists are not directed aesthetically in any way, the hope for Cuban art production is eventually to develop a visual language that corresponds to cultural identity' (Camnitzer, 1994:299).

²² Fernandes finds that the revolutionary government's Soviet-inspired invocation of socialist ideas, as a means of securing unity, was bracketed on each side by a consolidation of nationalism, in which 'the move to redefine Cuban culture and the arts as part of Cuba's historical and national patrimony makes culture a crucial site for the reinvigoration of national unity in the face of ideological polarization and economic differentiation' (2007:183-4). Farber describes the kind of:

[...] multiclass cultural nationalism almost universally shared by the Cuban population. Largely devoid of a specific social and political content, it expresses pride in the cultural distinctiveness of Cuban society and its particular contributions to world culture, such as its music. It is also a 'flag and national anthem' nationalism that affirms the blind devotion to one's native land and defense against those who might defame it or diminish its importance' (2006:131).

In comparison with other parts of Latin America, the role assigned to Cuban artists in forging national culture conferred upon them 'an actual cultural and social influence in their country. A history of revolutionary Cuba would be seriously lacking without an understanding of this unusual [sic] full partnership. That Cuba was able to achieve this with relatively few overt programmatic constraints and mostly by means of sponsoring creativity has to be seen as one of the greatest achievements of the revolutionary process' (Ibid:324). At the same time, maintaining an international outlook, it was understood that the most vigorous elements of national culture would surpass national frontiers (Anon, 1968r). As the *cubanía* underlying the Revolution has been ably dealt with elsewhere (Kapcia, 2005; 2008), let us continue considering the role of intellectuals in post-revolutionary society.

At the Vanguard

In earlier chapters, we saw how, with the exception of the group around *Nuestro Tiempo*, the majority of contemporary artists in 1950s Cuba were too discouraged and politically detached to play a major role in the insurrection. Fernández Retamar (1966) argues that, at that time, political leaders were ahead of the intellectual vanguard; this meant that while, for the political vanguard, the Revolution began with Moncada in 1953, the intellectual vanguard was shocked to find itself lagging behind both its political counterpart and its Russian forebears. However, as we have begun to see, the vanguard role attributed by Lenin to the party and its intellectuals would make an appearance in Cuba.

In the post-revolutionary period, a shared commitment to change would establish a necessary link between political and artistic vanguards (Pogolotti, 2006). Benedetti (1969), who spent considerable time among Cuban intellectuals during the timeframe under consideration, argues that, much quicker than in European socialist countries, the political and aesthetic vanguards reached a state in which they could fertilise one another. This potential for reconciliation gained currency in the cultural field, with Portuondo suggesting at the 1961 congress that creators were servants of the

people, capable of speaking on behalf of both Man in his universal condition and man in his specific historical circumstances (UNEAC, 1961).²³ Notwithstanding, Che (1965) would express his impatience with the slow revolutionary development of intellectuals. In reply, Fernández Retamar (1965b) emphasised the necessity of differentiating between the decadent and moribund art produced in the breast of capitalist societies and that which is vanguard – those rebellious works capable of heralding the future. He asserted that, aesthetically speaking, the majority of vanguard artists were also at the political vanguard,²⁴ and that, far from identifying themselves with the corrupt capitalist world, even those artists whose political development was not yet at the same level as their artistic development rejected its crimes, conventions, codes and hypocrisy. The following year, Fernández Retamar would build on the specifics of underdeveloped Cuba, giving complexion to the kind of artistic vanguard that could be envisaged there:

To make a vanguard art in a country in revolution had already revealed itself to be complicated enough. One of the misfortunes of this century has been precisely the separation between the two vanguards, political and aesthetic, which had demonstrated themselves capable of mutual fertilisation in the early years of the Russian Revolution [...] The political vanguard is a minority but by no means minor, being the cutting edge of a class. The artistic vanguard, in a similar way, if it really is a vanguard, is not a minority, an ivory tower, a gang [...] but the cutting edge of a conglomerate which, sooner or later, is going to receive the consequences of that vanguard. [...] However, as we know, those who well understand the necessity of a political vanguard do not always understand the necessity of an aesthetic vanguard. As a result, there has been a bifurcation between an official, conventional culture and a real vanguard, but marginalised, culture. It is our aspiration that what happens in Cuba is not that which has been happening until now (1966:284).²⁵

Fornet would later reflect upon how ‘the Revolution – the real possibility to change life – appeared to us as a political expression of the artistic aspirations of the vanguard’

23 In this effort, Portunondo would invoke Lope de Vega as the voice of the silent masses (UNEAC, 1961).

24 In this regard, Picasso was taken as an exemplar of artistic, political and human evolution (Ibid). On the Latin American continent, the poets César Vallejo and Pablo Neruda are singled out, while, in Eastern Europe, Mayakovski, Eisenstein, Meyerhold and the constructivists are mentioned for their ability to depict the October Revolution and to withstand Stalin’s persecution – with Mayakovski being identified as the ‘first poet of the Soviet era [who] represents an example of an artist from the vanguard, the aesthetic order, in service of the revolution’ – and Bertolt Brecht singled out for bringing the artistic vanguard of the German Democratic Republic to life (Fernández Retamar, 1965b:183).

25 At the 1968 congress, Jesús Díaz and Juan Valdés Paz of Cuba considered the role of the vanguard in underdeveloped societies, reclaiming it as ‘that group which situates itself consciously, scientifically and organisationally at the front of its people in its struggle for political power and subversion of social structures’ (Anon, 1968h:4). Gisele Halimi took care to clarify that intellectuals from developed countries could only humbly communicate their experience as a theme of reflection; they could not point a path to their brothers in combat in underdeveloped countries, being no more than fraternal and proactive witnesses in the search by subjugated people for their own culture (1968:42).

(2007:382-3) which led to an ‘alliance between the political and artistic vanguards, perhaps the most fruitful in our history, whose impact on the culture of the ’60s was of such magnitude that it spread itself beyond national frontiers’ (2004:10).

At the 1968 congress, Carpentier would deliver a paper on the peculiarities of the vanguard in Cuba, while Celaya would assert that ‘The intellectual is obliged to raise themselves up to the people and to walk a path in front of them’ (Anon, 1968r:5). Reinforcing the inter-relationship between political and artistic vanguards in the revolutionary condition, Benedetti would suggest that ‘the man of action should be a “trail blazer” of the intellectual and vice versa. That is, in the dynamic aspect of the Revolution, the man of action should be the vanguard for the intellectual and, in the sphere of art, of thought, of scientific research, the intellectual should be the vanguard for the man of action’ (1968:31).²⁶ Also at this event, Sánchez Vásquez would elaborate on the suppression of the creative vanguard in bourgeois society, which brought about a divorce between the artistic and political vanguards and imposed social conformity onto artists, draining them of any radicalism and curtailing their revolutionary potential. While this led him to the idea that ‘artistic revolutions cannot change society’ (Anon, 1968h:4),²⁷ the Cuban experience had shown that the creative act of revolution precipitates the conditions for ending the dichotomy between artistic and political terrain. This implied that the artistic mission would only be complete when a common language had been found with the revolutionary political vanguard and with the people.

26 Depestre would describe how, for many colleagues, art and literature had become substitutes for politics, performing an immediate, utilitarian role, a militant and didactic function akin to that of the man of action; however, the pedagogical role of art and literature would not be found, in the final instance, through its creator deliberately pursuing this end, because art and literature could not have the same power on the masses as journalism and political discourse. In a revolutionary country, intellectuals should exercise their responsibility on two levels – cooperating with the pedagogical duties of the Revolution, by being professors and participating in discursive events, and participating in the tasks of the Revolution through their militancy and voluntary work. But, creators also had an aesthetic responsibility to the Revolution, making valuable works that expressed its progress *at the level of art*; in this effort, art and politics could both be considered media of knowledge without being interchangeable (Dalton et al, 1969).

27 Sánchez Vásquez would say that:

The artistic vanguard historically arises in opposition to the dominant aesthetic order. But the bourgeoisie does not content itself with responding to [vanguard] protests, allowing progress in the ideological machinery, but socially excommunicates the artist. So opens a process of radical incompatibility between the artist of the vanguard and the decadent social regime in which their aesthetic protest is raised. This acquires new nuances – particularly aesthetic ones – however, in spite of their radicalism, it stops where effective revolutionary protest begins (Anon, 1968h:4).

In demarcating the artist as a permanent rebel, or revolutionary, at the same congress, Francisco Fernández-Santos²⁸ (1968) found that this constituted a vanguard in the philosophical sense, with the objectives of vanguard art being to change man and the world at the same time, using the weapons of imagination and critique. For Fidel, the intellectuals assembled at the congress collectively constituted a vanguard, capable of understanding the gravity of the contemporary situation. The final declaration also made explicit reference to the cultural vanguard acquiring a more defined sense as part of the advancing Revolution, which presupposed partisan participation in revolutionary life. The first responsibility of this cultural vanguard would be to the development of national culture, understood not only in local terms but as part of a process of incorporation into the hard-won achievements of humanity (Anon, 1968b).

Gilman describes how, within worldwide attempts to better define the vanguard project, Latin America would play a pivotal role in the search for a new art at the threshold of a new civilisation. In the early years of the Cuban Revolution, the term ‘progressive intellectual’ became redundant as the noun implied the adjective and ‘membership of the left became a crucial element for the legitimacy of intellectual practice’ (2003:58). Throughout the continent, ‘the intellectuals of Latin America shared a new conviction that they could and should turn themselves into one of the principal agents of radical societal transformation’ (Ibid:59). This would see politicised intellectuals of the epoch (critics, ideologues, writers and party activists) regarding intervention in public affairs as not just a possibility but an obligation. This implied belonging to a professional group of partial subjects that had become the spokespeople of humanist and universal conscience, in which the doctrine of ‘commitment’²⁹ secured for intellectuals their participation in politics without abandoning their own field.

28 A Spanish Marxist philosopher.

29 Gilman (2003) mentions the Italian philosopher, Norberto Bobbio’s *Dictionary of Politics* as typical of the era. This distinguished two accepted meanings of the word ‘intellectual’ – the first, a wide one, implied an understanding of the social sphere and the orchestration of non-manual duties; the second, more restrictive, defined those intellectuals who were ‘committed’ (or ‘engaged’ in Sartre’s terms). She also notes that certain authors (including Lezama Lima) demonstrated reluctance to be included in this latter category. Others, notably Carlos Fuentes, expressed discomfort with the power conferred on writer-intellectuals, which implied that ‘every word was dangerous’ (Ibid:74).

As in the capitalist world, the normative equivalence claimed between aesthetic modernisation and ideological commitment would become problematic for writers. The group around *Lunes*,³⁰ for example, defined the intellectual task as inherently political (González, 2002), a passive approach that was railed against by those around Casa de las Américas. At the same time, ‘social art’ was regarded by some in terms of lost quality, a perspective that sought to separate the relationship between the artist and their work and that between the artist and society (Miller, 1999).³¹ Some ‘argued, in more or less extreme terms, in favour of preserving some degree of autonomy for culture’, maintaining ‘that they were ultimately more effective propagandists of revolution if they preserved their reputation as independent intellectuals’ (Ibid:128). Others ‘insisted that if they had to choose between being revolutionaries and intellectuals, they would opt for the latter’ (loc cit), including Cabrera Infante, Vargas Llosa and Carlos Fuentes. Yet others, as we have seen, would adopt the former given the same choice (Dalton et al, 1969; Otero, 1997).

By 1975, the involvement of artists and writers in the process of constructing socialism could not have been made more explicit, and, at the PCC congress, systematic study of Marxism-Leninism was thought necessary in order to increase the possibility that artists and writers could make an effective contribution through their works (Comité Central del PCC, 1976). Accordingly, artistic and literary creation was compelled to reflect, from a proletarian perspective, the problematics of social and individual life and the tensions inherent in the process while continually searching for the means of expression most appropriate to the life of man.

Actively participating in a reform of the aesthetic vocabulary, Cuban artists were encouraged in the hope that it would be possible to correct the historical error of the Marxist-Leninist vanguards, which, in rejecting modern art, had reinforced the segregation between artistic and political vanguards (Gilman, 2003). In earlier chapters,

³⁰ *Lunes* developed a close affinity to Sartre’s works.

³¹ Notably, Sartre defined the work of art as both a social act and an individual production. Others, such as the Argentinean, Luis Felipe Noé, author of *Antiaesthetics*, was close to a group of artists seeking resolution between revolutionary ideals and modernist or vanguard art, who proposed Pop Art as an antidote to nationalism and localism. Similarly, Antón Arrufat wrote in *Casa* that art for the people almost always obscured contempt for the people (Gilman, 2003).

we received a foretaste of the conflict between those advocating an 'aesthetics of rupture' and those defending the precepts of socialist realism, and Gilman describes how:

The defence of a vanguard art had an underground and sometimes secret development, which reached its culmination in 1968, when the conditions for using the word 'vanguard' to refer to art met its historical limit in Cuba: the key question was whether it was possible to make a 'new' art or literature (which was key to vanguardist thinking, whether experimental or not) in an economically and politically dependent continent and in countries in which the only possible public for artistic products was recruited from the ranks of the middle class. Nothing was further from the people than that or any other type of art. For this reason, Roberto Fernández Retamar affirmed that the hypothesis about the mutual flowering of the artistic and political vanguards ought to be retracted and based only in those revolutionaries capable of considering themselves 'of the vanguard' (Ibid:330).

For Gilman, the late 1960s were accompanied by an abdication of hope in the aesthetics of rupture and a generalised renunciation of the term vanguard, which became framed in ideological terms with negative connotations:

The field of art and literature, restricted as practice and object of consumption to a minority of the social body, was perceived as an intrinsically autonomous sphere, that is to say not socialised and incapable of being so. If society as *public* had been a fervent aspiration at the start of the epoch, that which was produced was radicalisation of the demand for *culture* as a social space and only if the whole society was capable of *producing it* (Ibid:177; i.i.o.).

This campaign was led most virulently by non-Cubans who had not participated in the triumph of the Revolution and who, 'from more comfortable positions incited their Cuban peers to demonstrate, at least publicly, that they were willing to affirm' their subordination (Ibid:225).

Gilman also outlines how the category of 'committed intellectual' was re-designated as 'revolutionary intellectual', devaluing the notion of 'commitment' under which the majority of intellectuals had been labouring for some time and redefining the social function of intellectuals to emphasise the revolutionary aspects of intellectual practice. The balance between art and life was tipped in favour of the latter term, causing many writers to ask whether they should abandon their writing apparatus and take up arms or at least postpone aesthetic enjoyment until a future time when the triumphant Revolution had socialised the privilege of culture. For Gilman, the majority

of intellectuals ended up admitting themselves unworthy of the new notation and losing confidence in their symbolic practices and in all forms of commitment based on their specific professional competences.

At the end of the decade, Fornet would retrospectively undertake a comparison of intellectuals with men of action – defined as revolutionary leaders, political cadres and economists – to conclude that ‘We were none of those things. We were defenders of form, underdeveloped guardians of the vanguard’ (Dalton et al, 1969:17). Intellectuals flagellated themselves for not having taken part in the insurrection and for their subsequent lack of partisan aggression. Otero (1997), for example, writes candidly about not wholly having entered into the rebel cause, remaining at the margin of legality within the clandestine struggle, which led him to be pursued by an uncomfortable sense of recrimination.³² The parties to the 1969 *Casa* discussion seem agreed that, despite the civic and material conditions having been created to enable an artistic/literary movement that would articulate the same opposition to capitalism as had been achieved in the political terrain, this had not made itself felt in the cultural field with the exception of documentary film. While the Revolution was playing an increasingly profound political, moral and psychological role, the Cuban intelligentsia was not felt to be evolving at the ideological pace necessary to relinquish individualism and become organically linked to the people (Dalton et al, 1969). In recognition of the fact that their creative practice was not being evaluated politically, intellectuals began to advocate that their ancillary revolutionary duties should be taken into account. While, for Gilman (2003), this signalled a crisis that precipitated an anti-intellectual current, Fornet maintains that intellectuals were generally considered revolutionary except by those who ‘confused jazz with imperialism and abstract art with the devil’ (Dalton et al, 1969:18).

32 The three Cuban parties to this discussion – Desnoes, Fornet and Fernández Retamar – regularly represented the Revolution as writers in congresses and international meetings at home and abroad, but felt that this received little recognition in their work centres and CDRs. Depestre argued that, aside from their civic duties, intellectuals could win merits by depicting the Revolution in all its dignity and beauty. In departing from the chaos of underdevelopment, intellectuals would have to live the Revolution in all its aspects, having a militant attitude and expressing the new social realities of the Revolution and emotional structures of the people (Dalton et al, 1969). Kapcia notes the discrepancy between the ‘Sierra guerrillas and their urban counterparts, those who, despite often heroic activity in the Civil Resistance, had not gone through the radicalizing experience of the Sierra’ (2008:24).

In the midst of rapidly changing interpretations of revolutionary progress in Latin America, Gilman argues that ‘the word vanguard was co-opted into a form exclusively referring to the politico-military direction of armed groups’ (2003:162), to the exclusion of intellectuals. Not only did the political vanguard become the only legitimate vanguard, but this resulted in the idea that it was impertinent for artists to compare themselves to the political leadership when they were not peers but subordinates. For her, the only exception to this was the concept of Cuba as the vanguard of Latin American revolution which conferred upon its leaders the power to authorise both political and cultural propositions enunciated in the name of a revolutionary position. Accordingly, Fernández Retamar would locate the Cuban vanguard to be ‘struggling in the front ranks of a family numbering 200 million brothers and sisters’, in turn forming ‘part of another even larger vanguard, a planetary vanguard – that of socialist countries emerging on every continent’ (1971:41).

It will be remembered that, at the 1961 congress, the second of three points in the agenda was a consideration of exchanges, contact and co-operation between Cuban intellectuals and artists and those of Latin America and all the countries of the world, in defence of popular culture, national sovereignty and universal peace. A resolution was drawn up by the relevant working group, which considered dialogue between nations to form the basis of universal culture. In Cuba, it was perceived that the common struggle for independence that united the countries of Latin America was being thwarted by a deliberate strategy, aimed at eroding cultural linkages, orchestrated by the imperialist powers.³³ Consistent with the Casa approach, it was decided that, in the face of constant

33 Gilman (2003) describes the Latin Americanisation of culture and the highly successful creation of Latin America, as a space of belonging, which transcended notions of the national. Throughout the 1960s, multifarious congresses and meetings were organised in Chile and Mexico, Caracas and, of course, Havana. This was combined with a concerted effort on the part of certain journals, with *Martha* editing a special issue, in late 1961 – dedicated to recuperating the tradition and history of ‘Our America’ and affirming the Latin American intellectual as having made the anti-imperialist position their own – and *Casa* being prominent in perpetuating a notion of Latin America that promoted unity over diversity. In short, ‘The intensity of cultural life came to affirm that, in spite of sanctions and isolation, Cuba was still one of the most thriving and original cultural centres of the world’, which meant that, in less than a decade, Cuba became the setting for the massive reception and recruitment of artists and intellectuals, strengthening communal links around the defence of the Revolution and discussing the modes of intellectual intervention and aesthetics adequate to extending revolutionary possibilities throughout the continent. In light of this, it would not be long before intellectuals began to be regarded as a ‘problem’ and the US became preoccupied with the potential ‘politicisation’ of the artistic field.

aggression, an increasingly united response would need to be mounted, through multifarious exchanges especially in the field of culture (UNEAC, 1961).

When Simón Bolívar liberated Venezuela from Spanish colonial rule in 1813, he would advocate a federation of independent Latin American republics. With this in mind, Fernández Retamar urges us to remember two ideologically important events from this era – the Tricontinental Conference,³⁴ which took place in January 1966, and the conference of the Latin American Solidarity Organization (OLAS)³⁵ of 31 July–10 August 1967,³⁶ which arose from it.³⁷ For him, the Bolivarist current was evident at both conferences, with Che sending a letter to the former and Haydée assuming presidency of the latter (Sarusky, 1995).³⁸ The phrase ‘What is the history of Cuba if not the history of Latin America?’ was emblazoned in luminous letters behind the OLAS stage, together with portraits of Bolívar, Martí and Che,³⁹ and two central contentions dominated proceedings – that armed struggle was the only way to revolution and that Cuba should consider itself the vanguard of the Latin American revolution (Gilman, 2003).⁴⁰

34 Gilman (Ibid) cites this conference as a key example of the Third Worldist current active at that time, which involved solidarity between Latin America, Africa and Asia and overlapped with the purely Latin Americanist current. Lockwood notes that, perhaps deliberately, this event coincided with Che’s disappearance to the Congo at the end of 1965 and that ‘Many of these who attended the Tricontinental were *guerrilleros* or would-be revolutionaries travelling in disguise’ (1967:352).

35 According to Karol:

Fidel declared himself highly satisfied with the work of OLAS; in his opinion we were witnessing the birth of a vast movement which would sweep the continent in irresistible waves (*olas* is Spanish for waves). He affirmed that Cuba did not propose to found a new International; that it would not try to play the part of leader state. Cuba had simply put forward a number of ideas and was happy to see that OLAS had adopted them as their own. He pleaded that past differences be put aside as internal quarrels merely served to sap revolutionary energies. In the new movement, there would be room for everyone, and Cubans would never support one revolutionary faction against another (1970:379-80).

36 In the same way that Lockwood (1967) had suspected that the Tricontinental conference had been arranged to coincide with Che’s time in the Congo, he notes that Che had departed for Bolivia in November 1966, with the OLAS conference convened eight months later.

37 From this event arose the idea of forming an organisation with the twenty-seven delegations from Latin America (Gilman, 2003).

38 Of the OLAS conference, Fernández Retamar notes that ‘Those of us who had the honor to participate in it will never forget Haydée’s dynamic and feverish activity prior to and throughout the conference (2003:80).

39 Fernández Retamar describes how ‘when the curtain opened on the first day a huge effigy of the liberator Simón Bolívar appeared in the background and, in the final session, the effigy was of Che, who was fighting in the front line of what was at that time a new Bolivarian army’ (2003:80)

40 The General Declaration of the OLAS conference upheld ‘The Cuban Revolution as the symbol of the triumph of the armed revolutionary movement constituted as the vanguard of the anti-imperialist Latin American movement’ (Gilman, 2003:204).

Karol describes how, in 1967, Cuba ‘rose up against that “petrified and dogmatic” form of Marxism that was preventing Communist parties in Latin America from harnessing the immense revolutionary potential of their continent. The Cubans did not seem at all concerned about the anti-Soviet implications of this indictment,⁴¹ as it was common knowledge that all these parties were unconditional supporters of the Moscow brand of Marxism-Leninism’ (1970:295). Adopting Dorticós’s description of this anti-Soviet phase as Fidel’s ‘heresy’, Karol would comment on the accusations Che had earlier levelled at intellectuals, to note that:

[...] his peremptory judgment showed that he had failed to look at the deeper reasons for the withdrawal of intellectuals from politics. No doubt he would have been forced to make good his omission sooner or later, for to substantiate his thesis he would have had to analyze the power structure prevailing in Cuba, and in socialist countries in general. Unfortunately, now that Che was gone it seemed unlikely that anyone else had the quality or standing needed for reopening the debate on so thorny a subject. Fidel, though exceedingly tolerant of intellectuals in their own particular sphere, clearly felt no need to involve them in the theoretical elaboration of his ‘heresy’ (1970:396-7).

However, this account of intellectual withdrawal is largely based on the opinions of émigrés like Franqui, and underplays the role of intellectuals in the Latin American vanguard, which would manifest itself more fully after Karol conducted his research. As we shall see in this section and again in chapter ten, intellectuals were firmly committed to the continental revolutionary project.

Fernández Retamar prefaces an account of the aforementioned conferences with a consideration of deteriorating Soviet relations,⁴² explaining how ‘In the context of worsening relations with its main ally, Cuba concentrated her efforts on promoting revolution [...] Since imperialist actions were international, so, too, had to be the anti-imperialist struggle’ (1996:177). In 1969, Lumsden penned an incisive article, in which he describes the efforts of the Cuban government in ‘propagating a distinctive revolutionary ideology’ (1969:529) from a Soviet Union on which they remained economically dependent, at a time when relations between the two countries

41 Kápacia (2008) notes that Cuba was emboldened by the knowledge that Soviet credibility in the Third World depended on its visible support of the island.

42 Salkey reports a conversation with a US ex-pat in Cuba in which the latter described the Russians as ‘Thick-necked and disappointed in Fidel’ (1971:29).

had ‘deteriorated to the extent that speculation has been aroused with regard to the possibility of an open rupture’.⁴³ Against a backdrop of perceived Latin American indifference (verging on hostility) in relation to the Cuban Revolution – brought about by US-led counter-revolutionary activities, a widespread ignorance of revolutionary gains and mass media prejudice fuelled by emigration – Lumsden identifies that ‘The Cuban revolution may be the vanguard of the changes that will ultimately revolutionize Latin America’ (Ibid:537).⁴⁴

Viewed retrospectively, 1966 stands out as the year in which awareness of imperialist penetration became a pressing concern in Latin America.⁴⁵ It will be remembered that, from November 1966 until October 1967, the project of pan-American unity was being actively pursued by Che in Bolivia, and Gilman (2003) repeatedly cites Senator Robert Kennedy’s announcement on US television in May 1966 that the continental revolution was coming, whether they liked it or not,⁴⁶ which caused the US government to step up its efforts in the region through various strategies aimed at co-opting intellectuals.⁴⁷ This was the year in which the Latin American intelligentsia was called upon to show its solidarity in the face of attempts to ‘neutralise’

43 The two conferences mentioned by Fernández Retamar are taken as possible ‘indications that Cuba is about to sponsor a third bloc within the international communist movement’ (Lumsden, 1969:530). Lumsden identifies the main point of contention being the revolutionary strategy that should be pursued, concluding that ‘It seems unlikely, however, that Cuba would be willing in the final analysis, to endanger its economic development which will hinge on continued Soviet trade for the foreseeable future, merely because of ideological differences’ (loc cit). Kapcia notes that the Tricontinental Conference was ‘organized in Havana by the Soviet Union’ (2008:117) which would seem to undermine any thesis of rupture. By the time of the 1975 PCC congress, the Soviet Union was being held up as an example in the field of culture, for having surpassed the exploitation of man to permit the development of national culture (Comité Central del PCC, 1976).

44 In this, Lumsden cites Che’s conclusion that these attempts by Cuba to ideologically distance itself from the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe were both deliberate and necessary, a stance which makes it ‘even more important that it succeeds in breaking down its regional isolation within Latin America’ (1969:541).

45 Gilman (2003) locates 1966 as a key year for the Latin American intellectual family, in which debates on the function of the intellectual and the institutionalisation of the intellectual community became inextricably linked. Weiss (1973) points to a discussion on the theme of imperialist penetration on the continent, broadcast on Radio Havana on 10 August 1968.

46 The Cuban opinion on this was that ‘Revolutions in our time, we Cubans believe, come out of misery, out of conditions like those of the old Cuba. Where such conditions continue and there’s a mountain nearby, there’ll be revolutions’ (Mills, 1960:29). This would prompt Mills to reflect that ‘Latin America is a great world region; it is a continent, long and repeatedly plundered; and it is in revolutionary ferment. That it is now in such ferment is a heartening testimony to the will of man not to remain forever an exploited object’ (Ibid:173). By this rationale, Gilman (2003) asks rhetorically whether the left has since been defeated because of the brutal repression and military coups that were unleashed in response to this perceived threat.

47 The US strategies discussed by intellectuals on Radio Havana included a loosening of visa restrictions by the US State Department, invitations to write in US journals and lecture in US universities.

culture by *Mundo Nuevo*, which would ultimately drive a wedge between the accords that had formed throughout the continent. Thus, just as Che's attempts to perpetuate the Bolivarist revolution through armed struggle would be quashed through CIA subterfuge, a CIA-funded vehicle was remarkably effective at undermining the anti-imperialist cultural alliances that had been forged across the continent. In July 1966, in the wake of a PEN Club meeting in New York City, an open letter was sent by Cuban intellectuals to a high-profile attendee and friend of Cuba, the Chilean communist poet, Pablo Neruda,⁴⁸ sparking a controversy that was symptomatic of what Fernández Retamar describes as a 'broad and bitter polemic within the left, between those who believed in the viability of guerrilla struggle as a new chapter in the Bolivarist project, and those who sought refuge in the prudence counseled by the Soviets' (Saruský, 1995:38).⁴⁹ As we shall see, the tensions between the two factions identified here would continue to be played out on a national stage during the second half of the 1960s. After 'the betrayal of Che and his organization by the highest communist leadership of Bolivia, which had much to do with his untimely death' (Fernández Retamar, 1996:177), the Bolivarian army, which had intended to have 'continental impetus and scope' (Ibid:178), was destroyed in its infancy, causing the postponement of 'audacious project to advance the Revolution of Our America' (Fernández Retamar, 2001:302).

48 This letter was published in *Granma* on 31 July 1966 and later reprinted in issue 38 of *Casa*. In the wake of a schism between intellectuals precipitated by *Mundo Nuevo*, Neruda attended the XXXIV Congress of the PEN Club in New York, together with two authors who would break with the Cuban Revolution – Carlos Fuentes (already collaborating with *Mundo Nuevo* and other magazines of dubious provenance) and Mario Vargas Llosa. Given that Neruda had been active in organising an earlier meeting of the PEN Club, behind the Iron Curtain in Dubrovnik, and that he had recently travelled to Peru to accept a medal from the president, Fernando Belaúnde Terry (whose premiership had been dogged by accusations of human rights abuses), his participation in New York caused enormous discontent among the Cuban intellectual fraternity, prompting a letter addressed to 'Compañero Pablo'. What mystified the numerous co-signatories to this letter was the granting of Neruda's visa to the US after twenty years of refusals, and the impression it gave that the Cold War was over, despite the hostile gestures of the US in Vietnam, Indonesia, Ghana, Nigeria, Brasil and Argentina. It was felt that, if the US granted visas to determined leftists, it did so for one of two reasons – either because those granted entry had departed from their beliefs or because their admission was advantageous for the host country. Perhaps unsurprisingly, *Mundo Nuevo* seized upon the rift with Neruda, making him one of their own and aggrandising his poetry in the pages of the journal (Gilman, 2003). Fernet (2007) asserts that the model of committed writers and artists that the Cuban Revolution promoted in 'Our America' served as a pretext for the famous 'Letter to Neruda', which was circulated in all corners of the continent throughout the latter half of 1966 and prevailed a year later at the preparatory seminar of the Cultural Congress of Havana.

49 Fernández Retamar (1998) identifies this letter, the Padilla case and the polemics with *Mundo Nuevo* as the three particularly tough challenges of the time he has presided over *Casa*.

At the 1968 congress, just a few months after Che's death,⁵⁰ his approach was repeatedly invoked in the struggle against Yankee oppression, with imperialism being cited as the main causal factor in the continued underdevelopment of the tricontinental area and both armed struggle and culture being perceived as central in the real and rhetorical battle against it.⁵¹ In relation to the radicalised nationalism experienced in Cuba, Weiss asserts that 'a genuine nationalism must be equated with the desire to eliminate all vestiges of imperialism even in its neo-colonial phases, and to build a new culture' (1973:29). But, as a prelude to discussions, Dorticós (1968) would explain that an anti-imperialist consciousness had not yet been achieved, partly as a result of subtle ideological penetration, specifically in the cultural field. Attempts to maintain progressive, intercontinental links would remain vital for Cuba, and the 1968 congress is regarded as the third stage, after the Tricontinental and OLAS conferences, in a long period of constituting a world front against imperialism (Gilman, 2003). In the first of five panels, the relationship between national independence and culture would be thoroughly asserted against imperialist aggression. For Fernández Retamar, 'the ideals of the revolution, its antidogmatism, its boldness, its brave confrontation with the empire, its refusal of socialist realism, even its uninhibitedness' (1996:177) were major factors in that struggle.

Weiss observes that, by 1971, 'debates on commitment, militancy, roles of the intellectual, and imperialism had been virtually exhausted or resolved, and Cuba was clearly no longer an isolated voice in the Latin American community' (1977:13). Yet, between 7 and 20 June of that year, Fernández Retamar penned a 'defiant challenge to neocolonial ideology' (Fornet, 2007:393). Entitled 'Caliban',⁵² after Shakespeare's character in *The Tempest* (c.1611),⁵³ this text bemoans the limited linguistic and

50 Gilman (2003) also mentions the deaths of other revolutionary leaders – Luis de la Puente y Lobatón in Peru, Fabricio Ojeda in Venezuela, Turcios Lima in Guatemala and Camilo Torres in Colombia – as significant in this regard.

51 Symptomatic of this position was the presence of representatives from the two sides of the conflict in Vietnam, united in their resistance to US aggression in the country (Anon, 1968q).

52 Whose name, a rough anagram of cannibal, is derived from the Carib Indians who initially occupied Latin America (Fernández Retamar, 1971).

53 While Shakespeare can be shown to have read a translation of Montaigne's 'On Cannibals' of 1580, which portrays the native American in a noble light, the English playwright chose the pragmatic option in

conceptual tools provided to the native islander by his coloniser, Prospero,⁵⁴ to chart and expose the racism underlying colonial literature. In Martí's 1891 text, 'Our America',⁵⁵ Fernández Retamar finds a celebration of the blood and heroism of native Latin America and a rejection of the genocide perpetrated by Europeans equating civilisation with colonisation and oppression.⁵⁶ This meant that the Latin American intellectual could 'choose between serving Prospero – the case with intellectuals of the anti-American⁵⁷ persuasion – at which he is apparently unusually adept but for whom he is nothing more than a timorous slave, or allying himself with Caliban in his struggle for true freedom' (Ibid:39).

As Martí in general and 'Our America' in particular continue to determine the ethos of culture in Cuba, it is worth consulting the original text. Arguing that the day was imminent when Latin America would be called upon to face its greatest danger, 'The scorn of our formidable neighbour who does not know us' (1891:93), Martí urges continental unity. In this effort, he offers a few words that are specifically relevant to culture, beginning with a consideration of the power of ideas, which proposed that 'Barricades of ideas are worth more than barricades of stone. [...] A powerful idea, waved before the world at the proper time, can stop a squadron of iron-clad ships'

an increasingly bourgeois world, of depicting the native as an animal worthy of colonising (Ibid).

54 Fernández Retamar asserts that:

This is something that we, the *mestizo* inhabitants of these same isles where Caliban lived, see with particular clarity: Prospero invaded the islands, killed our ancestors, enslaved Caliban, and taught him his language to make himself understood. What else can Caliban do but use that same language – today he has no other – to curse him, to wish that the 'red plague' would fall on him? I know no other metaphor more expressive of our cultural situation, of our reality (Ibid:14).

In the process, Fernández Retamar directs us to Aníbal Ponce, who, in 1935, equated Caliban with the suffering masses.

55 Already in the year of revolutionary triumph, Fernández Retamar asserted a need to distinguish 'Our America' from the Latin American façade invoked by feuding politicians, to consider the possibility of genuine political unity based on solidarity between peoples. He found the plurality that existed throughout the region, with the situation south of the Rio Grande being described as 'pre-political', to be an impediment to real political unity (1959).

56 In much the same way, Hart is keen to stress the embeddedness of the revolutionary Cuban movement in the anti-imperialist thought of Martí and Lenin, with the cultural movement arising from that as a form of historical continuity to eschew nationalist myopia and overturn it in favour of Latin Americanism and socialism. Hart also cites those nineteenth century intellectuals, specifically Julio Antonio Mella, Enrique José Varona and Juan Marinello as having an influence on Cuban culture. For him, this consolidated the Marxist-Leninist and Martían anti-imperialist roots of contemporary Cuban culture and explained the lack of conservative – right-wing or Christian – opposition parties in Cuba (Sanchez, 1989).

57 In this context, anti-American refers to the culture 'of the oppressors, of those who tried (or are trying) to impose on these lands metropolitan schemes, or simply, tamely, reproduce in a provincial fashion what might have authenticity in other countries' (Fernández Retamar, 1971:38).

(Ibid:84). This has obvious significance in relation to intellectual practice within the Revolution, which would find itself at odds with the anti-idealism of the more ardent historical materialists.⁵⁸ At the same time, Martí cautions against the inauthentic polemicist, ‘The presumptuous man [who] feels that the earth was made to serve as his pedestal because he happens to have a facile pen or colourful speech’ (Ibid:86). Ultimately, though, as ‘The problem of independence did not lie in a change of form but in a change of spirit’ (Ibid:90), meaning that altered consciousness would be needed in order to ‘make common cause with the oppressed’ (loc cit), which fits with post-revolutionary concepts of the new man. The emancipatory nature of this formulation was acknowledged in the original, with Latin American governors being urged to work towards reaching ‘that desirable state where each man can attain self-realization and all may enjoy the abundance that Nature has bestowed on everyone in the nation to enrich with their toil and defend with their lives’ (Ibid:86-7). For Martí, creativity would provide the impetus and imagination on which authentic new Latin American societies would be formed,⁵⁹ in which ‘Playwrights bring native characters to the stage. Academics discuss practical subjects. Poetry shears off its romantic locks and hangs its red vest on the glorious tree. Selective and sparkling prose is filled with ideas’ (Ibid:92). And, in direct contrast with Haydée’s reminder to jurors that the Casa prize was a literary one, which should be awarded to the best work, irrespective of its political impeccability, Martí contends that ‘The prize in literary contests should not go for the best ode, but for the best study of political factors of one’s country’ (Ibid:88), thus subordinating culture to contextual imperatives and disproving Miller’s thesis about a Martíán separation of art and politics.

In revisiting ‘Caliban’ fifteen years after it was written, Fernández Retamar gives some background to its genesis, describing how, while the exposure of the CIA

58 Whereas García Buchaca railed against the Absolute Idea of Plato and Kant in her *Theory of the Superstructure*, Martí would argue that ‘Absolute ideas must take relative forms if they are not to fail because of an error in form’ (1891:92).

59 In the same text, Martí would argue that ‘creation holds the key to salvation. “Create” is the password of this generation’ (loc cit).

financing of *Mundo Nuevo* caused that particular organ to disappear, ‘among all sorts of people it sowed seeds of possible distrust towards the Latin-American revolution, which at that time could only offer the victorious example of Cuba, itself virtually overwhelmed by the diverse (and even contradictory) expectations that many people had of it but limited in actuality by its meager strength and inevitable errors’ (1986:49-50). Thus, when ‘Caliban’ was written, ‘anti-imperialism was [...] the basic criterion for much in Cuba, obliging the Havana cultural community to examine its possible subservience towards “imperialist” culture and to seek a cultural decolonisation’ (Weiss, 1977:139).

By the time of the 1975 PCC congress, part of the thesis underlying its resolutions on culture would be dedicated to aligning Cuba with other countries of Latin America and the Caribbean,⁶⁰ on the basis of shared socio-historical and ethnic roots, with the Revolution ushering in a new epoch on the American continent that would disrupt US imperialist domination. Another section of this document explicitly addresses the struggle against colonialism, neo-colonialism and imperialism, while the centrality of the Latin American family in resisting the economic, diplomatic and cultural embargo is acknowledged as a reciprocal process, encompassing the dissemination of a revolutionary message and the diffusion of artistic creations (Comité Central del PCC, 1976). By the end of the decade, Sarusky and Mosquera would highlight the expansion of national culture in Cuba and ‘its contribution to a dramatic struggle against its enemies’ (1979:9).

Viewed in this light, it is easy to see how culture in its pan-American branch found easy accommodation with revolutionary aims. In tune with Haydée’s perception that ‘this continent is one and the same thing’ (1977:64), Casa would find unity among diversity in a way that transcended the economic to become a ‘spiritual unity, which is realised at the frontiers of paper and ink’ (Fernández Retamar, 1959:48). The Latin American fraternity advocated by Bolívar and perpetuated by Martí was fostered at

⁶⁰ Fernández Retamar reminds us that this did not imply ‘Latin America and the Caribbean as a region cut off from the rest of the world but rather viewed it precisely as part of the world – a part that should be looked at with the same attention and respect as the rest, not as a merely paraphrastic expression of the West’ (1986:55).

Casa, with Haydée asserting that ‘The Revolution is very strong, but it has to confront a powerful enemy: imperialism’ (1977:61).

While anti-imperialism would be a consistent feature of all the cultural congresses considered throughout the period of this study, becoming heightened in 1968 and 1975, Farber considers the implied anti-imperialism of Cuban intellectual endeavours to be ‘more political and less cultural’ (2006:130) on account of the widespread acceptance of North American culture. Within Cuban visual art, Camnitzer (1994) asserts that, with a possible exception emerging in the 1980s, no challenge has been made to the Western (capitalist) mainstream in aesthetic terms; instead, vernacular elements have been integrated into the canon.⁶¹ Taken as a whole, the cultural outpourings of post-revolutionary Cuba have been by no means hermetic in their approach, embracing international influences and, in turn, finding easy accommodation with an international audience.⁶² This was not without its problems, and Gutiérrez would observe that, within the Cuban cultural process, confusion arose between terms integral to the Revolution – the construction of socialism – and stimuli produced externally through the idealistic enthusiasm of global solidarity struggles. Interestingly, he would assert that intellectuals had been indispensable to the process of dissipating this confusion, with the mass ownership of culture signalled by the Revolution exposing its incompatibility with bourgeois ideals (Dalton et al, 1969).

According to Hernández (2003), an intellectual vanguard did not appear in Cuba; rather, the political vanguard continued to set the terms of debate in relation to history, imperialism, Latin Americanism and revolutionary culture, with intellectuals legitimately participating in often heated ideological debate. Many causes are cited

61 This has led to a situation in which:

What is consistently challenged in meetings of Cuban intellectuals is the use of art historical values for cultural penetration, but not the values themselves. Cuban artists have never expressed a wish to break radically with the Western history of art. There is a move to expand rather than to contradict or separate from this history. Therefore, and to a certain extent, Cubans feel that they operate within a common aesthetic world with the Western countries (Ibid:135).

62 An early indicator of this was the number of prizes and honourable mentions awarded to Cuban films in international festivals. It was explicitly stated that ‘Participation in international festivals has a double objective – to confront the results of each year of working with the most important tasks and movements, and to break the imperialist embargo’ (Otero, 1972). More than this, film offered the chance for wider collaboration, and examples are heralded of Cuban and Latin American/international directors working together on films about guerrilla struggle and acts of resistance (CNC, 1970).

for this. For Gutiérrez, the intelligentsia could not enter the field of politics as that role had been reserved for the Revolution (Dalton et al, 1969). For Miller (1999), Cuban intellectuals relinquished their role when they identified too closely with the political vanguard (which they did enthusiastically, in their desire to change society as a whole, not just high culture). However, Kronenberg cites Cuba's film-makers as counterbalancing their support for the Revolution with the 'belief that artists should maintain distance from those wielding power' (2011:208). Conceding that, between the 1920s and the 1970s, intellectuals made a contribution to the formation of national identity in the areas of biculturalism, anti-imperialism and history, Miller concludes that the separation between culture and politics means that 'intellectuals have not played a leading role in the Cuban revolution, either as policy-makers or as opinion-shapers' (2008:684). Art historian and curator, Gerardo Mosquera,⁶³ concurs that artists and critics have 'obviously and fortunately' been excluded from 'the commemorative pantheon of the Revolution' (1999:27). However, this perspective would seem to be contradicted by the creative background of 26 July members, such as Otero, by the influence of creative protagonists at various congresses shaping cultural policy – notably Guillén and his colleagues in *Nuestro Tiempo* and beyond – by their contributions to forming national culture and by their impact within cultural institutions (such as the film-maker, Alfredo Guevara, at ICAIC and the poet, Roberto Fernández Retamar, at Casa de las Américas).

Adding texture to the picture given above, Hart would assert that 'The Cuban cultural tradition is broadly linked to the Cuban political tradition. In the new generations of intellectuals, one observes a preoccupation for ethics and for political action which is also at the core of our tradition' (1989:9). Yet, Karol would note that:

One could not but help feeling that in this deeply committed country, intellectuals, instead of being invited to play an increasingly important part in political and ideological activities, were gradually being driven further back into their own shells.

After the first wave of enthusiasm when Cuban men of letters had done their best to

63 Who contributed to a consideration of Cuban cultural policy to UNESCO in 1979 and founded the Havana Biennial in 1984. See http://www.iniva.org/library/archive/people/m/mosquera_gerardo (accessed 7 August 2010).

come to grips with the economic, social, and cultural foundations of their revolution, they had somehow lost their original drive. Works on contemporary history, economic studies of the period of transition toward socialism, analyses of the new culture and its relationship to the masses became increasingly rare (1970:395)

Bypassing ‘the simple tendency to see restraints on creativity as identifiable with political obstacles’, Kapcia examines the structural factors affecting creative production. He describes how, ‘in the 1960s, regardless of political pressures and supposed “hard lines”, the whole exciting and destabilising process of dynamic social change and political interaction generated a context for cultural creativity to flourish, while, after 1971, as institutionalisation slowed down that process, the resulting decline in the dynamism of Cuban life may well have contributed to a loss of creative tension’ (2005:155). The picture offered here is of an initial burst of free creative production that had somewhat run out of steam by the early 1970s, abetted by the growing network of institutions. Nonetheless, Hernández regrets that ‘policymakers have not always expressed sufficient receptivity to intellectual projects, especially those of a younger generation. Intellectuals have charged the bureaucracy with underestimating the political, social, and psychological value of artistic culture and of the sciences not associated with material production’ (2003:46). Accordingly, he contends that ‘no mechanisms have emerged to give intellectuals an influence in national politics that would make full use of their capacities’ (Ibid:45). While intellectuals have been summoned to political participation and ideological struggle, it is argued that their role has largely been confined to shaping social consciousness. By contrast, ‘a deeper socialist concept of democracy could offer civil society, including the intellectuals and their institutions, greater access to the channels where ideology is shaped’ (loc cit). Notwithstanding, as we shall continue to see, artists and writers had a part to play in shaping the policy that determined their fate and in setting the limits of the unacceptable. Let us turn now to a consideration of the role of artists not only in consolidating the revolutionary process but also in critiquing the same.

In Criticising the Revolution

Bolívar's tutor, Simón Rodríguez, proselytised that education should not only be about reading, writing and counting but also about thinking (Camnitzer, 1994), while Martí argued that 'Nations should live in an atmosphere of self-criticism because criticism is healthy, but always with one heart and one mind [...] Nations should have a pillory for whoever stirs up useless hates, and another for whoever fails to tell them the truth in time' (1891:92). Throughout the early literature, reference is made to instilling a critical sense in the people and, while Kumaraswami draws attention to Fidel's request 'that criticism always be directed towards constructive ends' (2009:534), the latter would consistently assert that 'when man's ability to think and reason is impaired he is turned from a human being into a domesticated animal' (1961:33). In a televised speech on 26 March 1962, his interlocutor described a recent process of combating 'errors and defects, sectarianism and conformity, with a great spirit of criticism and self-criticism' (1962:3), prompting Fidel to paraphrase Lenin's assertion that 'the seriousness of purpose of a revolutionary party is measured, basically, by the attitude it takes towards its own errors' (Ibid:4).

Espina argues for an understanding of socialism as a process of continual change 'with its advances, reversals, contradictions, conflicts, and ambivalences [whereby] the ability to transform and constantly renew itself is key to its economic, social and political policy-making' (2010:96). For her, it is this inherent state of flux, combined with the risk that 'socialist transformation may also generate its own forms of alienation on a macro and micro scale [that provides] the key to permanent self-criticism and self-correction' (Ibid:97). In the mid-1960s, Fidel would admit: 'We made many mistakes, many small mistakes, but no serious errors whose consequences might endure for a long time. That is, whenever we have taken a false step, we have been able to correct it immediately' (Lockwood, 1967: 95-6). But Desiderio Navarro⁶⁴ would later observe that 'For the majority of revolutionary intellectuals – but not for the

64 Editor of the journal, *Cristerios*, which emerged in 1972 to counteract the repressive forces of the period and offer an alternative to the Soviet approaches being advocated (Navarro, 2007a).

majority of *políticos* – it was clear that their role in the public sphere should be a critical participation’ (2001:40).⁶⁵

As in other bourgeois societies, certain artists and writers in pre-revolutionary Cuba emphasised the power of contestation in their work, mounting considerable opposition to the Batista dictatorship, as described in the case of *Nuestro Tiempo*. Having been constituted as a stronghold against repressive society, intellectuals had to find a reason to exist in the revolutionary one. Gilman (2003) describes how, in the immediate aftermath of the Revolution, the critical ideal became paramount, with the intellectual positioned as the critical conscience of society, capable of transforming the public, which constituted an opportunity to participate in action that would change the course of history, ultimately bringing an end to capitalism. At the 1961 congress, to those intellectuals who, for half a century, had formed the Achilles’ heel of imperialism by enacting their *dissent*, Rafael Rodríguez evoked the possibility of *consent*, mildly admonishing those who maintained a position of dissent as a matter of principle rather than as the necessary disagreement that is the substrate of all artworks. In considering more fully the reconciliation of creative practice with the people of Cuba, Guillén invoked the need for rigorous critique, which would necessitate various means of expression being refined in order to facilitate direct contact with the problems society was facing as the basis of all genuine works of art. Portuondo, who had been vocal in his scepticism about the line followed by *Lunes*,⁶⁶ provided the congress with a thorough report on the discussions that had taken place around this issue, reminding those present that critique had generally been informed by the system of values and aesthetic criteria (and, hence, conception of reality) of the dominant class. With the triumph of the Revolution, a decision had to be made as to whether these values and criteria, which had now entered into crisis, would be accepted or replaced with new formulations. In the latter case, every care must be taken not to slip into demagoguery or into a condition

65 Navarro would emphasise that critical Cuban intellectuals, more than many *políticos*, had considered social critique not a threat to socialism but its oxygen and motor, necessary to the survival and health of the revolutionary process (2001; 2007a).

66 Unable to see how *Lunes* had progressed beyond the stance of its predecessor, *Ciclón* (with whom several of the editorial board had been involved), Portuondo failed to understand how *Lunes* could simultaneously maintain anti-colonialist and anti-imperialist discourses (González, 2002).

of only praising those great men who contributed to the creation of socialism. The creation of things of beauty should not be negated; the Revolution had paved the way for the most extraordinary love poem, biting political satire or profound theological work. In tandem with proactive engagement with the people, this would give rise to knowledge that could not be gleaned from books.⁶⁷ Thus, Portuondo advocated that creative practitioners engage in a continual process of self-reflexive critique that did not imply some kind of suicidal tendency or aggression towards anyone's ideas (UNEAC, 1961).

In chapter four, we saw how, in 1966, Fernández Retamar defined the revolutionary intellectual as one who problematises in order to find solutions.⁶⁸ Reflecting on Fidel's 'Words' forty years after they were delivered, he finds that operating within the Revolution did not imply obsequiousness on the part of writers and artists, but 'included critique, from revolutionary perspectives, of those who appraise the conflicts or errors which we have incurred' (2001:301). As a theoretical precursor, he cites Martí's view that 'critique is health', to be carried out 'with one chest and with one mind' (Ibid:305), and as a tangible example, he invokes Gutiérrez Alea, as a rebel artist who protested during the national library meetings about the measures taken in relation to *PM*. Kronenberg has more recently noted that, 'while Cuban filmmakers consciously set out to incorporate political themes in their work, it is not always to elevate or endorse the revolution per se, but often critically and candidly to evaluate and, at times, deride its limitations' (2011:203). In his reply to Che's letter, Fernández Retamar raises the psychoanalytic subject of conflict (known in other social disciplines

67 With this in mind, Portuondo refers to a process that had already begun, of writers and artists visiting factories and co-operatives, to talk to people or to read poems. He also went further than this, advocating that it was even more important for writers and artists to involve themselves in the productive work of creating magnificent, revolutionary works of art and literature. The positive effects of this would be two-fold: the people would be convinced that the creator is a person of flesh and blood who is susceptible to being advised and guided, and a true dialogue would be established, an authentic dialectical game between the creator and those with whom they exchange ideas. When creators go to the people, they must do so not as maestros, but to be judged, and must listen to reactions with genuine humility (UNEAC, 1961).

68 This distinction was later reinforced by the son of Aldo Menéndez and leader of the Arte Calle [Street Art] group, 'artist Aldito Menéndez [who] summed up the problems [by] saying, "A counterrevolutionary artist criticizes all the problems of the Revolution but does not offer any solutions because he believes that the only possible solution is to change the political system. A revolutionary artist criticizes the problems of the Revolution and tries to offer solutions because he believes in the Revolution"' (Camnitzer, 1994:132).

as contradiction), to ask rhetorically, ‘Who will deny that there are contradictions in Cuba? Who will deny that there are contradictions in us? Contradiction is the motor of historical life as it is in personal life’ (1965a:188).⁶⁹ And, while acknowledging that contradiction may have disastrous consequences, he also outlines a positive sense in which this could be applied to the vast questions of the Revolution, rather than trying to suppress or evade conflict as the devotees of socialist realism had attempted. Eduardo Heras León⁷⁰ (2007) would later describe the revolutionary aesthetic of his post-revolutionary generation being that of not obscuring anything – that of speaking about courage and cowardice, love and hate, heroism and treachery – of the search for the purest form of truth.

Discussion around critique inevitably touched upon the role of the literary or artistic critic, as well as that of the writer or artist deploying critique as part of their praxis. We have seen how critique had formed a central issue on the agenda of artists and writers since the Camagüey meeting in 1960. A prime opportunity for defining the critical role was offered by the 1961 congress, which took as one of the main points on its agenda ‘sincere and honest critique as a means of situating the work of writers and artists’. At this event, Portuondo assigned to critics the duty of making a judgement on works in a way that assisted their colleagues in their quest to develop expressions of the new historical circumstances. And, while their work would need to be grounded in socialism and Marxism, this did not imply that only Marxists could serve as critics – rather, that critics could not ignore the dominant philosophical currents underlying contemporaneous conceptions of reality (UNEAC, 1961). Gramsci had earlier prophesied that a new ‘type of literary criticism suitable to the philosophy of praxis’ (1931-5:95) would be needed in a post-revolutionary situation, which ‘must fuse the struggle for a new culture (that is, for a new humanism) and criticism of social life, feelings and conceptions of the world with aesthetic or purely artistic criticism, and it must do so with heat and passion, even if it takes the form of sarcasm’ (loc cit).

⁶⁹ Fernández Retamar cites Frantz Fanon, the psychiatrist and great writer of Latin America, perhaps known better to Che than to anyone else in Cuba: ‘Contradiction is but the result of the dynamic evolution of the personality’ (loc cit).

⁷⁰ A Cuban journalist and literary critic.

If there was a false start to the cultural critique of Cuba, it must be due in part to the fact that there was scant critical tradition when the revolutionary government took power, with the bourgeois era having created ‘the worst political, artistic and ideological commentators, who exercised a constant influence on tastes and habits’ (CNC, 1970). By the mid-1960s, Fidel would affirm that ‘we have very few qualified people as yet who could even try to give a Marxist interpretation of the problems of art’ (Lockwood, 1967:111). In the process, he was forced to acknowledge that ‘We have a goal, a program, an objective to fulfill, and that objective essentially controls the activity of the journalists. I would say that it essentially controls the labor of all the intellectual workers’ (Ibid:115), elaborating that:

There is very little criticism. An enemy of Socialism cannot write in our newspapers – but we don’t deny it, and we don’t go around proclaiming a hypothetical freedom of the press where it actually doesn’t exist, the way [North Americans] do. Furthermore, I admit that our press is deficient in this respect. I don’t believe that this lack of criticism is a healthy thing. Rather, criticism is a very useful and positive instrument, and I think that all of us must learn to make use of it (Ibid:112).⁷¹

Accordingly, Benedetti (1969) claims that, contrary to the experience of the Mexican Revolution, which spawned many great essayists, Cuba had a low output and a correspondingly niche audience for writing of this kind. Despite exceptions, like Fornet and Fernández Retamar, he elaborates that ‘In Cuba, the few times on which someone establishes his disagreement with any work, the circle is shocked, the archway of the group shivers. It is odd to observe that a country that has turned armed struggle into little less than a gospel should display, nevertheless, in cultural circles a complete lack of being accustomed to critical aggressiveness’ (Ibid:520). This regrettable situation has persisted in a ‘mass media averse to serious criticism’ (Espina, 2010:101).

⁷¹ When Lockwood (1967) put it to Fidel that his own reaction against counter-revolutionary activities may be a contributing factor in this case, the latter conceded that this would need some attention in the near future. The extent to which the critical role has been delegated to the broader public is a point for debate, with Lumsden fearing that ‘Though Cubans are permitted to express criticism of the revolution, many do not feel free to do so in public. They fear that criticism, even if constructive, will be defined as counter-revolutionary in intent. This is not an unreasonable belief in view of the fact that [...] the mass media have ceased to articulate different points of view’ (1969:535). Note the use of the word ‘ceased’, implying both a change in policy in the late-1960s *and* the potential for its reversal. Domínguez (1978), who has more recently advocated market reforms in Cuba (2004), points to near-universal literacy as evidence of modernisation while expressing scepticism about the degree of critical thinking this engendered.

Upon assuming directorship of the CNC, García Buchaca issued the instruction that cultural critics confronting the enemy – that is, the writer or artist in the service of imperialist forces – would have to be devastating in their critique, not only through their arguments but also through the language and forms they used; by contrast, when reflecting on the work of a writer or artist friend, they should use an appropriately friendly tone, rather than an aggressive one (Gilman, 2003). Of the negation of critique implied by dogmatism – Fernández Retamar would observe that:

A theoretical error is committed by whoever converts their opinions into decisions; this is not only a theoretical error but also a possibly incorrect measure. The incorrect measures we have run into have raised a problem of conscience for the revolutionary intellectual, who cannot truly applaud, not only when knowing that it is an error of *their* revolution but also when they see that they are dealing with a mistake. [...] Their support [of the Revolution], if they really want to be useful, cannot be anything other than critical, since critique is “an exercise of criteria”, following the Martíán definition. When we have detected such errors in the Revolution, we have discussed them [...] not only in the aesthetic order but also mistaken ethical conceptions [...]. Such measures were corrected (1966:287-8, i.i.o.).

Somewhat surprisingly, at the threshold to the grey years, CNC policy purported that the critic who destroyed the creative impulse through simple absolutisms was as damaging as the critic who indulged in lavish eulogies. Rather, the critical task was perceived to lie in communicating the ‘integral dignity’ of an artwork to the people, simultaneously elevating their cultural level and increasing the efficacy of artworks – their command of language, communicative potential and mastery of expressing human sentiments. Within this, a shared ideological position would be necessary and critics should remain alert to the reactionary character of imperialist culture in its pseudo-socialist and anti-revolutionary guises (CNC, 1970). Hart would later affirm the dialectical potential of critique as found in Marx (and Hegel before him), dismissing the ‘sniper critic’ whose every tendency with respect to art and culture is negative. For him, ‘In culture, art, intellectual work, absolutely anti-dialectical, abrupt negations, with pretensions to ideological truth, constitute a danger that we ought to cease’ (Sanchez, 1989:8).

Gilman (2003) describes how, in their quest for a new function, intellectuals began to delimit their critical role, with a raft of articles appearing from 1966 under the banner of ‘the problem of intellectuals’. The definition of the intellectual as the

critical conscience of society was abolished as something belonging to a society that required critique, not to a reality immersed in revolution, in which all production, thinking and politics became revolutionary and the revolutionary Cuban society became, by definition, beyond reproach. We shall later see that the divergence between cultural functionaries and intellectuals intensified in the late 1960s, and, as a way of explaining this shift in attitude, Bonachaea and Valdés outline how:

By 1966-1967 the revolutionary leadership had developed a system of well-defined goals and ideas. Economic development, already a passion, now was the ideological instrument for the total integration of the society. Strict discipline, hard work and adherence to the new ideology became all-important. Under such conditions, questioning, criticism, and doubt were unthinkable. There had to be faith in the revolutionary leadership, and everyone had to be subordinate to it. Intellectuals could be no exception (1972:497-8).

This is excerpted from a prelude to a text by Benedetti, which offers a more sympathetic account of ‘the extraordinary effort involved in taking a small country out of underdevelopment’ (1969:524). By this rationale, every apparatus had to be deployed to ensure the success of the Revolution, from the example of the leaders and bureaucrats to the unpaid labour of the majority of the population. In considering the damage done to this osmotic conviction, he concludes that ‘it is at least understandable that someone who causes discouragement should not be viewed with sympathy precisely by those who have done everything possible, and everything impossible, to infuse a powerful social spirit, to infect the people with their own revolutionary tenacity’ (Ibid:524-5).

At the cultural congress held the year before, Benedetti had asserted that the intellectual ‘is almost by definition a non-conformist, a critic of his society, a witness with an implacable memory’ (1968:28). In the same commission, his countryman, Híber Conteris, declared that:

[...] the intellectual is an interpreter, a radical critic and an unraveller of society and of the world in which he lives with all mankind. [...] He must not be a neutral person. He will begin to atrophy if he relies on any kind of neutrality to see him through his role as an intellectual in a harsh world. He must search for the truth in his particular struggle and endanger his life and existence in doing so. He is a transformer in the times of depression and oppression, and he is obliged to become a critic during the revolutionary period. Even then he must never give up the truthful search for the real revolution for his society. He must be a revolutionary always, even within the established Revolution (Salkey, 1971:111-2).

By the end of the decade, Benedetti was able to recount that ‘Recently, a high Cuban official stated to several foreign juries these words, more or less: “We admit criticism within the Revolution perfectly, but to exercise that right it is first necessary to win it”’ (1969:523). At a meeting of the *Casa* collaborative committee in January of the same year, it was asserted that being revolutionary implied being critical, which meant it would be a mistake to affirm support of the Revolution in place of critique, whereas being critical did not necessarily imply being revolutionary (Otero, 1997). At the *Casa* round-table in May, Desnoes would assert that the right to critique should be retained by Cuban intellectuals as an obligation and responsibility; they would be at their most revolutionary when at their most critical. But, by contrast to bourgeois critique, which assumed a distancing from reality, revolutionary intellectuals would constantly and actively participate in the development of society, affirming critical freedom for the benefit of that society (Dalton et al, 1969). In the same discussion, Fernet would concur that Cuban authors had ‘always asserted critical literature, capable of expressing the tensions of the epoch and the contradictions of society, a literature that is a form of knowledge, a medium of enriching consciousness, a way of penetrating reality and helping to transform it’ (Ibid:20). Consistent with Martí, Haydée would later claim on behalf of *Casa* that ‘one of our characteristics is that we do not fear controversy. After all, controversy serves to measure our strengths’ (1977:61), while Fernet would advocate ‘criticism and self-reflexive criticism [as] the only exercise that is able to liberate us from triumphalism and preserve us from deleterious ideology’ (2007:381). However, as has been the case with freedom of expression, there has been a wilful tendency to underplay and undermine the possibility of Cuban critique from outside, with Davies finding that ‘postmodern expression in Cuba is that which not only challenges Marxist modernity (thus functioning as a neo-avant-garde) but *at the same time* mocks those very challenges, thus parodying the forms that critiques of Marxism have taken’ (2000:105, i.i.o.).

It will be remembered that Marx and Engels had observed that it is ‘not criticism but revolution [that] is the driving force of history’ (1846:59). As we have seen, in the

post-revolutionary years, the act of thinking became less of a pure intellectual exercise and more of a vital commitment to transformative action, forging a close dialogue between theory and practice (Pogolotti, 2006). And so, while the responsibility of creative intellectuals remained to polemicise, this acquired a new character in a country in which it was deemed ridiculous for intellectuals to strive to be more rebellious than those leaders who had liberated the country. For Gilman (2003), the contraction of possibilities available to intellectuals in the 1970s – when progressive forms became associated with reformist and bourgeois notions of the intellectual – curtailed their critical potency. Nonetheless, in the late 1960s, the power of contestation was invoked against the negative aspects of the human condition inherited from ancient society, against the alienation of underdevelopment and against spiritual dogma (Dalton et al, 1969), which fits more closely with first-order negation in the Hegelian schema outlined in chapter two.

Navarro (2001) retrospectively isolates 1968 as a crucial year, in which a series of administrative measures were imposed, which produced a tacit crusade against the critical intervention of the intelligentsia in the public sphere that culminated in the 1971 congress (to be discussed in chapter ten),⁷² being reversed in the early 1980s when new critical voices began to appear, the majority of whom were visual artists. At the 1975 PCC congress, which signalled an opening up of relations, a section of the deliberations on culture was given over to a consideration of literary and artistic critique. Consistent with the occasion, cultural criticism presupposed a profound knowledge of Marxism-Leninism but also of the socio-historical process in which artistic work was

72 For Navarro (2001), the rationale for these restrictions was three-fold:

- a) Because internal and external enemies of the Revolution could exploit critique for propagandistic ends.
- b) Because the knowledge of certain truths (difficulties and defects of social reality) would disorientate, confuse and discourage a people that had not yet had the necessary preparation to assimilate them.
- c) Because every new critical discrepancy constitutes a heterodoxy, a dissidence, that would break the monolithic ideological unity of the nation so necessary for its survival.

Citing the endurance of prostitution and racism as two taboo subjects, Navarro describes how intellectuals were deemed not to have the necessary expertise to concern themselves with social problems, restricting them to the cultural and politico-cultural field, with their criticism limited to specific artistic and literary works rather than being applied to cultural institutions. In this way, an 'egocentric' form of critique emerged that appeared to negate the socio-economic context in which artworks had been made, thus precluding their consideration as part of Cuban socialism and making them less Marxist in the process.

produced. Within this, artistic work was considered to have increased value if it could demonstrate continuity with previous cultures, affirmation of revolutionary realities and an impulse towards the future aims of socialist society (Comité Central del PCC, 1976). Thus, critique was not thought of as a scientific (empirical) process but a qualitative, contextual one.

Analysing the role of civil society in building Cuban socialism and culture from the vantage point of the early twenty-first century, Hernández concludes that Cuban intellectuals are both critical and politically committed, placing value on their critical function in a way that is consistent with the values of revolutionary political culture. Otherwise, ‘not only will the legitimacy of revolutionary power be affected, but so will the stability and continuity of the system itself. If the ideological/cultural dimension does not receive sufficient attention, if a holistic perspective on the sphere of economic organization or on the order of social and class relations is lost, the revolutionary process itself could be harmed’ (2003:30). In considering the role of intellectuals in critiquing the Revolution, he argues that, even, ‘if in Cuba intellectuals are not seen as the privileged depository [sic] of the social function of critical consciousness, still culture does constitute a fundamental space for the critical discussion of national problems’ (Ibid:45), with Casa de las Américas, ICAIC and, more recently, UNEAC providing such a space for discussion. In the previous chapter, we encountered Kapcia’s notion of ‘argumentalism’, found in the Revolution’s ‘willingness to allow and even encourage internal debate, within clear parameters and behind metaphorically closed doors, which has allowed writers, artists and intellectuals to know and even define the bounds of the acceptable’ (2005:134). With the benefit of four decades of hindsight, Mosquera describes how the visual arts have taken on the role of ‘assemblies’ – that is, ‘a space for expressing problems of ordinary people’ (1999b:28):

It is astounding that this whole ideological and social role should have been played by a rather elitist form of artistic expression, the visual arts. Paradoxically, this is exactly what made it possible, because the authorities did not give much importance to the visual arts – and the artists little by little took advantage of the possibilities. That is why the very modest catalogues of the exhibitions (almost always only a leaflet or a little pamphlet) have constituted a space of relatively free textuality, much more so than magazines or

books, which are under the control of editorial institutions. It is surprising also that the visual arts carry on this role without detriment to their searching qualities or even their artistic experimentation. On the contrary, they take advantage of the symbolic powers of art to carry on a problematical discourse that interweaves the multiple complexities of art and Cuban life. Starting from this focus of freedom, the entire culture reacted in the face of the social status quo, succeeding in imposing a generalized systematic critical voice [...] (Ibid).

During the 1980s and '90s, it became clear that one consequence of cultural policy to date was a remarkable lack of individualism on the part of artists, who instead work together in the name of the common good; in this way, 'The challenges expressed by the younger artists [...] are pointed against inconsistencies in the system but come from a profound commitment to the system' (Camnitzer, 1994:129).⁷³

Remarks in Conclusion

Having previously discovered post-revolutionary conceptions of culture to be centred on fomenting class struggle and enhancing spiritual growth, this chapter goes into greater detail about the specific role that was adopted by, and assigned to, Cuba's creative intellectuals. Seizing power after a prolonged guerrilla campaign, the 26 July members and their associates within the ORI were faced with the Leninist realisation that, in order for a new revolutionary consciousness to take root among the people, much work would need to be done. For Che Guevara, this revelation coalesced in his concept of the new man, a subject motivated by moral imperatives more than the promise of fiscal reward. Building on Marxist-humanist conceptions – predicated on a need for entirely new social relations as envisaged by Gramsci – the Cuban archetype would be encouraged to achieve full, un-alienated consciousness through holistic participation in society and culture. The role of artists and writers in this consciousness-raising exercise was immediately clear and roundly embraced, especially by participants to the Cultural Congress of Havana in 1968.

⁷³ On this, Camnitzer concludes that:

Despite unfortunate incidents of censorship, containment of information, and self-censorship, it is a remarkable success of the Revolution that this generation of artists exists in Cuba. Equivalent generations in other socialist countries have resorted either to the maintenance of a party-line aesthetic, to copying of Western art, or to the adoption of nihilist positions, which the Cuban artists feel that they are refining their own political and social process. In Cuba, art has developed into an increasingly sophisticated tool of constructive criticism and improvement of the system (1994:318).

Closely aligned with the idea of subjective transformation was the collective process of creating a national culture. This again posited a central role for the country's artists and writers – in the recovery of lost traditions and the creation of new symbols – that had been embraced in their November manifesto and continued to be emphasised throughout the period of this study. This assigned to Cuban intellectuals inestimable cultural and social influence in their country, with the influential Marxist aesthetician, Adolfo Sánchez Vásquez, deeming that the artistic mission would only be complete when a common language had been found that united the revolutionary political vanguard, the intelligentsia and the people. In a reversal of the experience of the European historical avant-garde, aesthetic regimes (responsive to international trends) remained largely unchanged. But, by maintaining the aim of breaking down the barriers between culture and the people (long before dropped by its European precursor), the Cuban experiment would realise itself in the most ambitious reconciliation of art and society to have taken place to date, which will be elaborated in chapter ten. At the same time, attempts were made to permanently decouple cultural work from didactic expectations.

In considering the possible routes to a new, revolutionary ideology, we have seen that Lenin gave primacy to the vanguard party and its intellectuals. Having lagged behind its political counterpart, the opportunity now presented itself for the artistic vanguard to play a significant role of shaping social relations. It is clear that this mutual fertilisation was the source of much frustration, based on differing speeds of action, and Weiss describes how:

The 'intellectual' whose entire life is devoted to the pursuit of knowledge or the artist whose entire life is dedicated to his art is one or several steps behind the political leader, because he experiences the annihilation of what is reactionary in himself only by means of his own creation; he is, in other words, materially speaking, one step or more away from the mass of his society, which is experiencing the revolutionary process at first hand. And he remains chronologically behind the cadre whose revolutionary growth does not take place solely through contemplation of past actions (1977:50).

At their own pace, intellectual communities developed new modes of expression that embraced revolutionary reality and posed a viable, if marginal, alternative to staid

official culture. Beyond this, the definition of ‘revolutionary intellectual’, which emerged in the second half of the 1960s, would displace the more passive and ill-defined notion of ‘committed intellectual’. This came to embrace not only creative praxis and extra-intellectual work vital to society (including armed combat) but also comprehensive problem-solving within the Revolution.

In turn, this pointed to the critical function of creative intellectuals, and the final section of this chapter demonstrates the abiding necessity of intellectual critique. As in many other areas of post-revolutionary life, acknowledgement of this need passed through different phases, with constructive critique being embraced in the early transformation of society, receding at the start of the second half of the 1960s (corresponding with what Gilman calls the loss of an ideal critical role for intellectuals) and experiencing a more sustained lull in the 1970s. In a characteristic process of trial and error, itself based on self-reflexive critique, the country would emerge from the grey years to embrace the dialectical nature of critique. This adheres closely to Hegel’s theory of absolute negativity, which sees the negation of extant reality being followed by a negation of this negation, to form the root of the dialectic and a central contention of emancipatory politics.

While certain outside commentators point to a recession of intellectuals from political life in the second half of the 1960s, the identification of Cuba as the vanguard of anti-imperialist struggle in Latin America opened up new avenues for engagement. And while, for Karol, the continental project was abandoned at a political level when close relations with the Soviet Union were re-established in 1968,⁷⁴ we have seen that

74 Karol notes that Fidel:

[...] was forced to turn his back on what had been his paramount objective until then: a continental revolution. True, he continued to extol the virtues of guerrilla warfare, thus honoring Che’s memory and justifying his own actions in the past. But the Latin American Solidarity Organization, founded with such solemnity in 1967, had virtually ceased to function, and its Havana secretariat had never even met. No fresh Cuban proclamations on the Latin American revolution had been issued since Che’s death; instead *Granma* would, from time to time, publish resolutions by Guatemalan or Bolivian guerrilleros determined to continue the struggle. No one, however, now spoke of victories in the near future – it had become clear that no anti-imperialist explosions were imminent south of the Rio Grande. The Cuban leaders did not shout this fact from the rooftops lest they demoralize their own ranks, but they were realistic enough to withdraw to defensive positions inside their ‘beleaguered fortress.’ They had clearly come around to the view that their survival depended on the eradication of underdevelopment at home and not, as they had thought in 1965, on a trial of strength in Latin America (1970:493).

this continued to preoccupy the intellectual community well into 1971 and beyond. Here, we can note the continuity of governmental rhetoric on this subject in relation to the cultural field, up to and including the 1975 PCC congress, and, in chapter ten, we shall see how the pan-American activities perpetuated by Casa de las Américas throughout the grey years constituted a second front in the attempts to consolidate a continent-wide anti-imperialist consciousness.

Chapter Nine: Cultural Policy of the Revolution Part Two

‘The rounded personality of the man of tomorrow requires more than mere passive spectatorship. For their physical and mental balance alike human beings need to know and practice one of the arts’
– Che Guevara, 1965¹

A hint has already been offered about the different interests at play in the cultural arm of the Revolution. Here, we shall look more closely at the ways in which policy was formulated and enacted, from the moment at which the CNC assumed control for interpreting the revolutionary government’s wishes in 1961 until the mid-1960s.

Formulation of Cultural Policy by the CNC 1961–4

When the 26 July Movement merged with the Revolutionary Directorate and the PSP to form the ORI in July 1961, it is said that:

[...] everybody in Havana knew that the old PSP formed the backbone of the ORI,² that Aníbal Escalante was in charge of organization, his brother César of propaganda, Carlos Rafael Rodríguez of economic matters, Edith García Buchacha [sic] of culture – and that they were all Communist leaders of the old school. People even had the impression that Fidel Castro and his supporters from the Sierra were willing to play second fiddle to this old guard (Karol, 1970:234).³

In Karol’s account, when confronted with a plethora of Cuban cultural products that might embarrass visitors from the Eastern Bloc, ‘the Communists asked for a free hand to bring some sort of order into this cultural and ideological jungle. [...] The cultural leaders, foremost among them Mrs. García Buchacha [sic], would have liked but were unable to supply their country with socialist culture imported from Russia in ready-made, easy-to-digest form’ (Ibid:237).

1 The same sentiment would find its way, unadulterated, into a 1970 CNC publication and a UNESCO report on Cuban cultural policy authored by CNC vice president, Lisandro Otero, two years later.

2 Of the twenty-five leaders of the National Directorate of the ORI, thirteen were from the 26 July Movement, ten from the old PSP and two from the Revolutionary Directorate (Karol, 1970). Those relevant to this study include Fidel, Che, Dorticós, Carlos Rafael Rodríguez, Blas Roca, Haydée Santamaría and Armando Hart.

3 Escalante would later be ‘criticised and punished for abusing his position to give the PSP an excessive influence in the body’ (Kapcia, 2005:121).

As we have seen, García Buchaca's control of culture was effected through the CNC and, in 1961, one of its provincial outposts published an unassuming four-page pamphlet entitled *Culture for the People*. Extracted from a manual of Marxism-Leninism issued the previous year, it laid the foundations for mass participation in culture, beginning: 'The socialist regime converts culture into a profoundly democratic instrument and makes it the patrimony of the whole society and not one reduced to the layer of intellectuals' (CPC:1961:1). Consistent with Gramsci's conception of organic intellectuals, the underlying rationale for this was that 'Thousands and thousands of men of talent are lost in the capitalist world, unable to find a path through the privations and indifference of society' (Ibid:2). By contrast, under socialism, 'persons with creative abilities should develop their gifts and individuality to the full,⁴ and [...] the work of writers and artists should contribute to the endeavour of social and personal liberation to which socialism is committed' (Saruský and Mosquera, 1979:21).

Towards the end of 1962, the council's interpretation of government policy had cohered into a ten-point plan for the following year, which aimed:

1. To study and re-evaluate cultural tradition, especially that of the nineteenth century in which Cuban national identity had arisen.
2. To study and research cultural roots, recognising the Negro contribution to Cuban culture.
3. To divest folkloric expressions of their non-essential elements.
4. To unreservedly acknowledge the talent and creative capacity of Cubans, offering the opportunities necessary to ending devaluation of their production.
5. To form, through art schools and seminaries, a new intelligentsia arising from the worker-farmer masses.
6. To promote art and literature consonant with the historical moment in which Cuba exists, through educative practice promoting a greater degree of intimate contact between creators and the people, through coexistence in farms and factories, enabling better reflection through creative work.
7. To afford sciences a corresponding place in cultural activity in the process of improving the conditions of an underdeveloped country.

⁴ While it may seem paradoxical that individualism is being encouraged under socialism, Rafael Rodríguez (1980) clarifies thinking on this when he distinguishes artists from other workers on the basis of their individuality, which must be freed from their previous individualism that was not 'artistic'. In this way, creative individuality is not incompatible with socialism – it is a part of socialist creation – only petit-bourgeois individualism, in which the creator pretends to separate themselves from others, is incompatible with the creation of socialism.

8. To promote cultural improvement in the great majority of people, intensively developing activities aimed at increasing interest in good art and reading books of literary and scientific value.
9. To erase the inequalities between the cultural life of the capital and the rest of the island, promoting cultural activities in the rural and urban areas of the provinces.
10. To develop the maximum possibilities for cultural exchange with all countries in a way that allows the people of Cuba, its intellectuals and scientists the opportunity to know the cultural expressions and scientific criteria of different schools and continents (CNC, 1963b).⁵

We see that ideas around the vindication of Cuban culture and folklore – outlined in the November manifesto and explored at the 1961 congress – remain constant, as does the objective of international cultural exchange. Within this, much more detailed consideration is given to the ways in which the ‘mutual reconciliation between writers, artists and the people’ (UNEAC, 1961:10), outlined in 1961, would be achieved, with specific steps being outlined for raising the cultural level of the population. We also note that the notion of critique has been displaced by the abiding revolutionary commitment to eradicating differences between rural and urban cultural life and the introduction of science into considerations of culture, which would continue to have resonance for the rest of the decade. Viewed retrospectively, the programme seems decidedly moderate, which causes us to remember that, the previous spring, Fidel had found it necessary to quash the orthodox tendency’s claim to moral supremacy,⁶ which formed a clear message to all dogmatic currents within the Revolution that would serve to subdue them for a brief period.

The missile crisis of October 1962 would have important consequences for Cuban-Soviet relations, and Karol notes of Fidel that:

5 In its report to the twelfth session of the general conference of UNESCO, held between 9 November and 12 December 1962, Cuba reiterated these functions as fundamental to CNC activity of this period (MINREX, 1976). For the agenda of this meeting, see <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0016/001604/160435eb.pdf> (accessed 29 June 2011) and for resolutions, see <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0011/001145/114582e.pdf> (accessed 2 July 2011). The report from Cuba was published by MINED in 1963 as *Labor realizado por el Gobierno Revolucionario de Cuba, en el bienio 1961–1962 en la educación, la ciencia y la cultura* [Work realised by the revolutionary government in Cuba in the two years 1961–1962 in education, science and culture].

6 This speech, on 26 March 1962, was largely directed at the wrongdoings of Aníbal Escalante and accompanied by the mutation of ORI into PURSC, in which the orthodox role would be diminished (Castro Ruz, 1962).

Whatever he might say in public about the unshakeable bonds which united Marxists-Leninists the world over, after the Cuban missile crisis Castro no longer identified himself with the Eastern bloc. [...] Cuba had to seek her own road to socialism, in the context of Latin America, her great continental fatherland and her natural ally against the United States. There was no longer any talk of Russia's superior wisdom; all that Cuba could now hope for was a *modus vivendi* with the Soviet Union, one that best suited the political and economic interest of her own revolution (1970:281).

In the process, it is argued that Fidel 'had come to the conclusion that he no longer needed ideological go-betweens in his negotiations with Russia. The Communists of the PSP had probably proved a greater disappointment to him than even Khrushchev:⁷ at the crucial moment they had supported the views of the Soviet Premier against his own. Fidel felt that he could no longer trust them, and denied most of them any further part in the negotiations with the East' (Ibid:284).

On Sunday 25 November 1962,⁸ a month after the missile crisis, García Buchaca (1962) presented the CNC's Preliminary Plan to a Provincial Assembly of Culture in Havana.⁹ Grounded in the imposing realities of the country, the plan was proffered as little more than a basis for discussion within every work centre, studio, farm and trench, from which the definitive remit of the CNC would arise. In formalising its plans, the council would emphasise its continued reliance on the exemplary efforts of professional writers and artists at a national, provincial and municipal level (1963c). This saw the support of creators being relied upon in the dissemination of cultural activities to the furthest corners of the island¹⁰



Intervention by Edith García Buchaca at the CNC's First National Congress of Culture, 1962

7 Fidel talks about the distrust between Cuba and Khrushchev that set in after the October 1962 missile crisis and 'could never be completely overcome' (Lockwood, 1967:226), reaching a low point just before the latter was ousted (October 1964), with relations improving immediately afterwards.

8 In a publication reproducing García Buchaca's intervention, the date is given as Sunday 25 November 1963, but the content of the talk and the fact that this date fell on a Monday in 1963 (which also coincided with Kennedy's funeral and would have been unlikely to have passed without mention) strongly suggest that this speech was delivered in 1962.

9 Buchaca (1962) refers to similar assemblies being effected in all the other provinces, with men and women representing official organisations, mass organisations and artists and writers discussing the Preliminary Plan – the first time this had been attempted at a national level.

10 One of the objectives identified by the province of Havana had been the integration of creators into factories, workshops, farms and trenches, through a discussion of their work and constant exchange. At the same time, every possible means would be made available to the mass of the population in order to raise their cultural level, bringing cultural activities to the countryside and provincial cities as part of a continuous effort to eradicate inequalities (Ibid).

and the integration of writers, artists, workers and government in cultural activities being cited as one of the greatest conquests of 1962 (Ibid).¹¹

Alongside considerations of the plan, the mass organisations spent two months elaborating their own proposals for accelerated cultural development, and, at the CNC-organised First National Congress of Culture in Havana in December 1962, each province outlined its programme of work in the cultural field in parallel with that being undertaken in production and defence (Ibid).¹² In his introduction to the national congress, Dorticós indicated that one of the fundamental tasks of the Revolution was to create a socialist culture based on the principles of Marxist-humanism – a culture for the people. The congress unanimously approved the plans that had been drawn up by the CNC and the concrete tasks relating to cultural and educational construction for 1963 (MINREX, 1976).

Looking again at the Preliminary Plan, we find a two-pronged strategy for tackling the gap that had been identified between art and the people.¹³ This proposed that overcoming the unequal access to culture that had been inherited from class society would be achieved both by disseminating the most representative artistic and literary expressions of each epoch and by encouraging direct participation in cultural activities (CNC, 1963a). The fundamental objectives of this dual programme were:

1. To incorporate thousands of working men and women into cultural activities, encouraging them to use their free time to improve themselves.
2. To enable the national talents existing within the people to be discovered and the best possibilities offered for developing them to the full.
3. To encourage the transmission via *aficionados* [amateur artists] to work colleagues, farmers and the general population, bringing cultural shows to the remotest areas which would otherwise feel themselves starved of culture owing to the scarcity of professional and semi-professional groups in the country; to increase the ideological level of the people.
4. To incorporate into revolutionary activity, through this movement, those vacillating, increasing their integration and fuller understanding of the Revolution.

11 García Buchaca (1962) asserted that all the official cultural, media and mass organisations and unions had been involved in preparatory committees, and the plan developed with the active participation of artists and writers who were also integrated in the various directorates and departments of the CNC.

12 A total of 2,058 delegates participated in the eventual congress. Of these, 1,577 had voting rights and 451 were invited guests from fraternal socialist countries (MINREX, 1976).

13 In 'Words to the Intellectuals', Fidel alludes to 'tests that have already been made [which] demonstrate the capacity of the simple farmer and man of the people for assimilating artistic questions, for assimilating culture and immediately beginning to produce it' (1961:34).

5. To procure a gradual elevation of a popular critical sense in the face of artistic work, bridging the gulf that exists between the cultural levels of the rural and urban areas and between the interior of the country and the most advanced sectors of the capital.
6. To procure, through the activities of those groups, the promotion of artistic spectacles, disseminating an interest in music, dance, theatre, literature and the visual arts (CNC, 1963a).

In this interweaving of appreciation and participation, we find the most explicit inscription into policy of the synergy between culture and ideology in incorporating non-revolutionary citizens to the Revolution, alongside a reinstatement of the critical sensibility of the people. With regard to cultural appreciation, the CNC implemented a programme of activities, and, in the first half of 1963, almost half the population had visited a concert, theatrical performance, museum, exhibition or similar (MINREX, 1976).¹⁴

At this time, Fidel was said to be counting ‘on two factors: success by a superhuman effort on the economic front, and the creation, in record time, of a popular consciousness capable of sloughing off old habits, of combining Communist with unorthodox ideas’ (Karol, 1970:287).¹⁵ Turning to a consideration of what he had called the ‘conversion of the people from spectators into creators’ (1961:32) as part of this consciousness-raising effort, we find the recognition that new tools would be needed (CNC, 1970). While establishment of the national schools had been instrumental to the training of professional artists, stimulating the broader population to practice the arts would demand the training of more art teachers. Building on Che’s earlier initiative to educate the peasants of the Rebel Army, the National Institute of Agrarian Reform created a School for Arts Instructors in 1961 (CNC:1963b). Following an extensive series of discussions and seminars, various skills deficits were identified and plans systematised under the CNC in a School for Cultural Activists,¹⁶ a boarding establishment at which training costs were covered and students were paid wages for the duration of their courses (Otero, 1972). This formed the basis of a major initiative to

¹⁴ In 1963, 8,500 artistic exhibitions were organised, the majority of them free of charge; the remainder at popular prices. In addition to this, 569 theatrical representations, 3,517 musicals, 114 dance performances and 988 shows for children were offered alongside visits by 32 foreign collectives and 2,226 shows by aficionados (MINREX, 1976).

¹⁵ In 1963, on letting slip in an interview for *Le Monde* that he had never asked for Russian missiles, Fidel had swiftly been invited on a protracted tour of the Soviet Union (27 April to 23 May) where he received a hero’s welcome (Karol, 1970).

¹⁶ Escuela de Activistas de Cultura in its original, which operated under the National Directorate of Cultural Extension of the CNC.

train thousands of arts instructors, with a key distinction being that ‘An instructor is not formed to be an artist but to detect, orientate, raise awareness of and stimulate activity in diverse sectors of the population’ (CNC, 1970). Teacher training courses would be of two years’ duration and entrants to the programme would be aged between fifteen and twenty-five, pending completion of the fourth grade of primary instruction (CNC, 1963a).

While something of a precedent for this programme exists in Poland,¹⁷ the CNC claimed no experience on which to draw for the selection of alumni and the planning of studies (1963c). By 1963, 1,500 people had registered as instructors and those with a vocation for teaching remained in the school. Thousands of instructors were initially selected from people’s farms and popular zones to study in the capital, thereafter returning to their places of origin to disseminate the skills they had learnt (Fernández Retamar, 1962). The Preliminary Plan refers to the school’s aim of training graduates capable of orientating groups of *aficionados* throughout the nation, and, by 1975, forty-seven schools were providing courses for artistic education, with 5,000 Cubans studying to become instructors (Comité Central del PCC, 1976). By the end of the decade, a UNESCO report refers to 40,000 young people being offered scholarships to undertake a ‘two-year training course to enable them to promote the various forms of artistic expression in the previously utterly neglected rural areas’ (Sarusky and Mosquera, 1979:14).

17 The Movement for Communication between City and Countryside was initiated in Poland in 1948, when, in accordance with directives coming from Moscow, it was decided that Polish agriculture would be the subject of collectivisation. The primary aim of the Movement was to gain the support of farmers for the forms of social and economic life propagated by the government while consolidating the bonds between the dwellers of the countryside and townsmen. It was originally introduced as a system of relationships between production plants, cooperatives and mutual aid villages, in which factories were the protectors of farmers. In order to win popularity amongst the peasantry, the authorities organised performances by company orchestras, theatres and choirs on Sundays; there were also 207 travelling cinemas. A deficit of qualified staff capable of handling agricultural equipment spawned a need for mechanics. For the authorities, this implied not only ad hoc technical support, but also a method of exerting political influence over the villagers by supporting meetings and talks on relevant issues, primarily collectivisation. Over time, the campaign gained momentum and, by 1952, it had 3,000 company teams. This new model of communist cultural policy was actively pursued during the implementation of the six-year economic plan of 1950–55. From 1950 onwards, the authorities organised so-called *plein-air* studios for writers, intended to familiarise them with the life of the working class. The Ministry of Arts and Culture awarded grants to attract as many participants as possible. Writers typically stayed in big industrial centres and went on tours of neighbouring towns and villages. The end of the Movement occurred in October 1956 (Pindera, 2011). It seems clear that the Movement adopted an instrumental and coercive understanding of culture, and Karol notes that, since the early 1960s, Poland had been perceived in Cuba as ‘a country far too much to the right, if not revisionist in the literal sense of the word’ (1970:318).

Instructors would be trained in theatre, popular music, modern dance and the plastic arts,¹⁸ underwritten by general technical knowledge and a study of folklore, with schools assuming responsibility for elevating the level of understanding in all manifestations of art and cross-disciplinarity being encouraged. The definition of teachers would include both the instructors of *aficionados* and professional teachers (Rodríguez Manso, 2010), and De Juan describes the fluidity between the two types of teacher, whereby ‘many of them went on from the *instructores de arte* to the *Escuelas de Arte*’. A National Centre for Aficionados and its provincial counterpart would eventually ensure the most effective links between professional and amateur artists.

It will be remembered that, in his speech to the August 1961 congress, Fidel had urged professional writers and artists to go into the countryside and teach. Practitioners were implicated in the process of training arts instructors, and Fernández Retamar (1962) describes how instructors could only be trained, directly or indirectly, by those who had already assumed the criteria and attitude of art – that is, by artists. In 1967, Rafael Rodríguez would argue that part of the artistic task lay in elevating the people to understand more complex forms of art. Reiterating Dorticós’s sentiment from the 1961 congress, he compelled creators not to descend to the people but rather to encourage the people to ascend to art.¹⁹ Camnitzer notes that: ‘Along with artistic utopias of the twentieth century, one might expect that the borderline between high and low culture, or between fine and applied arts, is being erased in Cuba for the benefit of a more total and seamless culture. But the differences between the areas seem to be carefully kept, if not by planning then by lack of interest in the problem or lack of clarity about what the solution can be’ (1994:116). Perhaps in recognition of this persistent division, there was an acceptance that the people needed access to professional or ‘high’ art.

18 The music and theatre section was created in 1961; the dance section in 1962 and the visual art section in January 1963 (CNC, 1963b); this latter had 600 entrants in its first year of operation and 400 in its second; it would train instructors of two types – in painting/culture/printmaking or handicrafts – with 500 of the initial 1,000 entrants training in each category (CNC, 1963a). In ‘Words to the Intellectuals’, Fidel praises the progress made in the areas of dance, music and theatre, which maps directly onto the activities that would have been operational (or about to be) by then, rather than suggesting a negation of literature, or a potential menace to writers, as Kumaraswami (2009) implies.

19 Rafael Rodríguez asserted that aesthetic theories based in reductive acts must be resisted, because one of the theories of capitalism that completely separated the people from the intellectual sectors was the theory that the art that is understood by the multitude is not true art – that true art is that of the minorities (1980:77).

Within early CNC literature, it was argued that the concerns of the Revolution could be expressed without recourse to demagogical or sectarian tendencies, with the cultural improvement of the people and the development of a critical spirit being considered inherently revolutionary (CNC, 1963a). Thus, the *aficionado* repertoire would extend to the production of works which heightened the best feelings of man,



A group of visual arts *aficionados*

without needing to be explicitly political in content. Mass popular aesthetic education was expected to promote the ‘transformative action of the masses in essential aspects of social life like family and human relations, an interest in beauty and modification of [...] work and domestic environment’ (Centro Nacional de Aficionados, 1988:1). Dissemination of the visual arts²⁰ would be centred on the principles of design²¹ and on the development of manual dexterity and the juvenile imagination (CNC, 1970).²²

One of the main outlets for new-found visual culture was in graphic design – on posters, record covers, journals and magazines, alongside the huge editions of books that became a mass medium of visual expression (CNC, 1970). In elaborating the aesthetic rights of the people in relation to the graphic arts, Sarusky and Mosquera

20 The CNC considered that the ‘utilisation of the visual arts as a medium of mobilisation of the people makes up one of the great social tasks, as much as campaigns for public health, productivity and commemoration of history’ (CNC, 1970:u/p) while the PCC would advocate the inclusion of sculpture, cult music and film to the portfolio of activities in 1975 (Comité Central del PCC, 1976).

21 This was consistent with primary teaching, and complemented by radio and television broadcasts. Benedetti details how:

On the primary, secondary and pre-university levels, the constantly serious problem of an insufficient number of teachers has been alleviated by making use of a means very little used until now for educational purposes in Latin America: television. In the morning and first hours of the afternoon, Channel 6 televises class after class (all of a good pedagogical quality and with a superb technology adapted to the means of dissemination), and in this way instruction reaches the most remote places on the Island, since the appropriate television receivers were placed in advance in every center of population (1969:501).

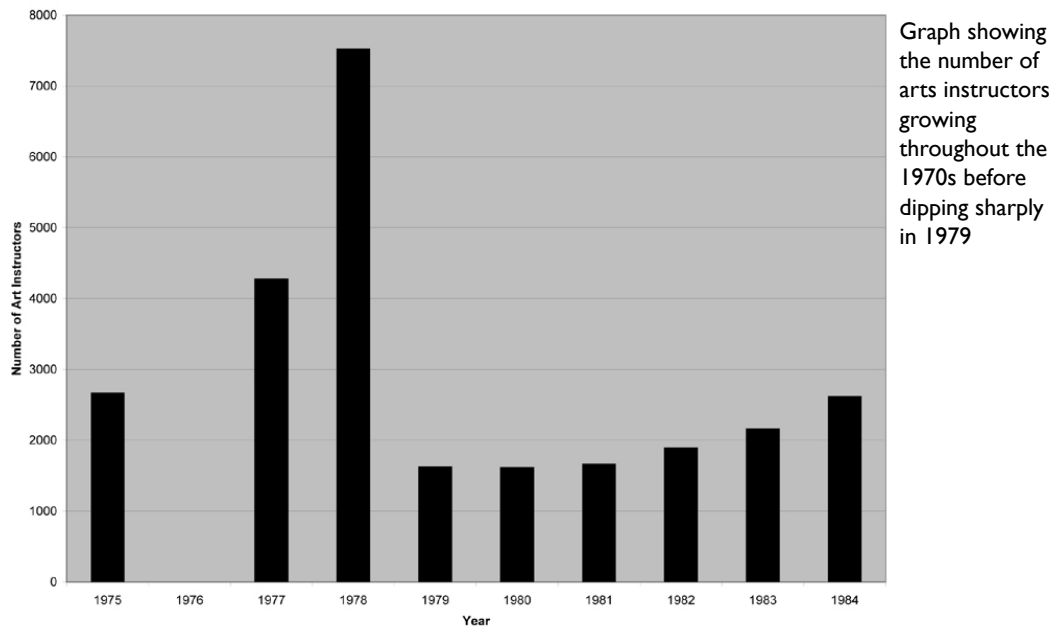
22 The CNC (1970) was charged with the sale of artistic works (often in reproduction) and of the instruments and utensils necessary to artistic creation and, alongside the unions, with the task of elevating the cultural level of the workers (Comité Central del PCC, 1976). UNESCO became a key partner in these educational endeavours, setting up a National Commission on Cuba and making available slides, art albums and other materials for the purposes of developing art education in adults and young people. One such exhibition, entitled ‘Materials Produced by UNESCO for use in Teaching Art’ toured the island in the first half of the 1960s, accompanied by a programme of lectures, as did ‘Reproductions of Famous Paintings of All Times’. The commission also organised panel discussions for pedagogical experts and arranged tours of didactic exhibitions, often involving the dissemination of reproductions of famous artworks. A panel discussion called ‘The Teaching of Art’ made special reference to the plastic arts (MININD, 1966).

assert that ‘in conformity with the principle that beauty should be consistently brought into every aspect of daily life, draughtsmanship is applied with the same commitment to aesthetic values to hoardings, posters, books, periodicals and other publications, record sleeves, packaging, textiles, fences and walls’ (1979:40).

Mediated by the CNC and relevant social organisations, the instructors succeeded in fomenting groups of *aficionados*, stimulating social and intellectual participation and ‘allowing the people to channel in large part their artistic vocations and to develop their aesthetic perceptions’ (CNC, 1970).²³ In the early years, the *aficionado* programme was based in student and work centres, farms, cooperatives and peasant organisations, promoted by the corresponding mass organisations and unions (CNC, 1963a).²⁴ During the first ten years of the Revolution, many vocational art centres were opened, which played an important part both in capturing the artistic talents of the people and in the diffusion of culture. Among sixty-three visual art centres, various workshops existed in which *aficionados* received (gratis) the training necessary to make their own artworks (CNC, 1963a). These workshops and *casas sociales* [social houses] were the font of copious production, and exhibitions of work initiated at these centres toured around the country. Like the literacy activists before them, *brigadistas* also took an appreciation of art into the countryside (Ibid), giving talks, organising conferences and explaining works of theatre, dance and music (CNC, 1963b). Massively improved access to creative education, combined with the proliferation of exhibition spaces, served to create a huge public for literary and artistic expressions previously reserved for an urban minority (Fornet, 2004). And, while there are those who contend that art audiences remained more sophisticated in urban areas (Camnitzer, 1994), Pogolotti (2010) argues that ‘The end result is that there has undoubtedly been an extension of the public for culture and that a great effort has been made to disrupt the monopoly of the City of Havana’.

23 Instructors would initially each oversee four groups, which was soon reduced to three (CNC, 1963a).

24 In ‘Words to the Intellectuals’, Fidel (1961) speaks of sending instructors out to 3,000 people’s farms and 600 cooperatives. The understanding of the PCC would be that creative dissemination through work centres and cultural organisations would undoubtedly contribute to augmenting the knowledge of art and literature among party activists, technical personnel and employees of MINED among others (1976:493).



In 1975, Fidel reprised the work of CNC in this area, commenting on the massive expansion from 1,164 *aficionado* groups in 1964 to more than 18,000 groups realising 120,000 creative projects a decade later (MINREX, 1976). In 1978, the network of Casas de Cultura would become the headquarters of the *aficionados* movement,²⁵ and, the following year, this effort would be specifically orientated towards the education of workers (MINCULT, 1979). By the end of the 1970s, it would be possible to say that: ‘on the one side, all possible facilities for artistic creation have been provided; on the other, the masses have been given access to aesthetic enjoyment as an inalienable right attaching to the human condition’ (Saruský and Mosquera, 1979:15).

While a National Technical Commission evaluated the progress of *aficionados* as distinct from that of professional artists, the Casas were responsible for collecting data on the various groups (Centro Nacional de Aficionados, 1988). From the vantage point of 1984, official statistics provide an overview of the programme, showing that the number of instructors rose steadily in the first twenty years of the Revolution, tailing off sharply in 1979 before beginning to rise again. The trough in the late 1970s, which coincides with the establishment of the Casas de Cultura, was partly compensated for

²⁵ Article 2(g) of resolution 32/78 describes the function of the Casas in ‘carrying out the direction and control of the *aficionados* movement, contributing to technical and political formation’ (Hart Dávalos, 1979:3).

by an increase in the numbers of teaching assistants, which more than doubled in the period 1975–84, dipping only slightly towards the end of the 1970s. Despite fluctuations in levels of pedagogical personnel, the number of entrants to the *aficionados* programme showed a gradual increase, which was reflected in the number of activities being undertaken.

In considering this initiative for bringing art to the people, Kapcia traces its roots to the *PM* affair and the attempts to disarm *Lunes* as a ‘self-appointed vanguard’:

Hence, while *Lunes* focused on the cultural *products* of established cultural *producers*, in the *barrios* a real revolution was taking place involving consumers in the processes of cultural *production*. It was a change with fundamental implications, asking Havana’s cultural activists to identify with a different cultural community, the Cuban world they had previously ignored, taken for granted, or perhaps theorised, instead of their natural tendency to identify with a wider global community of cultural producers (2005:135-6; i.i.o.).

For him, the tendency of Casas de Cultura to prioritise amateur creative production over professional practice inevitably created a rift between amateur and professional artists, ‘an inherent tension in the original concept, whereby the *aficionado*, regardless of talent, could not become an artistic professional without specialist training, having only been coached by *instructores* trained to teach rather than develop their own art. Moreover, *aficionado* resentment of professional counterparts was mirrored by the latter’s tendency to look down on the *aficionados*’ (Ibid:164). However, in his ‘Words’, Fidel had promised that ‘All the teachers in the country will learn how to recognize which child has special talent, and will recommend which child should be given a scholarship’ (1961:34) to undertake specialist training, and Camnitzer would describe how:

The aim of the [Casa] network is to open communication between artists and the public, to facilitate access to art, art education, and art production on the broadest base. Talent may be discovered here and directed into professional life. The program aims particularly at workers, and both the middle schools and the ISA have evening courses designed to accommodate students coming from the Casas de Cultura who continue working during the daytime (1994:167-8).

In this way, exceptional artists could ascend to ENA and join the professional ranks, which led to a proportion of *aficionados* entering the field of art as their vocation

(CNC, 1970),²⁶ and De Juan (2010) flatly denies the existence of any conflict. In return, the established professional community was enthusiastic about the potential of the *aficionados* programme, not only in generating new audiences²⁷ but also in engendering a rigorous culture in which the creation of a vanguard in an underdeveloped country in revolution could be more than just a theory (Fernández Retamar, 1966).

As one of the intellectuals articulating this stance, Fernández Retamar (1962)²⁸ would celebrate the reduced separation between culture and the people, while cautioning against populism. Wesker observes that ‘Retamar doesn’t confess to, or he’s aware [sic] of, another kind of exploitation of which he is guilty; that of living a satisfactory intellectual and social life – albeit a highly moral, revolutionary and responsible life – while his material goods are being provided by the people who hate having to provide them’ (1969: 20). This extends into the statement that ‘What Retamar needs, though he could not articulate it, is that the worker will become conscious but not too conscious, that he will assume new dignity but not get too carried away with it, that he will have respect for culture but not imagine he’s too cultured, that he’ll honour the professors but not actually demand to be one’ (Ibid: 21). Thus, instead of eroding the divisions between intellectuals and the people, we find that a hierarchy was maintained.

Another potentially contentious issue was that of the difference in quality between professional and amateur output, which the CNC stressed the need to resolve in its Preliminary Plan. As the massive incorporation of the people into cultural participation was being attempted in a culturally impoverished country, it was felt that, if quality was too strictly delineated, it would limit popular enthusiasm.²⁹ At the same time,

26 Sarusky and Mosquera noted that ‘Through this system [...] large sectors of the population have had the opportunity to receive instruction in the different forms of artistic expression. It has served to enrich the non-material aspects of people’s lives and given rise to a movement of amateur artists which has produced many artists of considerable talent’ (1979:14).

27 In considering the 1960s, Fornet describes how the successes of that decade found their way ‘directly or indirectly into the rugged terrain of ideology. Hundreds of thousands of people were able to read a book for the first time [...] Hundreds of thousands of adolescents attended a painting exhibition for the first time, listened to a recording of symphony music or were present at a performance of ballet or traditional dance’ (2004:10).

28 Fernández Retamar would identify that ‘the most important cultural task had consisted in bringing cultural realisations to a vast public and in making that public fit to gain access to the enjoyment of those realisations’ (1962:68).

29 It was emphasised that work would be needed before *aficionados* understood the need to rehearse for weeks before a performance or to develop techniques before mounting exhibitions. As there were insufficient instructors to meet demand in the early 1960s, groups formed without instructors, which

tendency towards the other extreme was also to be avoided, and *aficionado* groups were encouraged to strive for a continual increase in quality. Thus, two stages and two levels were introduced, with provincial monitoring being carried out.³⁰ In the first stage, the demands of quality were kept to a minimum; for *aficionados* progressing to the second stage, quality was more of a prerequisite. This mapped onto two levels, with the first level being comprised of those groups with trained instructors and the second those with spontaneous (self-taught) instructors attempting to compensate for the initial shortage of qualified personnel (CNC, 1963a). Notwithstanding, Morejón would find quality to be lacking at the start of the twenty-first century:

[...] there came a certain point when the idea of massive numbers of people pursuing cultural interests became a priority of the government, often above everything else. They forgot that, in order to appreciate art, people have to have some basic ideas about the need to recover the essence of beauty. It is very true that liberating social sectors as well as progress and social mobility clearly need not be limited to the individual. Just the opposite: They have to reaffirm it. The problem was that often, closely connected with this emphasis on such a massive approach to culture, there came the accompanying practice of justifying mediocrity, often in the name of a supposed form of equality. As a result, we have often protected mediocre cultural expressions, and I believe that we should be more rigorous (Kirk and Padura Fuentes, 2001:116).³¹

Reflecting on policy-making in the 1960s, Lumsden cautions that ‘Mass mobilization campaigns are not the same as political participation’ (1969:542). In outlining the technocratic tendency of policy-making in Cuba, Espina argues that ‘The people (recognized as heterogeneous) who should be the protagonists of the transformation controlling its outcomes and its use of resources, are merely consulted and mobilized’ (2010:98). In the cultural field, the population was not only mobilised but also participated in its own transformation through cultural engagement, thus departing from other spheres of social change through the active participation of its beneficiaries,³² and Kapcia observes that:

rarely gave rise to work of any quality (CNC, 1963a).

30 This was undertaken by the Provincial Council of Culture (CPC), to which the CNC disseminated the cultural policy of the revolutionary government, augmenting the popular slogan ‘Venceremos’ [We will overcome] to become ‘En la Cultura también Venceremos’ [We will also overcome in culture] (Ibid).

31 In his autobiography, Fidel describes how ‘We are educating art instructors: there are fifteen teacher-training schools, one in each province, and plans are for 30,000 arts teachers, selected on the basis of their talent, to share their knowledge in educational centres and in communities over the next ten years, because there’s a tremendous demand’ (2006:233).

32 At the same time, as we have seen, creative intellectuals have more control over the policies affecting their field than those in the capitalist world.

Once again, therefore, we return to the meaning of ‘cultural revolution’. For, by 1969, it was becoming clear that, in addition to the evolving definitions (of preserving traditional forms, bringing prestigious forms to the people, or responding directly to the Revolution’s concerns), it now had acquired another definition: a culture developed by the people. Indeed, this now took on a special and seminal form as the *movimiento de artistas aficionados* (‘movement of amateur artists’), initially an informal and loose ‘movement’, without headquarters, definition or system, but with an evident and real existence and clear organic roots, whose heyday (with an estimated million *aficionados*) was yet to come (2005:147).

By way of concluding this discussion, it is worth remembering that the original impetus underlying the *aficionado* programme came from Che’s insistence on educating all those who had fought in the uprising and his belief that ‘the Revolution stood primarily for social justice, for repairing the criminal neglect of the *humildes*, that enormous unemployed and semiliterate mass of yesterday’ (Karol,1970:325). Accordingly, Miller asserts that ‘The idea that socialism *is* cultural opportunity as well as social justice and equality became a leitmotiv of Cuban revolutionary discourse’ (2008:684, i.i.o.). And so, whereas Lenin had insisted on the vanguardist development of a party intelligentsia, which ‘implied training party cadres, professional revolutionaries who would strengthen the resolve and discipline of the party’ (Sochor, 1988:37), Che’s ideas were much broader by design, encompassing the whole populace. As we have seen, this thinking would coalesce into ideas around the formation of the new man. As will become evident, the aim of placing cultural power in the hands of young, ‘uncontaminated’ artists would become consistent with the CNC ethos of its darkest days (Fornet, 2007).

Returning to the development of policy by the CNC in the early 1960s, we find that, in the wake of the 1962 congress, the Preliminary Plan was worked up into a general plan that would be enacted by every province and municipality during the following year. At the same time, a pamphlet was published, describing the cultural policy of the revolutionary government, which reiterated the CNC role of orientating, directing and organising cultural manifestations across art forms, while training future creators, interpreters and professors (1963b). In July 1963, when necessity dictated that

the CNC cease being an appendage of MINED, it assumed responsibility for all activities related to the visual arts, including the intensification of artistic creation, exhibitions and the acquisition and conservation of artworks on the part of the state. In addition to this, the CNC would oversee artistic teaching at all levels, the import of necessary materials, briefing of the press, authorisation of permission for overseas travel by creative practitioners and the organisation of artistic and literary competitions as well as appointing their juries (MINREX, 1976), thus creating a situation of almost total control over every artistic avenue.

This early autonomous period of the CNC coincided with the launch of a staunch polemic that needed to be rebutted by Cuba's creative practitioners.³³ Apparently, few intellectuals suspected that 'the inheritance of scholastic Marxism was so strongly in our midst, or at least among some intellectuals from the Partido Socialista Popular' until 'one of our most brilliant and respected essayists, Mirta Aguirre, wrote in October 1963' (Fornet, 2007a:385) a text called 'Notes on Literature and Art'. In this, the CNC director of theatre and dance would invoke the power of art as a form of knowledge capable of investigating reality, which conferred upon artists a great responsibility and revolutionary duty. Addressing realism in art from a materialist perspective, she categorised images as representations of things, a subjective reflection of the objective world. Rather than striving for realism to provide a mimetic copy of external reality that would deceive the senses, she argued, the character of realism was derived from the extent to which it expressed a 'correct' reflection of the real. Reaching the crux of her argument, Aguirre would proclaim that 'Socialist realism which does not undervalue beauty in art, understands it as a vehicle of truth, a part of knowledge and a weapon of transformation of the world' (1963:53).³⁴ Combining aesthetics with

³³ Mariano describes how 'some civil servant [...] tried to set up interference to creative work, especially formal research. Fortunately, the revolutionary strand of artists and writers prevented that from happening' (Benedetti, 1969:506).

³⁴ Advocating a solid materialist philosophical training for creators, she argued that socialist realism would be possible without such training if the artist stood together with the proletariat, refusing any abstract metaphysical conception of man and society and using their sensibility and intelligence to gain undertaking. And, while there would never be a scientific method for determining whether a work was socialist realist or not, the prospect was greatly increased for artists and writers living in a socialist society. For her, the transformation of metaphysics into materialism required two routes of knowledge – science and art, or logical thought and thought acquired through images – both conditioned by objective reality.

scientific materialism, she argued, socialist realism obtains a truthful and historically concrete representation of reality in its revolutionary development. Railing against the purely sensory, she asserted that abstract art decoupled perception from intelligence, and, while it may provide positive support for the applied arts, abstraction was not considered the supreme expression of a socialist society. In a factor that is often missed in broad-brush studies of the cultural policy of this period, this approach was confined to a particular ideological faction, making it useful to analyse in more detail the polemic of this period, which has been edited into an invaluable anthology by Graziella Pogolotti.

Six months before Aguirre's essay appeared, Blanco would describe, in an article to the bimonthly UNEAC journal, *Gaceta de Cuba*, the anti-nationalism and obscurantism that had prevailed under the previous regime. While it had not been possible to counteract this under capitalism, the Revolution had rescued the dignity of a people, with artists among them. However, while Cuba as a whole would not delimit cultural advance, the regressive forces of imperialism had heirs, few in number, who used new arguments but made similar points to their forebears in matters of art and culture. Amid the dogmatists of the left and the opportunists of the right, he would find attempts to restrict revolutionary cultural policy and a desire to confine artists to one expressive course – realist or abstract, depending on their tastes – with the former group appealing to a deformation of Marxism-Leninism in a bid to disorientate the people. He urged his colleagues to unmask these enemies of the Revolution wherever they were found and to combat them with increasing force, with the full support of the revolutionary government.

In the same journal issue, García Espinosa (1963b) alluded to those within the cultural community who insisted on trying to impose pre-existing formulae to a

Aguirre elaborates that, in Marxist-Leninist aesthetics, as in science, the creative act loses all mysterious content to be based in hypotheses. Refinement of the senses depends on the development of both thinking and consciousness, which depends at its highest level on social conscience. She continues that, to undervalue the beautiful in art (which distinguishes it from science) would be a serious mistake, but to limit art to the sensorial, to the element of beauty, would be almost a crime (Aguirre, 1963).

rapidly changing reality.³⁵ He discerned that never before had Marxism been closer to a religion,³⁶ attempting to freeze reality and to make an abstraction of the Revolution and its people. In the process of suppressing the chaos of capitalism through socialism, the film-maker warned that dogmatism sought to dominate men rather than encouraging them to be masters of their own destiny. In order to counteract this, it would be necessary to become fully aware of the new reality and, without prejudice or fear, to raise all the questions that this reality dictated. This paved the way for a frank debate around the possible directions for culture.

Three months after his article appeared, García Espinosa would be one of more than 250 co-signatories (Otero, 1997) to a statement made by a group of film-makers – including Gutiérrez Alea and Humberto Solás – who met to discuss some of the fundamental problems of cultural policy and aesthetics (García Espinosa, Guillén et al., 1963),³⁷ particularly the application to aesthetic questions of debatable, and largely unacceptable, principles determined in the Soviet Union (Gutiérrez Alea, 1963). Rather than representing a precise consensus, the statement achieved unanimity around certain principles considered essential to the daily preoccupations of artists and intellectuals and of increasing interest to the people of Cuba. It proposed that, in a socialist society, the promotion of culture was the right and responsibility of the party and government. Beyond this, the trajectory of art should be determined through a struggle between aesthetic ideas; to deny that struggle and proclaim peaceful coexistence would be to proclaim an illusion, and the victory of one tendency over another could only be achieved through suppression, by attributing a class character to artistic forms in ways which arbitrarily restricted the necessary conditions of struggle and the development of art.³⁸ By contrast, the film-makers' statement was predicated on the idea that the

35 These matters of urgency had emerged during a recent UNEAC assembly (García Espinosa, 1963b).

36 At the 1968 congress, Fidel would echo this sentiment in outlining 'his own highly personal belief and conviction that, in Cuba and elsewhere but particularly in Cuba, Marxism should never be raised to the level of a religion, either for the people or for the society's leaders' (Salkey, 1971:220).

37 These meetings took place in the Department of Artistic Programming at ICAIC on 4, 5 and 6 May 1963; the statement was dated 1 July and published on 3 August of the same year (García Espinosa, Guillén et al., 1963). Its signature heralded the beginning of a custom of periodically confronting themes of communal interest in relation to the meaning of creative work within society.

38 The coexistence of conflicting ideas and tendencies recognises the imperative that culture only has one inheritance – the historic crystallisation of the creative work of all peoples and all classes – rather

formal categories of art do not have an inherently class character – rather, art is a social phenomenon, both a reflection and a form of objective reality in which the ideological position of its author is not a determinant of the quality of work.

In the October following the August publication of the statement, three articles appeared. One of these was authored by Alfredo Guevara (1963) in *Cine Cubano*, the in-house magazine of ICAIC, and affirmed the difficult, but possible, task of reconciling the ongoing ideological struggle against class enemies and imperialism with the necessity of securing the conditions for the most absolute freedom of experimentation and confrontation in all aesthetic manifestations. To Guevara, it seemed appropriate that creators would tackle the theoretical and practical problems thrown up by their work and consider, with the greatest coherence and seriousness, theses informing contemporary ideology, discussion and research with respect to the diverse ways of elaborating cultural policy. And, while the directorate of the journal did not share the theoretical formulation of the film-makers' statement and maintained reservations about some of its resolutions, it subscribed to its conclusions and declared absolute agreement with the moral intention underlying it. In affirming the validity of dialogue and analysis, *Cine Cubano* not only published the statement but also saluted it as a crucial advance in the movement.

On 18 October 1963, García Buchaca entered the debate, proclaiming that the task of government lay not only in promoting culture but also in orientating and leading it (as delegated to the CNC). Echoing her earlier manual, she asserted that the process of completely supplanting idealism with materialism should be reflected in creative work.³⁹ In considering the film-makers' assertion that the *formal* categories of

than being the exclusive expression of the interests of one class or people. Furthermore, this presupposed that bourgeois culture and proletarian culture do not exist exclusively antagonistically and that the universal character of culture compelled the preservation and continuity of the most valuable cultural expressions. Lenin's resolution at the 1920 Proletkult conference was invoked to support this argument, which stated that proletarian culture could only be possible through assimilating and re-elaborating that which was valuable from two millennia of human culture (Ibid).

³⁹ While they may coexist for a while, García Buchaca (1963) persisted, these two ideological expressions would be mutually exclusive if genuine Marxist criteria were adopted. Her rationale for this was that each socio-economic formation has a unique superstructure and cultural form, and that it is only when two antagonistic classes exist, the expressions of both cultures – that of the society in the process of disappearance and that of the new society – coexist.

art do not have a class character, she advised that the separation of the form of art from its content was inadmissible for a Marxist. Conceding that the major developments in productive forces do not always correspond with moments of artistic and literary splendour, she nonetheless tied works of art to the general laws of production. For her, capitalism had aesthetic values as surely as it had scientific values, and limitations to creative expression were an inevitable part of the intense struggle that accompanied the transition from one socio-economic form to another. In considering the position of the creator in socialist Cuba, García Buchaca would affirm the possibilities for producing work according to the parameters of 'Words to the Intellectuals' and the right of intellectuals and artists to deploy their work as a tool of struggle, in negating the alienated society of the past, which corresponds with first-order negation. The matter remained unresolved and, in an open letter to García Buchaca in the January 1964 issue of *Gaceta*, another Cuban film director, Jorge Fraga, would trace a century-long precedent in the search for a Marxist solution to the problems of aesthetics and cultural policy. He asserted that, despite the firm and consequent attitude of the revolutionary government, artistic culture was often analysed from a dogmatic position, and took issue with the idea that the conditions for ideological coexistence could not establish themselves within the current criteria of Marxism.

In the same month as the contributions of Guevara and García Buchaca appeared, the ensuing polemic provoked the aforementioned treatise from Aguirre. Briefly concurring with the position of her cinematic colleagues, she would assert that aesthetic contradictions were inevitable on the path to communism, and recognition of this would help to prevent dogmatism from taking root, as guaranteed by the Revolution. But, she would quickly state that there was no possible reconciliation between dialectical materialism and either idealism or religious faith, and neither could aesthetic tendencies be tolerated that were grounded in either of these philosophical orientations. Aguirre determined that certain intellectuals and artists simultaneously proclaimed their dedication to eradicating the ideological vestiges of the overthrown

society while finding justification for them. For her, impressionism and surrealism were found to be fundamentally incompatible with dialectical Marxism, and bourgeois culture (which represented the interests of the overthrown class) must not be allowed to proliferate. In an open letter, published in *Gaceta* the same month, Fraga (1963) extracted the essential points of the film-makers' earlier thesis. Most particularly, he sought to demonstrate the dual existence of bourgeois and socialist cultures in the struggle for Marxist hegemony.⁴⁰ This led him to take issue with Aguirre's idea that only selected technical aspects of bourgeois culture should be carried forward. For him, the form and content of bourgeois culture, past and present, ought to be considered part of the valid cultural inheritance of the proletariat within a dialectical process of acceptance and critique.⁴¹

The following month, García Espinosa would reassert that the film-makers considered it a mistake to try and diminish or negate the importance of ideological struggle. In addition to daily creative work and the taking up of arms when the Revolution called for it, ideological struggle would be fundamental to the necessary development of critical thought. In his spirited defence of critique, García Espinosa pointed to those self-proclaimed Marxist-Leninists who promoted a formalist current that tried to present communal truths without elucidating them.⁴² Only by struggling against decadence and dogmatism could the people be brought closer to artistic problems in a dialectical relationship that would be necessary to the development of art. In the process, he would allude to the fact that, not for the first time, intellectuals had to call upon the principal leaders of the Revolution in a bid to ensure that cultural policy was not made behind their backs.

40 Fraga (1963) argued that, to dispute the film-makers' thesis of the unity of culture, it would be necessary to prove an absolute antithesis.

41 Taking idealist philosophy as an example of bourgeois culture, Fraga argued that the aim was to surpass it, expropriating anything of value, and that failure to do this would only lead to cultural isolation, the contemporary form of which was the ivory tower. In this, he argued that, if this tendency towards rejection disappeared, so too would schematic thought (Ibid).

42 A necessary precondition for this was the separation of form and content, and García Espinosa (1963a) concedes that, in proclaiming that formal categories had no class character, the film-makers had introduced some ambiguity into the debate which could have been avoided by first clarifying that form and content are inseparable.

The debate rumbled on, with a public discussion being staged by the Students' Association at the School of Letters, after which the film-makers felt the need to reaffirm their commitment to both their original document⁴³ and an anti-dogmatic approach (Gutiérrez Alea, 1963). In the rebuttals that followed, they were variously accused of being part of a 'chapel' that should be rendered ineligible to use means of diffusion financed by society, and berated for their bourgeois origins in the face of the proletarian vision of the world that was being formulated (Flo, 1964).⁴⁴ They were charged with separating art from life, in order to take positions around the former, and seen to embrace cultural heritage in a way that was tantamount to continuing bourgeois culture rather than contributing to social transformation (Benvenuto, 1964). On the part of the film-makers, it was argued that consciousness did not evolve at the margins of class struggle but within it, and that, as art enriched man spiritually, it could participate in the struggle for a new socialist culture (and the erasure of idealism) without having to be Marxist (Gutiérrez Alea, 1964).

In December 1963, the discussion shifted from *Gaceta* into the daily newspaper, *Hoy*, the official organ of the PSP edited by the party's former Secretary General, Blas Roca.⁴⁵ Within the 'Clarifications' column, a debate was generated around a handful of films from the capitalist world – specifically *La Dolce Vita*,⁴⁶ *Accattone*,⁴⁷ *The Exterminating Angel*⁴⁸ and *Alias Gardelito*⁴⁹ – which were accused of representing corruption and immorality. While an initial question, about whether the Cuban people should have access to these 'defeatist' films, was attributed to the well-known television actor, Severino Puente, future incarnations of the column were taken to be the work of Blas Roca himself (Guevara, 1963; Otero, 1997). The first relied on anecdotal evidence from

43 In relation to this discussion, Benvenuto (1964) conveyed the impression that some of the original signatories had retracted their support.

44 Juan Flo was Professor of Marxist Aesthetics (Gutiérrez Alea, 1964).

45 Questioning the editor's authority in using this official organ in this way without consulting the party, Alfredo Guevara was informed, via the paper on 27 December 1963, that his contributions had not been included in the relevant file submitted to the central committee of the party due to the paper's inexperience with regard to intellectual property rights.

46 Directed by Federico Fellini in 1960.

47 Directed by Pier Paolo Pasolini in 1961.

48 Directed by Luis Buñuel in 1962.

49 Directed by Lautaro Murúa in 1961.

unnamed workers that these films were unsuitable, particularly for Cuban youth,⁵⁰ and a combatively critical attitude was incited from those who were more revolutionaries than artists, more Marxists than anti-dogmatists, more creators than heirs (Puente, 1963).⁵¹

On 14 December, this prompted a spirited defence by the directors of ICAIC in the 26 July newspaper, *Revolución*, arguing for the properties of film in enriching discussion and stimulating the imagination, which could become a factor in economic development (1963). In a letter to the same paper three days later – signed by García Espinosa, Gutiérrez Alea, Fraga, Massip and other film-makers from the Department of Artistic Programming – a response was made to both Puente and the directors of ICAIC (1963). To insinuate, as the editor of the Clarifications column had done, that life is a reflection of art would be to attribute to cinema transformative powers that it could never possess. To suggest the prohibition of films of undeniable cultural value would be to restrict cultural development and negate the freedom of cinema screens that was conquered on 1 January 1959. The following day, Alfredo Guevara (1963b) entered the fray to respond to the original Clarifications and expose the abyss between the editor and the meaning of culture sustained by ICAIC. He eloquently advocated to artists the combined role of witness, protagonist, combatant and prophet, arguing that there was nothing more revolutionary than an artist who applied their sensibility, knowledge and imagination not only to themes of immediate concern but also to political agitation and revolutionary propaganda without allowing their work to become propaganda in itself. In the process, Guevara expressed concern that, while Blas Roca's editorial did not constitute the cultural policy of the revolutionary government, it coincided with, and would have been seen by, those responsible for this area, particularly those informing the CNC at the First National Congress of its activists.

50 In this, cinema was taken to be the most influential of all the art forms by virtue of the directness of its representations and mass transmission, which led to claims of surreptitious ideological sabotage at a time when the Cuban people were living through a history that reclaimed heroism, laboriousness, ingenuity, a spirit of sacrifice and collectivism over individualism.

51 It was argued that dogmatism – defined as a subordination of means to ends – only constituted an error if carried out mechanically. In the process of claiming their opposition to dogmatism and advocating eclecticism, the film-makers committed dogmatism in reverse by subordinating ends to means (Puente, 1963). Consistent with an anti-dogmatic attitude, Lumsden cites Castro's contention that 'communists are distinguished by how they actually behave in "action and struggle" and not by their adherence to specific revolutionary theories' (1969:540).

This provoked a prolonged textual exchange, with a total of six responses to Guevara being published by Blas Roca and several other interjections being made. The latter's contention was that artists should be more closely linked to the Revolution, not only reflecting daily reality but also making explicit reference to revolutionary successes and the action of the people (1963c). In this, he demonstrated a rather sycophantic adhesion to the central contentions of 'Words to the Intellectuals' that reveals little understanding of the often fraught processes involved in creative production (1963a). Mocking Guevara as the 'champion of free thought', he also asserted that Cuba's artists and intellectuals were neither revolutionary nor socialist in the full sense of either word (1963b). On the same day as his second response was published (1963d), Antuña (1963) responded to Guevara on behalf of the CNC, specifically in relation to the latter's contentions about the CNC congress celebrated the previous year, stating that this had not been confined to the council's activists and that Guevara had participated with his voice and vote alongside the leaders and representatives of state and mass organisations. The reference paper and conclusions had been approved without abstentions by, among others, a hearty delegation from ICAIC; furthermore, Guevara had participated both in the preliminary meetings at which the ten-point plan (outlined above) had been drawn up and in a meeting with the CNC president and the Prime Minister at which these points were discussed and accepted, and at no time had any discrepancies been raised.⁵²

In a final reflection on the spat with Roca that remained unpublished at the time, Guevara (1963a) commended Fidel's stance of refraining from either excommunicating people, engendering a climate of suspicion or prescribing 'artistic formulae', opting instead to create a spirit of communication and clarity about the role of the party and government in the field of culture. And, while ICAIC and its leaders studied and accepted his 'Words', rather than applying them mechanically, Cuban intellectuals understood that the party and government would orientate the cultural movement

52 This led Antuña (1963) to accuse Guevara of serious incomprehension of the functions of the state and every one of its organisations as well as of the discipline and relationships that exist among them, and, without without to ridicule him, to demand an explanation in relation to any allegation of conflicts between the CNC, Fidel and Dorticós and the reasons for his own publicly aired discrepancies with the ten points that formed the cultural policy of the revolutionary government.

rather than anybody appropriating so delicate a task. Notwithstanding, it would be possible that the concrete practical objectives of the Revolution could be deformed if the field of thought was restricted or Cuba's citizens underestimated. Rejecting the cult of spontaneity as inimical to Marxism, Guevara refuted the idea of holding mythical workers up as a source of knowledge while simultaneously denigrating their ability to understand art. As we shall see in the next chapter, this debate would remain unresolved for a while longer.

In 1964, policies were put in place for the subsequent five years, which, for the visual arts, entailed:

1. Continuing dissemination of different expressions of the visual arts in their national and international manifestations, promoting their free discussion.
2. Guaranteeing the presence of Cuba at significant international events.⁵³
3. Increasing the exchange of exhibitions with all countries interested in them.
4. Maintaining the functioning of galleries and museums, realising the necessary work with mass organisations and schools in order that this service bears the necessary fruit.
5. Opening new galleries and museums and readapting others, to bring different museum collections to the public.
6. Continuing the plans of the National Commission of Monuments (1963c).

As we have seen, García Buchaca would not be in a position to see these plans come to fruition, being jailed for betrayal in December 1964 (see chapter four). In the meantime, another threat to revolutionary credibility would raise its ugly head.

Crisis Talks between Armando Hart and the Intellectuals in 1965

In the mid-1960s, as was common practice throughout the world at that time,⁵⁴ Fidel regarded it as the government's 'duty to take at least minimum measures to the effect that those positions in which one might have a direct influence upon children and young people should not be in the hands of homosexuals, above all in education

⁵³ In the 1964 Project Plan, seventeen exhibitions were planned abroad (CNC, 1963c).

⁵⁴ The UK Government would persist in this outlook, with clause 28 of the 1988 Local Government Act legislating against 'the teaching in any maintained school of the acceptability of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship'. See <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1988/9/section/28> (accessed 2 February 2012).

centres' (Lockwood, 1967:107).⁵⁵ Domínguez describes how, in 1963, when national service was being discussed, Raúl Castro advocated a three-year term; 'In addition, the lazy, the corrupt, homosexuals, religious proselytizers, especially Jehovah's Witnesses, all classified as social deviants, would be drafted into special military units; they would be given no weapons but would instead be socially "rehabilitated" through national service. Although compulsory military service was claimed not to be primarily for these purposes, that was a not insubstantial side-effect' (1978:357). Fidel (2006) retrospectively details three barriers to entering military service at that time – educational level, religious belief and sexuality. With regard to the latter group, he argues, machismo led to 'widespread rejection of the idea of homosexuals serving in military units [...] but that became a sore spot, because they were not called upon to make the hard sacrifice [for the country] and some people used that argument to criticize homosexuals even more harshly' (Ibid:222-3).

Accordingly, in November 1965, Military Units to Aid Production (UMAP)⁵⁶ were formed and Casal notes that 'large numbers of Cuban writers and artists were sent to those camps' (1971:459).⁵⁷ Karol finds that the authorities 'did not encumber themselves with theoretical explanations or justifications but simply drafted "guilty" and suspects alike into UMAP [...]. Most of this contingent was made up of intellectuals [...] and the purge at Havana University had been specially [sic] severe' (1970:395). The first draftees were treated so brutally that their commanders were court-martialled

55 This continues:

Nothing prevents a homosexual from professing revolutionary ideology and, consequently, exhibiting a correct political position. In this case he should not be considered politically negative. And yet we would never come to believe that a homosexual could embody the conditions and requirements of conduct that would enable us to consider him a true Revolutionary, a true Communist militant. A deviation of that nature clashes with the concept we have of what a militant Communist might be (Lockwood, 1967:107).

56 Unidades Militares de Ayuda a la Producción, taken to be the creation of MININT (Kapcia, 2008).

57 This period coincided with prevarications over whether to publish José Lezama Lima's novel, *Paradiso*, with its overtly homosexual content. Three decades after the Revolution, between undertaking an undergraduate degree at Harvard and a postgraduate at Yale, Georgina Dopico Black asserted that 'the fact that the work was published at all in Cuba represents a significant departure from the conservatism that has generally prevailed in the state's official artistic policy, a departure only partially explained by the year of its publication' (1989:129). In an ambiguous text that touches on the cultural policy of the post-revolutionary period, Cuban émigré, Carlos Ripoll, argues that 'Fidel Castro disregarded angry protests by Cuban Communists and personally authorized the publication of *Paradiso*, by José Lezama Lima, a decadent and perverse book in the eyes of Marxist critics because of its morose descriptions of acts of sodomy' (1985:462).

and charged with torture (Domínguez, 1978).⁵⁸ The intellectual community, including Fernández Retamar, Guevara and Carpentier (Kapcia, 2008) protested their existence, and Gilman (2003) recounts a story of Julio Cortázar and Ángel Rama remonstrating to Fidel about the monstrous persecution of homosexuals at a meeting of international writers; twenty-four hours later, repressive measures ceased. Domínguez describes the eventual fate of the camps:

The UMAP functioned throughout the sugar harvests of 1965–66 and 1966–67, but it was not universally approved. When many intellectuals and university faculty were sent to the UMAP as alleged homosexuals, the Cuban National Union of Writers and Artists (UNEAC) protested to the Prime Minister. Although [Fidel] Castro had approved the establishment of the UMAP and at first spoke well of it, he agreed that the treatment of UMAP draftees was scandalous; the UMAP was disbanded after the 1967 harvest (1978:357).⁵⁹

Nonetheless, the presence of the UMAP sits alongside other instances of gay persecution, which have conspired to discredit the regime in the eyes of cultural protagonists inside and outside of Cuba.

Visiting Cuba in 1968, the lesbian writer, Susan Sherman, would later reflect that ‘even though the camps were closed, gays in Cuba were closeted, but so was I in the United States – this was before Stonewall and the emergence of the Gay Liberation Front in 1969. I found myself once again confronting an untenable position. While vigorously joining the struggle here in the United States, I was reluctant to join in a public outcry against Cuba – a revolutionary country under constant siege’ (2007:162).⁶⁰

Fernández Retamar also situates these events in their historical context, alluding to ‘those who talk about the unacceptable homophobia in Cuba, as if we were still in the times of the UMAP (which we opposed) and not in those of *Strawberry and Chocolate*⁶¹ (which we praised)’ (Saruský, 1995:40). Fernet attributes the creation of scandals,

58 Kapcia notes that ‘The camps were certainly hard, but not “labour camps” on the *gulag* model; conditions were Spartan, the work manual and exhausting (although some detainees carried out clerical tasks), and the regime was military in style’ (2008:135).

59 Fidel describes a visit to Camagüey, during which he ‘became aware of the distortion the original plan had been subjected to’ (2006:224).

60 Sherman notes that ‘Official attitudes in Cuba have since changed, sparked in 1985 by the report that homosexuality should not be treated as a pathology, and almost certainly by the influences of the Gay Liberation struggle’ (2007:162) in the US and elsewhere.

61 A brilliantly dialectical 1994 film, by revolutionary director, Tomás ‘Titón’ Gutiérrez Alea, centred on the Copelia ice cream parlour in Havana, which charts the friendship that develops between an artist and a member of the Young Communist League, whose sexuality is divulged through their respective penchants for strawberry and chocolate ice cream.

around issues such as the persecution of homosexuals at UMAP, to a broader struggle between dogmatists and liberals, during which time it was easier to create a diversion than to seriously address the responsibility of intellectuals in a country in revolution (Dalton et al, 1969).⁶²

Yet, while the forces of dogmatism accused all creative intellectuals of remaining outside the great social process that was underway (Otero, 1997), homosexual writers and artists were victimised more than others; within the CNC, this relied less on political suspicion and more on a kind of scientific certainty that 'homosexuality was a contagious disease, a species of leprosy incubated in the breast of class society, the propagation of which had to be prevented by avoiding contact' (Fornet, 2007a:396). Guevara (2007) asserts that homophobia arose from ignorance, the worst enemy of the Revolution, while Otero (1997) echoes Fidel in attributing repression through the interment camps of UMAP to excessive machismo in the wake of the dictatorship.

As homosexuals were dismissed from their jobs, the breaking point came when the directorship of the most important Cuban dramatist, Vicente Revuelta at Studio Theatre,⁶³ was terminated. Carlos Lechuga, who would become president of the CNC, informed Otero of the problem and a meeting was hastily convened at the latter's house, with Gutiérrez Alea, Desnoes, García Espinosa, Fornet, Fernández Retamar and others in attendance. Lechuga explained the origin of the decision and various solutions were proposed; in the end, it was agreed to try and create a commission to restructure Cuban theatre that would restore Revuelto to his role while ensuring that the government retained its authority.

In October 1965, Hart was made secretary of the new 26 July-dominated PCC. The intellectuals who had convened at Otero's house met with him, together with some new personnel, including Carpentier, to discuss the stronger links that the PCC wished to create with the country's intellectual workers. A series of three small meetings took

⁶² Kacpia comments that 'While these measures attracted outside criticism (seeming to confirm growing suspicions of inherent Stalinism), a more positive implication of the measure was ignored: that it implicitly guaranteed full employment' (2008:52).

⁶³ Together with Mora Badía, Revuelta had run the theatre section of *Nuestro Tiempo* (Kacpia, 2005).

place to establish a systematic dialogue, and the intellectuals took the opportunity to air their concerns about problems within the cultural sector, with García Espinosa immediately pointing out that such a dialogue would be difficult while the issue of Revuelto remained unresolved. As previously agreed with Lechuga, Otero proposed the creation of a commission on intellectual work to kick-start a dynamic cultural policy. Over the course of the meetings, Hart clarified the essentially anti-dogmatic character of Marxism and the aversion of the Revolution to manuals telling people how to think;⁶⁴ he also emphasised the serious responsibility assumed by the Directorate of the Revolution in the ideological and ethical training of youth and its preoccupation with deviations of personality.⁶⁵ Following his participation in these meetings, Otero (1997) concludes that they were a continuation of the discussion begun in the national library in June 1961 and, although the constituency was much smaller, they served to create an atmosphere of understanding between artistic creators and the leadership.

Remarks in Conclusion

One of the most striking elements of this era of cultural policy formulation lies in the massive effort that was made to unleash the latent creative potential of an entire populace. In the unique circumstances of Cuba, the Gramscian understanding of organic intellectuals arising from every social class was extrapolated from the proletariat to the peasantry. Grounded in Che's ideas and implemented by the CNC, we have seen that the *aficionados* programme achieved considerable success in eroding differences in cultural level between town and country. In this enormous educational effort, professional artists and writers embraced their revolutionary duty by disseminating their skills to the instructors who would act as intermediaries.

64 Guevara (2007) points us to Che's *Critical Notes on Political Economy*, written between 1965 and 1966, which took the *Manual of Political Economy*, published by the Academy of Sciences in the USSR, to task, paving the way for discussions on the limitations of manuals in *Cuba socialista* and *Teoría y Práctica*.

65 Much later, Fornet (2007a) would assert that, for reasons of artistic quality, it had been deemed impossible for recognised homosexuals to gain prestige that would influence the formation of Cuban youth.

Having achieved mass participation, attention was quickly turned to criteria of quality, as had been stridently maintained in professional quarters. While qualitative measures met with varying degrees of success, the revolutionary government nonetheless maintained provision for the transition of the most gifted amateurs into the professional ranks. Herein lies the area of post-revolutionary policy with the most consequence for the capitalist world – the possibility of eroding the gap between art and society, between intellectuals and the people – the lapsed preoccupation of the avant-garde which we began discussing in the previous chapter. It is, therefore, regrettable, that in the final analysis, we find that a hierarchy was maintained between the two groups, alongside traces of mutual suspicion.

In the dispute that erupted between the CNC leadership and film-makers in 1963, several philosophical points emerged. Crucially, the orthodox Marxists of the CNC held the eradication of idealism to be paramount, refuting all possibility for its reconciliation with dialectical materialism. But, whereas Marx and Engels had pitted themselves against Hegelian idealism (1846), C.J. Arthur notes, in an introduction to *The German Ideology*, that ‘It is possible to select certain one-sided formulations which the authors no doubt resorted to for the purpose of contrasting forcibly their positions from the dominant idealist trends, and make these the basis of a fatalistic view which negates human purposefulness and activity’ (1970:22). However, ‘A careful reading of Marx’s work soon shows that this interpretation is not adequate; because the circumstances which are held to shape and form consciousness are not independent of human activity’; as against this mechanistic tendency, Marx was ‘even prepared to give some credit to idealism’ (loc cit).

Other dimensions of the 1963 polemic perfectly expose the positions of hard-line element among the PSP, specifically those of García Buchaca, Aguirre and Blas Roca. Central to this is the assertion that works of art have an inherently class character, and that only selected technical aspects of bourgeois culture should be carried forward, which directly contradicts both Marx and Lenin on the validity of cultural inheritance.

Following this argument through to its logical conclusion would lead to a dismissal of all object-based art on the basis of its exchange value under a capitalist system in which the market has become the only indicator of value. Stopping short of this, Aguirre would advocate that certain forms of creative expression be curtailed in the transition from capitalism to socialism, singling out abstract art for particular vilification.

In marked contrast to this, Cuban film-makers argued that artistic production thrived in an atmosphere in which different aesthetic ideas vied for attention, and any attempt to deny this could only lead to suppression of one form or another. While all parties to the debate agreed the formal properties of an artwork to be indivisible from its content, the film-makers vehemently resisted formal prescriptions. Crucially, they described art as both a form of objective reality and a reflection of it, and argued that, to claim that reality imitates art would be to over-estimate the influence of their work. As we have seen, this approach could be applied to cultural works imported from abroad, meaning that, however violent or representative of bourgeois norms, European films were not deemed capable of exacting an adverse influence upon the Cuban people. The counter-argument, mounted by elements within the PSP, exposes the moral guardianship that was assumed on behalf of mythical workers. It is also noteworthy that this latter position sits in diametric opposition to the idea of engendering a critical spirit in the populace that is reflected in Fidel's evocation of 'People sufficiently cultivated and educated [who are] capable of making a correct judgment about anything without fear of coming into contact with ideas that could confound or deflect them [who] could read any book or see any film, about any theme, without changing our fundamental beliefs' (Lockwood, 1967:112).

In a discussion with ENA students, published on 1 October 1967 in the first issue of *Revolución y Cultura*, Rafael Rodríguez describes the many sectarian errors committed in discussions around form and content over the preceding two decades, which had been supplanted by a gradual understanding that a vision of the world

would inevitably communicate itself through the work of revolutionary artists.⁶⁶ He was adamant that unilateral dogmatism was not compatible with the development of socialism, which was characterised instead by multiple interpretations of truth. Similarly, socialism demonstrated an aversion to ‘administrative invasion in the sphere of art’ (Ibid:83), which saw a handful of functionaries judging what should and should not be exhibited and had created huge catastrophes for art in other socialist countries. For him, no-one had a monopoly on contemporaneity, and the aesthetics of revolutionary times would continue to be formed through diverse currents across all disciplines. At the same meeting, he discussed with students a nascent Cultural Commission within the Central Committee of the PCC, which would be dedicated to discussing questions such as these and to constraining functionaries.⁶⁷ This reminds us that we must take care to distinguish the perpetrators of dogmatism, however dominant, from those adhering to more revolutionary interpretations of cultural policy, while remembering that, for Latin American communist parties, Che’s death would signal a return to the orthodoxy of Moscow (Karol, 1970).

66 Rafael Rodríguez (1967) refers to the discussion that had taken place among French communist intellectuals, between those who argued for an obligatory revolutionary theme in painting and those who supported the expression, in the most perfect visual way possible, of the artist’s perception of the revolutionary world, which could be in abstract form. For him, the only distinction to be made was between the individual position of the artist and the final content of their work. Later, echoing ‘Words to the Intellectuals’, he allows plenty of scope for those artists who accept and like the Revolution but who do not feel themselves to be communists. In this, he states categorically that ‘There are people who work with us, who respond at decisive moments with the defence of the Revolution but who have a way of thinking resistant to the programmatic content of Marxism-Leninism and of communism’ (1980:69). For him, the distinction made in Fidel’s key phrase was too generic to be applicable to the objectives of revolutionary artists, all of whom consider themselves to be acting within the Revolution but who are little more inside than those who accept the Revolution without working arduously towards revolutionary objectives and without sharing all the ideals of the Revolution. By the same token, for him there is no such thing as ‘reactionary art’ or an ‘intrinsically reactionary’ (Ibid:81) painter as it is possible for a painter to be counter-revolutionary in intent even if they have talent. Similarly, a painting may have a revolutionary theme but be technically poor; thus, it is not legitimate to say that certain forms or art are counter-revolutionary – only the content of a work can determine this. Further, it would be counter-revolutionary to persecute those people who paint in a certain way, as had happened with Tachist (abstract) paintings, for example, as no damage can be done to the people from exposure to such work. In the question and answer session that followed his 1967 presentation, Rafael Rodríguez re-iterates that these problems continued being discussed and, while there were rigid advocates of a ‘correct thematic expression’ (Ibid:73) who do not understand that one can make a Revolution even if painting or music does not make any direct thematic allusions, there are others – among whom he was situated – who believe that this has to be viewed with the greatest amplitude, with the fullest criteria.

67 According to Rafael Rodríguez (Ibid), the commission would be consulting cultural organisations, creators, audiences and students on the substitution of abiding liberal popular art forms.

Chapter Ten: Cultural Policy of the Revolution Part Three

Speculating on the impact of Fidel's 'Words' on the cultural policy of subsequent years, Casal finds that 'until 1968, at least, this policy was characterized by tolerance toward all forms of artistic expression as long as there was a basic acceptance of the Revolution' (1971:459).¹ More detail emerges from Cuba, with Fernández Retamar finding that 'The sixties, with their romantic flair, ended for us between 1967 and 1968' (1996:179) and Fornet (2004) describing how the concluding three years of the decade interwove both apotheosis and catastrophe. On 9 October 1967, Che was assassinated in Bolivia,² which marked the closure of the continental revolutionary project and a focus on domestic concerns (Lockwood, 1967). In August 1968, to the surprise of the world, including Cuba, the Soviet Union invaded Czechoslovakia. Allegedly reluctantly supported in public by the revolutionary government,³ this move 'violently interrupted the process of constructing a socialism autonomous of the USSR' (Gilman, 2003:208). Between these two historic events, an ambitious cultural congress was convened in Havana.

In January 1966, intellectuals taking part in the Tricontinental Conference in Havana had outlined the necessary and urgent task of redefining the role of the intellectual in society; a year later, a meeting of intellectuals picked up on this theme.⁴ As a result of various convergences within the Latin American family – which had

1 Cuban émigré, Carlos Ripoll, argues that Cuban literature thrived up to this period: 'The greatest activity occurred during a three-year period beginning in 1966, and was especially notable in 1967, when production in the novel tripled' (1985:462).

2 At the end of December 1967, Salkey spoke to a North American who had settled in Cuba, who describes how 'with Che gone, something's snapped somewhere; something great's been lost, as if it wasn't really around at all. You won't find much hope of replacing Che; there's hope, yes; but you know what I mean about replacing Che. We're all stunned at the moment. It was only last October, you know that I mean. There's been no time to think of anything else but the assassination and the fantastic loss' (1971:31).

3 Lockwood observes that the Soviet move towards 'peaceful coexistence' (1967:352) with capitalism in the mid-1960s prompted scathing criticism from Cuba. Lumsden writes of 'Fidel Castro's belief that the root causes of Czechoslovakia's "counter-revolutionary situation" were the very same quasi-bourgeois policies which are increasingly being pursued' in the Soviet Union (1969:537). Fernández Retamar is even more explicit in his pronouncement that:

The invasion of Czechoslovakia was characterized by Fidel (in a tense and, to a point, surprising) speech as tragic, and considered to be without legal and moral excuse; but it was not openly denounced from a political standpoint, since it was understood that the invasion could be interpreted as the long-awaited response of the Soviet Union against the violent imperialist aggression that, at the time, was being directed against Vietnam and that still threatened Cuba (1996:180).

Notwithstanding, Otero (1997) notes that Fidel publicly affirmed support for the international communist movement, regardless of its position, and that Cuba suffered considerably as a result.

4 This meeting was held in homage to the Nicaraguan poet, Rubén Darío, on the centennial of his birth.

been solidly constituted with Cuba at its head (Gilman, 2003) – a group of Cuban artists and writers, in dialogue with Fidel, decided to convene a congress of intellectuals from throughout the continent and beyond (Dorticós and Llanusa, 1967). This would manifest itself in Havana the following January, hints of which have been provided throughout.

Writing retrospectively, Otero (1997) would trace to the 1968 congress the culmination of a growing rapprochement with international intellectuals, and Karol notes that:

[...] in asking the intellectuals to deal quite openly with the problems of the Revolution, the Cubans were inviting them into realms that Communist parties had always considered their own preserves. Indeed, official Communists had invariably heaped abuse on these petit bourgeois hairsplitters and troublemakers as soon as any intellectuals had had the audacity to encroach on that preserve. Now, quite suddenly, the Cubans, heroic Communists though they were, had asked these same intellectuals to share in their most intimate deliberations and to provide the answers to their most pressing questions. Nor did the Cubans leave it at vague hints, for every time they denounced the failure of revolutionary movements in capitalist countries, every time that they attacked reformism or the spirit of compromise, they put the blame squarely on the orthodox Communists, and so exonerated most of those present (1970:399).

However, Miller puts a different slant on this, describing how support of the revolutionary government by non-Cuban intellectuals peaked at the 1968 Cultural Congress, because foreign intellectuals ‘were prepared to turn a blind eye to signs of increasing cultural repressiveness, from a regime they knew to be under considerable international pressure’ (1999:129). Wesker, who attended the congress, verbalised his reservations about the Revolution while observing that its colourfulness and ‘idealism is so infectious that its [sic] making Cuba the focal point not only for the hopes and aspirations of the under-developed countries [...] but also for Europe’s artists, intellectuals and perhaps, soon, for Europe’s tired and despondent younger political leaders’ (1969:16). Karol enthusiastically describes how:

[...] many left-wing intellectuals from Europe had long been looking upon Cuba as a kind of spiritual home. It stood for an entirely new attitude, for the rejection of a life built on commercial standards, that had not degenerated into sectarianism or intolerance. After the regrettable but brief mini-Stalinist interlude – long since forgotten – the Cuban leaders had apparently forsworn any type of cultural dictatorship, and their encouragement of the free arts formed a striking contrast to the murky habits of the other socialist countries (1970:394).

Similarly, Fornet conveys the prevailing mood of revolutionary optimism and the growing international prestige of Cuban culture, and regards as a triumph the fact that the final resolution-declaration was ‘elaborated from Marxist and Martían positions, [underwritten by] a decolonising thought more linked to Cuban reality and the problems of the Third World than to the Eurocentric ideological currents from both sides of the Atlantic’ (2007:390). In contemporaneous press cuttings, it is interesting to note the prevalence of a sentiment reiterated from the congress declaration, that ‘for an underdeveloped country the cultural act par excellence is Revolution’ (Anon, 1968b:5), which, for Gilman (2003), meant that the only privileged protagonist in the Revolution was the revolutionary leader or *guerrillero*. In the mid-1960s, Fidel had affirmed that ‘Revolution is an art. And politics is also an art. The most important one, I think’ (Lockwood, 1967:187), and, in this chapter, we shall see how this played out.

In considering the cultural policy of this period, Miller notes that consensus formed around more restrictive interpretations when ‘Cuba’s relationship with the USSR sharply deteriorated in 1967–8’ (2008:677). Gilman (2003) refers to a worsening Cuban-Soviet polemic at the end of 1968, but Karol argues that this was the precise moment at which Fidel surprised Havana by reconciling Cuba to the USSR,⁵ forcing the continental revolutionary project to be postponed indefinitely, with the leadership coming round ‘to the view that their survival depended on the eradication of underdevelopment at home and not, as they had thought in 1965, on a trial of strength in Latin America’ (1970:493). Further, he notes that ‘Sudden political changes invariably pose serious problems, even in socialist countries whose masters do not take too much notice of public opinion. They throw the leadership – not to mention the ordinary Party members – into utter confusion; experience has shown that every psychological crisis in the ranks of the

5 This rapprochement was only partial, and Karol notes that: Cultural and political exchanges between the Soviet Union and Cuba continued to grow, and other members of the bloc followed suit by sending delegations and experts to the island. Yet none of them seemed anxious to make Cuba any economic presents or to help it alleviate the cruel shortage of consumer goods that kept growing worse throughout 1969; like the first great love affair of 1961-62, the new honeymoon coincided painfully with a marked drop in supplies on the island. There was no direct relation between the number of pro-Soviet speeches in Cuba and the cut in the rations, but for many Cubans who had not forgotten their leaders’ complaints about the quality of ‘revisionist’ merchandise, the concomitance of friendship with the U.S.S.R. and restrictions at home did not seem fortuitous (Ibid:516).

socialist elite has unavoidable repercussions on society as a whole' (510-11). In the cultural field, this would lead to criteria being imposed on creators, which ran counter to the aspirations of many Latin American artists who had joined in the defence of the model established in Cuba (Gilman, 2003).

The Padilla Case (1968–1971)

In October 1968, Padilla was unanimously awarded the UNEAC prize for his poetry collection, *Fuera del Juego*,⁶ while Antón Arrufat received three of five votes for his dramatic work. Of the former work, Benedetti comments: 'I do not believe that it can be described as counter-revolutionary. However, it is an ambiguous, conflicting and bitter book' (1969:522). Rafael Rodríguez finds that it contained 'poems evidently hostile to the Revolution' (1969:112) but that their author had not been judged counter-revolutionary. Within Cuba, Padilla has been described as 'a poet who had become if not critical of, certainly somewhat distanced from, the revolution' (Fernández Retamar, 1996:180), while Kápacia notes that he 'had been cultivating the persona of a dissident writer, following models witnessed during his work as Prensa Latina correspondent in the Socialist Bloc' (2008:136). While the prizes were honoured and the books published and distributed internationally,⁷ a prologue was inserted by the UNEAC executive, deeming them unworthy of a prize in a revolutionary country (Ibid).⁸ Fornet (2007a) describes how, in a bid to undermine the committed writers and artists that the Cuban Revolution had promoted as a model, *Mundo Nuevo* wasted no time in publishing the views of the English critic, J.M. Cohen, who had served on the jury,⁹ while Otero (1997) remembers that Cohen acted so unscrupulously in influencing the committee by publicly alluding to his favoured candidate in the press that UNEAC president, Guillén, had to remind him of his obligations.

6 Out of the Game.

7 Rafael Rodríguez (1969) was keen to emphasise that neither the scope nor quantity of distribution were affected by this stance because the revolutionary government did not fear ideological confrontations.

8 In reference to the Padilla case, Guillermo Cabrera Infante cites the UNEAC intention to 'let it be known that ideologically he (the poet) manifests himself outside the principles of the Cuban Revolution, it was agreed ... to express its absolute disagreement with the work' (1968b:41).

9 Fernández Retamar asserts that this put *Casa de las Américas* on a collision course with *Mundo Nuevo* (Saruský, 1995).

For Fornet, the publications of Padilla and Arrufat had begun as ‘works that served “our enemies” but now came to serve other ends, one of which was to “openly raise the ideological struggle”’ (2007a:388-9). That autumn, a series of articles appeared in the army magazine, *Verde Olivo*, under the pseudonym Leopoldo Ávila, which has since been attributed to its editor, Lieutenant Luis Pavón.¹⁰ The first of these exposed the conduct of Guillermo Cabrera Infante in an Argentinean magazine, in which he declared himself a staunch enemy of the Revolution;¹¹ the next two articles were aggressively dedicated to Arrufat and Padilla, and the last two opined on the problems of the intellectual world and the ‘depoliticisation’ suffered by Cuban critics (Gilman, 2003). At the time, Fornet would censure intellectuals for their timidity in allowing the cultural offensive to come from the armed forces rather than *Casa* or *Revolución y Cultura* (Otero, 1997), and he would retrospectively discern that the ideological turn advocated by Ávila had gradually been acquiring a more international character, contributing in part to the attacks on the Revolution by various intellectuals from outside the country (2007a).¹² Benedetti would observe that ‘Oddly, the Latin American intellectuals residing in Latin America were not alarmed as much: they still trust the Cuban Revolution more than the Associated Press of the Voice of America, the broadcasting station that rejoiced in the announcement that Padilla and Arrufat were in prison. The truth is that both writers enjoy freedom, and any foreign visitor encounters no difficulty in interviewing them and in learning their opinions’ (1969:521).¹³ Indeed, Fornet remembers that Padilla himself continued a more or less normal life,¹⁴ with a recital at UNEAC of poems from a book in preparation with the suggestive title *Provocations*, paraphrasing Arnold Hauser’s observation that ‘works of art are just that – defiant

10 See discussion of this in chapter four.

11 In 1969, Rafael Rodríguez described how Cabrera Infante had been given permission to leave the country temporarily, on the basis of seeking isolation from the polemical atmosphere of Cuba, whereupon he joined the ranks of those attacking the country.

12 Similarly, Benedetti discerned that ‘On an international scale, [...] an attempt has been made to stir up in the European and Latin American intellectuals [...] an appropriate panic with regard to the possible restoration in Cuba of the socialist realism that had withered away as the only artistic trend’ (1969:525).

13 Rafael Rodríguez (1969) confirms this impression, saying that no writer had suffered any repressive activity as a result of their manifestations, and Padilla not only remained in full liberty but also continued writing and expressing his ideas.

14 For Del Duca (1972), Padilla’s decision to remain in Cuba deprived him of the support of foreign leftist intellectuals, although this would not seem to be borne out by experience.

invitations to dialogue' (2007a:391). While Cuban émigré, Carlos Ripoll, would later argue that the content of Ávila's articles 'effectively summarize what was to become government policy on freedom of expression in Cuba' (1985:464), Rafael Rodríguez emphasised at the time that the government only intervened administratively in culture, without seeking to 'concretely guide either the pen or the palette' (1969:115), but that cultural counter-revolutions would not be allowed.

At the end of the decade, the aforementioned round-table discussion of the *Casa* collaborative committee took place (Dalton et al, 1969). Against the backdrop of Fidel's recent nationalisation of the universities,¹⁵ Fernández Retamar began with a brief overview of the distinct phases of the Revolution – the 1961 library meetings, the earlier struggle against sectarianism, the frontal combat against Yankee penetration and the softening of certain Latin American leftist intellectuals. Many of the ideas that would continue into the 1970s are to be found in this discussion, including an acknowledgement of the responsibility of intellectuals in advancing revolutionary consciousness by confronting reality in transformation, which compelled them to immerse themselves in the most intense social practices, from agricultural work to guerrilla warfare. The notion, outlined at the 1968 congress, that partisan militancy was the highest level of social practice, was echoed and the primacy of practice over theory was reasserted. Having been central participants in the earlier congress, these intellectuals speculated that, rather than remaining mere critics of society-in-transformation, they should make a revolutionary commitment to armed struggle.

Within this discussion, Fornet would assert that the earlier danger of sectarianism was still being felt, with dogmatism as its ideological offspring and liberalism as the stupid son of petit-bourgeois idealism. And, while it was popular knowledge that the forces of sectarianism had attempted to empower themselves, using state resources to turn the revolutionary leadership against the intellectuals (by making differences of approach to cultural problems seem like ideological differences with the Revolution), it was less well known that they had attempted the same process against

¹⁵ This was outlined in a speech delivered on 13 March 1969. See <http://lanic.utexas.edu/project/castro/db/1969/19690314.html> (accessed 18 June 2011).

the cultural policy of the Revolution. He observed that ‘For many years, we made and supported a policy based on negation which consisted in avoiding mistakes made in other socialist countries. We avoided mistakes, but that was the end of our successes. For many, that appeared to be enough, but the pitfall of a defensive attitude is that it doesn’t generate an offensive with its own dynamic’ (Ibid:19) – in other words, it is not revolutionary. As such, he discerned a vacuum in cultural life that was reflected in the cultural sections of the press, which caused the most revolutionary intellectuals to absorb themselves in their work, leaving the field clear for dogmatists and liberals.¹⁶

Jumping ahead by two years, the next phase of the so-called Padilla case was about to flare up. On 20 March 1971, the writer was arrested and jailed, allegedly ‘without charges and by personal order of Fidel Castro’ (Bonachea and Valdés, 1972:498). This prompted a letter, addressed to Fidel, signed by ‘fifty-four formerly sympathetic prominent Latin American and European intellectuals’ (Kapcia, 2005:154), including Jean-Paul Sartre, Gabriel García Márquez and Carlos Franqui, now a ‘zealous accuser of the Revolution’ (Fornet, 2007a:392).¹⁷ Published in *Le Monde*, the letter expressed alarm at Padilla’s arrest – which was seen as evidence of a re-emergence of sectarianism on the island (Ibid) – and urged his release (Casal, 1971). Fernández Retamar describes how ‘This letter was copiously circulated by the world’s capitalist media, becoming – whatever the intentions of the original signatories might have been – an open accusation against the Cuban Revolution, given the letter’s assumption of the use of “repressive methods,” and so forth, in Cuba’ (1986:50).¹⁸ Associated Press

16 In contradistinction to the dogmatists, liberals advocated freedom of development for anti-socialist campaigners, softening the ideological positions of the Revolution. While both camps preferred to operate in secret, because they were not defending revolutionary positions, each took the other’s existence as a pretext for their actions (Dalton et al, 1969).

17 *Casa* committee members, Cortázar and Vargas Llosa, also signed this letter to Fidel, from which Fernández Retamar provides the following citation:

Given that so far the Cuban government has not provided any information on this matter, this fact makes us fear the reappearance of a process of sectarianism even stronger and more dangerous than the one denounced by you in March 1962... At a time when a socialist government has taken office in Chile and a new situation created in Peru and Bolivia facilitates the breaking down of American imperialism’s criminal blockade of Cuba, *the use of repressive methods against intellectuals and writers who have availed themselves of their right to criticism within the revolution* cannot but have profoundly negative repercussions on anti-imperialist forces throughout the world, and most especially in Latin America, where the Cuban Revolution is a symbol and banner (1986:50, i.i.o.).

18 Ripoll reiterates Padilla’s description of his persecution at the hands of the security service, and mentions that Padilla’s arrest was preceded by ‘the imprisonment of Raúl Alonso Olive, an official of the government who had assisted the economist, René Dumont, author of the book *Cuba ¿es socialista?* [Cuba is socialist?]' (1985:465).

speculated that Padilla would face execution for his treachery and European intellectuals presumed a generalised persecution to exist.

Upon attaining his freedom thirty-eight days later, Padilla made a self-critical ‘confession’ to a UNEAC meeting, and denounced several other intellectuals as counter-revolutionaries.¹⁹ Fornet (2007a) describes how, as a result of his experiences in Prague and Moscow, Padilla had become an incurable sceptic, troubled by phantasms of Stalinism, who recalled the painful confessions of the Moscow process. The intended parody was swiftly de-coded by ‘mainly ex-Stalinists who were familiar with the original texts (his intended audience)’ (Fernández Retamar, 1996:180). On 4 May, a second letter was sent to Fidel, protesting ‘Padilla’s confession, pointing out the similarity of these proceedings with the worst moments of the Stalinist era’ (Casal, 1971:462). This was signed by sixty-two intellectuals, with some of the ‘original signatories retract[ing] their participation in what they saw as an inappropriate bourgeois criticism of a Revolution they supported’ (Kapcia, 2005:154).²⁰ Authorship of this second letter may be traced to Vargas Llosa, and, although Cortázar claims that it would not have been sent had the first one received a timely reply, Fernández Retamar asserts that it ‘was not the necessary consequence of the lack of response (since response would have been nearly impossible) to the first one’ (1986:50).

19 Ripoll (Ibid) maintains that this confession was forced and refers to a personal visit from Fidel while the former was recuperating from his injuries at the hands of the security services. According to this account, among the list of intellectuals Padilla denounced for being counter-revolutionary was his own wife.

20 Among those who refused to sign the second letter was Cortázar, who described it as ‘paternalistic, insolent, unacceptable in every regard [...] I insist that insolent interference or paternalism of the kind displayed in the second, unspeakable letter can by no means be attributed to those who signed the first one’ (Fernández Retamar, 1986:51). Fernández Retamar quotes at length from the second letter:

We deem it our duty to communicate to you our shame and anger. The pitiful text of the confession that Heberto Padilla signed can only have been obtained by methods that are the negation of revolutionary legality and justice. The content and form of said confession, with its absurd accusations and delirious statements, as well as the meeting that took place at UNEAC in which Padilla himself and comrades Belkis Cuza, Díaz Martínez, César López and Pablo Armando Fernández submitted to a pitiful charade of self-criticism, recalls the most sordid moments of the Stalinist period, its prefabricated practices and witch-hunts. With the same vehemence with which we have defended the Cuban Revolution from the outset, because we deemed it exemplary in its respect for human beings in its struggle for liberation, we exhort it to avoid for Cuba the dogmatic obscurantism, the cultural xenophobia and the repressive system that Stalinism imposed in the socialist countries, in which events similar to those taking place in Cuba were flagrant examples. The disregard for human dignity entailed in forcing a man ridiculously to accuse himself of the worst betrayals and the vilest acts does not alarm us because it involves a writer but because any Cuban comrade – a peasant, worker, technician or intellectual – might also be the victim of a similar act of violence or humiliation. We would like the Cuban Revolution once more to become what at one time lead [sic] us to consider it a model within socialism (Ibid:51-2).

Gilman (2003) finds that the Padilla case complicated the circulation of discourse in the Latin American intellectual field and problematised the breach between discourses circulating in public and those conducted in private. For Fernández Retamar, spring 1971 ‘was marked by passion, and – on our part – indignation at the paternalism, the rash accusation against Cuba, and even the grotesque “shame” and “anger” of those who, comfortably situated in the “West” with their fears, their guilt, and their prejudices, decided to proclaim themselves judges of the revolution’ (1986:53). For Pogolotti (2010), the public fracturing of support for the Revolution created a crisis for the nation, which was exacerbated by internal tensions and created an imbalance that would bring about a redefinition of some of the practical aspects of cultural policy. According to Fornet (2007a), the initial letter from foreign intellectuals prompted the decision to convert the already-announced Congress on Education scheduled for April 1971 into one of Education and Culture, ‘making culture implicitly subordinate to education’ (Kapcia, 2008:136).

The First National Congress on Education and Culture (23–30 April 1971)

On 14 December 1970, a ministerial resolution created a commission to organise a congress under the Ministry of Education. Seven committees were set up to deal with specific issues, with an organisational structure predicated on the popular participation that had been missed at the 1968 congress. More than two thousand preparatory meetings were held around the island, feeding into congresses at the increasingly influential municipal, regional and provincial levels. This culminated in a week-long national congress of 1,800 delegates (Del Duca, 1972) in Havana, spanning eleven commissions, during which 4,703 of 7,843 of the proposals made during earlier meetings were scrutinised and between 2,500 and 3,000 approved.²¹

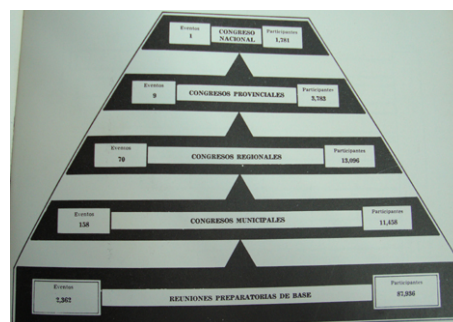


Diagram showing how preparatory meetings fed into congresses at a municipal, regional and provincial level, culminating in the First National Congress of Education and Culture, 1971

²¹ Figures taken from Fidel’s closing speech, reprinted in *Granma* on 1 May 1971 (Anon, 1971c) and

The abiding focus of the congress was educational, with culture being mentioned at the point at which it overlapped with education and the only recommendations of the organising committee relevant to this study being:

- To propose measures strengthening the ideological formation of young artists.
- To study the forms of neocolonialist cultural penetration and to work out a plan of action designed to counteract its negative effects on the national scene.
- To encourage the genuine and partisan cultural expression of Latin America, Asia and Africa, and to assimilate in a discriminating manner the best of world culture (Instituto Cubano del Libro, 1971:u/p).²²

All three of these objectives – the development of the young artist as a new man, the knowing resistance to imperialist cultural penetration and the desire to develop legitimate forms of tricontinental culture drawing on the best of universal culture – echo discussions around the 1968 congress. Yet, as we shall see, the surrounding rhetoric became more emphatic.

As in 1968, the declaration was intended as a summary of discussions.²³

Evidence of educational themes is uppermost, taking up two of three densely printed broadsheet pages in *Granma* and ranging from a consideration of juvenile delinquency to relations between production centres and community schools. Having posited mass media as powerful ideological tools and paraphrased Lenin's elucidation of film as the most important art form, the final section of the declaration is dedicated to cultural activity. This opens with the words: 'Development of the artistic and literary activities of our country must be based in the consolidation and promotion of the *aficionados* movement, within the broadest cultural development in the masses, contrary to elite tendencies' (Anon, 1971c:4). Echoing the CNC's earlier Gramscian rhetoric, one of the English pull-quotes of the congress publication would state that:

Culture in a collectivist society is an activity of the masses, not an elitist monopoly, the

Juventud Rebelde on 2 May 1971 (Castro Ruz, 1971b).

22 Elaborating on this, the congress declared that 'music, as well as other art forms, ought to:

1. Work on the development of our own revolutionary cultural forms and values.
2. Develop knowledge of the cultural values of the fraternal Latin American peoples.
3. Assimilate the best of universal culture, not that which is imposed from outside' (Anon, 1971c:4).

A fourth criterion was to develop didactic programmes in which the character and origin of Cuban music were studied.

23 According to Del Duca (1972), the declaration was read by José R. Fernández, First Deputy Minister of Education.

plaything of a few chosen ones or the label of a few misfits. [...] In the heart of the masses true genius is to be found, and not in groups of isolated individuals. The classic culture profit has meant that until now only a few exceptional individuals excel [sic]. But this is only a symptom of society's prehistory, not a definitive cultural characteristic (Instituto del Libro, 1971:u/p).

As before, then, culture was firmly conceived as the patrimony of the masses, part of a formidable artistic movement that fulfilled something more than the function of entertainment and distraction common to bourgeois societies.²⁴

The declaration would consider those home-grown artists and intellectuals to whom the Revolution provided resources and creative freedom unimaginable under capitalism. Looking abroad, it was found that, alongside those intellectuals who 'honestly unite with the revolutionary cause, understand its justice and defend it' were opportunists who used the Revolution as a springboard from which to win international prestige, while attempting to impose their ideas and tastes and acting as judges of the revolutionary process. This made it seem that, 'Many of the pseudo-revolutionary writers in Western Europe who masquerade as leftists in reality have positions against socialism, those who play with Marxism but are against socialist countries, who speak of solidarity with liberation struggles but support Israeli aggression and conquests of territories sponsored by North American imperialism against Arab peoples, who have converted leftism into a commodity' (Anon, 1971c:4). Ostensibly aimed at those who had petitioned the revolutionary government over Padilla (said to have found a small group of like-minded Cubans to perpetuate their ideas), this description also explicitly encompassed disingenuous Latin American writers who continued to use the underdeveloped peoples as their subject matter while seeking refuge in the decadent capitals of Paris, London, Rome, West Berlin and New York. Thenceforth, their counter-revolutionary contagion would be inadmissible on Cuban shores, which would

24 Four years later, the first congress of the PCC would describe how teachers, writers and artists had come together in 1971 to ratify a decision to permanently strive for the extension of culture to the masses, extracting as its central point the proclamation that 'aesthetic and cultural education should be an important aspect of all education' (Comité Central del PCC, 1976:491). In 1975, this would lead to a cultural ambience being established in all schools and aesthetic education being advocated across organisations. Under paragraph 22 of the PCC resolutions, organisations including MINED, the CNC, Union of Pioneers, Young Communist League and mass student organisations were implicated in this task (Ibid).

necessitate the revision of juries (as instigated by Haydée at Casa) and the implementation of a rigorous vetting system before foreign intellectuals were invited. The pretensions of bourgeois pseudo-intellectuals, who claimed to act as the critical conscience of society, was vehemently rejected as a role reserved for the people, with intellectuals among them, contributing to the task from within the struggle rather than from any privileged position. And, in a sentence that has repeatedly been picked up on by outside commentators, it was declared that ‘cultural media cannot serve to allow the proliferation of false intellectuals who claim to convert snobbery, extravagance, homosexuality and other social aberrations into expressions of revolutionary art, removed from the masses and the spirit of our Revolution’ (loc cit).



Fidel takes centre stage at the First National Congress of Education and Culture, 1971

Bearing in mind that this declaration was made just days after Padilla’s release, it is hardly surprising that it evokes a Revolution under threat. The fifth clause begins ‘We are a blockaded country, constructing socialism in the middle of the imperialist world. The threat of military aggression, of Yankee imperialism, against Cuba is not speculation. Our people struggle to construct socialism on all fronts’ (Instituto del Libro, 1971:u/p). Within this perpetual war, it was claimed that ‘Art is an arm of the Revolution. A product of the combative morality of our people. An instrument against the penetration of the enemy’ (Ibid). And, while many commentators have taken this as evidence of instrumentalisation specific to the period, the notion of art as a weapon was not necessarily novel. At the 1961 congress, Fernández Retamar had referred to artists taking up arms to defend the Revolution, clarifying that ‘these are not arms of gunpowder but of paper, of colour, of rhythm’ (UNEAC, 1961:67) while, at the 1968 congress, culture was invoked, by Benedetti and others, as the ideological corollary of armed struggle.

Kapcia finds that, for some, the 1971 congress seemed ‘to signal a new “hard line” on creative freedom’ (2005:153). Indeed, in the year that it took place, Casal would describe how:

Castro’s speech during the closing session of the Congress on April 30, 1971, further emphasized the new hard line on cultural affairs: (a) the primacy of political and ideological factors in staffing, universities, mass media, and artistic institutions, (b) the barring of homosexuals from these institutions, (c) tighter controls on literary contests to assure that judges, authors, and topics are truly revolutionary, (d) more control on subjects of publication, giving higher priority to textbooks than to literary works, (e) the elimination of foreign tendencies in cultural affairs in order to wipe out ‘cultural imperialism,’ and (f) a violent attack against the ‘pseudoleftist bourgeois intellectuals’ born abroad who had dared to criticize the Revolution on the Padilla issue (1971:462).

But this list, published in Pittsburgh, exaggerates the congress recommendations and conflates the congress declaration with Fidel’s speech, which mentions neither homosexuality nor Padilla.²⁵ Rather, this closing speech, delivered in the theatre of the Central Workers’ Union at 8:30pm on 30 April, pays homage to the 100,000 delegates, primarily teachers and professors, who had taken part in the thousands of meetings in a spirit of camaraderie and non-conformity, addressing every detail with a critical spirit. Surveying the country’s educational situation and the work of the congress in evaluating and developing that work, Fidel turned his attention to the cultural colonialism that had outlived its economic variant. He spoke at length of the failure of the bourgeois media to grasp the very real problems with which Cuba was having to contend in feeding, clothing and educating its children: ‘our problem is that of underdevelopment and how to overcome the backwardness in which you, our exploiters, imperialists, colonialists, left us’ (1971b:2). Condemning the cultural colonisers who had been deliberately excluded from the congress and would thenceforth be omitted from national juries, he argued that ‘to play the role of judge, it is necessary to be a real revolutionary, a real intellectual, a true fighter. In order to win a prize in a national or international competition, one must be a true revolutionary, a real poet’ (loc cit). Expanding on this, he would outline how the revolutionary people would evaluate cultural and artistic work according to how useful it was to them and the extent to which it contributed to mankind’s liberation and

²⁵ A transcript of this speech in Spanish is available at <http://www.cuba.cu/gobierno/discursos/1971/esp/f300471e.html> (accessed 17 August 2011).



Issue of *Juventud Rebelde* commemorating the First National Congress of Education and Culture, 1971, emphasising the development of mass education

happiness. Consistent with humanistic conceptions of art, he asserted that ‘There can be no aesthetic value without human content. There can be no aesthetic value opposed to man. There can be no aesthetic value opposed to justice, opposed to well being, opposed to freedom, opposed to man’s happiness’ (Instituto del Libro, 1971:u/p). In his final word on bourgeois intellectuals, Fidel would speak of the tiny minority of intellectual rats (which certainly did not include those present, much less all intellectuals) who would sink in the tempestuous sea of history as part of the terminal decline of capitalist Europe. He referred dismissively to that handful of witch doctors who knew how to practice cultural alchemy in contrast to the real intellectuals among the teachers, technicians, researchers and the rest of the population, who had the potential to both be creative and enjoy culture, thereby referring to his abiding preoccupation that the people should not only be passive recipients of culture but also active participants. Taking a holistic view of the country’s progress, he acknowledged the presence of both Soviet and Swedish delegations, there to lend their expertise, and looked forward to the day when all Cuba’s educational and cultural work would come to fruition.

Camnitzer finds that ‘Sensitive to world opinion, both the congress and Castro had a shriller tone than usual’ (1994:126). For Miller, his speech resolved any remaining ambiguities around ‘Words to the Intellectuals’, meaning that ‘afterwards, Cuban officials also made it clear that intellectuals were expected to contribute to the collective endeavour, primarily by acting as propagandists against imperialism’ (1999:76). Thus,

while 'Words' may be read as an attempt to accommodate into the Revolution those artists and writers who did not consider themselves truly revolutionary, Fidel's 1971 speech has generally been interpreted outside the country as a more programmatic step. So, for example, Dopico Black asserts that, by declaring 'that only true revolutionaries would have a place in the arts' (1989:112), Fidel reneged on his earlier inclusion within the cultural revolution of artists and writers capable of being non-revolutionary without being counter-revolutionary. But this perspective would seem to be negated by the congress's acknowledgement of all those intellectuals who 'honestly unite with the revolutionary cause, understand its justice and defend it' and Fidel's pains to confine his dismissive comments to a tiny minority. In the year of the congress, Fernández Retamar would discern that many outside observers attributed the violence in Fidel's speech, 'an attitude that is at the very root of our historical being to a deformation or to foreign influence' (1971:40), thereby demonstrating their incomprehension, 'ignorance, if not disdain, regarding our concrete realities, past and present' (loc cit).²⁶ Rather, for him, a remarkable consistency was demonstrated between this speech and that made a decade earlier, particularly in the primacy given to creative works according to their contribution to humanity.²⁷

While the borders of Cuba would remain closed to bourgeois liberal intellectuals and agents of imperialism, this did not imply, as Casal suggests, the elimination of foreign tendencies in cultural affairs, which would have contradicted the internationalist aims of Cuban culture. Nor did it connote the prescription of certain themes. Similarly, the priority given to education in the publishing industry, so that much-needed textbooks would flow to the schools, was not necessarily proposed at the expense of literary works. On the contrary, the best cultural works, which were more than likely to emerge from the masses, were embraced as an integral part of humanity and plans were made to disseminate them using all available mass media. Miller notes that 'even in one

²⁶ The editors of *Casa* would publish a statement in full support of the declarations of the congress and the policy arising from it (Weiss, 1973).

²⁷ Fernández Retamar found that, within the Latin American intelligentsia, 'the only national circle of writers on the continent to exploit an obvious pretext for breaking with Cuba and slandering the conduct of the revolution was the Mexican mafia' (1971:30).

of the most restrictive government statements on culture (declaring that aesthetic values could not be separated out from ideological content), it was emphasised that: “the best cultural works, the best artistic creations of humanity must be available to the people” (2008:687).

The months following the congress and the ‘detention and confession of Padilla were full of declarations and public positioning, widely disseminated through the Latin American magazines and newspapers’ (Gilman, 2003:243). The majority of these missives, including a letter authored by forty-one Cuban writers, sought to distance Cuban intellectuals from their European counterparts.²⁸ Fornet asserts that, in addition to the 1971 deliberations leading to ‘a politics of affirmation of identity and national sovereignty [...] it is certain that the situation combined to mark a point of rupture or cooling between the Revolution and numerous European and Latin American intellectuals who until then considered themselves friends and fellow travellers’ (2007a:393), and Fernández Retamar (2009) describes how the ill-fated congress cost them dearly, causing them to lose not only opportunists but also valuable friends. Miller determines that those foreign intellectuals, whose interventions over Padilla had been rebuffed, were forced to choose between breaking with the Revolution or the right of Cuba to self-management. Many intellectuals, including Benedetti, aligned themselves with the political leadership, making declarations against the suspect character of those who had signed the letters to Fidel (Gilman, 2003).²⁹

Gilman (2003) finds that this period signalled a split between those intellectuals who supported the Revolution – and accepted within the definition of revolutionary intellectual those who took the part of the working class, militarised themselves in the revolutionary struggle and submitted to the directives of the revolutionary political

28 The consensus, according to Gilman (2003), was that, as critiques of the socialist camp were prevalent in the pro-imperialist press, critiques of the Cuban Revolution (including those in circulation privately, which were published later) were better to remain unvoiced due to the reticence of individuals to confront the opinions of the leadership. Others, notably Vargas Llosa, Carlos Fuentes and Ángel Rama, maintained the ideal critical role of the intellectual, which caused an initial rupture with the Revolution. Since Fuentes’s signature of the two open letters to Fidel, Fernández Retamar maintains that the former ‘has shown unequivocal support for the Cuban and Nicaraguan revolutions’ (1986:54).

29 This was done via the Prensa Latina [Latin Press] news agency.

leaders – and those who sustained the critical ideal of intellectual tradition. But, again, nuance is useful here, with a distinction necessary between critique being made from outside (by bourgeois intellectuals in a position of relative comfort) and critique being made from within the Revolution (for the purposes of its improvement).³⁰ Gilman concedes that Fidel's closing words 'expressed to the intellectuals present his confidence in the possibility that revolutionary action could be manifested in the vanguard, while tacitly advising against rooting these discussions within the continent's Marxist parties or organisations that did not support armed struggle with the proper enthusiasm' (Ibid:119).

Coverage of the congress in the national media points to its being educational, with Fidel seen to be heralding a new and superior stage of revolutionary action in the pedagogical field, the sciences and (as something of an afterthought) culture (Anon, 1971c). The Deputy Minister of Education, José R. Fernández, is pictured presiding over the event, with the National Union of Educational, Cultural and Scientific Workers playing a prominent role.³¹ In a series of short statements published by *Verde Olivo*, representatives from each of the creative disciplines were called upon to give their opinion of the congress, with those cultural protagonists introduced in chapter four being notable by their absence (Lopez Morales et al, 1971). All the contributors seem to be agreed on the fraternal nature of debates in which a great proportion of those working in education and culture (without whom any undertaking in the field would be impossible) came together to air their dissatisfactions.³² Nonetheless, Camnitzer (1994) cites this period as one in which dogmatism took over from liberalism.

Immediately after the congress, Pavón was appointed as president of the CNC to

30 Weiss notes that 'Cuba's need for the solidarity offered to her by sympathizers abroad was great, in the context of the political isolation she was suffering; these intellectuals, however, continued to exist in comfortable consumer societies where they were free to market individualism and eccentricity at premium rates' (1973:246).

31 In the 1 May issue of *Granma* covering the congress, it was reported that Armando Hart (now a Polit Bureau member) had returned from a trip overseeing the Cuban delegation assisting at the tenth congress of the Communist Party of Bulgaria (Anon, 1971c).

32 In these comments, not only the products of culture but also the problems of culture were embraced as a shared patrimony that refused to remain the elite preserve of an administrative class. The comments reinforce different strands of the congress declaration, outlining the need to adapt the cultural superstructure to the radical changes produced in the economic base. Predictably, the necessity of harnessing of culture against ideological penetration was emphasised in this military forum.

become the ‘representative of the Revolutionary Government in the sphere of culture and, therefore, the supreme authority of the council and of all its integrated units and personnel’ (MINREX, 1976:17). As this Pavonist interregnum has not been considered in sufficient detail, it seems appropriate to do so here.

The Five Grey Years (1971–6)

As we have seen, the 1971 congress sought to orientate creative production towards the Revolution. It is said that, in the process, ‘the leaders hoped to eliminate much of the contemplative, introspective and diffuse individual activity in which intellectuals tended to indulge, and they hoped furthermore to lend a substantive base to the creative sector of the new political culture’ (Weiss, 1977:31). At the same time, in the wake of the international Padilla scandal, it is argued that the government needed to attract sympathetic intellectual attention from outside the country, becoming ‘willing to foster any form of intellectual undertakings that would further certain of their basic aims, such as an open-door policy to attract and maintain the support of western, Soviet socialist, and third world intellectuals’ (loc cit). The former of these tendencies won out, and the five years following the congress have retrospectively been termed *el quinquenio gris* [the five grey years] by Fornet.³³

Camnitzer describes how the congress:

[...] became a vehicle to underline some points over others, and the interpretation of ‘ideological rigor’ became slightly tricky. While Castro’s statements about the role of the intellectuals were kept, the slogan of ‘art as a weapon’ received particular emphasis. Many new bureaucrats came from military ranks, representing a hope for efficiency. However, instead of an overt change of mandate to the artists, in a subtle way a new breed of politically oriented artists was favored for promotion, and some more dogmatic publications became more easily available in bookstores (1994:127).³⁴

Mosquera writes that, during this period, ‘the basic result for culture was the closure of the plural, intense, and quite autonomous scene that had prevailed. No official style was

³³ Fornet (2007a) dates his written use of the term to 1987 and a text of literary criticism published in *Casa*. See chapter one for a brief discussion of why this term was felt inadequate to the severity of reprisals and the extended period over which they were endured.

³⁴ Camnitzer notes that the writings of Fischer, Garaudy and Sánchez Vázquez were replaced with those of the ‘rather conservative Soviet aesthetician, Avner Zis’ (1994:127).

dictated, but a practice of culture as ideological propaganda was imposed, along with a stereotyped nationalism. Under the slogan “Art: An Arm of the Revolution,” many of the principal intellectuals were marginalized for “ideological” or “moral” reasons’ (1999:24).

While this account of developments within Cuba reads as a fairly moderate reflection, other commentators, notably those based in the US, write with barely constrained glee when discussing the repressions exacted by the bureaucracy. In a publication for the University of Wisconsin, Howe writes that ‘after the relative openness and utopian euphoria of the early 1960s, Cuba’s cultural vitality atrophied as authorities drew skewed parallels among harvesting sugar cane, fomenting guerrilla warfare, and engendering culture through social volunteerism. Although authorities encouraged a variety of cultural activities, they funded primarily pro-revolutionary literature, documentary films, and graphics’ (2004:16). According to her, this meant that ‘while artists and writers resisted pressure to conform, experimental or “cosmopolitan” styles were punished, silencing dissenters by dismissing them from their positions or relinquishing their publishing privileges’ (Ibid:16-17). While it is vital to distinguish between experimental aesthetics and cosmopolitanism – the latter of which was associated with Western metropolitan centres and had been consistently derided within the Revolution – Howe’s account continues that ‘punishment for the slightest ideological dissent or lack of commitment led prudent artists to reach for “revolutionary” metaphors, which lowered standards of artistic judgment. The government’s insistence that the proper role of artists was to extend the “revolutionary” political struggle into the realm of culture had lamentable effects on the independence of the art world and on the rich variety of Cuban cultural life’ (Ibid:18).³⁵ This hints at an ultimate lack of

35 At the end of the 1980s, Ivy League scholar, Dopicco Black, defined the ‘Limits of Expression’, outlining how literature ‘may be actively promoted, prohibited outright, or marginally tolerated by the official state bureaucracy, depending upon its adherence to prevailing revolutionary norms’ (1989:107), determining that ‘the government’s role within the literary arena has directly resulted in the broad promotion of some works of questionable quality, in the outright censorship of some of the country’s best literature, and in the institutionalization of an atmosphere of suspicion that in literature assumes the guise of self-censorship’ (Ibid:109). Adding complexion to this picture, Camnitzer describes how: [...] rather than outright prohibitions of art exhibitions, there were amicable discussions in some cases and complex negotiations in others, but always aimed at reaching a consensus between functionaries and artists. In this regard the Revolution has created one serious double-edged

agency on the part of Cuban artists, and diminishes their contribution to intellectual life. Antonio Benítez-Rojo, a writer who, during 1971–6, ‘remained unpublished and lost his job as director of Casa’s research centre’ (Kapcia, 2005:155),³⁶ would comment that:

[...] the ‘limits of expression’ are conditioned not only by the content or the form of a literary work, but also by its author’s standing with regard to the rigid requirements the Cuban state imposes on its subjects. [...] if a literary work is promoted, prohibited, or tolerated, its treatment is due largely to the degree of esteem its author deserves in the eyes of the state. I could name dozens of writers whose literary works were at some time rejected, impounded, prohibited, partially censored, or criticized in Cuba for purely extraliterary reasons (1990:171-2).³⁷

While a counter-revolutionary stance or a perceived excess of power among the intellectual vanguard (Gilman, 2003) may have been equally influential in determining the fate of creative work during this period, certain changes in priorities may be discerned, and Kapcia observes that ‘Cultural policy as such would thus for some time be somewhat empirical, subordinated to political needs, perspectives and dictates, determined by people who, although sympathetic to the need for a parallel cultural revolution, would make political rather than strictly cultural decisions’ (2005:128).

As before, close scrutiny of the circumstances within Cuba allows us to understand how the harnessing of culture to revolutionary struggle came to be met

sword. Functionaries and artists come from a common pool of intellectuals and are, more often than not, bound by friendship. Communication with the higher ranks in the power structure is easy and uncluttered by ceremony. This openness facilitates the circulation of ideas and minimizes corruption. On the other hand, it also creates an ambiguous situation in which genuine friendly advice can be misread as an order and vice versa. It is this ambiguity that causes artists, sometimes unwillingly (and sometimes more willingly), to react with *autocensura* (self-censorship) (1994:132).

Elaborating on the notion of *autocensura*, he describes how:

Self-censorship in Cuba operates on two levels. One is in regard to the tenor of the actual creative work being produced; the other is what is said in meetings. Both modes do not necessarily happen simultaneously. Until recently, discussions were very open, and nobody seemed overly worried about making theoretical criticism and analyzing the situation. There is generally more insecurity about how far the artist can go with the creative work, but [...] it is more an issue related to where the pieces will be presented than to what the pieces are communicating. [...]

The present lack of clarity (or the potential excess of clarity) of the limits of expression does not seem to affect the general notion of the artist as a fully participating member of the Cuban socioeconomic structure. If this comparatively privileged status of art is to suffer, it probably will be the consequence of a general economic deterioration (*loc cit*).

36 Later to be appointed director of Casa de las América’s Centre of Caribbean Studies (Kapcia, 2005).

37 As we have already seen, one such extra-literary reason may be a writer’s pre-revolutionary history, and Casal writes that:

After 1959, many [writers] returned to Cuba and became involved with the Revolution. ‘Involved’ is perhaps not an adequate word. They became part of the Revolution and the Revolution part of them, and their poetry was transfigured by the sudden invasion of history. However, because they had not been directly engaged in the anti-Batista struggle, the process of learning how to relate to the political vanguard of their generation was rather tumultuous (1971:449).

with punitive consequences for non-compliance. In the first place, as we have seen, the five grey years coincided exactly with Pavón's omnipotent presidency of the CNC. Prompted by an attempt to exonerate Pavón and his cronies on television in 2007,³⁸ the then Minister of Culture, Abel Prieto,³⁹ accepted that some analysis of the period was badly needed and took part in a discussion about past mistakes.⁴⁰ Reflecting on this 'nightmare', this 'act of suicide', Fornet offered a damning critique of a man whose way of operation was 'not so much the expression of a political tactic as a vision of the world based on suspicion and mediocrity' (2007a:379-80).⁴¹ According to this account, Pavón's anti-intellectualism led him and his mentors to strip power from those vanguard groups which, until then, had predominated in the cultural field and now came to be regarded as politically untrustworthy:

38 On 13 December 2006, a few months after Armando Quesada – Director of Theatre at the CNC under Pavón – had been interviewed for *Dialogo Abierto* [Open Dialogue], former comandante, Jorge Serguera – who had condemned dozens of opponents of Fidel's regime to death (Cancio Isla, 2007) and served as director of the Instituto Cubano de Radio y Televisión, (ICRT) [the Cuban Institute of Radio and Television] from 1966 to 1973, eliminating any mention of personalities considered critical of political dogmatism (Rodríguez, 2007) – appeared on *La Diferencia* [The Difference] (Cancio Isla, 2007) and, on 19 December 2006, on the widely watched programme *Este día* [This Day] (Portela, 2007). On 7 January 2007, while Fidel was convalescing and the government otherwise engaged (Rodríguez, 2007), Luis Pavón was interviewed for *Impronta* [Stamp] on Cubavision. Dressed in white, his hands trembling as he spoke with a barely audible voice (Arrufat, 2007), Pavón displayed his medals and was shown in photographs alongside the leaders of the Revolution (Cancio Isla, 2007), with the presenter emphasising that he should be remembered as a committed revolutionary (Anon, 2007). This triggered a deluge of calls to TV Cubana (Arrufat, 2007) and a 'small avalanche' (Portela, 2007) of emails as intellectuals condemned his rehabilitation, which seemed to suggest a return to the dark Stalinist past (Cancio Isla, 2007). Among correspondence advising that the resurrection of these corpses prompted reflection and concern (Anon, 2007) and demanding a public apology from the leaders of the ICRT (Cancio Isla, 2007) was a message of solidarity from Mariela Castro Espin (daughter of Raúl Castro and Vilma Espin) to Reynaldo González, one of those marginalised by Pavón, who had gone on to be awarded the National Prize for Literature. On 12 January 2007, ICRT offered a detailed explanation, making it clear that it was not responding to the policy of the CNC, which had committed grave errors. UNEAC issued a statement via *Granma*, aimed at reassuring its members, indicating that the anti-dogmatic, Martí cultural policy favoured by Fidel and Raúl was irreversible (Rodríguez, 2007), but the then-director of the union, Carlos Martí, passed these problems off as personal ones (Cancio Isla, 2007). In response, a conference called 'El Quinquenio Gris: revisitando el término' [The Quinquenio Gris: revisiting the end] was organised at Casa de las Américas by Ambrosio Fornet on 30 January 2007 as part of a series entitled 'The cultural policy of revolutionary Cuba: memory and reflection' organised by the Centro Teórico-Cultural Criterios [Theoretico-Cultural Centre associated with *Criterios* journal, which describes itself as being closely linked to the *quinquenio gris*, inasmuch as it was 'an attempt to counteract the intellectual obscurantism which fell over the country' by maintaining links with world cultural thinking (Navarro, 2007a)]. Having been initially planned as a public event, the appearance of the old commissars on national television prompted a decision to be taken by intellectuals to limit participation to invited guests – members of UNEAC, students of the art schools and relevant departments of the university, specialists and staff of the ICRT and the institutions of MINCULT (Anon, 2007).

39 Prieto held this post from 1997 to 2011, standing down when the Political Bureau of the PCC was streamlined at its 2011 congress. See <http://repeatingislands.com/2011/04/22/cuban-minister-of-culture-abel-prieto-and-the-communist-party> (accessed 8 December 2011).

40 The Casa de las Américas vertical archive holds a collection of papers pertaining to this event.

41 At the same time, it was acknowledged that Pavón was neither the primary motor of persecution nor simply the obedient foot soldier of a higher power (Navarro, 2007).

That which the publishing houses and magazines published, that which the galleries exhibited, that which the theatres staged, that which was filmed by ICAIC, served to demonstrate who pulled the strings of the ‘cultural industry’, how far our discourse became the hegemony, weighed against refusal and the suspicions that at the same time were stirred up between some professional ideologues who we usually called the pious Guardians of the Doctrine (headed by a high functionary of the Party who, according to rumours was the political godfather of Pavón) (Ibid:395).

Fornet describes how, as the *quinquenio gris* consolidated itself, the idea gained ground that ‘aesthetic discrepancies hid political discrepancies’ (Ibid:383). To the detriment of intellectuals, 1971 was the moment at which the ‘relative equilibrium that we had favoured until then’ was broken and, with it ‘the consensus on which cultural policy had been based. It was a clear situation of *before* and *after*: from one stage in which all were consulted and all was discussed – although not always to arrive at agreement between the parties’ – into a period of ‘cultural policy imposed by decree [...] of exclusions and marginalisations, converting the intellectual field into a bleak terrain (at least for the bearers of the virus of ideological diversionism and for those youths inclined to extravagance, that is to say, aficionados of long hair, the Beatles and tight trousers)’ (Ibid:395). In the professional creative field, the years 1971–2 saw certain ‘parameters’ being applied to the ‘high risk’ sectors of the arts, notably theatre. Those who did not adhere to these parameters and who did not ‘qualify as trustworthy – that is to say revolutionaries and heterosexuals – were relocated to other work centres’ (Ibid:396) in agriculture or industry. This led to the imposition of ‘neozhdahnovist cultural work which took decades to eradicate’ (Navarro, 2007), preventing artists from exhibiting and writers from publishing and ultimately bringing about the exodus of important cultural figures (Arrufat, 2007).⁴²

Heras (2007) – who was removed from his professorship at the university and his role on the editorial board of *El Caimán Barbudo* and sent to work in a factory far from Havana but nonetheless remained loyal to Fidel and the Revolution – remembers being trapped in a Kafkaesque situation in which he stood accused of something unspecified, lacking the means to defend himself or provoke a dialogue about it.⁴³

⁴² Navarro (2007) singles out various exceptions to this, notably Agustín Pi at *Granma*.

⁴³ Similarly, Piñera remained ‘unpublishable, his movements were limited, his manuscripts were seized

Navarro (2001) describes how the critical role of intellectuals was diminished during this period, not – as one might have hoped – through a demonstration of the negative effects of certain forms of critique or through a demonstration of the erroneous character of critical affirmations but through a generalised demonisation of attempts by the intelligentsia to serve as the critical conscience of society, through the attribution of contemptible attributes to specific intellectuals and through accusations of hypercriticality or of introducing disorder into public life, offending public taste or posing a moral danger to revolutionary or Marxist truth.⁴⁴ Referring to a period that was characterised by individual abuses and perverse instances of prejudice, intellectuals have latterly indicted themselves and their colleagues for contriving to feign ignorance about those responsible, and for maintaining a silence that served to create a climate of immobility and a simulacrum of unanimity that detracted from a proper consideration of the threat to integrity these policies represented (Fornet, 2007).⁴⁵ Questions remain about why, having achieved notoriety for his militant pseudonymous views in the FAR magazine, Pavón had been appointed to run culture.

In the cultural policy emerging from the CNC in that era, we find great emphasis being placed on mass creativity. Elaborating on this in relation to the *aficionados* movement, the council's director of cultural outreach, Arnaldo Reyes (1972), would explain that not only did participation in art play an important part in the aesthetic training of man but it also contributed to politico-ideological and moral training and the simultaneous development of the intellect.⁴⁶ For the whole of January 1972, for example, a brigade of young writers, painters, musicians, poets and dramatists, visited various locations in the Sierra Maestra, developing diverse cultural activities

and he was briefly detained in 1978, a year before he died, while Reinaldo Arenas spent eighteen months in prison in 1974–5 [and] found his new works unpublished' (Kapcia, 2005:154).

⁴⁴ As evidence of this, Heras cites a report, written for the university (which was itself undergoing scrutiny, particularly its Department of Journalism) by Armando Quesada, Director of Theatre at the CNC under Pavón, in which a group around the journal, *El Caimán Barbudo*, questioned at the 1971 congress, was found to have 'fallen into positions of evident ideological diversionism' (2007:15).

⁴⁵ Fornet (2007a) elaborates that it is not possible to apologise enough to those *compañeros* who suffered at the hands of Pavón the cruelest fate which, without doubt, led to their civic death as professionals.

⁴⁶ In this, Reyes (1972) drew on Fidel's understanding of cultural and artistic creations and their function in revindicating and liberating man and their contribution to the happiness of man, with its obvious political value.

and joining in the community life of this historic region, the dual objective of which was to promote a revolutionary movement among young artists and enrich their artistic experience (Suárez, 1972).⁴⁷ In the second week of July of the same year, a national meeting of arts instructors was convened at ENA, preceded by meetings at provincial and regional levels, with 198 delegates invited to discuss the problems directly concerning the basic task of developing the *aficionados*.⁴⁸ In addition to plenary sessions – presided over by Reyes – the group split into three commissions, with interventions being made by the leaders of cultural, political and mass organisations, including Pavón and Guevara.⁴⁹

In accordance with the 1971 congress resolution to massively develop the *aficionados* programme, the first commission – dedicated to the work of instructors – elaborated a new structure to co-ordinate relations with political and mass organisations,⁵⁰ operating across student, worker and peasant fronts.⁵¹ Instructors could

47 In June of that year, Reyes was interviewed about the *aficionados* movement in the council's organ, *Revolución y Cultura*. He emphasised the maximum effort being demanded of the people in the material order and the continued necessity of the integral development of man, in which culture – specifically in its artistic and literary manifestations – would have an important part to play. Drawing on the 1971 congress, he invoked the rhetoric of ideo-cultural enrichment as a primary task in strengthening the people against Yankee imperialism, in pursuit of the consolidation and advance of the full cultural development of the masses. This fundamental effort was grounded in finding revolutionary forms and values, acquiring knowledge of the culture of fraternal Latin American peoples, assimilating the best of universal culture without it being imposed from outside and developing programmes with didactic ends. Reyes emphasised that, in the visual arts, knowledge should be geared towards practical and useful results in society, as much through the content of work as the possibility of objective utilisation. These understandings should be a function of propaganda, with design or murals contributing to the embellishment of places in which *aficionados* worked or studied, while works realised in clay would be useful not only for their ornamental and aesthetic properties but also for their practical use as ceramics. Emphasis was placed on the utilisation of vocational centres for *aficionado* improvement, while those dealing with the visual arts should maintain open exhibitions with social, political and recreational content.

48 The starting point for this work was the 1971 congress's invocation that art was an arm of the Revolution and a powerful instrument against enemy penetration and all the deviations of decadent bourgeois culture. Artistic education of the masses was reiterated as an inseparable part of the integral education of man, on the basis that art was vital to the formation of the new man and to augmenting revolutionary spirit.

49 Aside from several CNC directors making presentations, organisations represented included ICR, ANAP, UJC, CDR, FAR and MINED. The closing address was pronounced by Dr Julio Le Riverend from MINED (CNC, 1972).

50 In this endeavour, CDRs and FMCs would undertake profound work in kindergartens, countryside schools and infant circles. Training of instructors would be undertaken in collaboration with UPC, presided over by FAR and MININT. Instructors needed to have well defined qualities to be considered as educators, of which technical and political advancement were fundamental; being an educator could not be separated from the problematics of the Revolution and each instructor should also consider themselves an assessor and disseminator of art (Reyes, 1972).

51 A fundamental objective was to organise and develop groups of *aficionados* in each and every work and student centre in the country, forming and maintaining a cultural and recreational movement in every corner of the island; to this end, it was recognised that festivals stimulated the effort and quality of groups and provided recognition at a regional and provincial level, but training and improvement would be a daily task unrelated to the next festival (Ibid). The student front would be aimed at artistic education (increasing the access of all students to cultural activities) and artistic expression (stimulating all students

be one of three types: a) those wholly dedicated to a specific activity;⁵² b) voluntary (or artist) instructors – professionals who, in addition to carrying out their normal work, would lead or look after one or various groups; c) instructor-activists who worked on other fronts and led one or more groups in their spare time (Reyes, 1972). All instructors must be disciplined workers, capable of maintaining a good moral attitude and being radically resistant to ideological diversion, given their influence as combatants of Marxist-Leninist ideals on the student/worker/peasant body.

The CNC would have a central role in the educational improvement of instructors,⁵³ and a dedicated Raúl Gómez García brigade was created to orientate the political work of instructors and professors of art, whose studies would be centred on art history (particularly that of Latin America, from the pre-Columbian era to contemporaneity), painting, drawing, sculpture, design and graphics, combined with visits to museums and galleries (CNC, 1972). The second commission concerned itself with the training of activist instructors in developing the latent creative potentialities of the people.⁵⁴ This amplified the potency of culture as a weapon in decolonisation, which compelled every instructor to study national cultural roots and the cultural expressions of the fraternal peoples of the tricontinental area. Those teachers with an artistic vocation would be selected by official organisations to attend schools, seminars and courses, and would be regarded as a vanguard in creating a great artistic movement. Through the work of heroic youth, it was anticipated that a great artistic movement would be created, the divisions between manual and intellectual work would be erased

in ways consistent with their vocation) in an initiative across all educational levels. So, for example, an activist for each artistic discipline would be in every primary school and kindergarten, with parents' associations mobilised to get involved. The role of activists would be to orientate the rest of the teachers in the schools, and each instructor would be supported by a monitor (CNC, 1972). The worker front was attributed extraordinary significance and centred on exposure to cultural media, through talks, conference and visits to museums or by visitors to work centres, while the special characteristics of the peasant front were acknowledged, necessitating training of groups according to their particularities and a departure from music into theatre and dance (Reyes, 1972).

52 Full-time instructors would work eight hours a day, dividing their time between direct contact with *aficionados*, professional and technical improvement and cultural research, with studies undertaken to establish the optimum utilisation of their time (CNC, 1972).

53 This was to be achieved using existing materials, such as *El Caimán Barbudo*, *Revolución y Cultura* and *The Aesthetic Ideas of Marx*, and reference was made to a journal called *Orietador del Aficionado* [Amateur's Orientator], circulating in 1962 (Ibid). Training would be realised in two stages – the first in study centres, with alumni of inferior levels; the second in training and work centres were studies would be linked to practical work (Ibid).

54 Schools for activists were set up in Holguín and Oriente (CNC, 1975).

and every vestige of individualism abolished.⁵⁵ A decision was taken to increase the socio-economic content of works so that they directly reflected reality (CNC, 1972), which represented a new departure in the prescription of themes.⁵⁶

By 1975, the project spearheaded by Pavón was in its death throes. From a final directive issued by the CNC that year, we can determine the form into which cultural policy had congealed. Summarising the most important aspects of work conducted in 1974, priority is given to the *aficionados*,⁵⁷ with the support of professional artists, the schools of art and permanent cultural centres. Ideological struggle has become a decisive factor in artistic manifestations, contributing to the construction of socialism and solidarity with peoples struggling for their sovereignty, independence and national liberation. Within this document, the presence of Soviet advisors in the country is again mentioned explicitly, along with the novel suggestion that their recommendations should be adopted to reform the teaching of art. At the same time, plans were afoot to establish the obligatory study of Marxism-Leninism among students, professors and leaders of art schools and – alongside the intention to improve the conditions for, and increase the dissemination of, artistic activities – a stipulation was being made that artistic groups conform to the *thematic and aesthetic* orientations of the cultural policy of the Revolution. In relation to the visual arts, the emphasis was on: familiarising provincial communities with the most important work being made; cultural knowledge

55 In a bid to increase the quality of *aficionado* activities, the Gerardo Abreu Fontán order of achievement was created, which set minimum requirements and promoted constant improvement and increased participation in the cultural activities of a given locale.

56 As one of the outcomes of this meeting, various letters and communiqués were sent to various dignitaries on behalf of the instructors. A letter to Fidel was issued on 10 July, outlining the instructors' intentions to deepen their work and knowledge of traditions as part of the integral education of the new man. Three days later, an expression of solidarity was sent to professional artists, who were considered to be forging a path in compelling the art of the masses. This missive indicates that the history of art in Cuba would continue to count on its most celebrated exponents, with the most genuine representatives of expression of nationality uniting absolutely with cultural proposals to elevate the cultural level of the masses and perpetuate this educative task. In addition to these and other letters, a final declaration was made which provides a historical overview of, and insight into, the *aficionado* movement. This refers to hundreds of thousands of trainees coming together to exalt the act of culture, whereby art is a manifestation of full social maturity. Interestingly, it was stated that, within the Revolution, individual and collective creativity were not mutually exclusive, and that individual liberation would be achieved within the breast of the community; the only contradiction would be between egotism, created by millennia of private property, and consciousness of serving the masses.

57 This cites 1,181 new entrants and eighteen international exhibitions being realised alongside 606 national ones. By now, the organisational structure of the council had been altered, with particular emphasis being given to the preparation of staff, revision of their salary scales, regular meetings and three-monthly statistical analyses.

exchange within the socialist camp; the incorporation of professional artists in the task of stimulating popular creation; and the development of a youth movement. A national seminar for visual arts in 1976 was also mooted (CNC, 1975).⁵⁸

Another misdemeanour for which the CNC was responsible during this period was its reinforcement of the notion, inherited from the previous society, that ‘the majority of intellectuals and artists – at least those who did not engage in really lucrative activities – were a kind of “parasites”’ (Fornet, 2007a:398). In this, the council took great care to isolate those considered the old guard – including those who were scarcely forty years old, thinking them already ‘contaminated’ – instead handing power to the young, who were perceived as politically trustworthy. If, rather than defining this era as one of dogmatism and mediocrity, Fornet speculates, one defines it according to its malignity, it would ‘have to be seen as a dangerous and grotesque phenomenon, because there is nothing more terrible than a dogmatic meddler [...] There are acts from this period – including those of the end of the period – which may be considered crimes of cultural and patriotic treason’ (Ibid:401). Eventually, through their various unions and with recourse to the Law of Work Justice, the persecuted appealed to the Supreme Tribunal which – in an unprecedented case – ruled that this imposition of parameters was unconstitutional and that the claimants ought to be compensated (Ibid).⁵⁹ In 1979, Pavón was ‘retired’ for abuses of power (Arrufat, 2007).

The Grey Areas within the Grey Years

It is important to note that the controversies outlined here were largely confined to theatre, film⁶⁰ and literature,⁶¹ media having the potential for wide distribution of a

⁵⁸ A need for professors was outlined alongside plans to create new art schools, which would require material and human resources (CNC, 1975).

⁵⁹ Pogolotti (2010) describes how the artists concerned also appealed to the thirteenth congress of the CTC, the last to be convened under Lázaro Peña, historic worker-leader of the old Communist Party, who deemed that the separation of the artists from their work constituted a violation of socialist legality.

⁶⁰ Kapcia (2005) notes that ICAIC’s output dropped to just twenty-three films in the period 1971–6 compared to twenty, twenty-four and twenty-seven in 1986, 1987 and 1989 respectively.

⁶¹ Writing about the facilities for literature in 1971, Casal describes how:

The Revolution has substantially increased publishing facilities, both for books and magazines, has established well-funded and prestigious contests, and has subsidized most writers. On the other hand, the abolition of royalties, the nationalization of publishing houses and newspapers, the abolition of some journals, the organization of UNEAC under government auspices, and

message perceived to be counter-revolutionary.⁶² Fidel had earlier differentiated between media on the basis that ‘All manifestations of art have different characteristics. For example, movies are different from painting; [...] It is not the same thing to make a film as it is to paint a picture or write a book’ (Lockwood, 1967:112).⁶³ In 1963, Aguirre isolated literature as the art form in which ideological content was paramount, because it found the shortest route to conceptualisation by using words as its expressive instrument as compared to the sensory stimuli received through music or visual art. This led her to advise caution in relation to writers and playwrights and to urge all intellectuals and artists, but particularly writers, to remain open to being orientated towards ‘correct’ modes of thought.⁶⁴

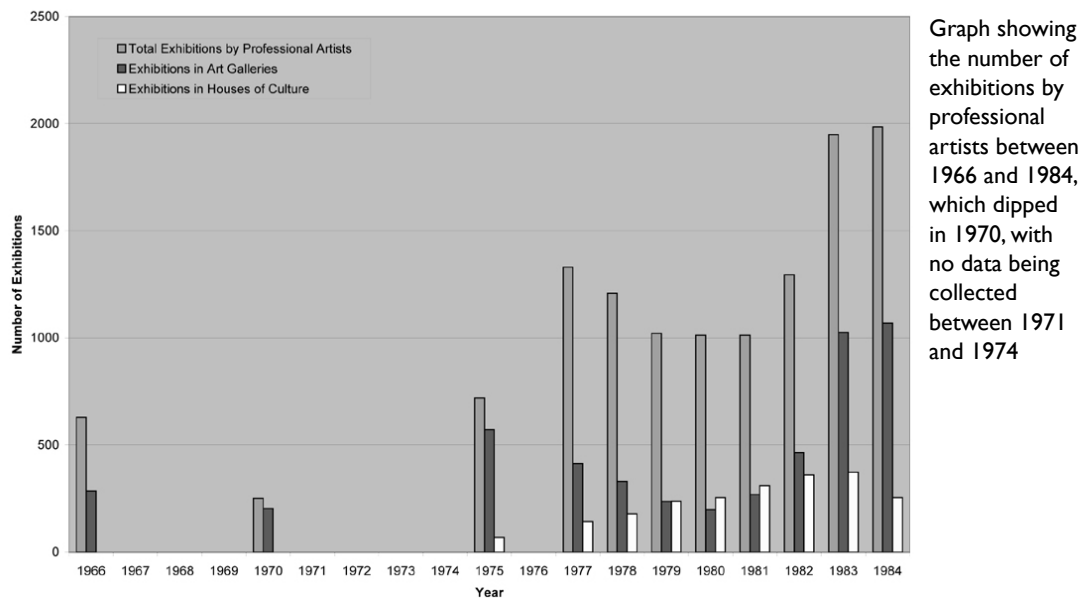
In considering the different nexi around which policy was constructed during this period, it would seem that visual art does not find easy accommodation within emerging categories given its relatively elliptical nature. Rafael Rodríguez would assert that ‘evidently, workers and farmers do not go to [...] exhibitions en masse’ (1967:82), and Mosquera concurs that ‘the space of the visual arts [is] less controlled and more permissive because it is considered a minor activity’ (1999:28). Similarly, Chanan describes how censorship in the film world allowed plastic artists to overtake filmmakers as the vanguard, noting that ‘there is a lively aesthetic debate accompanying the exploration of conceptual art and multi-media work’ (2003:3-4). However, during the five years from 1971 to 1976, levels of cultural production are generally considered to

the integration of all publishing activities into the state agency Instituto del Libro have made the writer totally dependent on the state. The state has used this power to manipulate the writers by granting or withholding publication, using (temporarily) labor camps against some of them, hiring and dismissing them from state jobs, and pressuring them by criticism and appraisal through communications media (1971:463).

62 As evidence of this easy dissemination of a simplistic message, the exception proves the rule, with Dopic Black conceding that ‘the unintelligibility of [Lezama Lima’s] prose to the average Cuban reader protected *Paradiso* from outright censorship’ (1989:130).

63 In considering literature, Fidel conceded that, in addition to economic factors (which saw textbooks being prioritised over fiction), political factors were at play and ‘A book that we did not believe to be of some value wouldn’t have a chance of being published’ (Lockwood, 1967:112).

64 For a detailed account of the literary discourses of this period, see Gilman 2003, particularly chapter 7. This demonstrates how opinion was polarised around *Casa* and *Libre*. The latter of these titles – regarded by Fernández Retamar (1986) as the successor to *Mundo Nuevo* – advocated the creative freedom of the intellectual and included those subjects perceived to have been excluded from the Cuban canon (women, homosexuals, black people). When the magazine folded after a handful of issues, it was perceived as a victory for Cuba around which European intellectuals had again begun to coalesce.



have fallen away, and Kapcia notes that the art world ‘spent much of the 1970s relatively silent’ (2005:160). This becomes evident if we study the official statistics that were issued to account for artistic activity in this era, with 1970 marking a low point and no data being collected for 1971–4.

However, for the artist and writer, Tonel,⁶⁵ the grey years may be reclaimed as a ‘contradictory and dramatic period’ (Eligio Fernández, 1999:40). Similarly, De Juan (2010) suggests that there were ‘many ways of taking refuge from [repression], not taking part in what you don’t believe in’, and points to the Meetings of Latin American Plastic Artists⁶⁶ in the 1970s as evidence of another approach. Four of these meetings took place at Casa – in 1972, 1973, 1976 and 1979 – documentation of which will be analysed briefly here.⁶⁷ In August 1971, when rigid parameters were being applied to artistic work at home, Casa deployed its characteristic continental outlook in a way that was consistent with the objectives of the 1971 congress to announce that a meeting would be taking place the following May.⁶⁸ It was anticipated that this would provide a forum for defining a role that all artists with a revolutionary conscience could assume,

65 Antonio Eligio Fernández, cartoonist and art critic (Camnitzer, 1994).

66 Encuentros de Plásticas Latinoamericanas in the original.

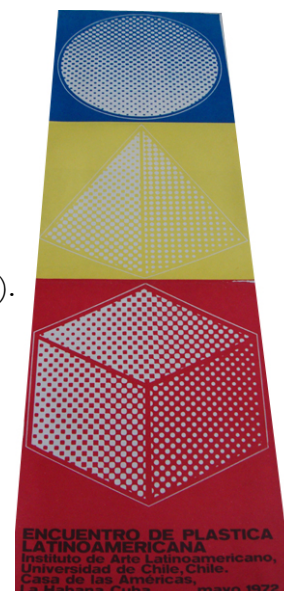
67 Precise dates of the meetings were 24–30 May 1972, 19–20 October 1973, 17–24 May 1976 and 21–25 May 1979.

68 The idea for this meeting had arisen during a Cuba-Chile exhibition taking place that year (Rojas, 1972). In the press release for the 1979 Encuentro, this is named as La Exposición de La Habana [The Exhibition of Havana] 1971 Cuba/Chile.

emphasising the necessity of creating new values in configuring an art that would be the patrimony of all and an intimate expression of Our America. Confronting bourgeois uses of art, this would find its expression in the needs of the populace and signify a re-encounter of the artist with the people (Anon, 1971a).

The first meeting included twenty-six artists, critics and art historians from ten Latin American countries.⁶⁹ Artists Mariano (president) and Lesbia Vent Dumois (secretary) were instrumental in organising the meetings from Casa. Those assembled analysed imperialist cultural strategy and agreed concrete measures for opposing its alienating mechanisms.

The meeting culminated in a collective exhibition of artwork from the participating countries,⁷⁰ a declaration of solidarity with the Vietnamese struggle and an Appeal to Latin American plastic artists. The latter of these,⁷¹ to be distributed throughout the continent, was predicated on an understanding that the historical category of Latin American art was a relatively new one. Those involved took account of, and sought ways of inserting themselves into, the revolutionary struggles taking place across the continent. Liberated from the mechanisms of supply and demand as the Revolution had promised, they asserted that revolutionary art neither suggested a model nor determined a style but implied – as Marx had said – the



Publicity materials for the first Meeting of Latin American Plastic Artists in 1972

69 Co-organised with the Institute of Latin American Art at the University of Chile, participants included: Graciela Carnevale, Ricardo Carpani and Julio Le Parc (Argentina); Sérvulo Esmeraldo (Brasil); Carlos Granada (Columbia); Miguel Rojas Mix, José Balmes, Alejandro González, Eduardo Garreaud, Carlos Maldonado and Lautaro Labbé (Chile); Mario Orozco Rivera (Mexico); Raúl Rodríguez Porcell (Panama); Tilsa Tsuchiya and José Bracamonte (Peru); Eugenio Darnet (Uruguay) and Régulo Pérez (Venezuela). Participating from Cuba were Adelaida de Juan, Carmelo González, Fayad Jamis, José Fowler, Félix Beltran, René de la Nuez and Alberto Carol alongside several assistant/observers. Delegates and Cuban artists were entertained by the CNC (Executive Director, Lázaro Marcos, and Director of Visual Arts, José Pomares) at an evening reception at the National Museum of Fine Arts (Anon, 1972b). According to the press release for the 1979 Encuentro, a reciprocal preparatory meeting – el Encuentro con los Artistas del Cono Sur [the Meeting with the Artists of the Southern Cone] had taken place in Chile.

70 The opening of the exhibition of 240 works by 127 artists was attended by Juan Enrique Vega (Ambassador of Chile in Cuba), Lisandro Otero (Cultural Consul of Cuba in Chile) and José Pomares (Anon, 1972m). It ran for a month in all the rooms at Casa, open 2–7pm daily; this included a display of Peruvian posters and a mural at the exterior of Casa (Rafael, 1972).

71 The appeal was dated 27 May 1972 and signed by all those present.

tendentious character of art in the measure to which it affirms the personality of a people and a culture. Consolidating the declaration of the 1971 congress, the participants to the Appeal proclaimed that Latin American artists could neither declare themselves neutral nor abstractly separate their condition as artists from their duty as people, with the development of revolutionary consciousness being the primary task of the moment.



Participants at the first Meeting of Latin American Plastic Artists in 1972

Just as the 1968 and 1971 congresses had emphasised the necessity of combating imperialist cultural infiltration,⁷² some of the most interesting visual artists of the region (led by one of Cuba's foremost painters) assumed the revolutionary mantle at the 1972 meeting, situating themselves in the continent's showdown with imperialism, denouncing, rejecting, boycotting and dismantling bourgeois ideology where possible,⁷³ engaging in violent confrontation where necessary. Their perceived contribution to the taking of power in advance of implementing a revolutionary cultural programme conducive to the formation of the new man, reads like an attempt to perpetuate the Cuban cultural model in the rest of the continent.

In addition to the written Appeal to all Latin American artists, asking them to join this ideological battle, a concrete programme was devised, which included the creation of a continent-wide network of information/co-



Working groups at the first Meeting of Latin American Plastic Artists in 1972

⁷² The commission of the 1968 congress chaired by Fernández Retamar found that 'Anti-Bodies must be formed to fight against the "invisible" enemy [...], against imperialistic persuasiveness: Anti-Awards-and-Foundations watch committees ought to be set up: Anti-Metropolitan-and-Foreign-Education complexes should be founded to resist imposed language domination, imported popular entertainment and all the other cultural influences designed to overrun the Third World, with their appeal in books, films, television, advertisements, etc.' (Salkey, 1971:149).

⁷³ The second work session was dedicated to a specific consideration of US cultural penetration through biennials, prizes, competitions and grants. During this session, it was agreed to create information centres (Anon, 1972a).

ordination centres, with facilities that could be used to support the struggle against the common imperialist enemy without losing sight of local specificities. Added to this, diverse exhibitions were proposed, accompanied by reproductions of artworks being distributed to work centres.



Haydée Santamaría (centre right) at the first Meeting of Latin American Plastic Artists in 1972

Competitions would be launched to create images and symbols of revolutionary scope that could be used in the struggle. Articles were proposed that contributed to demystifying the mechanisms by which revolutionary art was neutralised, alongside other denunciations of bourgeois repression.

Casa began publishing an irregular visual arts bulletin,⁷⁴ the first issue of which documented the meeting and accompanying exhibition.⁷⁵ In coverage of the event, De Juan describes how purely aesthetic discussions had been rejected from the outset. Rather, those assembled aimed to establish the function of the artist in Latin America in terms of their individual and collective creation and the cultural strategy they would follow. Granada highlighted the most important outcome of the meeting being the opening of dialogue among the revolutionary artists of the continent (De Juan et al, 1972).

In October 1973, thirty-seven artists and critics from nine countries would convene in Havana, many of whom would overlap with the first meeting.⁷⁶ This time,

⁷⁴ This was designed by Umberto Peña, who was also responsible for the graphics of *Casa* journal.

⁷⁵ The concrete accords, dated 30 May 1972, were read by Lesbia Vent Dumois of the visual arts department at Casa and secretary of the presidency (Anon, 1972m).

⁷⁶ This included Graciela Carnevale, Ricardo Carpani, León Ferrari, Ignacio Colombrés, Julio Le Parc, Alejandro Marcos and Luis Felipe Noé (Argentina); Gontran Guanaes Netto (Brasil); Carlos Granada (Columbia); Guillermo Cenicerso and Teresa Morán (Mexico); Raúl Rodríguez Porcell (Panama); José Bracamonte, Ciro Palacios and Cristina Portocarrero (Peru); Rafael Rivera Rosa (Puerto Rico); Luis Arnal, Claudio Cedeño and Régulo Pérez (Venezuela). From Cuba, René Azcuy, Félix Beltran, Adigio Benítez, Francisco Blanco, Alberto Carol, Fayad Jamis, José Fowler, Mario Gallardo, Carmelo González, Ernesto González Puig, Adelaida de Juan, Manuel López Oliva, Sergio Martínez, Luis Martínez Pedro, René de la Nuez, Mariano Rodríguez, Alfredo Rostgaard and Lesbia Vent Dumois were all present. Delegates had the chance to meet with Haydée to discuss the practicalities of economic, educational and cultural work in Cuba (Alvarez Quiñones, 1973a), and were entertained by the CNC (Vice President, Félix Sautié, and Director of Visual Arts, José Pomares) at an evening reception at the Museum of Decorative Arts; UNEAC also hosted delegates for cocktails (Alvarez Quiñones, 1973b).

representatives from Chile were notable by their absence and the event was overshadowed by the recent coup against Salvador Allende. Presided over by Mariano and Gonzalo Rojas,⁷⁷ the meeting made a unanimous statement of support to the Chilean people struggling against the fascist military junta.⁷⁸ Alongside other accords, those present energetically demanded that artworks be donated to a Museum



Participants at the second Meeting of Latin American Plastic Artists in 1973, with Haydée Santamaría and Mariano Rodríguez (facing)

of Solidarity in order to preserve them until power had been returned to popular control in Chile. The meeting unanimously approved the Panamanian delegate's⁷⁹ proposal to send a letter to UN Secretary General, Kurt Waldheim, demanding the safety of all those Chilean artists persecuted, imprisoned and in danger of death.⁸⁰ The meeting then proceeded to a discussion of the ways in which the objectives agreed at the previous meeting had been achieved and an analysis of the efficacy of art as an anti-imperialist device. In alphabetical order, countries undertook to summarise their activities. Argentinean artists had denounced the repression and torture brought about by the military regime of General Alejandro Lanusse by, among other things, mounting an exhibition called 'America of Che', organising two counter-salons in repudiation of the military dictatorship and disseminating the Appeal as widely as possible; Brazilian artists (including émigrés in Paris) were reported to have organised exhibitions, and other politico-cultural acts, denouncing the imprisonment and torture of Brazilian revolutionaries; Panamanian artists had signed the so-called Declaración de Colon,⁸¹ calling upon intellectuals to integrate into a broader anti-imperialist front. Alongside the

⁷⁷ Representative of the Chilean Government of Popular Unity (UP), the leftist coalition that had seen Allende elected to power.

⁷⁸ In support of this, the meeting approved a total cultural blockade of Chile for 4 November, the third anniversary of Allende's ascension to government (Anon, 1973b).

⁷⁹ Raúl Rodríguez Porcell.

⁸⁰ An issue of *Granma* reprinted an extended excerpt from Allende's final speech, which makes reference to the threatened destruction of support for artists and the torture, imprisonment and death suffered by numerous artists, professors, professionals and cultural workers in general (Anon, 1973l).

⁸¹ The Columbus Declaration, addressed to the UN Security Council.

meeting, an exhibition of more than 150 works was organised at the National Museum of Fine Arts⁸² and delegates painted diverse works on the museum patio⁸³ before visiting the historic sites of Oriente province.

Through its discussion of concrete plans, Mariano would differentiate this second meeting from the first, in which it had been necessary to hone a general strategy and tactics. Among the conclusions and accords of the second meeting⁸⁴ were: the intention to organise partisan demonstrations of solidarity against fascism in Chile and in defence of political prisoners and victims of torture;⁸⁵



Participants at the second Meeting of Latin American Plastic Artists undertake some fresco painting on the patio of the National Museum of Fine Arts in 1973

the promotion of artistic activity in working class and popular sectors through the incorporation of visual images into daily struggle; the promotion of art workshops as a platform for party activists; the proliferation of co-ordination centres beyond capital cities; the extension of activities into the recently independent areas of the Caribbean; the exhortation of revolutionary Latin American cultural workers in the common struggle of liberation and the revolutionary forces of the world in their struggle for socialism (*Cuba Internacional*, 1973).⁸⁶ Predictably, *Verde Olivo* emphasised the militant aspect of the artists' programme and implored creators to act on their agreement not to confine their activities to galleries but to work at the base of the revolutionary process itself, not just for the people but within the people (Anon, 1973j). The following year, a bulletin issued by UNESCO's National Commission on Cuba would announce a

82 The exhibition was opened by Mario García Incháustegui (Ambassador of the Government of Popular Unity in Cuba), Mariano and Gonzalo Rojas with functionaries of the CNC in attendance (García Incháustegui, 1973). *Granma* (Anon, 1973k) describes 161 works by eighty-nine artists from eleven countries.

83 Assisted by Belarmino Castilla (Deputy Prime Minister) and Haydée Santamaría.

84 Dated 20 October 1973.

85 The first document to be approved, on 16 October, was an exhortation to the popular and progressive governments of Latin America to give the fullest and most generous political asylum to those persecuted by the military dictatorship in Chile, whatever their nationality. Support was also offered to Puerto Rico and to Arabs facing Zionist aggression, calling on all artists of the world not only to support the restitution of land to Palestine but also to refuse to cooperate with any organisations responding to the interests of Zionism, publicising and justifying Israeli aggression (Anon, 1973c). A short declaration against Zionism was dated 18 October 1973 (Anon, 1973g).

86 The conclusions and accords were dated 20 October 1973 and signed by all those present.

new function for visual artists in the continent as a direct participant in the process of transforming society in response to the anguish and impatience common to all underdeveloped peoples (January–February 1974).

The straitened circumstances of the grey years meant that the next meeting was not organised until 1976 and, even then, participation was much reduced, confined to the Spanish-speaking Antilles of Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic.⁸⁷ Accordingly, discussion themes were confined to a report on the characteristics of creative work in participating countries, a consideration of US support of two events in the region and the possibility of collaborating with all Caribbean countries at the next meeting, with an exchange of ideas in relation to painting creeping in (Cardosa Arias, 1976a). The final declaration sought an end to the mutual ignorance imposed on the continent by the US, marked greater purpose in reaffirming identity and unity in the struggle against imperialism, most acutely expressing solidarity with the Puerto Rican people fighting for their independence and the Panamanians for their canal while continuing to demand freedom for intellectuals, writers and artists in Chile and Uruguay (Anon, 1976d). The final meeting in 1979, which falls beyond the scope of this study, was a return to form, with twenty-nine artists participating from eleven countries. A press release for the event referred to the series as ‘one of the most fruitful and effective paths for contributing to the permanent defence, diffusion and stimulus of culture of our peoples’. And so, just as Gilman (2003) finds that the arrival of illustrious visitors to the island – bringing modernisation to the world of Latin American letters – had neutralised the impact of certain cultural leaders in the 1960s, the solidarity forged among Latin American visual artists at Casa enabled the revolutionary continental aspects of previous congress declarations to be realised in a non-dogmatic environment.

⁸⁷ A statement from Casa cites as participants: Lorenzo Homar and Carlos Irizarry (Puerto Rico); Marianne de Tolentino, Ramón Oviedo, Ada Balcácer, Danilo de los Santos, Fernando Peña Defilló and Silvano Lora (Dominican Republic) with one observer from Panama – Mario Calvit. Mario Tolentino, husband of Marianne, a neurologist, also visited Cuba. Elsewhere, thirteen Panamanian painters – including Teresa Icaza, Guillermo Trujillo, Dario Calvit, Antonio Alvarado, Horacio Rivera, Luis Aguilar, Luis Méndez and Alfredo Sinclair – are said to have taken part in the meeting (Anon, 1976f). An exhibition of 170 works by eighty artists from the participating countries (press release, 1979) was hosted in the Casa galleries, a daily programme of museum, theatre and cinema visits was planned to given an idea of Cuban achievements in the development of education and culture (De Tolentino, 1976a), while Jibacoa and Oriente were also visited (De Tolentino, 1976b).

Emerging from the Grey Years

While the five years from 1971 arguably marked a low point for relations between creative practitioners and the cultural agencies of the state, it is generally agreed that a thawing occurred from 1976, ‘perhaps somewhat surprisingly, since this coincided with supposedly the period of greatest political “orthodoxy” with institutionalisation’ (Kapcia, 2005:155).⁸⁸ Two crucial events of the mid-1970s, which facilitated this shift, will be mentioned here.

First Congress of the Cuban Communist Party, 17–22 December 1975

After nearly sixteen post-revolutionary years, the PCC convened the first⁸⁹ of six congresses to have been organised to date.⁹⁰ Among twenty main themes – ranging from legislative to agricultural matters – a thesis and resolutions were elaborated on artistic and literary culture and included in a dedicated chapter of the retrospective publication. Further to the detrimental effects of the grey years, the congress provided the party and the revolutionary government with an opportunity to refocus its attitude towards culture. In tacit recognition of the stultification that had occurred, it was stated that PCC policy on artistic culture aimed to establish an atmosphere most conducive to the progress of art and literature, conceived as the legitimate aspiration of all the people and the fundamental duty of the political, state and mass institutions.

Ripoll maintains that ‘because of the political and propaganda value that is expected in art, as was made clear in the Party platform, even that freedom in artistic form is subject to the obligation to create a functional art that will serve the interests of the government’ (1985:469). However, the majority of commentators are agreed that the party congress represented an important shift in ending the instrumentalisation

88 Dopico Black concedes that ‘Between 1976 and 1978, a number of writers were removed from the state’s “blacklist”’ (1989:109).

89 The first congress had initially been planned for the end of 1967 but the party was apparently not organised enough (Lockwood, 1967).

90 The most recent congress was scheduled for 16–19 April 2011, to coincide with the fiftieth anniversary of the Bay of Pigs invasion. Information about the various congresses can be obtained at the PCC website: http://www.pcc.cu/congresos_asamblea/cong_asamb.php with an idea of party activities and preparations leading up to the various congresses being given at: <http://congresopcc.cip.cu/referencias/cronologia-2> (both accessed 14 April 2011).

of culture to political objectives. Thenceforth, cultural policy would rest on two fundamental propositions – firstly, that creative abilities fully express their power and uniqueness; secondly, that the work produced by writers and artists contributes valuable support to the initiation of social and personal liberation that socialism embodies. Again, the distinction between amateur and professional practice is implicitly maintained, and again we see emancipatory understandings of cultural production being foregrounded and the prescription of themes being avoided. As such, the objectives of socialism and communism were aligned with those of art and literature in achieving the noblest of human aspirations, with culture being directed towards the creation of the new man. Based on an understanding that the Revolution had created and reinforced the material and spiritual conditions necessary for the freest artistic creation and the social esteem this confers, the responsibility of creators to the project of social and human transformation was reasserted alongside the right to reject any attempt to use art as an instrument adverse to socialism. In cultural policy terms, continuity with earlier cultural congresses is evident, notably through references to the assimilation of Cuban cultural heritage and the best of universal culture (Comité Central del PCC, 1976).

Consistent with the occasion and in accordance with Marxist-Leninist principles, art and literature were harnessed to the socialist humanism inherent in the Revolution, with a section of the thesis distinguishing this from bourgeois humanism. The former was regarded as exalting the solidarity between peoples, encouraging the best and most progressive in man, while the latter was seen as a corruption of the revolutionary origins of the bourgeois class, characterised by private ownership, the profit motive and the individualism of a conservative and reactionary class, underpinned by exploitation and the negation of human values (Comité Central del PCC, 1976). In this formulation, culture was placed centre stage in the ideological confrontation between the two. Accordingly, a section of the thesis on culture is dedicated to the struggle against colonialism, neo-colonialism and imperialism, against attempts by exploiters to brutally impose their cultural values on a country. The most appropriate source for new artistic

production was taken to be ‘the same essence of socialism, the daring and vitality of which is situated in the scientific certainty of the perfectibility of man, in an inexorable future of well-being and happiness, in revolutionary optimism and in the fraternity and solidarity which result in a highly elevated level of social development’ (Ibid:475-6).⁹¹

The congress would also reaffirm the government’s commitment to the *aficionados* movement, and demand ‘the support of the most qualified specialists, artists and instructors and a full mobilisation of activists’ at the same time as insisting on the ‘elevation of artistic quality’ (Ibid:489). The continuing rationale behind this programme was that ‘Those who participate in artistic activities as *aficionados* will better understand surrounding reality, will intensify their sensibility for colour, movement, sound, word and image; they will enrich their representation of the world and they will be more capable of interpreting and valuing artistic manifestations’ (loc cit). As Cuba emerged from the grey years, the party congress advocated full institutional and professional support for cultural workers and, in a return to the consensus of the 1968 congress, the widespread utilisation of mass media in disseminating the work of (professional) artists and writers.⁹² At this time, the revolutionary position with respect to aesthetics was that:

Socialist society requires an art which, through aesthetic enjoyment, contributes to the education of the people. The generalising and educative character of art is a factor of great importance in promoting and contributing to strengthening the new, which emerges from the habits of life and work in socialist society under construction – which does not imply limiting the role of art and literature to a didactic function but the recognition of the great possibilities for the formation and transformation of man (Ibid:483).

It is interesting to note here the explicit rejection of the didacticism that had dogged the grey years, and an embrace of the approach Fornet had advocated in 1962 (after Croce and Gramsci), whereby ‘In the first instance, that which art *teaches* us is to sharpen the senses; that which art *educates* is our sensibility (2004:12; i.i.o.). This formed the theoretical basis for a further comment on the expressive properties of art, which took account of the contemporaneous photorealism being produced by artists:

91 This forms paragraph twelve of the resolutions on culture (Comité Central del PCC, 1976).

92 Advocacy of the use of the written press, radio, TV, cinema, publications and other media, to disseminate the work of those who stood out for their merits, was asserted in paragraph fifteen of the congress resolutions on culture (Ibid).

The nexus between socialist art and reality resides in an apprehension of their essences and its aesthetic expression through the most appropriate formal structures. That which is important is not a simple copy of reality but the quality living and dynamic reflections of which Lenin spoke to characterise the knowledge conveyed in art, unearthing the intimate truth of objective processes by means of specific aesthetic languages (Comité Central del PCC, 1976:483).

In this way, art was finally freed from didacticism and mimesis and hailed as a way of increasing understanding about the objective world, by utilising aesthetics to interrogate reality.

The Ministry of Culture (1976)

Fornet (2007a) recounts how such a sigh of relief has never been heard in Cuba as that which accompanied the television broadcast, on the afternoon of 30 November 1976, announcing the creation of the Ministry of Culture.⁹³ In the birth of the ministry, Miller echoes Benítez-Rojo in finding that ‘the government’s responses to cultural works henceforth tended to be shaped by the perceived relationship of their creator to the revolutionary regime: those deemed to be loyal enjoyed some leeway, those suspected of dissidence did not’ (1999:76). Nonetheless, the inception of the Ministry, to replace the CNC, seems to have been designed to calm cultural waters at home. For Fornet, Hart’s appointment categorically ended the *quinquenio gris*, and the country’s relief was due in no small part to the fact that ‘Old or young, party member or not, he did not ask if one liked [...] the Beatles, if one appreciated realist or abstract painting more, if one preferred strawberry to chocolate or vice versa; he asked only if one was disposed to work’ (2007a:401). Indeed, one ‘had the impression that he rapidly re-established the confidence lost and that the consensus would be made anew’ (loc cit). Pogolotti (2010) describes how, ‘at the beginning of 1977, Hart had a meeting with the writers and artists of UNEAC, which marked an opening in the ambit of artistic creation that was certainly very well received’. Hart reassured his audience that, ‘when government officials with responsibilities in the cultural area misunderstand their mission and feel justified in interfering with the artists’ creative work, they lose prestige and influence and

⁹³ The Ministry was created under law 1323 on 30 November 1976 and entrusted with the protection of cultural patrimony on 4 August 1977 (under law 1).

become unable to fulfill [sic] their duties' (Camnitzer, 1994:128). Instead, he advocated a 'cultured' politics – which involved communication across society, democratic dialogue, self-reflection and self-analysis – a form of thinking that was not only revolutionary but also autonomous, critical and organic (Acanda González, 2003).

In citing Hart's assertion that 'To confuse art and politics is a political mistake. To separate art and politics is another mistake' (1992:77), Craven observes that:

Both positions reaffirm a dialectical approach to art by disallowing the mechanical reduction of art to the old dichotomy that counterposes political or ideological content with aesthetic form. Such a binary view, which implies that art is a passive reproduction or reflection of the 'correct' position, quite naively overlooks the way a visual language actively shapes, forms and even transforms the ideological values and political position it transmits, as part of a dynamic interchange among these interrelated parts (Ibid:92).

Seeking an end to institutionalised intolerance, Hart inaugurated a network of organisations better able to cope with the demands of the mid-1970s, some of which will have been discussed in chapter five,⁹⁴ and it has been observed that: 'Just a few years later [...] these new state structures began to assimilate the need for a more profound change of policy. This was not the result of a new interpretation of the cultural phenomenon per se. Rather, it was demanded by artists themselves, who expressed their feelings clearly in their work' (Padura Fuentes, 2001:179). He also encouraged the cultural communities to look beyond Cuba for their inspiration and participated in the rehabilitation of those creative intellectuals persecuted in the preceding years (Kapcia, 2005).

Until 1976, the revolutionary government had worked with an amended version of the 1940 Constitution, which stated that 'culture in all of its manifestations constitutes a fundamental interest of the State. Scientific research, artistic expression, and the publication of their results, as well as education, are free, in this regard, without prejudice, from inspection and regulation by the State, as established by law' (Bell et al, 2006:55). When the new Constitution – which has variously been claimed to have been USSR-influenced (Miller, 1999) and market-driven (Benítez-Rojo, 1990) – was accepted by the people in a referendum (Fernández Retamar, 1996),⁹⁵ a specific article

⁹⁴ He also loosened the restrictions on previously-sanctioned artists and writers (Kapcia, 2005).

⁹⁵ Craven notes that this was accompanied by 'changes [which] involved a shift from unrelieved national decision-making to *poder local* [local power] and to the establishment of a degree of workplace

on education and culture was added which contained a clause echoing ‘Words to the Intellectuals’ to state that ‘artistic creation is free so long as its content is not contrary to the Revolution. Forms of expression in art are free’ (1976:39d).

When asked, in an interview for the popular magazine, *Bohemia*, whether the Cuban Revolution had been subject to errors of dogmatism or liberalism in the cultural sphere, Hart was keen to distinguish between generalised errors of this kind, which could not be said to exist within Cuban cultural policy, and those specific instances of dogmatism that had crept in to create an abyss between intellectual sectors and socialist thinking (Sanchez, 1989). Camnitzer describes how ‘The peak of dogmatism that occurred during the 1970s [...] is severely criticized in Cuba today as a grave cultural mistake and considered as something akin to a “dark age.” There have been and still are “hawks and doves” in Cuba’ (1994:128). Accordingly, MINCULT would become a haven for doves, while maintaining ideological consistency and fertilising the ground for artistic practice (Ibid). By the mid- to late-1970s, cultural policy was much more clearly defined in relation to revolutionary aims and the perceived needs of artists and people,⁹⁶ and, from the vantage point of the late-1980s, Hart would describe its essence as ‘that which is able to develop the fullest freedom in the artistic field on the foundation of the development of the highest patriotic and revolutionary conscience and of the most elevated political sensibility’ (Sanchez, 1989:8). In 1996, just before resigning his position, he would argue that his ministry had assumed ‘responsibility for applying the principles enunciated by Fidel in “Words to the Intellectuals” and for radically banishing the weaknesses and errors which had arisen in the instrumentalisation of that policy’ (Fernández Retamar, 2001:304). This would be achieved by fostering national culture and articulating socialist thinking appropriate to the century, to which end, Hart recognised that ‘in a field as subtle and delicate as art and culture it was necessary to employ the political styles of Martí and Fidel’ (loc cit).⁹⁷

democracy hardly rivalled [sic] elsewhere in the world, all of which resulted in the new and more democratic Constitution of 1976’ (1992:89).

⁹⁶ By the end of the 1970s, a UNESCO pamphlet would pronounce that ‘The object of the cultural policy of the Government and Communist Party of Cuba is to establish a highly creative atmosphere conducive to the advancement of all forms of cultural expression, as a legitimate aspiration of the people and as a duty of the political, State and mass organizations’ (Sarusky and Mosquera, 1979:21).

⁹⁷ Miller describes how:

During the *quinquenio gris*, prejudices about sexual preference had been accompanied by more generalised prejudices about the intellectual condition, which undermined the role of artists and writers in acting as the ‘critical conscience’ (Fornet, 2007a:397) of society. When the country emerged from the grey years, these tensions did completely not disappear – rather, Fornet claims that conflicts of opinions were left to flourish in a living culture, with relations transmuting into mutual respect and an authentic interest in the normal development of shared culture (Ibid). In this way, the atmosphere that had been sought by film-makers in 1963, in which multifarious intellectual currents and aesthetic tendencies would be allowed to thrive, would seem to have been achieved. In 1991, Hart would write about the setbacks, pain and sorrow caused during that earlier era, while simultaneously asserting that none of the strategists responsible had the influence necessary to cloud the broader cultural work of the Revolution. On the contrary, the highest and finest level of intellectuals remained loyal to ‘Words to the Intellectuals’ and to service of the Revolution (Fernández Retamar, 2001).

Remarks in Conclusion

When detailed consideration is given the factors that brought about the narrowing of creative possibility during this phase of Cuban cultural development, a certain amount of confusion is evident. In the first place, there are anomalies in relation to the timing and broader geopolitical shifts that might go some way towards explaining it. The timeframe of the grey period is typically taken to encompass the years between 1971 and 1976. However, as we saw here, the situation for creative practitioners worsened during the closing years of the 1960s. Consistent with this outlook, the main Cuban

[...] in the early 1990s there was a manifest official shift away from a Sovietised version of Marxism-Leninism (back) to Cuban progressive nationalism laced with a dash of Marxism. This change was inscribed in the constitutional amendments of 1992, which retained the previous clause on artistic freedom, and established the guiding force of the Revolution as ‘the worldview (*el ideario*) of José Martí and the socio-political ideas of Marx, Engels and Lenin’, instead of ‘the victorious doctrine of Marxism-Leninism’, as in the 1976 version. The revised constitution also stated that thenceforth education and cultural policy would be founded on ‘the advances of science and technology, Marxist thought and the ideas of José Martí (*el ideario marxista y martiano*), the progressive Cuban pedagogic tradition and the universal pedagogic tradition’ rather than solely on ‘the scientific conception of the world, established and developed by Marxism-Leninism’ (2008:679).

commentator on the *quinquenio gris*, Ambrosio Fornet, notes that 1971 witnessed ‘an upturn in dogmatism’ (2004:13). Similarly, while steps were taken to reverse this trend in 1975–6, it would take several more years before the damage was repaired.

In considering the causes of the grey years, Miller allows to remain uncontested the idea that sharper measures were applied when ‘Cuba’s relationship with the USSR sharply deteriorated in 1967–8’ (2008:677). And, while Gilman (2003) refers to a worsening Cuban-Soviet polemic at the end of 1968, Karol argues more convincingly that this was the precise moment at which Cuba became reconciled to the USSR. Taking the facts outlined in this chapter together with earlier trends, it would seem that the restoration of relations with Moscow towards the end of 1968 paved the way for the emboldening of orthodox positions.

In chapter two, we saw how CIA-sanctioned attacks on Cuba were far from fictitious. Within this perpetual war, the notion of art as an arm of the Revolution – alluded to throughout the 1960s – was given renewed emphasis in 1971. In considering the hierarchical relationship between Cuba and its main antagonist, we find that the autumn of 1968 coincided with the beginning of a sustained attempt on behalf of the CIA-funded *Mundo Nuevo* to exacerbate conflicts within Cuba, in particular around the judging process of that year’s UNEAC prize.

Within Cuba, we should bear in mind Fornet’s assertion that the ongoing dispute was one between dogmatists and liberals. Considerable attention has been given to the former camp throughout this study while the declaration of the 1971 congress would allude to the latter, which we can presume to contain Padilla and any remaining members of *Lunes*, aided and abetted by the capitalist media. Fornet notes the regrettable upshot of this conflict being the retreat of intellectuals into their work, which deprived the Revolution of their active participation and provided further ammunition for those dogmatists determined to berate them for their perceived disinterest in revolutionary participation.

At the same time, we have seen how liberal writers at home and abroad reasserted their ideal critical role, prominent among whom was Vargas Llosa, who

aligned himself with the Cuban émigré community in Europe and took the lead in authoring the second letter to Fidel following Padilla's mock confession. In response to this largely external threat, the 1971 congress vehemently rejected the claim that a limited group of bourgeois pseudo-intellectuals should act as the critical conscience of society, favouring instead the assumption of a critical role by the people. However, it is important to note that this did not amount to a total rejection of critique on the part of intellectuals; rather, it contained the potential to reinforce their position within the Revolution.

In the wake of the postmodern era, during which ideology became a dirty word, Miller denigrates the emanations of the 1971 congress as 'one of the most restrictive government statements on culture (declaring that aesthetic values could not be separated out from ideological content)' (2008:687). However, in the previous chapter, we saw that aesthetic values were inextricably linked to the content of artworks by all parties to the debate that took place in 1963. Rather than tying aesthetic form to ideological content *per se*, the 1971 congress emphasised the links between culture and the humanist aims of the Revolution, with Fidel asserting that there could be no aesthetic value without human content, no aesthetic value opposed to man or to justice, well being, freedom or man's happiness. Rather than being an oppressive novelty, there are several consistencies between Fidel's speech to the 1971 congress and those of the decade preceding it. Two months after the later speech was delivered, Fernández Retamar would find that, in giving primacy to creative works according to their contribution to humanity, Fidel continued in the same vein as his 'Words' from 1961. Similarly, in chapter four, we saw how Fidel proclaimed in the mid 1960s that:

As a revolutionary, it is my understanding that one of our fundamental concerns must be that all the manifestations of culture be placed at the service of man, developing in him all the most positive feelings. For me, art is not an end in itself. Man is its end; making man happier, making man better. I do not conceive of any manifestations of culture, of science, of art, as purposes in themselves. I think that the purpose of science and culture is man (Lockwood, 1967:111).

Referring to the enclave of traditional intellectuals nurtured by the bourgeois world in 1971, Fidel would ask rhetorically: 'Why should we care about the magic of

those sorcerers; why should we care when we know that we have the possibility of making an entire people creative, of making an entire people intellectuals, making them writers, making them artists – a whole people. This is the revolution, this is socialism, this is communism – because it seeks to liberate the masses, it seeks to liberate all society from exploitation’ (1971b:3). In this exhortation, he succinctly prioritises the creation of organic intellectuals, which had been an abiding preoccupation since ‘History Will Absolve Me’ of 1953. As before, then, care must be taken to distinguish Fidel’s words from the restrictive ways in which they were interpreted by cultural bureaucrats.

In revisiting Fidel’s actions of the late 1960s, Karol finds that:

[...] in opting for militarization, Castro had departed from his thesis on the need for introducing elements of Communism during the present phase of socialist construction, and of initiating a genuine political and ideological confrontation with the orthodox. The Cuban leader gave the impression of having deliberately sacrificed the most original – and, to progressive opinion, the most fascinating – aspects of his experiment by suddenly slamming the door shut on all criticism, all genuine discussion, all forms of political dialectics (1970:494-5).

That the army magazine, *Verde Olivo*, led cultural debate from 1968 onwards adds validity to Karol’s impression of increased militarisation. That a FAR officer and former editor of *Verde Olivo* became president of the CNC also speaks volumes, and we have witnessed the devastating impact of this appointment. During the early 1970s, the idea of placing cultural power in the hands of young, ‘uncontaminated’ artists would be actively pursued, by focusing on the indoctrination of brigades of youngsters, with the CNC co-ordinating creative retreats at the sites of military victories in the Sierra Maestra. In parallel to this, artistically inclined teachers were revered as a new (and, by implication, non-professional) vanguard, ideological training was being recommended for all teachers and, by 1972, the prescription of socio-economic themes within creative work had explicitly entered the policy documents of the CNC.

According to Karol’s account (1970), the Soviet synergies of the late 1960s completely superseded the anti-imperialist project, but it would seem that Fidel’s scepticism towards the continent’s Marxist parties, which had been in evidence in 1968, was reinforced in 1971 in a way that Karol could not have foreseen the previous

year. And, while the anti-imperialist campaign may have been postponed in the political realm, it was approached with new vigour among the intellectuals of the cultural field. In this sense, the Meetings of Latin American Plastic Artists, hosted by Casa de las Américas between 1972 and 1979, took the meaning of ‘art as an arm of the Revolution’ literally, calling upon creative colleagues throughout the continent to join their ranks. In a more concerted effort than had been made before or has been attempted since, they fully explored the power of art as a weapon, opening up new pan-American avenues for the sharing of information and the co-ordination of activities, while testing new strategies for devising and disseminating experimental and revolutionary visual icons. Never allowing the focus of their mission to be sidetracked by relapses into aesthetic discussions, the participants to these encounters sought to establish the function of the artist in Latin America once and for all. In this way, the solidarities between visual artists forged at Casa during the 1970s served as a forerunner to the critical artistic ‘assemblies’ (discussed in chapter eight) that Mosquera has subsequently identified.

As we have seen, the trigger for the island’s emergence from the grey years was the first PCC congress at the end of 1975. This recognised the inherent power and uniqueness of creative practice, while acknowledging that the work undertaken by writers and artists contributed valuable support to the construction of socialism. Representing a significant departure from instrumental understandings of culture, this accepted aesthetic experience to be an educative experience in and of itself. This simultaneously, and definitively, put an end to the advocacy of educative art and exempted creative praxis from the need to represent objective reality. In this way, during the second half of the 1970s, art was finally freed from the expectations of both didacticism and mimesis and hailed as a way of increasing our understanding of the world by any means necessary.

Chapter Eleven: Concluding Remarks

During the course of this study, it has become clear that, before 1959, the Cuban cultural infrastructure of museums, galleries and cinemas was dilapidated and unfit for purpose, and the decision to undertake creative work was a risky business that was only tenable through self-financing from sales of work or other sources. At the same time, as in other areas of social life, there was a persistent divide between rural and urban parts of the island (which saw resources concentrated on Havana), and a huge gulf between the cultural access that was provided to an elite minority and that available to the rest of the population.

Notwithstanding, among those who would lead the Revolution and the intellectual communities, there was a high level of cultural consciousness. Moreover, discussions about improving the island's cultural situation were being undertaken within *Nuestro Tiempo*, the cultural society born of frustrations around the disconnection between art and the people. Just over two years into the life of the society, the 1953 assault on the Moncada barracks prompted the PSP (which would eschew armed resistance for another five years) to heighten its activities in the cultural arena. One of the ways in which it attempted this was by assuming responsibility for the political orientation of *Nuestro Tiempo*, a move which would seem to have been embraced by the society's members, consolidating their creative dissent in the face of dictatorship. This politico-cultural platform enabled support for the Revolution to be articulated while attention was given to forms of cultural policy appropriate to creative praxis.

In considering the years immediately before and after the Revolution, another factor that emerges as significant is the proactive part played by the country's creative practitioners in determining their fate, and the extent to which this was encouraged by the revolutionary government. Under the auspices of *Nuestro Tiempo*, for example, the film-maker, Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, would outline a programme for overhauling the indigenous film industry that provided a useful template for ICAIC. Having consistently addressed cultural questions during the 1950s, the country's leading artists and writers

converged on Camagüey in October 1960, to align their praxis with the aims of the Revolution. We have seen how the agenda that was developed at this meeting would find its way into the First National Congress of Writers and Artists in August 1961 in advance of the revolutionary government formalising its policy in the field.

It is also to the precedent of *Nuestro Tiempo* that we must also look when seeking to understand why, in 1961, the PSP was given responsibility for formulating cultural policy via the CNC. As the only group within the ORI to have given consideration to cultural policy before the Revolution, this would have seemed to be a logical choice. At the same time, we have seen how the failure of the PSP to dissolve its Cultural Directorate created tensions that would thwart the CNC for most of its existence, exacerbated whenever Cuban-Soviet relations were strengthened. Yet, although the PSP-dominated CNC would eventually subsume both ICAIC and Casa de las Américas under its jurisdiction, the fact that these two pioneering institutions came into being within two and three months of revolutionary victory is notable, as is that fact that their leadership was assumed by loyal 26 July figures.

More generally, those who had fought alongside Fidel would be given central roles once the Revolution triumphed, and we have seen how Che went on to occupy influential positions and provide the impetus for the educational and cultural direction the country pursued thereafter. Similarly, the inextricability of Haydée Santamaría with Moncada and the actions of Armando Hart in the Sierra Maestra secured them posts in post-revolutionary society that would have a significant impact on the cultural field and provide a defence against the worst moments of dogmatism. By contrast, it is necessary to mention the conflicts experienced by those protagonists among the revolutionary intelligentsia who felt themselves to have been bystanders to the insurrection. We have seen how Guevara, Fernández Retamar and Otero took part in revolutionary activity through the relative safety of the clandestine urban struggle, which, for the latter at least, created a hangover of recrimination that could never be completely shed.

While the main research questions that framed this study – centred on the people, places and policy underwriting the cultural revolution – have been answered in the appropriate chapters, perhaps more interesting to scholars of cultural policy are the considerations of theory and ideology that this study has permitted. It is with a sense of weary inevitability that we reflect on the post-revolutionary dispute between the two factions Fornet identifies as dogmatists and liberals. We have seen that, while the declaration of the socialist character of the Revolution was little more than a formality – consolidating its social and anti-imperialist aims – it caused urgent questions to be raised about the nature of creative practice that would be permissible in Cuba thenceforward. Cognisant of both the Stalinist roots of the PSP and the catastrophe that befell culture in the Soviet Union, cultural protagonists in Cuba – particularly the group around *Lunes*, which was heavily invested in European avant-garde ideas and Sartre’s notion of the committed intellectual – attempted to defend freedom of expression at all costs.

We have also seen that concerns about the PSP takeover of culture were not unfounded. Studied in microcosm, the tussle between CNC *sarampionados* and artists, writers and film-makers, which took place throughout the 1960s, provides some useful insight into the parameters being discussed in relation to cultural production under socialism. Revisiting Aguirre’s treatise on realism, we find that a fundamental conflict was centred on whether or not multiple forms of expression should be permitted to coexist in the new society. With the benefit of fifty years of hindsight, CNC attempts to render abstract art synonymous with idealist philosophy, as a prelude to the abolition of both, may be regarded as reductive and undialectical. Similarly, while CNC spokespeople insisted that artworks had an inherently class character, a consensus emerged among cultural practitioners that it was they (rather than their artefacts) who were the potential bearers of ideology and thereby implicated in the eradication of class society. In turn, this implied that cultural products must be judged according to the socio-economic system in which they were made, and one has only to compare the Pop collages of Raúl Martínez with those of Andy Warhol to see that this is the case.

If the law of value is abolished, as was attempted in the post-revolutionary cultural field during the period of this study, the terms of the debate are turned on their head and art is evaluated according to the social role it plays. During the early 1960s, this way of thinking led to advocacy, within the CNC, of an 'educative art' with a didactic message. However, we have seen that creative intellectuals attempted to promote the idea that art educates by heightening receptiveness to the world around us – by showing us *how* to think and feel, rather than dictating the content of those thoughts and feelings. By the time of the first PCC congress in December 1975, the revolutionary government subscribed to this understanding of the inherently educational nature of aesthetic experience.

Furthermore, it has been evident that the ambition to eradicate the gap between art and society, long ago abandoned by the historical avant-garde and its reincarnations in Europe and the US, was resurrected within the Cuban experiment. Cultural democratisation rested on the conviction of revolutionary leaders that both passive spectatorship and active production were necessary to human emancipation. The enormous effort and commitment required to educate the people to both appreciate and produce cultural forms cannot be underestimated, and President Dorticós is noteworthy for his refusal to equate mass access with vulgar popular forms of art.

As we have seen, the participatory element of cultural democratisation required a total overhaul of the education system, the construction of new schools and the training of hundreds of thousands of teachers, which represented a political and economic commitment that remains unsurpassed in any other part of the world. It seems clear that the *aficionados* programme made artistic opportunities available to all those members of the population wishing to take part. As a result, the Cuban people benefit from a high degree of cultural literacy. However, questions remain about the extent to which this access permitted the emergence of new creative intellectuals. While there is evidence that scope existed for the transition between amateur and professional ranks, there is an extent to which the low expectations around artistic quality in

aficionado circles inhibited nascent artists from making this leap. One can assume that the deployment of instructors as intermediaries between professional and amateur artists did not create a direct enough relationship for quality to be transmitted. Furthermore, while serious attempts were made to undermine creative professionals during the 1970s by repressive currents within the CNC, the distinction between professional and amateur remained, which allowed elitism to persist. In the final reckoning, perhaps there was not enough willingness on the part of intellectuals trained before the Revolution either to disseminate their creative skills or to relinquish their hard won territory.

Another interesting facet of this discussion has been in the area of critique, and the extent to which this was tolerated and encouraged in post-revolutionary society. We have seen how, within the capitalist world (including that of pre-revolutionary Cuba), artists of a committed persuasion tend to assume a critical stance. While certain of their European and Latin American colleagues upheld their claim to serve as the critical conscience of society throughout the 1960s, it fell to Cuban artists and writers to accommodate their understanding of critique to the Revolution. During the early post-revolutionary years, this evolved into a form of critique that exposed the contradictions and errors in the revolutionary process alongside a desire to solve the problems identified, which was initially accompanied by an acknowledgement by the revolutionary government of the need to maintain a self-reflexive critique and to cultivate the critical abilities of the people. Sadly, this process did not come to fruition and, from 1968, underhanded attempts were made to suppress criticality within the intellectual community through various demonisation strategies. Since the early 1980s, critique has returned to the intellectual domain, with visual art consistently providing a nexus for the airing of societal problems, and Navarro (2001) asserts that the success of post-Soviet socialism in particular depends on whether theory and practice can uphold the critical adhesion of intellectuals to the Revolution, whether it is capable of publicly responding to social critique and whether it can not only tolerate but also propagate such critique according to the principles, ideals and values it claims as its own.

It is repeatedly claimed here that post-revolutionary Cuba provides an example of Marxist-humanist cultural policy in practice. Ramonet notes that ‘Although Cuba in no way intends to “export” its socio-political model, in many places in the world women and men protest, struggle and sometimes die trying to attain social objectives such as those achieved by the Cuban Revolution’ (2005-8:7). Taking culture to be an integral part of social justice, it is presumed that those in the neoliberal world might learn from Cuba’s comprehensive re-evaluation of culture. Setting aside *cubanía* and the building of national culture that was specific to Cuba’s status as a country deprived of its identity during centuries of colonial and neo-colonial rule, it is possible to isolate the main tenets of Marxist-humanist cultural policy as follows:

- Cultural heritage provides us with glimpses of humanity’s development. As such, the best of universal culture should be preserved for future generations, not only in its technical aspects but also on the basis of the insights it can offer.
- Cultural production must be released from the law of value, through the provision of bursaries/salaries and, where necessary, a reconsideration of copyright.
- With the right encouragement, those engaging in mental labour may emerge from any sector of society to play a social role.
- Socialism provides both the possibility and necessity of integrating the creator with the social totality. A close relationship between art and the people can be nurtured through both passive spectatorship and active participation. In the first place, this implies that ‘all the manifestations of culture be placed at the service of man, developing in him all the most positive feelings’ (Fidel). In the second place, it acknowledges that active participation in cultural production develops spiritual life and carries with it an emancipatory potential.
- The political commitment of intellectuals is to be found in a combination of their praxis with revolutionary activities, the dissemination of revolutionary ideas at home and abroad and the raising of problems in order to find solutions.
- Creative practitioners also have a part to play in engendering revolutionary consciousness, which relies on their full participation in class struggle.
- The inherent power and uniqueness that resides within creative practice means that the work undertaken by writers and artists contributes valuable support to the construction of socialism.
- Art reflects reality and may change our perception of it, but creative practitioners do not necessarily have to cultivate revolutionary themes in their work in a direct way; a new vision of the world will inevitably communicate itself indirectly through their work.

- Aesthetic experience is educative in and of itself. This presupposes that ‘the content of any artistic work of any kind – *its very quality for its own sake, without its necessarily having to carry a message* – can give rise to a beneficial and noble feeling in the human being’ (Fidel).
- The quality of intellectual work is paramount, as society would be disadvantaged by anything less.
- Freedom of experimentation must be maintained in an environment in which all aesthetic tendencies can be explored.
- Cultural works do not have an inherently class character – they are conditioned by the socio-economic conditions in which they are produced. So, a painting or collage, produced under capitalism, will have different resonance to one produced under socialism, but painting or collage, abstract or figurative art, cannot be labelled solely ‘capitalist’ or ‘socialist’.
- Creative practitioners are to be involved in the development of policies that affect their work.
- Culture cannot be developed in isolation – it both assimilates and informs international developments.
- Culture may be deployed as a weapon in anti-imperialist struggles, by enabling new forms of communication and revolutionary aesthetics to be developed.
- The dialectical nature of critique must be embraced within a cultivated and educated society capable of forming opinions about a social reality that is constantly in flux.
- It is not enough to critique existing reality or to identify past mistakes (first order negation). In adherence with Hegel’s theory of absolute negativity, positive, emancipatory visions of the future rely on achieving a negation of this negation.

If we can take a universal lesson from the Cuban Revolution, it is, as Fidel long ago observed, that subjective conditions outweigh objective ones in a society undergoing revolutionary change. Whereas Marx had somewhat optimistically expected consciousness to change spontaneously when capitalism was overturned, Lenin better understood that revolutionary consciousness would need to be both stimulated and sustained. In the Cuban case, it seems clear that this process was in its infancy at the moment of revolutionary triumph. The seizure of power by a relatively small fraction of the population with mass popular support gave way to a sustained campaign aimed at endowing the people with the educational and critical tools necessary for achieving class consciousness and inspiring individual and collective effort in overcoming the country’s

underdeveloped condition. We have seen the unique part that was played by culture in this ambitious retrospective effort, and the reader is left to decide whether such a large-scale shift in attitude and behaviour was tenable under the circumstances. What seems beyond doubt is that the totalising process that was undertaken in the 1960s and '70s enabled Cuba to depart from instrumental and mercantile considerations of culture and to reconcile art with society in such a way as has consistently been precluded under the capitalist system.

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Appendix A

Timeline of Events Significant to Cultural Development in Cuba

1952

- 10 March Military dictator, General Fulgencio Batista, takes power and viciously eradicates the last traces of the constitutional democracy he had earlier set up. Eighty percent of Cuban imports come from the US; \$1 billion of US capital is invested, giving the US a virtual monopoly (Carmona Báez, 2004).
- Diplomatic relations between Cuba and the USSR are severed (Farber, 2006).
- The international sugar market begins to decline, which affects Cuba's monocultural economy. US investors withdraw from sugar and move into utilities and oil (Farber, 2006).

1953

- 26 July A group, led by the 26-year-old Fidel Castro, attacks Moncada (the second largest army barracks in the country, lying just outside the centre of Santiago) and, simultaneously, the barracks at Bayamo (Gott, 2004). Described by Fidel (2008) in all its disastrous detail, this action – which saw more than seventy captured guerrillas shot in retaliation – nonetheless served to destabilise the Batista regime, bringing wide renown to its leader (Gott, 2004) and giving his revolutionary movement its name.
- September Fidel Castro is put on trial in Santiago; as a trained lawyer, he represents himself and more than 100 others, many of whom played no part in the attack. Only twenty-six prisoners were found guilty, including Fidel's younger brother, Raúl, who was sentenced to thirteen years in prison (Gott, 2004).
- 16 October Fidel delivers a legendary speech before the emergency court of Santiago de Cuba, which serves as his defence and an outline of his political programme, and has to be reconstructed from memory afterwards to become known as 'History Will Absolve Me', after its concluding remarks, effectively serving as the manifesto of the 26 July Movement (Gott, 2004).
- Alongside the five revolutionary laws – returning sovereignty to the people; transferring ownership of land to agricultural workers; granting workers in industry, mining etc. a 30 percent share of the profits; granting sugar planters the right to 55 percent participation of the yield; confiscating wealth from those misappropriating public funds – consideration is given to agrarian reform, internal reform of the education system and nationalisation of electricity and telephone companies.
- Carlos Franqui would later claim that this speech was written by 'Castro's university professor Dr. Jorge Manach, then an undercover anti-Batistiano' (1983:xiii). Fidel Castro is sentenced to fifteen years in prison

- 1954** The Castro brothers serve their sentence on the Isle of Pines, where Fidel reads extensively.
- 1955**
- June Having served less than two years of their sentence, the Castro brothers are released by the recently-restored Batista.
- July Seeing no future in electoral politics, Fidel follows Raúl to Mexico. Within a week, he is introduced by his brother to the twenty-seven-year-old Ernesto ‘Che’ Guevara (living in Mexico since the previous September). According to Gott, ‘Guevara provided Castro with broader horizons, a wider reading list, an insight into other revolutionary experiments and considerable first-hand knowledge of Latin America. Castro gave Guevara a ready-made political cause, for which he had long been searching, as well as the benefit of his own brief experience in charge of an armed revolutionary movement’ (2004:152)
- From exile, Fidel foments a workers’ movement in Cuba, centred on a Rebel Army of conscientious peasants, disenfranchised young professionals and workers (Carmona Báez, 2004).
- 16 August On the fourth anniversary of death of Eduardo Chibás [founder of the Orthodox Party], Fidel publishes 50,000 copies of a manifesto. This is followed by a second, with a print run of 100,000 copies, recommending insurrection and general strike.
- 1956**
- November A guerrilla force of eighty-two, assembled by Fidel and trained by Alberto Bayo (who had fought against Franco in the Spanish Civil War) boards a small motor yacht, the *Granma*, at Tuxpan on the Mexican coast and sails towards Cuba (Gott, 2004).
- 2 December The *Granma* runs aground just off the coast at Playa Las Coloradas. Planned to coincide with an armed insurrection at Santiago and Moncada, the landing is delayed by the weather and awaited by the authorities. Several guerrillas are killed and twenty-two captured and tried. ‘According to legend, just 12 of them had survived, though this biblical number was an underestimate’ (Ibid:155)
- 1957** A prolonged and unforeseen period of guerrilla warfare centred on the Sierra Maestra mountains presents itself as the only option for Fidel and his troops as part of an integrated strategy with the urban network of the 26 July Movement, led by Frank País, Faustino Pérez Hernández and Haydée Santamaría.

- 12 July The Sierra Manifesto details courses of action derived from revolutionary laws. It also outlines agrarian reform, literacy and educational campaigns. Harnecker (1987) finds in this manifesto – and the absence of shared profits/yields and nationalisation – a much weaker iteration than that articulated in ‘History will Absolve Me’. However, this manifesto is primarily a call for unity, concerned with the immediate creation of a civic-revolutionary front [Frente Civico Revolucionario, which corresponds to the initials of Fidel Castro Ruz]. Its immediacy is palpable, calling for the blockage of any attempts by Batista to impose a provisional military junta and an embargo on arms being sent to the dictatorship by the US. Alongside consideration of the structural changes that will be needed to create a new society, this document emphasises the pressing need to name ‘the person called to preside over the provisional government of the Republic, to demonstrate before the world that the Cuban nation is capable of uniting behind the ideal of freedom and supporting the person who, meeting the conditions of impartiality, integrity, capability, and decency, can represent that ideal’, the person who ‘must be designated by all civic institutions because those organisations are apolitical and their backing would free the provisional president of partisan compromises and lead to absolutely clean and impartial elections’ (12 July 1957).
- 30 July Urban coordinator of the 26 July Movement, Frank País, is gunned down in Santiago, representing a serious blow to the movement.
- October A pivotal meeting takes place between Fidel and the PSP’s Ursinio Rojas, which leads to synergy between the two camps, but PSP hesitation to support the Revolution, combined with its former strategy of collaborating with the Batista regime, will lead to its having a diminished role in early 1959 (Farber, 2006).
- 1958** Having consistently advocated mass struggle instead of armed struggle (Ibid), the PSP publicly throws its weight behind Castro. Party members have success within guerrilla columns led by Raúl and Che while operating its own sixty-five-strong guerrilla group.
- 9 April The day of liberation is announced, with a general strike planned that is expected to overthrow Batista. According to Gott, ‘Castro’s misgivings proved well-founded. The workers were unprepared, the police and the army were armed and ready. The Movement’s urban activists had insufficient weapons to stage their various diversionary schemes. Their militia melted away. The insurrectionary action scheduled to bring down the regime was over almost before it began.’ (2004:163) With the failure of the strike, Batista redoubles his efforts to dislodge the rebel army from the mountains, but victory over his soldiers provide a much-needed boost for the revolutionary forces.

Less than a month before revolutionary triumph, the PSP suggests the nationalisation of foreign utilities and agrarian reform (Farber, 2006).

The US Government steps up pressure on Batista to resign (Ibid).

31 December Batista flies from Havana to Santo Domingo with his family and friends.

1959

1 January Official triumph of the Revolution. Che Guevara enters Havana.

2 January From a balcony in Santiago, Fidel makes 'his first speech at the dawn of the Revolution' (Gott, 2004:165). Camilo Cienfuegos enters Havana.

8 January Fidel Castro enters Havana after a one-week tour of the island. Manuel Urrutia is appointed President and José Miró Cardona Prime Minister; Castro acquires the title of Military Commander-in-Chief (Ibid).

Between 500 and 600 of the 'worst criminals of the Batista tyranny' (Mills, 1960:51) are executed. Fidel will later describe this process as 'a mistake, but a mistake that was not motivated by hatred or cruelty. You try a man who's killed dozens of *campesinos*, but you try him in a courtroom where there are thousands of people, where repudiation of the murderer was universal' (2006:222).

March Urban Reform Laws redistribute income by halving rents (Kapcia, 2005).

19 March Fidel makes a speech about the democratisation of the universities.

20 March The Instituto Cubano de Artes e Industrias Cinematograficas (ICAIC) is created by Law 169 under the directorship of Alfredo Guevara, to whom Fidel Castro's 2006 autobiography is dedicated.

22 March The revolutionary government makes racial discrimination illegal.

23 March The first issue of *Lunes de Revolución* is published.

April The Comisión de Alfabetización [Literacy Commission] and the National Institute for Agrarian Reform begin a modest programme of literacy work alongside ongoing efforts in this area by the Rebel Army (Fagen, 1969).

28 April Casa de las Américas is founded to initiate pan-American cultural dialogues.

17 May	<p>The revolutionary government institutes the Agrarian Reform Act, which puts an end to all estates over 1,000 acres, dividing them into smaller, individual plots to be distributed among the landless and specifying that the land can only be owned by Cubans. The US responds by demanding compensation for US interests affected by the new law; the US Ambassador to Cuba fails to have any influence and the CIA is authorised to undertake subversive activities against Cuba (Farber, 2006). The new law gives credence to the rumours that Castro is a Communist (Gott, 2004) This will prove relatively moderate compared to 1963 reforms (Kapcia, 2005).</p> <p>Manuel Urrutia is forced to resign after a series of anti-Communist comments; Dr. Osvaldo Dorticós Torrado is appointed President. US State Department policy towards Cuba hardens and the US Ambassador fails to have any influence at home, allowing Congress to become more extreme. The CIA takes control of infiltration and sabotage, plotting to execute Castro and other top officials and training exiles into a paramilitary force.</p>
October	<p>A Soviet intelligence agent meets Che and Fidel to talk about restoring diplomatic relations. Fidel advises that the people are not ready and requests that a Soviet cultural and technological exhibition – which had been touring Latin America throughout 1959 and is due to close in Mexico – be brought to Cuba.</p>
December	<p>Urban Reform Laws regulate land use, fix low prices and end speculation (Kapcia, 2005).</p>
1960	
31 January– February	<p>Anastas Mikoyan, vice-premier of the USSR visits Cuba, touring the island with Fidel for several weeks (Franqui, 1983) and opening the exhibition about Soviet technology and culture (Farber, 2006). This eventually leads to the signing of new trade agreements between Cuba and the USSR to the value of \$100 million (Ramonet, 2006) that signals a ‘new era of Cuban-soviet accords’ (Gilman, 2003:190).</p>
May	<p>Diplomatic relations are restored between Cuba and the USSR. 300,000 tons of Soviet crude oil arrive in Cuba and the government asks Shell, Standard Oil and Texaco, (owners of the three refineries on the island) to process it for them. Despite Eckstein’s contention that ‘U.S.-owned island refineries refused to process the crude’ (1994:31), Farber finds that, ‘the Cuban government notified U.S. oil companies in Cuba that they would have to refine the Soviet oil Cuba was importing. These companies initially were willing to obey the government’s orders under protest, but they received instructions from U.S. Secretary of the Treasury Robert B. Anderson not to comply’ (2006:85). The Cuban government confiscates US oil company assets. Washington proves itself the most coherent agent of US corporate interests (Ibid).</p>

July	<p>The US Government dramatically reduces the quota of sugar bought from Cuba.</p> <p>In advance of expropriation, certain US companies stop fertilising land and planting new crops, which leads to Washington's confident prediction of lower crop yield, attributed to government inefficiency (Farber, 2006)</p>
August	<p>Cuban bishops make a general declaration against communism at 7 o'clock mass which, by the 9 o'clock mass is being shouted down by the congregation who 'didn't want to hear all that. Our real religion in Cuba is for the Cuban revolution' (Mills, 1960:63).</p>
6 August	<p>Castro announces the nationalisation of all American properties, including thirty-six sugar mills with adjacent plantations, oil refineries, electric power and telephone utilities. This leads to an exodus of US and Cuban capitalists (Farber, 2006).</p>
15 August	<p>At a session of the Organisation of American States (OAS) in Costa Rica, the US condemns Cuban policy, declaring that 'totalitarian' states are incompatible with the continental system (Gilman, 2003).</p>
September	<p>All US-owned banks – including the National City Bank of New York, Chase Manhattan and the Bank of Boston – are confiscated (Farber, 2006).</p>
2 September	<p>As a reply to the OAS declaration dictated according to the interests of North American imperialism in Costa Rica, Fidel convenes a national General Assembly of the Cuban people and, in front of a million people in Revolution Square delivers 'The First Declaration of Havana'. This defends the sovereignty and right to self-determination of the Cuban people and acknowledges the help offered by the Soviet Union in case of pro-imperialist attack (Gilman, 2003), thus expressing 'without naming itself, the socialist character of the Revolution' (Fernández Retamar, 1966:278).</p>
26 September	<p>In a speech to the United Nations General Assembly, Fidel announces Cuba's aim of eradicating illiteracy (Fagen, 1969:33).</p>
28 September	<p>Committees for the Defence of the Revolution (CDRs) are launched 'to promote urban reform, education, and public health programs by organizing neighborhood meetings, distributing printed materials, and ringing doorbells. The large scope of the mobilization and the sense of popular participating in pursuit of a common goal led to a dynamic sense of popular participation in pursuit of a common goal that had a strong impact on the lies of many Cubans' (Fernandes, 2007:29).</p>
October	<p>In the US presidential campaign, Kennedy and Nixon compete over who can be more hardline in relation to Castro (Farber, 2006).</p>

	Urban Reform Laws transfer all housing titles to tenants, 'making Havana one of Latin America's greatest concentrations of owner-occupation' (Kapcia, 2005:127).
	The First Congress of Municipal Councils of Education is held. At the same time, the Comisión de Alfabetización becomes a national institution (Fagen, 1969).
27–30 October	First National Meeting of Poets and Artists is held in Camagüey.
19 November	As a result of the above meeting, Cuban artists and writers publish 'Towards a National Culture Serving the Revolution' which is referred to in an unsigned foreword of the English publication of 'Words to the Intellectuals' as 'the beginning of the enthusiastic work of artists and writers to unite, to take a position, to play a specific role in the revolutionary process' (MINREX, 1962)
	Film posters begin to be produced in Cuba, initiating a new visual style.
1961	Labelled the 'Year of Education' on account of the massive literacy campaign, beginning in April, which is led by 100,000 teachers, most of whom are: teenagers, each given a special uniform to wear and an oil lamp with which to travel in the countryside at night. [...] The campaign was not without danger, and some became the target of counterrevolutionaries. More than 40 were killed. Yet the teenage teachers caught a million people to read and write. And, as Castro had promised, the Revolution abolished illiteracy in a single year. The campaign was one of its greatest triumphs. (Gott, 2004:189)
January	Just before JFK is sworn in as president, Eisenhower terminates all diplomatic relations with Cuba and prohibits all US exports, excluding medical aid (Farber, 2006).
4 January	The Consejo Nacional de Cultura (CNC, the National Council of Culture) is established under Armando Hart's Ministry of Education with its most influential leaders being PSP activists (Kapcia, 2005).
14 April	Meeting of the organising committee of the First National Congress of Writers and Artists held in Havana.
15 April	An air raid, launched from Nicaragua, alerts Cuba to the coming invasion.
16 April	At the funeral for those killed in the air raid, Fidel declares the socialist character of the Revolution, reconciling Marx and Martí.
17 April	US forces land at Playa Girón [the Bay of Pigs].
20 April	The Bay of Pigs landing is defeated by a huge mobilisation of the Cuban people.

May	After a screening on television, sponsored by the literary periodical, <i>Lunes de Revolución</i> , further distribution of a film about Havana's night life, called <i>PM</i> is suspended by representatives of the CNC. In the same month, the film industry is nationalised, which empowers 'the political leadership to set priorities for cinema and to control the production and distribution of film' (Fernandes, 2007:13).
June	Khrushchev visits Cuba. A debate is held between various writers, including Heberto Padilla, Ambrosio Fornet, Virgilio Piñera and Jaime Sarusky, pondering how they can serve the Revolution as men of letters (Gilman, 2003).
20 June	A law is passed nationalising education.
16, 23 and 30 June	Meetings are called at the auditorium of the National Library in Havana, involving the most representative figures of the Cuban intelligentsia, including the <i>Lunes de Revolución</i> group and leading members of the PSP. Artists and writers have an opportunity to expound on different aspects of cultural activity and problems relating to creative work. Present at the final meeting are the President of the Republic, Dorticós; the Prime Minister, Fidel Castro; the Minister of Education, Armando Hart; members of the National Council of Culture and other representatives of the government (Castro, 1961). In conclusion of the third meeting, Fidel Castro delivers his 'Words to the Intellectuals'.
July	The Partido Socialista Popular (PSP), led by Blas Roca, merges with Fidel's 26 July Movement and Faure Chomón's Revolutionary Directorate March 13th to form the Integrated Revolutionary Organisations (ORI)
18–22 August	The First National Congress of Writers and Artists is held in Havana, originally scheduled for April but postponed because of the Bay of Pigs invasion. As a direct consequence of this meeting, the Unión Nacional de Escritores y Artistas de Cuba (UNEAC) is created.
	The Revolution becomes synonymous with the state.
November	In the aftermath of the <i>PM</i> debacle, <i>Lunes de Revolución</i> is folded (Casal, 1971).

1962	<p>The US imposes an economic embargo on Cuba as a reaction to the nationalisation of US companies and Castro's declared Marxist-Leninist affiliations. This policy is adopted by all the countries of the continent except Mexico and Canada and costs Cuba an estimated \$41 billion in the period 1962-96. According to the UN, the embargo is illegal because it violates Cuba's right to self-determination. It lacks international backing and has been a factor in the decrease in US popularity (Carmona Báez, 2004). Weiss asserts that:</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">The blockade affected direct communications and, in the case of Latin Americans, made it more difficult to travel to Cuba without fear of reprisals, since all people flying to and from Cuba via Mexico (the most logical, direct route) were photographed and their files presumably forwarded to the security police of their respective countries. Only those willing to go out of their way, via Madrid, Prague or Moscow, would henceforth come to Cuba. Many courageous writers and artists continued to visit from their countries of origin; a great number of Latin American visitors were still residing abroad and would not be immediately affected (1977:54-5).</p>
February	The Escuelas Nacionales de Arte (National Schools of Art) are established and construction begins.
4 February	The Second Declaration of Havana is made (see Castro, 2008).
26 March	ORI becomes the United Party of the Cuban Socialist Revolution (PURSC). Fidel denounces a sectarian tendency within the Revolution.
October	The discovery by the US of Soviet nuclear missiles on the island triggers a major international crisis, during 'the hottest moment of the cold war, which put humanity on the brink of destruction' (Fernández Retamar, 1996:177). The solution to this crisis, 'which was reached by a deal made behind Cuba's back and which also revealed Soviet goals [...] was humiliating [...] and caused a distancing between Cuba and the Soviet Union' (loc cit).
December	The First National Congress on Culture is held by the CNC.
1963	<p>A significant land reform 'drastically reduced the maximum landholding (to sixty-seven hectares) and effectively put some 60 per cent of Cuban land in state hands, mostly in state farms (<i>granjas del pueblo</i>) (Kapcia, 2005:121).</p> <p>The CNC's authority is enhanced, giving it 'greater autonomy, under the Consejo de Ministros, with a brief to organise, coordinate and direct all cultural activity nationally and locally, and, most significantly, to rescue national cultural traditions' (Kapcia, 2005:134).</p>

- 4, 5 and 6 May Meetings take place between a group of film-makers in the Department of Artistic Programming at ICAIC to discuss the problematic relationship between cultural policy and aesthetics.
- 1964**
- April The debate around culture rumbles on, evolving into a very public spat between Alfredo Guevara and Blas Roca in the PSP newspaper, *Hoy*.
Labour identification cards are introduced.
- 1965**
- March Che Guevara writes the letter, entitled ‘Socialism and Man in Cuba’, which explicitly condemns socialist realism as a trope. José Lezama Lima’s *Paradiso*, a novel with overt homosexual content, is almost prevented from being published. An international crisis erupts, centred on the labour camps used rehabilitate ‘antisocial’ elements to which large numbers of Cuban artists and writers have been sent [UMAP]. This uproar, combined with the intervention of UNEAC, causes the camps to be abolished (Casal, 1971).
- 26 July The Escuelas Nacionales de Arte are opened in an incomplete state.
Che Guevara leaves Cuba to pursue armed insurrection in Africa (Kapcia, 2005).
El Puente publishing house is closed down, which ‘signaled an end to the existence of independent presses and to relative aesthetic freedom [...]’ (Howe, 2004:7)
- 3 October The governing party is renamed the Cuban Communist Party (PCC) with Armando Hart as its secretary (Otero, 1997). It is noteworthy that this happens after the most important reforms have been carried out under Fidel’s personal jurisdiction (Farber, 2006), which includes the formation of pivotal cultural institutions such as ICAIC and Casa de las Américas. While Franqui (1983) likes to claim that Castro’s Communism predated the Revolution, Farber contents that:
Rather than the outcome, as some would have it, of a conspiracy hatched before January 1, 1959, Castro’s – and Cuba’s – eventual political direction was most likely the result of a conjunctural choice made by the fall of 1959. This choice was fostered first by the potentially high political cost that Fidel would incur by breaking with the pro-Soviet and pro-Partido Socialista Popular wing of the 26th of July Movement headed by Raúl Castro and Che Guevara and second by the affinity of Castro’s brand of authoritarian populism for the Soviet-type systems (2006:170).

19 October A meeting is convened between Hart and various intellectuals, including Alea, Carpentier, Desnoes, Espinosa, Fornet, Otero and Fernández Retamar to discuss the role of intellectuals within the party, precipitated by the suspension of the dramatist, Vicente Revuelto at Studio Theatre (Otero, 1997).

1966

- January The Tricontinental conference takes place in Havana, with Che sending a letter of support (Saruský, 1995). A survey is conducted by intellectuals present at this conference, which gives rise to a theme for future exploration – the role of the intellectual in society (Gilman, 2203).
- spring Having suffered the worst drought on record during 1965, which diminishes the sugar crop, torrential rains stifle the harvest, reducing it from a predicted 6.4 million to 4.45 million tonnes (Lockwood, 1967).
- 12 May On US television, Robert Kennedy speaks of the inevitability of revolution in Latin America (Gilman, 2003).
- 11–18 July The XXXIV Congress of the PEN Club is held in New York. The previous meeting, presided over by Arthur Miller, had been held in Dubrovnik, the first to have taken place in Eastern Europe since the Second World War. That this congress of the world's intellectuals behind the Iron Curtain was followed by one in the US apparently signalled a desire for the thawing of relations between east and west that was shared by the majority of the world's intelligentsia. In anticipation of the US event, it has been understood that, in order to qualify as a genuinely international meeting of intellectuals, Soviet and Cuban representatives would be granted visas to attend (Gilman, 2003). However, visas are generally not forthcoming, with one notable exception being that issued to the Chilean communist poet, Pablo Neruda.
- 31 July An open letter to Neruda, questioning his decision to participate, is published in *Granma*.
- 10 August A round-table discussion on the theme of the 'Intellectual Penetration of Yankee Imperialism' is conducted on Radio Havana, involving Fernández Retamar, Otero, Fornet and Edmundo Desnoes (subsequently published in *Casa*). The conclusion of this discussion is that, as a consequence of the adherence to the Cuban Revolution by the majority of intellectuals, the US has become preoccupied with the danger of the radicalisation of the continent's intellectuals and has put subtle methods of co-optation into practice (Gilman, 2003).

Lisandro Otero is appointed as vice-president of CNC. A novelist, he was 'one of the first writers and artists to be absorbed into the higher echelons of the organizational machine. He served as cultural attaché to Chile during Allende's presidency' (Weiss, 1977:53).

November

Che Guevara arrives in Bolivia (Kapcia, 2005).

1967

5–8 January

The first meeting of the collaborative committee of *Casa de las Américas* takes place in Havana – attended by Fernández Retamar, Pogolotti, Fornet, Desnoes and others – which gives rise to a declaration, pondering the insertion of the intellectual in society, which is published in the journals *Casa*, *Marcha* and *Siempre!* (Gilman, 2003).

16–22 January

A 'Meeting with Rubén Darío' takes place in Cuba, in homage to the centenary of the birth of this Nicaraguan poet. Picking up on a theme elaborated at the Tricontinental Conference, those assembled decide on the necessity of urgently redefining the task of the intellectual in society. The meeting also decides to convene a conference of all the intellectuals of the continent (Gilman, 2003), which would be manifested in January 1968 as the Cultural Congress of Havana.

29 April

At a graduation ceremony in Pinar del Rio province, Fidel recommends the rejection of copyright for creative works.

May

Many of those involved in the 'Meeting with Rubén Darío' publish poems dedicated to Nicaraguan modernists in issue 42 of *Casa*.

The Instituto Cubano Libro is formed and all publishing is taken over by the state (Miller, 2008). 'Until it was dismantled in 1977, the Instituto del Libro remained in control of all publishing (outside Casa de las Américas and UNEAC), with thirteen different presses subordinated to its centralised management decisions' (Kapcia, 2005:157). According to one account (Saruski and Mosquera, 1972), this was necessary to cope with the massively increased demand for books, brought about by increased literacy, providing subsidised reading material rather than succumbing to market forces determined by private publishing companies; according to another, this had the effect of shifting responsibility for the regulation of affairs concerning art into the hands of political power (Gilman, 2003).

26 July

To commemorate the anniversary of Moncada, the 'Salon de Mai' exhibition, hailing the European avant-garde, is brought to Havana by Wifredo Lam (Kapcia, 2005). This involves 150 painters, sculptors, intellectuals and journalists. In Havana, ninety artists and writers paint a giant mural, entitled *Collective Cuba*. Meetings between Cuban and European painters and a meeting of protest song is organised in Varadero (Gilman, 2003).

31 July–10 August	The Conference of the Latin American Solidarity Organization (OLAS) takes place in Havana with Haydée Santamaría as president (Sarusky, 1995).
5 October	A declaration, issued by Casa de las Américas, emphasises the importance of the role of intellectuals in the Revolution, which accounts for the North American interest in co-opting them (Gilman, 2003).
9 October	Che Guevara is killed in Bolivia.
25 October– 2 November	A preparatory Seminar for the Cultural Congress of Havana takes place, involving leading representatives from the fields of culture and science.
	Towards the end of the year, ‘first generation’ poet, Heberto Padilla, sends a letter to the literary journal, <i>El Caimán Barbudo</i> (the weekly supplement of <i>Juventud Rebelde</i>) critiquing Lisandro Otero’s novel, <i>Pasión del Urbino</i> , recently published in Cuba (following its appearance the year before in Buenos Aires) and praising Guillermo Cabrera Infante’s <i>Tres tristes tigres</i> . In the process, Padilla brings the literary debate into the political domain and attacks the grey bureaucracy permeating the cultural field (Otero, 1997). This controversy leads to the resignation of the editorial board of <i>El Caimán Barbudo</i> and the removal of Padilla’s permission to travel (Casal, 1971). Less well reported outside of Cuba is that Padilla takes ‘advantage of the opportunity not only to attack that novel violently but also to attack Otero as an official [and to attack] State Security’ (Benedetti, 1969:523). As an antecedent to this, the novel of Padilla’s friend, Guillermo Cabrera Infante, published in Spain, came first in the Biblioteca Breve prize (awarded by the Barcelona-based publisher, Seix Barral), while Otero’s novel, published in Cuba, came second (Gilman, 2003).
December	As a consequence of the July celebrations, a Centre for Literary Research is founded, with Mario Benedetti as its first director (Ibid).
1968	
2 January	Fuel rations are introduced and Fidel declares that the dignity of the Revolution would be compromised by asking for the Soviet provision of petroleum to be increased (Ibid).
5–12 January	The Cultural Congress of Havana takes place, with more than 600 intellectuals from all over the world participating, in an attempt to ‘end the isolation of the Cuban intellectuals and to put them in contact with the most radical currents of thought of the world and with the main cultural currents of the vanguard’ (Ibid:118).

Heberto Padilla writes *Fuera del Juego* [Out of the Game], a poem that distances him from the Revolution without directly declaring himself against it, by alluding to bureaucratic socialism and exalting individualism in the face of collective demands (Otero, 1997).

13 March	The Revolutionary Offensive is launched, which goes about expropriating small businesses and private shops, nationalising ‘the remaining 55,000 non-agricultural enterprises’ (Kapcia, 2005:122).
June	The editors of <i>El Caimán Barbudo</i> argue that to be revolutionary does not imply divesting oneself of all autonomy and depersonalising oneself on the altar of official criteria. Otero (1997) responds with an article outlining that iconoclasm and rebelliousness are not the exclusive privilege of intellectuals – the Revolution itself maintains a permanent revision of its values, questioning of methods and a rejection of the established and conventional.
30 July	Cabrera Infante breaks decisively with the Revolution in a letter to the Buenos Aires-based journal, <i>Primera Plana</i> (Ibid).
August	During an interview given in exile, Cabrera Infante is explicitly critical of the Revolution, denouncing ‘the condition of writers within Cuba. This leaves Padilla in the dangerous position of having been on the side of a now public “traitor to the Revolution”’ (Casal, 1971:460).
15 August	Cabrera Infante is expelled from UNEAC, together with the pianist, Ivette Hernández, ‘as traitors to the revolutionary cause’ (Cabrera Infante, 1994:20).
20–1 August	Soviet troops invade Czechoslovakia.
23 August	Fidel makes a pronouncement in favour of the invasion, which revives the spectre of Stalinism among the intellectual community and undermines the potential plurality of socialism (Gilman, 2003).
6 October	Following the award of the Casa de las Américas prize to Norberto Fuentes, Haydée Santamaría goes before Cuban television cameras to defend the policy of internationally prestigious prizes at the institution and to define quality as the sole criterion of prize-winning works (Ibid).
7 October	For the first time in seven months, two Cubans are accused of being spies of the CIA and condemned to death (Ibid).
17 October	Against a backdrop of civil unrest, five hundred hippies are arrested by the police in the centre of Havana (Ibid).

- October Padilla is unanimously awarded the UNEAC prize by a panel of international judges for his *Fuera del juego*, while Antón Arrufat receives three of five votes for his dramatic work *Los siete contra Tebas* [The Seven Against Thebes]. The English critic, J.M. Cohen, who had served on the jury, is accused of having unscrupulously influenced the committee, by publicly alluding to his favoured candidate in the press, to the extent that UNEAC president, Guillén, had to remind him of his obligations (Otero, 1997). While the prizes are honoured and the books published, they also attracted ‘the condemnation of the executive committee’ (Del Duca, 1972:114) of UNEAC and a disclaimer is printed in the publications (Casal, 1971).
- 20 October The annual meeting of writers, held in Cienfuegos, approves a declaration of principles which includes the following: ‘the writer must contribute to the Revolution through his work and this involves conceiving of literature as a means of struggle, a weapon against weaknesses and problems which, directly or indirectly, could hinder this advance’ (Casal, 1971:460). In his closing speech to the meeting, Otero makes an allusion to Padilla (Gilman, 2003) and reclaims the validity of a genuinely Cuban vanguard, with its own contemporary language, giving rise to an art in which social justice is united with the most audacious formal advances. At the same meeting, he rejects the idea of writers acting as a social conscience (Otero, 1997).
- November A number of articles, signed by Leopoldo Avila, which are ‘rather frankly aggressive against Padilla and Arrufat’ (Benedetti, 1969:521), begin to appear in the army magazine, *Verde Olivo* [Olive Green], serving as ‘an indication of a new offensive on the cultural front’ (Casal, 1971). Two later Avila articles:
 [...] draw away from the personal attack and refer rather to most general aspects of Cuba’s literary activity, without abandoning the aggressive tone.
 The news agencies immediately echo the most forceful parts of Avila’s articles. Since he has suggested in them that Padilla has been playing into the hands of the counter-revolution with his poems, the well-intentioned Associated Press immediately deduce that this could mean nothing less than the poet’s execution by shooting (Benedetti, 1969:521).
- Haydeé Santamaría, director of the pan-Latin American cultural house, Casa de las Américas, suggests that juries of future UNEAC prizes should thenceforth be restricted to Cuban authors; this advice is heeded for the 1969 prize (Casal, 1971), accompanied by ‘a new emphasis on an attempt to stimulate authors to produce works that are revolutionary in content’ (Ibid:461).

- Casa convenes a meeting of its collaborative committee to discuss the discrepancies arising from the Padilla affair. Otero (1997) reprises the discussion that, if agreement could be reached that the principle was to safeguard socialism but the method was at fault, disagreements could be overcome; for him, individual liberty could and should be defended without entering into contradiction with social justice.
- 28 December A year and a half after Carbrera Infante's article is published in *Primera Plana*, Padilla launches a polemic against him which lasts until the following month (Gilman, 2003), revivifying his support for the Cuban process by stating that revolutionary writers are either with the Revolution or nothing; this has the effect of producing growing irritation with his attitude (Otero, 1997).
- 1969**
- 8, 9, 10 January Casa convenes another meeting of its collaborative committee to amend its earlier declaration (Otero, 1997).
- 11 January A manifesto is issued by *Casa*, summarising the understandings of the preceding meetings.
- 13 March Fidel announces the nationalisation of Cuba's universities.
- March A declaration by the collaborative committee, in *Casa de las Américas* issue 9, defines 'the duty of the intellectual within the Cuban context as the execution of "a creative and critical work rooted in the revolutionary process, and above all, linked with his dedication to tasks that support, orient, and stimulate the ascending march of the Revolution"' (Dopico Black, 1989:111).
- At a convocation of the jury of the Casa prize, Haydeé announces that future jurors will be from Latin America (Gilman, 2003).
- UNEAC institutes the David literary prize, which takes its name from the *nom de guerre* of Frank País and is aimed at young writers who have as yet accumulated little cultural capital (Ibid)
- 2 May A round-table discussion is convened by the *Casa* collaborative committee (including Fernández Retamar, Fornet, Desnoes, Dalton and Depestre) on the theme of the first ten years of the Revolution.
- Padilla writes a personal letter to Fidel and, a day later, receives a response asking him to choose which job he would like to take up at the University of Havana, which is taken as a sign of his rehabilitation. He also serves on the jury of UNEAC's David prize, but Carbrera Infante continues to petition against him (Gilman, 2003).

1970

- May Fidel announces the failure of the ten million-tonne sugar harvest because of technical deficiencies resulting from fundamental political deficiencies, taking his share of responsibility for the failure. For Gilman (2003), this unites the Cuban intellectual field in its anti-intellectualism.
- Fidel and the PCC decide that the ‘push for Communism’ would be a mistake without passing through socialism first. Camnitzer (1994) attributes this idea (which went against Che Guevara’s ideas) to the deal that was struck between Cuba and the Soviet Union, which also included centralisation of the economy.
- October A meeting is held with the aim of reconstituting the *Casa* collaborative committee by inviting new collaborators (Otero, 1997).
- Personal identification cards become universal.

1971

- A law against ‘ideological diversionism’ is implemented (Dopico Black, 1989).
- 20 March Padilla is arrested and jailed, allegedly ‘without charges and by personal order of Fidel Castro’ (Bonachea and Valdés, 1972:498).
- 9 April A letter, ‘devised and edited by [Juan] Goytisolo and [Julio] Cortázar’ (Gilman, 2003:239) signed by ‘fifty-four formerly sympathetic prominent Latin American and European intellectuals’ (Kapcia, 2005:154), including Jean-Paul Sartre and Gabriel García Márquez, is addressed to Fidel, published in *Le Monde*, expressing, in moderate language (Otero, 1997), alarm at Padilla’s arrest, which they see as a possible reappearance of sectarianism on the island (Fornet, 2007:392), and urging his release (Casal, 1971). Among the signatories is Carlos Franqui, ‘now zealous accuser of the Revolution’ (Fornet, 2007:392).
- 23–30 April The First National Congress on Education and Culture is held in salons of the Havana Libre hotel (Fornet, 2007). Kapcia finds that ‘while that Congress seemed, outside Cuba, to signal a new “hard line” on creative freedom, the ensuing policy seemed to follow the 1960s ethos, the new focus on deepening the social revolution being paralleled by a drive to develop Cuban attitudes to reading and to privilege the reader as well as, or even more than the writer’ (2005:153).
- 25 April Upon attaining his freedom thirty-eight days later, Padilla makes a self-critical ‘confession’ to a meeting of UNEAC intellectuals, claiming his many errors to be truly unforgivable, reprehensible and unqualifiable (Gilman, 2003).

- 4 May A second letter is sent to Fidel in increasingly irritated language (Otero, 1997) and published in *Le Monde*, protesting ‘Padilla’s confession, pointing out the similarity of these proceedings with the worst moments of the Stalinist era’ (Casal, 1971:462). This letter is signed by sixty-two intellectuals, with some notable defections (including Cortázar) (Gilman, 2003). Thus, ‘some original signatories retracted their participation in what they saw as an inappropriate bourgeois criticism of a Revolution they supported. In short, the *caso Padilla* was when many foreign intellectuals (most notably Mario Vargas Llosa) broke with the Revolution permanently, some, already disenchanted, long seeking an opportunity to break. It was also a cathartic moment for the Revolution’s attitude to outside culture’ (Kapcia, 2005:154).
- By way of reply to the letter from intellectuals, the official transcript of Padilla’s confession is circulated by the Cuban government through *Prensa Latina* and printed in full by *Libre*. A transcript of the poet’s words (minus the interventions of other writers present) is published in *Casa* issue 65-66 (May – June 1971). This did not have a favourable outcome for the Cubans, the Latin American family of intellectuals or for Padilla himself (Gilman, 2003).
- 5 May Vargas Llosa writes to Haydée Santamaría, resigning his post on the collaboration committee of *Casa* journal. Haydée replies that it had already been decided months before – in a declaration that Vargas Llosa had himself signed – that the committee would be substituted by a broader list of collaborators (Gilman, 2003), observing that he had not hesitated in adding his voice to the choir of the most ferocious enemies of the Cuban Revolution (Otero, 1997).
- 24 May Padilla addresses a letter to the signatories of the letter to Fidel, accusing them of launching poisoned darts against Cuba (Gilman, 2003). A war-like situation results in which some of the principal intellectuals of Europe and America are alienated from the Revolution (Otero, 1997).

- 1972 'Besieged militarily, isolated in the political and diplomatic fields, hardened in the intellectual field, and in a difficult economic situation' (Fernández Retamar, 1996:181), Cuba is inserted into the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance [(CMEA/ COMECON), set up in 1949 as a political response to the 1947 Marshall Plan and an economic counterpart to the Organisation for European Economic Co-Operation (OECD)], 'a Soviet-inspired, parallel international market providing a "fair deal" to the countries of the socialist bloc in Europe, Cuba and later Vietnam' (Carmona Báez, 2004:79). While Cuba never joined the Warsaw pact, this move 'strengthened its ties to "actually existing socialism"' (Fernández Retamar, 1996:181) but 'did not serve to improve things' (Fernández Retamar, 2001:303).
- 1973 For Kapcia, 'the radical experimentation of the preceding seven years was abandoned and a series of reforms between 1972 and 1976 set the process on a course of necessary consolidation
- 1974 along more orthodox lines' (2005:122-3). The years 1971–5 have retrospectively been termed the *quinquenio gris* [the five grey years] by Ambrosio Fornet.
- 1975 A new draft Constitution is drawn up and circulated to party cells and to factories and farms (Gott, 2004) to replace the amended version of the 1940 Constitution that the revolutionary government had adopted, itself a legacy of the 1933 Cuban Revolution [against the military dictatorship of Gerardo Machado (former director of General Electric in Cuba) which oversaw arrests, murders and deportations of union and labour movement leaders, driving them underground (Carmona Báez, 2004)], 'the first produced by an elected constituent assembly since the first Republican constitution of 1902' (Gott, 2004).
- December Artistic and literary creation forms one of the topics of discussion at the First Congress of the Cuban Communist Party. Dopico Black observes that 'While earlier policy prohibited art opposed to the Revolution, this act prohibits art contrary to the socialist state, further narrowing scope of the permissible' (1989:119). However, the majority of commentators are agreed that the PCC congress and the subsequent opening of the Ministry of Culture (MINCULT) signalled a thawing of relations between the revolutionary government and the intelligentsia.
- Abrogation of the CNC's strictures against homosexuality (Kapcia, 2005).

- 1976** A Ministry of Culture and Council of State for education, science and culture is founded, to replace the Consejo Nacional de Cultura and the Instituto del Libro, with Armando Hart (former Minister of Education) appointed as Minister of Culture. Domínguez (1978) asserts that this leads to a more coherent arts policy and fragmentation in parallel with centralisation. Alongside several other moves aimed at loosening the institutional hold over creativity, the old ban on copyright is lifted (Kapcia, 2005).
- The Instituto Superior de Arte [Higher Institute of Art] is inaugurated.
- February Ninety-eight percent of the population participates in a referendum to ratify the Constitution, with 97 percent voting in favour of it. The new Constitution provides a formal parliament, declares the republic a sovereign workers' state with the PCC as the ideological motor of the Revolution. Thus, the state/revolution is placed at the heart of a Soviet-inspired constitution and the role of the PCC becomes that of leading Cuba to communism after a socialist phase. PCC representatives inhabit all aspects of society, leading change from within. Other mass organisations are set up to provide an outlet for participation of the whole society (Carmona Báez, 2004). The amended constitution includes an article on education and culture on the basis that 'the state orients, fomentos and promotes education, culture and science in all their manifestations'. Fidel is elected President.
- Cuba witnesses an increase in standard of living and access to defences, medicines, life expectancy and literacy rates and a decrease in infant mortality.
- 1977** The de facto blacklist against artists and writers is ended (Kapcia, 2005).
- The Instituto del Libro (centralised publishing house) is dismantled.
- 1978**
- 1979** Many transgressive artists and writers are released from prison (Kapcia, 2005).

Appendix B: Cultural Modes Before and After the Revolution

The Vanguardia and Modernism in Cuba

Cognisant of the European avant-garde movements of the early twentieth century, artists in Latin America adapted prevalent trends to their specific national context. In Mexico, this gave rise to the mural movement, formed in 1922, which prioritised socio-political over aesthetic concerns (among whom Diego Rivera, who famously befriended Trotsky, is, perhaps, the best-known exponent). In the same year, a group of Brazilian painters emerged from the Modern Art Week in Sao Paulo to occupy ‘a middle ground in its concern for creating a complex national identity expressed in the language of European avant-garde art’ (Martínez, 1994:1). By contrast, the Argentinean modernists, centred on the magazine, *Martín Fierro* (launched in 1926) promoted cosmopolitan art at the expense of nationalism. However, the conventional account of modernisation in Latin America hinges on the apparent paradox that, while the region had a flourishing ‘modernist movement in the avant-garde of the 1920s, its modernity was at that stage far behind Europe’s. In consequence, the Spanish American *vanguardista* movements are deemed to be primarily derivative of European experience rather than a product of socio-economic change within the region itself’ (Miller, 1999:2).

Following four centuries of colonialism, during which Spanish (via Italian) and French influences over the national psyche were rife (Guillén, 1962), Cuban visual arts were typified by their ‘derivative styles until the 1920s’ (Kapcia, 2005:81), when an urgent identification and development of native culture was motivated. Modernism arguably permitted Cuban realities to be depicted for the first time (Saruský and Mosquera, 1979), which was realised through a sequential process:

The development of modern Cuban painting can be divided into roughly three phases. In an initial or embryonic period, from 1924 to 1927, the new generation began to exhibit in Havana. Their paintings of that time showed their abandonment of academic practices for tentative approximations of French impressionism and postimpressionism. The vanguardia or first phase of modernism took place from 1927 to 1938, when these painters appropriated forms and concepts from French modernism to interpret and affirm *lo cubano* in its most evident manifestations. The 1940s marked the classical phase of Cuban modernism, when a new generation of artists, along with some of the preceding one, moved toward a more intimate expression of the Cuban ethos (Martínez, 1994:5).

While Cuban artists in the 1930s and '40s demonstrated 'thematic populist similarities with Diego Rivera' (Loomis, 1999:3), the notion of *lo cubano*, *Cubanidad* or 'Cubanness' – influenced by 'the writings of Martí and later in that of the revolutionaries and reformers of the 1920s and 1930' (Martínez, 1994:47) lent their mutations of the European avant-garde a particular character:

Influenced to some extent by the Mexican mural movement but closer in its aim to Brazilian modernism, a strong and cohesive artistic avant-garde emerged in Havana in 1927. Like most pioneer Latin American modern art movements, the Cuban vanguardia involved a nucleus of painters who visited Europe during their formative years and, on return to their native land, linked with review magazines and new exhibition spaces in a drive to reform and rejuvenate their nation's art and, by extension, its culture. Mexican art was known in Cuba through the long and extensive historical and cultural relationship between the two countries. The Cuban vanguardia artists admired the achievements of the Mexican mural movement, which encouraged them to explore, among other things, the expression of national identity through art. On the other hand, modern Cuban artists, like their Brazilian and Argentinean counterparts, were so committed to formal innovation. They wanted to express a sense of place in the artistic language of their time (Ibid:1-2).

Wifredo Lam grew out of this period and surpassed it, making 'a shift of historical importance in presenting the first vision stemming from the African American presence in the visual art of the West' (Mosquera, 1999:23):

Of mixed Chinese, African, and Spanish heritage, Lam fused the experience of European modernism, especially surrealism, with that of his own cultural, especially African, identity. Not only a cultural radical, Lam was a political radical, a self-declared Marxist long before the Cuban Revolution who remained closely identified with the Revolution until his death, despite long periods of residence abroad. Lam's work, often aggressively sensual and sexual, is unique in how it transcends the specifics of iconography to penetrate the essence of Afro-Cuban culture from within (Loomis, 1999:4).

Interestingly, after the Revolution, the third-wave painter, Mariano Rodríguez, who became head of visual arts at Casa de las Américas, would discount Lam from having any influence on the Cuban painting of the post-revolutionary era (Benedetti, 1969:505). Artists such as Carlos Enriquez, Eduardo Abela and Marcelo Pogolotti are also associated with the *vanguardia* generation, as is Cuba's most renowned female artist, Amelia Peláez. Yet, Camnitzer discusses the difficulty in attributing the influx of modernism to Cuba to a single individual, and cites Víctor Manuel García and Rafael Blanco (the latter not associated with the *vanguardia* painters) as those most often

identified as likely candidates:

Both artists were connected with the magazine *Social* (published between 1916 and 1933), which may deserve a bigger credit for the introduction of modernism than any individual artists. The magazine became the voice of the Grupo Minorista, a nucleus of politicized artists and writers that in 1927, years after their organization, would proclaim the need for a 'vernacular art and the new art in its manifold manifestations.' However, the big event that marked the official beginning of modernism was a group exhibit. When in 1927 the *Revista de Avance* sponsored the 'Exposición de Arte Nuevo,' the aim, again, was to place Cuban art in the context of the new European modernist trends without giving up identity. The accompanying 'manifesto' affirmed, '(We are) artists of the new generation who, with a concentrated effort, fight to incorporate the great undertakings of our time without neglecting, however, [our] essential Cubanism' (1994:101-3).

While rejecting nineteenth century academicism and contradictorily embracing both expressionism and realism, the *vanguardia* artists identified 'independence, rejection of tradition (as it turned out only in rhetoric), affirmation of the new, and nationalism as the top issues in the [their] agenda' (Martínez, 1994:11-12). Consistent with the European avant-garde, their work did not strive for autonomy from the leading social issues of the day:

In the case of the *vanguardia* generation of painters there are important relations between the form and content of their work and progressive tendencies in Cuban sociopolitical ideology. [...] In fact, there are a number of points of contact between the art and attitudes of the *vanguardia* painters and the progressive sociopolitical ideology of their generation. Moreover, many of the leading sociopolitical activists of the Cuban vanguard generation were intellectuals and writers or artists who believed in affirming the connections between the cultural and social spheres (Ibid:32).

While giving 'symbolic form to the progressive sociopolitical definition of nationalism' (Ibid:47), the artists of this generation also took part in direct action, such as the war of independence and its aftermath and resistance to the Machado regime, bringing them close to the political vanguard:

The Cuban political and artistic vanguards of the 1920s and 1930s both considered themselves avant-garde or radical and mixed sociopolitical and cultural issues in their ideologies. Both considered themselves elites who were preparing the way for social and cultural redemption. In spite of the contradictions between elitism and the cult of the popular, many leading intellectuals and artists advocated the interests of the Cuban masses, closely linking politics and culture [...] the Cuban vanguard's views and actions tended to blur rather than accentuate the line between the sociopolitical and artistic-cultural domains (Ibid:47-8).

By the 1940s, Mosquera observes, the avant-garde ‘popularized a poetics which was more Baroque, subjective and interiorized, inspired by light and colour, traditional precious metalwork and architecture, and interested in expressing an identity of essences’ (1992:63-5). This group, centred on the magazine, *Orígenes*, and noted for its Catholicism, included the writers, Alejo Carpentier and José Lezama Lima and the painters René Portocarrero and Mariano. These artists ‘moved away from the “social” toward an introspective sensibility, although without abandoning the nationalist preoccupation, directed at that time toward a “Cubanness of essences”’ (Mosquera, 1999:23). By the 1950s, this energy was largely dissipated:

Although some of the important artists achieved their best works at the beginning of the 1950s, by then a certain general exhaustion was apparent. Visual art became stereotyped in derivative tendencies – especially in a honied, Picasso type and a redundancy that is characteristic of ‘Creolist’ mannerism. The awareness of this exhaustion prompted an increase of abstraction under the influence of North American abstract expressionism. This move helped young artists to break with the tropical sweetness, to rebel against the establishment, and at the same time to attempt a more ‘international’ discourse (Mosquera, 1999b:23).

While several of the 1927 generation left for Europe, eleven artists formed the group known as Los Once (containing some overlaps with the *Orígenes* group) which again had recourse to abstraction. Raúl Martínez, a member of Los Once, remembers: ‘We believed that art is for art’s sake, but what one does with art is a problem of individual conscience, and that is already political’ (Camnitzer, 1994:108). Beyond their praxis, as we saw in chapter five, the group:

[...] had a bigger impact as an example of integrity than because of their aesthetics. Their organization of the Anti-Bienal in 1954 was an influential statement against dictatorship. Batista and Franco had promoted a Bienal Hispano-Americana to take place in Havana that year. The group encouraged the boycott of the exhibit and organized the alternative show. The artists further boycotted an exhibition to be held in Venezuela under the auspices of Venezuelan dictator Pérez Jiménez and the Panamerican Union as another metaphorical protest against Batista (loc cit).

Fear of reprisals caused the group to dissolve in 1955, reforming briefly in 1957 to participate in a protest exhibition against the National Salon. By 1958, theatre had overtaken visual art as the ‘most innovative and avant-garde artistic form’ (Kapcia, 2005:102).

The First Visual Forms of the Revolution

While guerrilla war raged in the Sierra Maestra, drama and especially film-making overtook the plastic arts at the vanguard of creativity:

The balance of ten years of film production shows in the first place that the Cuban film industry, born with the Revolution, has been not only its chronicler but a protagonist, a participant in it, enriched by Cuba's prime reality – the Revolution – and enriching it in turn with its vision of it. Inseparably involved in these ten years of struggle by our people, it has been at their side in all their combats for the building of socialism and communism. Rejecting superficiality, it has sought the most vitally and authentically revolutionary dialogue with the hero and audience of its entire production, the people of Cuba, successfully creating films of genuinely artistic significance, weapons of affirmation and combat, which have come to form part of our cultural heritage (Otero, 1972:41).

In particular, the oppositional potential of film was recognised, and Alfredo Guevara and others looked to the European new wave for inspiration (Kapcia, 2005).

As touched upon in chapter five, the Cuban film industry would also spawn a new and unexpected visual form. 'Following the stereotypes about socialism and Latin America but ignoring the country's cultural history, foreign observers expected that Cuba would enter a period of Mexican-style muralism to communicate with the masses. Instead, the silkscreened poster took its place' (Camnitzer, 1994:109). First produced by Casa de las Américas in 1960, ICAIC was to set the stylistic benchmark as a counter to the film posters produced in the capitalist world. This brought about a 'heyday of "public art" through posters' (Kapcia, 2005:160), which was not due to any particular policy or artistic strategy but drew on international trends to project Cuban national identity (Camnitzer, 1994). Indeed, 'The period in Cuban art from approximately 1965 to 1975 has been called the golden age of the poster' (Craven, 1992:79).¹

1 This continues:

The international reception afforded Cuban posters was indicative of the way they embraced a remarkable range of global, visual languages, in keeping with the support given to national liberation movements around the world. Pop Art, Op Art, Minimalism and Conceptual Art, as well as the earlier avant-garde traditions of Cubist collage, Constructivist montage and Surrealist disjunction, were all important during this period. In turn, the very catholicity of Cuban poster design was interrelated not only with the resolutely internationalist aims for which they were produced, but also with the new aesthetic synthesis that the revolutionary process had created (Craven, 1992:80).

Post-Revolutionary Literature

Adopting the kind of ‘generational’ approach that had been discredited by Retamar (1966)² and would come to be so by Miller (1999), Casal (1971) considers various genres of literature to identify: a pre-revolutionary group of social poets who would go on to propagandise the Revolution; a first generation coming to maturity after the Revolution – many of whom had lived abroad during the struggle and faced an uneasy assimilation back into cultural life in their native country – and a second generation, or new wave, of Cuban poets who eschewed the need to make explicit reference to the Revolution in order to pursue formal innovations. Similarly, within short story writing, Casal notes that the first post-revolutionary generation combined a critique of pre-revolutionary values with stylistic experimentation, often taking guerrilla warfare as their theme and the second generation broadened the thematic base of literature to make parallel improvements in quality while significantly making no move ‘toward the politicization of literature or a greater willingness to handle the conflicts and problems of the revolutionary society’ (Ibid:455). According to this account, the novel assumed supremacy as the literary medium of choice after the Revolution, with poetry struggling to maintain pre-revolutionary levels. Interestingly, Armando Hart, who presided over culture for several decades in his role as Minister – first within education and then culture – regards generations of intellectuals more holistically, across art forms. He describes the largest groups as being those who were already established at the triumph of the Revolution (typified by Nicolás Guillén), those who developed during the revolutionary process and those who began their practice in the 1970s, to emphasize a need for continuity between the new and that which preceded it (Sanchez, 1989). Meanwhile, Retamar (1962) identifies Nicolás Guillén, Alejo Carpentier, Enrique Labador Ruiz, Juan Marinello, José Antonio Potuondo, Samuel Feijoo, Onelio Jorge Cardoso and Félix Pita Rodríguez as the great writers of the Cuban Revolution.

² Retamar’s objection relates to the fact that generational categorisation obfuscates class positions, whereby revolutionary and conservative artists may be included in the same chronological category. Here, he makes a distinction between class origin and attitude to assert that the majority of Cuban intellectuals are of petit-bourgeois origin.

Plastic Arts of the Revolution

In 1962, Retamar would describe the expectations of some of his Latin American colleagues, impatiently awaiting the new art forms of the Revolution. Some advocated a turn to the Mexican muralists (which, however exciting they may have seemed in their own time, struck the new protagonists as old) and others harked back to Cuban art of a previous era, to ask what was happening with abstract art. To the first group, he replied that a political and economic transformation was not the same as an artistic one, reminding his readers that it took twelve years for the Mexican muralist movement to develop, and that, even then, it lacked a corresponding movement in literature. The second group he referred to Fidel's 'Words to the Intellectuals' and a major exhibition of abstract art at the National Museum of Fine Arts. At the end of the decade, Benedetti would ask Mariano – who had been identified by Retamar (1962) as one of the great painters of the Revolution³ – about the developments that were discernible in Cuban painting. He replied that the work itself had not changed, beyond the 'greater emphasis on what is Cuban' (1969:504) that predated the Revolution. Perhaps surprisingly, he noted a generalised absence of 'great universal themes that are shaking contemporary painting' (loc cit); rather, the Revolution manifested itself in the mood of the work, in joy rather than suffering.

Visiting Cuba in 1967-8, Salkey would visit an exhibition of modern Cuban art that contained 'examples of Cubism, Tachism, Pop Art, Surrealism, Expressionism, poster work, abstract stuff, everywhere; some a little derivative, wild, crass; some original, sensitive, path-finding, safe-playing' (1971:189). Socialist realism was nowhere in evidence and he commented that there was 'Not a trace of Party productions, except for one or two canvases with obvious political content, done by young artists badly wanting to reflect their position in the Revolution' (loc cit). Isolating specific visual tropes, Mosquera reflects on how, 'In the midst of the revolutionary atmosphere, pop art, the new figuration, and the dialogue between them set the tone of visual art of that

³ Others include Wifredo Lam and René Portocarrero (loc cit).

time, with curious local reinterpretations and embellishments of the “internationalist” tendencies then in vogue’ (1999b:24). Martínez of Los Once is typical of this development; politicised by the US embargo, he moved from abstraction to figuration in 1965, drawing on his previous work in advertising and borrowing the serial structure of Pop Art⁴ to repeat images of Martí and Che.⁵

In the 1970s, there was a lull in visual art production, and Kapcia explains that:

This was partly generational, the 1970s being a hiatus between the pre-1959 artists who had dominated the 1960s and the emergence of the graduates of ISA, of the reformed San Alejandro and other art schools. There were also other factors. In the first place, the end of the material shortages (which had helped determine the 1960s’ innovation) and the greater availability of paper boosted a resurgence of drawing [...] and a willingness to experiment beyond the previous minimalism. Secondly, the effect of institutions such as ISA and the ENA was positive and negative; on the one hand, they guaranteed employment after graduation, which changed the Havana art world drastically, but, on the other, they also determined the potentially rigid criteria and parameters for the new art, as the new art hierarchy (using its prizes, spaces and training opportunities) effectively laid down the rules for acceptability (2005:160-1).

Nonetheless, writing in 1979, Sarusky and Mosquera were able to note that ‘in the plastic arts [...] artists hardly known before the Revolution have produced a valuable body of work, while established artists enriched their output under the most favourable conditions for creative work. At the same time, every encouragement is given to young artists and writers who make a vigorous contribution to cultural life’ (1979:19).

While this study is centred on the period 1959-77, it is, perhaps, interesting to follow the outcomes of the policies discussed in the body text to their logical

4 In 1967, Carlos Rafael would go to some length to explain to art students that art forms produced under radically divergent socio-economic conditions may result in similar expressions (1980:78). At the end of the same year, Salkey would report the somewhat ironic words of his friend, John La Rose: ‘The North American “pop” thing dies hard [...] Only revolutionary Britain’s been able to resist it’ (1971:35). Craven would explain how ‘the Cuban variation of Pop Art was built on the perceptually sophisticated aspect of Warhol’s work – including a measured anti-authoritarian tendency to view the “heroic” in non-hierarchical terms, thus extending the progressive attributes of Pop Art at the expense of the ideological cynicism to which Warhol’s work often leads’ (1992:87). Specifically in relation to Martínez’s 1970 collage, *The Island* (1970), he notes:

[...] we see Warhol’s grid framework for flattening-out portraits used in a new way. Here it does not merely repeat the same image, but rather presents, in quite matter-of-fact terms a group portrait that includes many anonymous people from various sectors of Cuban society, along with Che, Fidel, and Camilo (as well as Ho Chi Minh and Lenin) – none of whom stands out in ‘heroic’ isolation or hierarchical placement. Through this deft play between a geometric grid and considerable variation in imagery, Martínez uses the celebratory colour, bold flat forms, and even a qualified sense of mock-heroism, to transform Warhol’s cynical ambivalence into a positive openness still capable of affirming historical progress, yet not dogmatically [...] This particular use of Pop Art in revolutionary Cuba helps us to understand retrospectively its progressive potential, especially the anti-authoritarian tone and critical detachment of its original phase (Ibid:87-8).

5 In the context of a poster featuring Che, Craven notes that: ‘It should also be emphasized that the *Che* poster appeared in Cuba after his death, while the images of Stalin and Mao were used during their lifetimes to foster a ‘cult of the personality’ that helped radically centralize power in their respective countries. (It should be noted here that Marx himself attacked any personality cult as *anti-socialist* in character)’ (Ibid:86).

conclusion, to note that, in the 1980s, the approach perpetuated by the Ministry of Culture prompted something of a 'revival of Cuban visual arts' (Miller, 2008:688). Having lain relatively dormant for a decade, visual art 'seemed to blossom again, especially with the promise of new space and opportunity' (Ibid:19). Mosquera argues that, confronted with an expectation that they would consolidate revolutionary propaganda, 'the new artists, rather than rebel in the face of those clichés and impositions, ignored them with an Olympian air. Their resolute stance allowed them to prevail despite the hostility that surrounded them' (1999:25). Craven notes that, in general, the 1980s were typified by a:

[...] renewed concern with the formal values of art, as opposed to a mere focus on extra-aesthetic compulsions; a re-engagement with avant-garde art from the West; a usage of elements from popular culture along with local home-made kitsch [...]; a preoccupation with one's international identity (what it means to be from Latin America or from the Third World); a consideration of the ethical role of art; and a commitment to the ever-greater re-integration of art and life (1992:78).

Camnitzer (1994) writes extensively about the three generations of artists emerging in the 1980s as the first true beneficiaries of the Revolution. The first of these was centred on the 'Volumen I' exhibition, which opened on 14 January 1981 in the Centro de Arte Internacional in Havana receiving some 8,000 visitors in two weeks, signalling 'the emergence of radical critical art in Cuba' (Fernandes, 2007:137). Keen to distinguish the brand of realism this exhibition advanced from that of socialist realism, Camnitzer writes:

Because of the traditional attribution of realist aesthetics to socialist regimes, it becomes important to analyze the function of realism in the Cuban development. Realism was indeed a strong formative element for most of the artists of the 'Volumen I' group. [...] But realism in Cuba was not socialist realism in the old-fashioned Soviet sense. It was photo-realism, a label consciously used to define a Cuban brand of hyperrealism. [...] In spite of its idiosyncratic nature, the movement was used by Western media to try to link Cuban with Soviet art as a proof of cultural dependency (1994:8-9).

Instead, Cuban photo-realism had discernable links to the kind of 'testimonial literature' being nurtured by Casa de las Américas, which sought to describe significant historical events without leaving time for aesthetic distance (Ibid).

While the first generation of artists to emerge in the 1980s was defined by aesthetic rupture and the third by political analysis brought on by rectification, ‘the second generation served to refine the potential of the first generation through individual artistic achievements and to help focus what was to come for the third generation’ (Ibid:173). More specifically:

What separates the second generation slightly from the first generation is the introduction of humorous, erotic, and scatological elements in some of their work, a trait that has been picked up more blatantly by the generation following. [...] The third generation, with a median age of twenty-five years old today, is radically different. Although also exhibiting individually, they were organized in even more intense groups than was the first generation. They are highly conscious of belonging to one generation and of a need to find their own generational expression. In that sense, even if most of the distinct groups we will discuss were extinct by the end of the decade, the generation itself still carries a kind of ‘group identity’. [...] One of the main concerns of the third generation is to ‘desloganize’ Communist Party language, which they feel has gradually been frozen to death (Ibid:175).

‘The construction of this new art and culture presupposes much more than the mechanical notion that art merely reflects ideology or the simplistic belief that progressive art simply involves the “correct” political content, as if the visual language used were of secondary importance’ (Craven, 1992:91). The radicalism of the third generation was self-evident. ‘While previous generations of the 1980s are, to a great extent, concerned with aesthetics, this [third] generation is concerned with ethics, including those governing the art market. It is here where they distance themselves from the older artists’ (Ibid:177). The third generation isolated itself, eschewing membership of UNEAC (which actively sought to include them) and refusing to work with members of artists from other generations, whom they regarded as purveyors bourgeois art. A commitment to the politics of communication also defines the third generation and one of its representatives, Aldito Menéndez, has written:

The degree of urgency and of ambiguity of a message are in inverse proportion. It has been agreed in the capitalist system that the poetics of ambiguity should be used because it eliminates the possibility of art becoming an efficient weapon against the system. . . . Isn’t it strange that when the art of the (capitalist) world had reached its highest revolutionary level (during the 1960s and 1970s), at its highest degree of freedom. . . it stopped, to regress several decades? . . . Artists don’t exist. Art doesn’t exist. There are only people who work according to the dictations of the capitalist or the communist systems. Among them, there are people who pollute the environment

the same way the industrialists do. [...] Che Guevara was an artist. . . . Art is a nameless trade, a secret organization with an infinity of shapes, to which some people belong, from street sweepers to poets. That is why true artists always deny both being artists and their existence (Ibid:198-9).

Reading about the third generation of artists to emerge in the 1980s, there is a sense that they have absorbed the realities of the Revolution and, rather than seeking to remake society anew, they wish to serve it through their art, whereby:

Regardless of the sometimes rocky trajectory of the Revolution, its ideological and social conditions have been internalized by the artists. In addition, the youngest generation of artists in Cuba now consists mostly of individuals coming from segments of the population that before the Revolution did not have access to education. The traditional monopoly of the middle class on art has been broken, and their art unites a sophisticated education with political awareness and grass-roots sensitivity. It is not surprising then that some traditional borderlines that characterize art are erased. The younger artists see themselves not only as artists but also as a part of a political spearhead (Ibid:316).

The similarities should be noted here with the earlier approach of writers who ‘claimed for themselves the right to write not against or for but from within the Revolution [presenting] a critical view of the Revolution and of the problems of constructing socialism, taking for granted their involvement with and loyalty to revolutionary principles’ (Casal, 1971:451). Pitting artists against the Revolution, Mosquera identifies the 1980s as a golden age in which ‘cultural discourse became separate from “official discourse”’ (2001:13), while Padura Fuentes describes how ‘painters, writers, dramatists, and even dancers and people involved in the cinema took fairly substantial risks and began opting for a less inhibited cultural expression. This decision was based more on an identification with the aesthetic function of art than on any direct political expression of the content’ (2001:180).

Considering the third generation, Mosquera notes that ‘If in the first half of the 1980s the predominant concerns were of a conceptual and anthropological nature, in the second half, parody and a new allegorical expressionism prevailed’ (1999:26). This approach carried its own consequences and various exhibition closures followed, such as that of Tomás Esson’s *Mi homenaje al Che* (1987), ‘which shows grotesque monsters fornicating before the image of the hero, depicted with Negroid features’ (Mosquera,

1999b:26). But, official reaction tended to be in proportion to the size of audiences exposed to controversial material:

[...] this new art found little resonance among the public, exhibitions being largely enclosed within the small circles that revelled in their freedom but, unlike their predecessors, paid little overt heed to the demands of Revolution or public. Hence, not only did it risk isolation and condemnation for excess in a still cautious atmosphere but it seemed to break the link between the visual arts and the needs of cultural democratisation, the search for cultural identity seemingly being replaced by a concern for individual or group identity, and by a drive for artistic eclecticism [...] Indeed, the fact that many of the 1980s generation subsequently left Cuba was no surprise (Kapcia, 2005:161).

Indeed, Kapcia notes, with a sense of inevitability, that ‘recent tendencies, new opportunities and official reactions all led to a gradual withdrawal from public art towards individualism’ (Ibid:192). While theatre retreated into similarly hermetic experiments, ‘it was again left to film to address social issues more publicly, albeit focusing on the question of cultural identity’ (Ibid:162).

Appendix C

Letter to Colleagues [Castilian Version – English Version to Follow]

Estimado Colega,

Quiero presentarme. Mi nombre es Rebecca Gordon-Nesbitt. Soy graduada universitaria en las especialidades de Historia del Arte y Ciencias Sociales en las universidades de Londres y Strathclyde respectivamente.

Trabajé como crítica de arte, generalmente en Londres y Glasgow y dos años en Finlandia en El Instituto Nórdico de Arte Contemporáneo (desde el 2000 hasta el 2002). Hice críticas de arte y también relacionadas con el sistema artístico de muchos países capitalistas y neoliberales. Estas críticas aparecen en diferentes revistas y libros, en el Reino Unido, (*Critique Journal of Socialist Theory; Mute; Variant*), Europa y los Estados Unidos (Free University of Warsaw; Academy of Fine Arts, Vienna; Apexart, New York).

Estoy en Cuba por un período de cinco meses (desde noviembre hasta el último día de marzo), con el objetivo de investigar acerca de la política cultural que ha tenido el gobierno revolucionario desde los primeros momentos del ejército rebelde hasta la actualidad. Es mi propósito conocer las diferentes etapas que ha tenido el desarrollo cultural cubano especialmente las artes plásticas.

Me gustaría ver unos documentos sobre la formación de la nueva cultura (desde la información económica hasta los congresos de cultura) y estoy interesada en conocer quienes trabajaron directamente en esta formación. Después me gustaría poder conversar con artistas, funcionarios, representantes o trabajadores que tienen mucha experiencia en este campo y que deseen colaborar conmigo ya que este trabajo de investigación que realizo responderá a mi doctorado que tiene por tema: El Impacto de la Revolución de la Cultura Cubana. Los intercambios pueden ser personales (o por correo electrónico), y la información puede ser anónima.

Usted puede contactarme a través del teléfono (832 8221) también a través de mi dirección electrónica (rebecca.gordon-nesbitt@strath.ac.uk). Me despido de usted esperando su pronta colaboración.

Rebecca Gordon-Nesbitt

Letter to Colleagues [English Version]

Esteemed Colleague,

I would like to introduce myself. My name is Rebecca Gordon-Nesbitt. I am a university graduate in the specialities of History of Art and Social Sciences in the universities of London and Strathclyde respectively.

I have worked as a curator, generally in London and Glasgow and for two years in Finland at the Nordic Institute for Contemporary Art (from 2000 to 2002). I have undertaken critiques of art and of the relations of the artistic system in many capitalist and neoliberal countries. These critiques appeared in different magazines and books, in the United Kingdom (*Critique Journal of Socialist Theory; Mute; Variant*), Europe and the United States (Free University of Warsaw; Academy of Fine Arts, Vienna; Apexart, New York).

I am in Cuba for a period of five months (from November until the last day of March), with the objective of researching the cultural policy that the revolutionary government had from the early days of the Rebel Army until its realisation. It is my proposal to know the different stages that the development of Cuban culture has had, especially in the visual arts.

I would like to see some documents about the formation of the new culture (from economic information to cultural congresses) and I am interested in knowing who worked directly on this formation. Afterwards, I would like to be able to speak with artists, functionaries, representatives and workers who have much experience in this field and who wish to collaborate with me on this work of research which is undertaken for my doctorate which takes as its theme 'The Impact of the Revolution on Cuban Culture'. These interviews can be made in person (or by email) and the information can be anonymous.

You are able to contact me by telephone or email [details given].

I leave you in the hope of your prompt collaboration,

Rebecca Gordon-Nesbitt

Appendix D: Interview Schedules

Adelaida de Juan, Havana, 3 March 2010 [conducted in English]

Rebecca Gordon-Nesbitt: So I very much enjoyed reading your book, *Modern Cuban Art*, which has been translated into English.

Adelaida de Juan: Yes, I translated it. But I don't know why the editors did not want both names to appear. Esther Pérez is a friend of mine is a very good translator and I translated half and she translated half but somehow they did not want me to appear as a translator.

RGN: Because you're a professional writer.

ADJ: [Laughs]

RGN: You know there's a compelling case for certain style before the Revolution and after the Revolution which I hope we'll come back to. I just want to ask you about your assertion that, as with many other Latin American countries, the Cuban aesthetic avant-garde felt themselves to be very aligned with the political avant-garde.

ADJ: That's right.

RGN: In the '20s and '30s, they both rejected the conditions that were prevalent at the time and I'm wondering, in the 1950s, whether a similar thing happened. I know you mentioned the retreat into abstraction during the years of the dictatorship, but there was a very active rebellion around the 1953 biennial. Apart from a stylistic rebellion and a refusal to participate in institutional structures, did the artists of the time, the mid- to late-1950s, align themselves with the revolutionary forces, did they take part in any kind of revolutionary activity?

ADJ: Well, I think, on a personal basis, yes. Not – how can I say – a way of using the cultural world to oppose the dictatorship of Batista at that time. Besides, abstract painting and sculpture at the time came in very well because of the force of the New York School of abstract painting, Jackson Pollock and all of them and we are very much under the influence, everybody was under the influence; Cuba especially has always been very close to the United States for obvious reasons and culture would... those who were up to date were very much in. As a matter of fact, the name... the young artists joined in 1953... the name was also abstract – Los Once – that is a way. There were means of personally opposing the regime, means of which I also took part; I don't think they were very risky but they were risky. I remember, we lived in this building at the time; we've been living here for over fifty years. At the time, you could not get here, downstairs to this big apartment – in a very small apartment at the last storey – and we hid some compañeros in danger at the time. And also, I remember leaving early in the morning with Roberto for work and finding a friend of ours hanging, who had been hanged from an electric post. That was the general air, you know. We took that in a civilian way, I would say, writing, distributing newspapers, clandestine newspapers, taking up money

that would later be sent to the Sierra, but not in an otherwise active way I would say. I think there was a very cultural tradition.

RGN: To remain at one remove.

ADJ: Yes. I mean, there was a risk, there was a risk. I remember, in 1958, which was very hot at the time because the *compañeros* in the Sierra were winning at the time, were fighting very hard and I remember, when my husband and I went around picking up money, that we regularly did monthly, it felt a lot... and I was pregnant at the time, because then that would be another [hiding place] around the city and my husband used to write in the clandestine newspapers and I used to hide the papers there, which helped. But, compared to those who took up arms, we were doing very little, I think. It was very little. We did what we could, but it was not too much.

RGN: No, but you were part of the urban struggle.

ADJ: That's right.

RGN: Have you seen a new film by Rebecca Chávez called Ciudad en Rojo?

ADJ: Yes.

RGN: It's a beautiful film.

ADJ: But that is what took place in Santiago de Cuba; that was very close to the Sierra and Havana is a different thing. It was the type of work we call *juano* and there were things that we used to do and things that we used to not do. For example, there was a time for months it was called La Trece these were sort of a standard ambience in Havana and we use to take up the... my English is very faulty today...

RGN: No, not at all [Laughs]

ADJ: It used to be better, I'm more used to translating and writing than talking, I have nobody to talk with in English now. So the civilian ways of participating I don't recall any artists of high value, except one who left in 1958 I think he saw where the wind was blowing at the time, so, in 1958, he left Cuba and established himself some place else.

RGN: Who was that?

ADJ: Mario Cavelli. He was the only one who collaborated with the Instituto de Cultura.

RGN: Did any artists visit the Sierra and create works there or when they came back from there?

ADJ: I don't understand the question.

RGN: Did any artists from Havana or from other cities visit the Sierra Maestra

and create artworks as a result of their experience?

ADJ: I don't think so.

RGN: If we think about the early post-revolutionary period now, were any of them involved in the developments arising after the government was formed, any of the cultural policy. Obviously I'll talk about this with other people as well, but I just wondered if you knew of any artists who involved themselves in policy-making?

ADJ: Well, many artists had posts in the new government. For example, Mariano... diplomatic posts. My husband was Cultural Attaché in Paris in 1960, Mariano was Cultural Attaché in India, that sort of thing and, later, Mariano was attendant of the classic work picture, artwork, art section when the UNEAC was created. That was calling together all the artists and writers.

RGN: If we think about the art of that period, you've written about the work which embraced the language of Pop Art and I'm a big fan of Raúl Martínez, for example. In the US, that was very much a celebration of capitalism and that typing industry and Martínez worked in the advertising industry, didn't he, before the Revolution?

ADJ: Yes.

RGN: So, I'm wondering... obviously context is very important when we talk about artwork. What were the ideological implications of Cuban artists?

ADJ: Well it's often called... what Raúl did, he followed a bit the route, the same route – he told me didn't know it but, well, I'm pretty sure that he did – I mean, there were abstract painters, like Rauschenberg, who also started out as an abstract painter, and then deviated towards what was later to be known as Pop. But Raúl Martínez's Pop had nothing to do with New York or London Pop, no, because he worked with the images of great heroes of great Cuban and Latin American heroes. And later with people in the street. Raúl is a very unusual figure because he was excellent in three ways of classic art; he was an excellent painter, he was an excellent designer and he was an excellent photographer. So, many of the figures that appear in Raúl's paintings were people that he had photographed in the streets and that is nothing to do with the cans of Campbell or with the comics, which is the world of the New York Pop Art, no? It had nothing to do with it. It is similar in the sense of the images – that it takes up images from what you call another world and brings it to painting. But the images, the world itself is completely different.

RGN: There's a superficial similarity formally.

ADJ: Yeah it's very superficial, it's like the language being used for two different things. Let's say... going back to the '30s where German as a language that had been a language of great poetry was used as the language for Nazi propaganda. Well, the language is the

same but the image it represented is completely different, the message is different. I think that that is with Raúl. As a matter of fact, when he showed in the '60s – he had a show in Mexico with another great painter of the '60s, a woman, Antonia Eiriz – they both exhibited in Mexico at the time when he wrote the catalogue, the words to the catalogue, and somebody, a Mexican art critic, called Raúl's work that was already in that language, not abstract – Martí, the different versions of Martí – he called it Raúl Martínez's Cuban Pop to distinguish it completely from the Pop that was in the market. Because the market has a very big importance in all of this.

RGN: Absolutely, yes. In Britain we have a case of an advertising guru, Charles Saatchi, are you familiar with him?

ADJ: No.

RGN: He was the guru behind Margaret Thatcher, he helped to polish her presentations during her election campaign. He promoted a whole school of artists who were dealing with very easy to understand visual messages in the same style as advertising, and they've become hugely wealthy like Damien Hirst, Tracey Emin and these characters. So it's not political at all, purely aesthetic, and using the genre of advertising.

ADJ: But Raúl was political. In the taking of great tradition of Cuban history, Cuban and Latin American history.

RGN: And bringing them into the mainstream, making people aware.

ADJ: That's right.

RGN: If we think about of artists at this time, obviously there have been gestures of international solidarity made during the '60s with people in Vietnam and in Africa and there was an ongoing discussion about the role of an artist or an intellectual in the revolutionary society which has been developed consistently. I wonder if there are any particular discussions about aesthetics and ethics that you can point me to in the literature?

ADJ: No, not specifically but I would recommend that you look up a small book volume by Graziella Pogolotti with the intellectual discussions during the '60s, do you have it already?

RGN: I've requested a copy, I've seen it in the National Library and I've ordered a copy.

ADJ: Yes because that would give you a bit the world that we were living in, and it was a world of great discussions about everything, about absolutely everything, and UNEAC was important at the time, and especially the Casa de las Américas was important at the time and up to now. It's a place for discussion and a place for interchange, which is very important because we were cut off. At the time, intellectuals who were invited to

the Casa de las Américas had to cross the Atlantic two or three times in order to get to Cuba because we were cut off from all Latin American countries and many European countries except for Mexico, So I remember Mario Benedetti laughing about it, that to come to Havana for the Casa de las Américas, he had to cross the Atlantic four times [via Prague], but he did it and that was very important.

RGN: I was speaking actually yesterday to Arien Gonzalez, the librarian from Casa de las Américas, and she was talking about this and how Casa fulfilled a role almost like the United Nations for artists and intellectuals – everybody could come together there and bypass the governments that were blockading each other.

ADJ: Yes, I remember, in the '70s, Mariano was at the head of the art department in Casa de las Américas; he had been in the '60s for the UNEAC and in the '70s at Casa de America. He organised what were called the Encuentros de Plásticas Latinoamericanos, which was a getting-together of artists and art historians and art critics from all America and we used to, it was quite big, and those artists would end up doing a collective mural, installed.

RGN: Is this how the Che Guevara mural came about in the executive office, the board room?

ADJ: That's one of them.

RGN: Multi-panel, that's fantastic. Did this just happen once, this Encuentro, or many times?

ADJ: Oh no, three or four times in the '70s.

RGN: So there would be documents about this in the archives?

ADJ: Oh yes. They were called Encuentros de Plásticas Latinoamericanos.

RGN: I'll have a look, thank you. I'm also very interested in the experiments that have happened here, which you touch upon briefly in your book, that seek to reconcile the traditional division between art and the people. Thinking about experiments like Telarte, Arte en la Fábrica and Arte en la Carretera. Could you tell me a bit more about those because it's very hard to find out about these experiments?

ADJ: It is. Telarte had to do with a conjunction between culture and the textile. They sent Tomín who was an artist, very young, worked at the time at the cultural ministry to help, to guide a bit at the textiles and then I remember they made like a sort of *concurso* you know, among artists – painters, designers, etc. Then, say, five or six designs were chosen – Mendive, Sigueros, Raúl Martínez and Amelia Peláez – who was dead at the time but they asked a designer to make a design based on her work – René Portocarrero. I used to dress a lot with Telarte and that was I remember... the Minister of Culture

at that time was Armando Hart and he defended the existence of Telarte. We designed it in cotton which for our climate, not in these days but during the rest of the year, was very popular, especially Mendive made a great deal. I found a Mendive recently – something that had been left over and immediately bought it. It's a tablecloth now in my house! Yes. Arte en la Carretera also... they were chosen – I was on the jury of most of them, so I know how we got to do it – and we talked to the artists. Arte en la Carretera were big... I think in England you call them hoardings, I think... billboards. There were some made based on the work of artists that were no longer alive; there was one by Portocarrero, based on Portocarrero, one based on Mariano, but the rest were young artists like Tomás Sanchez, _____ and they got together, they presented proposals. And they got together; that didn't go through a jury – the jury named the artists but, once they were named, the artists could do what they wanted. And they got together... it was the work of a week at the University Centre for Architecture and Engineering, a bit outside Havana, where the billboards were there... they painted directly on the billboard. Each of them knew where that billboard was to be placed on the high road. One artist, who is an artist after the Revolution, who... what was his name? He was married to Alicia Leal – used to earn his living before the Revolution painting billboards, so he was the one who taught a new, young artist how to translate a painting from a canvas to a billboard and I was invited to go there and talk with them for a while as I had chosen... had helped to choose the artists and I remember Tomás Sanchez was... are you familiar with the work of Tomás Sanchez?

RGN: No I'm not.

ADJ: He paints landscapes that are very profound, very anthropological and he is very careful. He paints... I remember Tomás Sanchez, what patience, what strength, because he painted every blade of grass as if... it was just a huge billboard full of grass – that's all he painted. But then, there was this primitive artist, naïve – called Roberto Matta Moros – who later won prizes, painter of the year [Laughs]. He was an older man and he had been – to give you an idea of what he was, before the Revolution he earned his living as something else, but then he painted on a Sunday – you know, a Sunday painter – and he... if he could sell a canvas, he would say 'what is the price?' the buyer would ask 'what is the price?' and he said 'well, so much for the paint, so much for the brushes, so much for the nails, so much for the canvas and so many hours of work – \$47 and 28 cents! [Laughs] So, Morello taught him how to make a billboard, how to take his painting, magnify it to a billboard, you take the billboard and you draw round, you know, to make squares and then Matta said 'Ah yes I understand perfectly' and then he paid no attention to that [laughs]; his lines were like this instead of being horizontal, but he painted it, it was only done once.

RGN: Whose initiative were these projects?

ADJ: The Art Department of the Ministry of Culture.

RGN: They found the money for them?

ADJ: Yes and also Telarte, the Ministry of Culture with the textile industry and what

was the other thing you asked for?

RGN: Arte en la Fábrica

ADJ: The same.

RGN: Yeah. What about the instructores de arte and aficionados programmes?

ADJ: That was in the early... it started out in the early '60s. And the first students were taken from those adolescents that had done the campaign against illiteracy. They came back and they were offered the opportunity then to study whatever they wanted. I have an anecdote... I don't know if I'm rambling on, you don't, you're not interested, it's not good for your work.

RGN: It's very interesting.

ADJ: I remember being in... taking down the names of the youngsters and what they wanted to study, obviously I was in the art group, the line that said 'Arte'... the queue. There was this boy, young man, adolescent, he had nothing in common with art, no knowledge, no experiences, nothing, and finally I asked him 'why do you want art?' and he confessed that he thought it was a diminutive for artillery [Laughs]. This is what he wanted! I was a teacher at the first school, when the first art school... new art school was opened. The buildings weren't built then – in Cubanacán – they were starting them and I remember I used to teach at one of the homes that had been abandoned by its owners who had emigrated to the United States, the most ridiculous house I've ever seen, because it was obviously copied from a *Good Housekeeping* magazine. In this climate, the living room had a fireplace – that gives you an idea of the sort of people that lived there. Well, that was the house where I taught; we used to get together, I used to go with my two daughters because I had nobody to leave them with, because my mother also worked, and I used to go with one baby in one arm and the slide projector under the other and the other daughter hanging on to my skirt and then the... what we called the *dueña*, the woman who was in charge of the house, was taking care of the functioning of the house, used to help me take care of them; there was a garden there, with grass, so I could leave the children with her, and my pupils helped; many of them had a lesson with one of the children on their laps. It was very spontaneous at the time. Then I used to work there and at the university and going back and forth; at the time, we were young you know and when you're young you do a lot of crazy things.

RGN: That's true. So were these the professional artists that you were training or were they instructores de arte?

ADJ: Those were professional.

RGN: Yeah. What were the successes and failures of the instructores programme and the aficionados?

ADJ: Well, as in all programmes there were successes and failures and many of them

later taught at public schools and many of them went on from the *instructores de arte* to the Escuelas de Arte, but many of them were... developed to something else, not as today that they normally go to schools to work with children and adolescents, at the time it lasted very short, a short time and then it was sort of abandoned, it sort of died out. They became more professional.

RGN: So there wasn't a moment of conflict between amateur movement and a professional movement?

ADJ: No.

RGN: If we come back to the discourses within art, I have a sense that modernism found an easier home here, the ideas behind modernism and the Enlightenment which tend to go hand in hand within emancipatory politics, found a more easy accommodation here than the ideas of postmodernism which has been identified with capitalism and imperialism. Would you say that was the case?

ADJ: I think there is a bit of everything and it depends on the generation and I think there are clearly several... these last fifty years there were those painters who were very mature at the time and went on working, those of my generation that were in their twenties or thirties at the time, developed and the first generation of graduates from the Escuelas de Arte and there have been at least two or three generations after. Each of them, of course, looks for – Picasso would say finds – its own language and they have been very eager to be in tune with what is being done in the modern art world, so you get artists... there was a time of conceptualism and there was a time of a new abstract, now is the time of the installations and performances which is... most of the young people do it. There is more recently, a coming back to the perfectionism, perfecting the forms and the techniques together with the performances, you can find everything nowadays. There is in... I don't know if it's closed already, an exhibition, a show of very, very young artists called 'Bomba' here in L Street, a gallery in L Street. They are painters they're not doing performances and the like, but performances have become very... and installations, very popular among the other artists.

RGN: During the '80s, as you say, there was more of a move towards abstraction then there's also been a move away from public art to individualism and then back again into more public forms, hasn't there?

ADJ: There is no... this thing of being individual, I don't think it's very strong. In mean, there's many... they have even taken into, some artists open their homes as a gallery and all that is... there are many shows being put on at the same time and also you must remember, Havana is the capital, Havana has the big museums, Havana has the main galleries but there are very active places and art going on in the west of the state too. So it isn't only Havana.

RGN: I'm hoping to travel around for the last couple of weeks and see some other places, galleries and museums around there. I'm also very interested in

something that I've seen written down several times but never really had any access to which is this idea that artists play some kind of productive part in society because, where I come from, artists are considered failures, they're not productive they are just wasters who sit around all day, painting or talking or smoking cigarettes, that's how they're perceived, whereas...

ADJ: Socially.

RGN: Socially, yes, there's no status to being an artist in my society.

ADJ: Well, I think here, being an artist is established and recognised as such. I think, for example becoming a member of the UNEAC is a sort of stamp that you are professionally valid, because every... besides, you have to prove yourself every five years, so it's not a question of... because you did something at the time and then for the rest of your life... That is how it's supposed to work; it doesn't work always but it's supposed to be that way. In meant that, about every five years you're supposed to have done something in five years, or you stop being a member.

RGN: Some form of exhibition or?

ADJ: That's right. Publish a book or have a show or something, you know.

RGN: How do the government regard this, how did it effect this switch, was it enough for the union or?

ADJ: Well, it was formed very early.

RGN: Yes in the '60s.

ADJ: Very early and it's been kept up quite actively; it's grown a lot, it has certainly grown a lot since it was founded in...

RGN: It has state support and the support of artists...

ADJ: Oh yes.

RGN: Was there a change in the way the artists were thought about in the media, in society in general?

ADJ: I think so because the government has instituted the Premio Nacional that is for literature, it's for art, visual art. I have been a member of the jury several times, in the art prize, the meeting of the most distinguished artists of the year, and we have tried, at least I have tried, to let it have a very wide scope so that there have been distinguished, or distinguished that way, a painter... a painting, sculpture, photography, even recently... [searches for right word]

RGN: Installation?

ADJ: Caricature, yes. Installation would come under sculpture. Let me, see what else – paintings.

RGN: Any video art?

ADJ: Nobody in video art has been chosen because it's supposed also to be a very long-term execution, not something that you've been doing for the past two years, no, it's supposed to be something that you have been distinguished in during many, many years.

RGN: How do I find a list of the winners?

ADJ: In the... I could tell you some of them – in sculpture, a woman, Rita Longa, and, more recently, the last one given was José Villa, he who does abstract sculpture and also John Lennon [a life-like sculpture of the Beatle in the park named after him], so that was the last one. Painter: Nelson Domínguez. Who else in painting? This naïve painter I told you about, Matta Moros. In caricature, Nues; in photography, Raúl Corrales. You could find all that in the Consejo Nacional de Artes Plásticas. They should have... because that's where they're chosen.

RGN: Okay I'll go. I need to pay a visit there anyway. As well as social terms, if we think about economic terms, did artists manage to, and do they still manage, to survive as artists through their practice?

ADJ: They are very rich, oh yeah.

RGN: They're inside the market for now. Does the state pay them a salary to be artists?

ADJ: No.

RGN: No, so how do they make their money?

ADJ: Some of them are teachers, at the art schools, both at the elementary level and the ISA, which is the Instituto Superior de Arte, which I think is very healthy, to have artists who work, who are working but at the same time teaching something, because that brightens up the experience. And, when they sell, they sell at very high prices, very high prices. Or they work as designers, some of them are very good designers and they work at the galleries, at the book institute...

RGN: And they have a possibility to travel, don't they, many artists? So they can sell their work overseas?

ADJ: Oh yes and some of them have as... the United States... part of the embargo, is that the dollars cannot be negotiated in Cuba, which is to say that, if you win a prize in dollars, you cannot receive it in dollars in Cuba; the bank will... the US will stop the bank. So, there are ways of going round that, either establishing a false residence in, say,

Jamaica or something like that so you go through... Or you have the payment come in Euros or in Sterling and they pay very highly. Now I have heard that there was a Chinese Cuban hotel built in Shanghai and the decoration is completely Cuban, it is all by a Cuban artist, which I imagine was highly paid.

RGN: Yeah. When you talk about the blockades, there was a blockade on intellectual property for many years wasn't there and that was lifted at some point to allow...?

ADJ: No, it was not lifted.

RGN: No, but intellectual property, so artwork can now travel to the United States from Cuba?

ADJ: With difficulty, with difficulty. It is very difficult. They can do shows there; it's difficult, but this question of the dollars, unless they get it there, in hand [slaps hand], because they cannot get it in cash, they cannot be sent.

RGN: Here there have been fluctuations in...

ADJ: I will give you an example, this book of mine you have in English was originally translated for the University of Florida Press. You know that those press... as all printing houses have readers who recommend and accept. The two readers of my book recommended my book, then the editor, who was to act as an editor, to edit the book, wrote me, making some suggestions to change, everything was fine until it got to the people who manage the printing press and it never came out, for political reasons. You know it's not a political book, but it's a book of an art critic, not political, I'm not a member of the communist party, I don't write as a politician.

RGN: No, but you write about the thriving art movement which could threaten the United States in some sense.

ADJ: Well, true. This whole thing fell through and that's why it has been published in Cuba, in English. That was to be published in the University of Florida Press, who had everything, even the photographs of the paintings, because it had been accepted at that level until it came to the practical level.

RGN: What a shame.

ADJ: It was censored.

RGN: Yeah I feel very sorry about this because...

ADJ: I have received letters from colleagues in the United States, asking me why can't they get a book of mine, I say it's not my...

RGN: It's such a shame because there is so little literature that exists in English

to explain what's happening here, across all fields, culturally it's very difficult.

ADJ: I always think of that when people say the Cuban government has a big censorship, because the only censorship I've ever received comes from Florida.

RGN: Absolutely, no, it's really regrettable. Now it seems that we've missed fifty years of development, we are behind you by fifty years because you've had a thriving discourse for fifty years and we haven't had that, so we actually need to import ideas from here and translate them urgently, I think. So, to think about the market, there was a restriction placed on copyright. Artists weren't allowed to claim copyright for their work in the '60s and then that was reversed in the mid '70s wasn't it?

ADJ: Yes, well after the creation of the Ministry of Culture in '76; it really started functioning in '77 and it was really an opening and a great enrichment and that's when artists started living from their art.

RGN: Why was the decision taken to restrict copyright or to remove...?

ADJ: It was a very grey period, a very sad period, *quinquenio gris*; some have called it *quinquenio negro*. I remember [Laughs] at the time I was writing a great deal about colonial art, art in colonial times, when Mariano, who wanted me to write about him, said to me 'why are you always writing about colonial art and you don't write about me?' I said 'because they're all dead, Mariano, I write about people who are all dead.' Because it was very difficult, the *quinquenio gris*, it was... I did not suffer anything directly, except certain invisible, ambient... things in the air you could say. It was a time when they tried... certain sections of the government tried... that had to do with culture, tried, it had to do with they tried to implant social realism, like in Europe. No artists... real artists took part in that.

RGN: Of course Che Guevara had explicitly advised against that line of thinking.

ADJ: And then with the creation of the Ministry of Culture that was finally... the air was finally cleared. Things were vulnerable but open.

RGN: Since you brought it up, how did this come about, who – without wanting to name names – what were the forces that were at work during that time? Was there a heavy Soviet influence trying to have an impact on cultural policy?

ADJ: Because there were people that had belonged, or that believed or that continued the line of the old communist party in Cuba, that were very close to the Soviet journey, whereas the real government sources – that came not from that party but from the 26 July [Movement] – did not have that close ideological following of the Soviet Union and we kept on with our own history and our own historical values.

RGN: And your new history that you were building at the time.

ADJ: Yes.

RGN: And so there were obviously very public conflicts around this time, but were there also private conflicts within the government bodies and between government bodies?

ADJ: As I told you before, I'm not a party member. So I'm not on the inside of politics, but I imagine that there were.

RGN: And the fallout from that was that people felt distinctly uncomfortable within their cultural milieu, and they censored themselves to some extent.

ADJ: Exactly. The art was censored. Or they... basically, in the case of painters, they did not show their work. But, I remember, I can tell you an anecdote about that. I was at the time in the office of the person who was an artist herself, had been an artist herself, who was at the head of the art department and there was no ministry at the time; there was this department, art department, and then one of the heads of this of this soviet... Lisandro, came into her office, asking that a certain painting be taken down from the museum and she... luckily they didn't pay any attention to my being there – I was like a nonexistent object there – and then they had a big argument about it and the one who was in charge of the art department said 'you take it down over my dead body'. So there were conflicts, there were conflicts, but there were also people who said 'over my dead body' and they were not dead; they continued and the painting is still hanging in the museum! In that sense, you cannot say that social realism had anything to do with us.

RGN: Absolutely and nobody ever picked it up did they?

ADJ: No, not at all.

RGN: Tony Kapcia talks about a lull in the 1970s as a result of this.

ADJ: Certainly, but there are many ways of taking refuge from that, not taking part in what you don't believe in, and what you do, you do something else and then, when you can, you go back to what you want.

RGN: And that's what happened.

ADJ: In my case I wrote about colonial art.

RGN: You turned your attention somewhere else and then as soon as...

ADJ: Yes.

RGN: So there was very much a separation between official political discourse and social discourse at this time, which is regrettable.

ADJ: Oh yes, yes.

RGN: Finally I wanted to ask a little bit more about the market and what kind of impact that's had lately.

ADJ: It has [small laugh] made certain painters very, very rich. When somebody puts up a *subasta*... how do you say?

RGN: Auction?

ADJ: Auction! There have been two types of auction here, one, what we call a humanitarian auction, which is that the profits derived from it, go to hospital, to a certain hospital or mainly... usually goes to the cancer, the children who suffer from cancer because they pay great attention, it's so painful, you know... as far as I'm concerned I cannot believe in a God that brings that suffering upon a child. And then the Subasta Ana, the auction which is present and online also actually. It has a double function – one is selling obviously works, and the other is promoting young artists and now I will tell you something to do with one of the courses I do at the university, a postgraduate course, which has to do with gender in art that Grizelda Pollock would... has been my guide in many things. In this promotion of young artists, it is amazing how, *unconsciously*, we promote men rather than women. Unconsciously. Because I've spoken to them, asking them to take part in my course, my postgraduate course. I say 'I want you to think and to bring me numbers, records of how many young men artists you have promoted and how many young women artists you have promoted.' and they are the first lot to be surprised how we promote men rather than women without knowing they are promoting men, rather than women.

RGN: I have to say I noticed this in the collection at the Bellas Artes as well, there's very much a presence of men.

ADJ: Now, especially after the decade of the '90s, the emergence of women, of young women artists is considerable – in photography, installation, etchings, performances – are mainly women.

RGN: So who runs the auction in Havana?

ADJ: It's the Galeria Ana in Linea – that's the auction. I have to go there.

RGN: How often does it happen?

ADJ: Once a year.

RGN: Which month?

ADJ: It's usually [pause]. Frankly, I don't remember.

RGN: Okay. I'm very impressed by the literacy campaign, obviously, as

everybody is.

ADJ: The what?

RGN: The literacy campaign. And its results in the Feria del Libro are evident; everybody in Havana went to the Feria, everybody...

ADJ: But not only in Havana.

RGN: Oh, in the country.

ADJ: We just came back from Santa Clara, where I took part in the bringing out a book of caricature and Roberto had books and had a poetry recital and one of my daughters, who is a medical doctor and also a writer, has one of her books also, and I wish you could see in... Santa Clara is in the middle of the island and is a relatively small city, you could hardly walk to the area, and the theatre was full and the books I would get out of print immediately and that is from one end of the island to another.

RGN: Incredible, absolutely incredible. It's such a reading public isn't it?

ADJ: Yes.

RGN: I wonder about the audience for visual art, does it have the same enthusiasm?

ADJ: No. Frankly no. Anywhere in the world, when you open a show, the first day is full, because all your friends go and your family and your mother and your children and your cousins and then, the rest of the time, the gallery or the museum is empty. One person, two persons. Usually I hate the opening day and when I go to take notes in order write about it, I go later; there is nobody there to bother me, I can work very calmly, very quiet, there is not the same appreciation in spite of the fact that recently, yesterday I was watching spots at the television... programmes promoting different aspects of visual arts.

RGN: It has been part of people's education since childhood...

ADJ: Yes. There's an effort because television, of course, is the way of getting to mass media. I think it's insufficient, but it is an opening – programmes with a certain dignity, certain knowledge, are well done. Both of universal art and some Cuban art, or Latin American art; it's not limited by Cuban art.

RGN: I wonder why that is the case, the world over, that people don't have that visual literacy; it's just harder to engage with visual things than the written word.

ADJ: Besides because you can't be at home, I guess, you have to move yourself, you have to go out.

RGN: Having said that, there's been a fantastic amount of visual production here and great quality collections.

ADJ: And, for example, the applications to enter the art schools are very strict because there are so many who want to go that you can't manage so many, so there have to be tests in order to accept a student.

RGN: Where would I find images of artworks?

ADJ: That is a big deficit. I have spoken many times with the director of the museum, who was a pupil of mine; practically everybody was a pupil of mine – that's one of the things of being old and to tell them you have to... nowadays slides are out of fashion because nowadays you get the digital and the computer and all that, but you have to have at least postcards or something.

RGN: Yeah it's very inaccessible; I'm not allowed to take photographs in the museum of the actual artwork and then nothing exists that I can take away.

ADJ: They allow photography for professional magazines. On Mondays and previously only certain things can be photographed.

RGN: So if I take my press card there I might be allowed?

ADJ: Maybe. I suggest that you make a list of the artists you want to photograph, that would help you. Say 'I want to photograph so and so, so and so and so.'

RGN: Okay I'll do that, lovely. That's more or less it. Thank you very much for your help. Very instructive.

Graziella Pogolotti, Havana, 9 March 2010

[English Questions to Follow; Relevant Answers Appear in Body Text]

Rebecca Gordon-Nesbitt: Me agrada conocer que usted creció en una casa colonial artística. ¿Puede decirme algo sobre las condiciones para los artistas antes de la Revolución?

Graziella Pogolotti: Las formaciones de los artistas antes de la Revolución... Eran muy difíciles, en primer lugar porque no había ningún modo de tener una vida profesional como artista, no había editoriales en el país, no había tampoco mercado de las artes plásticas, en el mundo del teatro lo que estaba apareciendo era un teatro muy experimental, dirigido a un público muy limitado, que por lo tanto no tenía éxito comercial, no había una industria de cine tampoco, y los que lograban sobrevivir de su oficio eran los músicos populares, tampoco con demasiado éxito, porque en muchas ocasiones, al ser ellos músicos muy ingenuos, muy poco instruidos, se dejaban maltratar por contratos muy desfavorables.

Algunos vivían de otros trabajos más o menos relacionados con el mundo intelectual, como el periodismo, en algunos casos la enseñanza, muy poquitos, algunos tenían alguna renta familiar, así era la situación de los artistas.

RGN: Pensando en los años de lucha, ¿quiénes dentro del ejército rebelde comprendían realmente la importancia de la cultura en una nueva sociedad?

GP: Yo creo que el ejército rebelde se fue formando sobre la marcha, una parte importante de los combatientes del ejército rebelde eran campesinos, los que tenían un mayor grado de instrucción, los que realmente pudieron elaborar un programa en términos conceptuales, eran los dirigentes de la lucha revolucionaria, que tenían una idea de la importancia del arte. En *La Historia me Absolverá* de Fidel Castro, él habla de la situación del país, de los obreros sin trabajo, también menciona a los graduados de la Escuela de Artes Plásticas de San Alejandro, que tampoco tenían trabajo y que estaban incluidos dentro de la definición de pueblo que se dio en aquel momento. Por otra parte la lucha revolucionaria tuvo su aspecto urbano donde participaron intelectuales, estudiantes universitarios por eso decimos que allí había un concepto del papel de la cultura.

RGN: Cuando el gobierno revolucionario se fundó, ¿quiénes eran los «comisarios» de cultura?

GP: Bueno la palabra 'comisario' en Cuba nunca se ha utilizado. Realmente, la palabra 'comisario' en una época se usaba en el sentido de 'fundadores de exposiciones'. Bueno en el primer gobierno en enero 1959 se establece una Dirección de Cultura que formaba parte del Ministerio de Educación que en aquel momento el Ministro era Armando Hart, y en la dirección de cultura una profesora de la universidad llamada Vicentina Atuña que procedía del partido político de la izquierda intelectual, del partido anterior a la Revolución llamado el Partido Ortodoxo. Poco después la Dirección de Cultura empezó a funcionar en 1959. En marzo de ese año se crea el ICAIC y al frente del ICAIC estaba Alfredo Guevara, que procedía del movimiento estudiantil, que

procedía también, primero de la izquierda comunista y después del Movimiento 26 de Julio, que había estado en la clandestinidad y en el exilio, justo en aquel momento inicial estaban Tomás Gutiérrez Alea y Julio García Espinosa que habían estudiado cine en Roma, en Cinecittà. Después, en abril de ese año se crea la Casa de las Américas que la dirigía Haydée Santamaría, ella procedía del Movimiento de 26 Julio, había sido una luchadora de la clandestinidad en el Moncada, la Sierra Maestra y el exilio, tenía una vida política intensa, pero en la etapa que estuvo en la lucha clandestina aquí en La Habana estableció contacto con algunos jóvenes intelectuales de la época, o sea, colaboradores que le sirvieron de puente para relacionarse con el mundo intelectual.

RGN: ¿Aquí en Cuba o en toda América Latina?

GP: Sí, el objetivo de la Casa de las Américas era fortalecer las relaciones con América Latina, entonces la Casa de las Américas formó un equipo de artistas y escritores, trabajaron con ellos directamente o como colaboradores que fueron ayudando a diseñar los planes iniciales.

RGN: Usted ha hecho referencia al carácter importante e irreversible de la política cultural de los '60. Durante esa época, varias instituciones culturales se fundaron y el compromiso con la cultura era evidente en la retórica del gobierno. Estoy interesada en conocer cómo esto se hizo realidad.

GP: Bueno, Fidel tuvo siempre una concepción del papel de la cultura, también a lo largo de su vida por distintas razones ha tenido contacto con gente que procedía o tenía vínculo con el mundo de la cultura. Es por eso que llama la atención que desde una fecha tan temprana, desde los primeros meses en el año 59, en una etapa bien confusa, se empezaban a fundar instituciones culturales, por eso también había una cierta tradición que contribuiría a prediseñar algunos proyectos en relación a la cultura, dentro de la izquierda intelectual de los años 50 hubo una sociedad, una organización civil, que se llamó Nuestro Tiempo, que fue una organización de escritores y artistas.

Tenía una revista pero además, desarrollaba conferencias, charlas, exposiciones, publicaba también folletos sobre ciertos temas, y realmente algunas de las líneas que se fueron desarrollando eran líneas que prefiguraban las bases de una política cultural. Allí también se hizo la película documental, _____. Entonces toda esa gente que estuvo en Nuestro Tiempo, cuando triunfa la Revolución, pasó a hacerse cargo de distintas instituciones, a tener responsabilidades dentro de ello – también hace que, muy rápidamente, en el año 60, se crea la prensa nacional, que va a ser la entidad que va a patrocinar el desarrollo del trabajo editorial en el país, tanto a lo que se refiere a la publicación de autores cubanos, de autores latinoamericanos, como la publicación de literatura universal o por lo menos occidental, conocida, legitimada en aquel momento, entonces esto contribuirá a cerrar el círculo institucional que fue acompañado también por algo que tuvo mucha importancia para la cultura en esos años, y que fue la aparición de las revistas y suplementos culturales; el periódico *Revolución*, la revista de la Casa de las Américas y a partir de la creación de la Unión de Escritores y Artistas en el año 1961, las revistas *La Unión* y *La Gaceta* que eran las de mayor alcance. Esto condujo a difundir la literatura, el arte, el pensamiento, alrededor de todo eso, independientemente de que

también hubo una etapa en la que el pensamiento social tuvo mucho peso.

RGN: A mí me gusta mucho su descripción de cultura como un espacio de diálogo y de los intelectuales cubanos como el alma de la Revolución. El Primer Encuentro Nacional de Poetas y Artistas en Camagüey (octubre de 1960) y el manifiesto resultante (noviembre de 1960) me parece significativo en el desarrollo de la discusión. ¿Cómo fueron decididos los objetivos de ésta?

GP: Yo en ese momento no estaba aquí, estaba en los Estados Unidos. Pero de forma indirecta conocía a algunos de los que participaron en eso, no conozco bien el proceso. Yo no sé si Luís Manrique, que vive todavía, tiene más conocimiento de esto.

RGN: Como consecuencia de esos objetivos y después de Playa Girón y la prohibición de la película PM, tuvieron lugar los encuentros en la Biblioteca Nacional y las Palabras a los Intelectuales. ¿Cómo era el clima en esos momentos?

GP: Bueno, el clima en esos momentos... vamos antes de continuar, decía un café o un jugo, o agua.

RGN: No gracias, no me gusta el café.

GP: Yo creo que en este proceso, el que lleva 'las Palabras a los Intelectuales', entra en un contexto que hay que tener en cuenta. En abril de 1961 fue Playa Girón, y al fin de Playa Girón, Fidel ofreció al público el carácter socialista de la Revolución. Por otra parte, como todo proceso de este tipo, dentro de la Revolución había distintas tendencias. Bueno, yo pienso que existe la... [telephone ringing]; porque no todo el mundo piensa lo mismo ni cree que las cosas tienen que hacerse de la misma manera, dentro del ámbito intelectual había una zona que venía de la tradición marxista ortodoxa y también había otra tradición muy importante que venía de la izquierda, en algunos casos marxista, pero que tenía también lo que había significado el estalinismo en materia de arte y literatura. Es decir, la encarnación del llamado Realismo Socialista. Y lo que eso había significado para muchos artistas soviéticos que habían pertenecido en Rusia a la Vanguardia, el movimiento artístico cubano estaba muy involucrado / enraizado?? [background noise] en la Vanguardia y tenía preocupaciones al respecto.

RGN: ¿La Vanguardia de qué país?

GP: La Vanguardia artística que había tenido su centro fundamentalmente en París en los años 20 y 30, es decir, en el caso de las artes plásticas la abstracción, todas las tendencias no realistas que se daban en el arte y la literatura.

En la música podría ser lo experimental, y bueno, estas preocupaciones estaban en ciertas zonas del ambiente cubano, a todo esto se le añadió como causa circunstancial el incidente que se produjo con el documental *PM*, hecho por el hermano de Guillermo Cabrera Infante. Estos últimos años han sido documentados de alguna manera bastante pública, que trataba estas diferencias de posiciones que había dentro de la Revolución. Algunas se aglutinaron alrededor del periódico *Anuncio* y su suplemento

cultural, que fue además polémico en más de un aspecto. Y otros se unían en torno al cargo, por decirlo de una manera simplificada, al producirse el incidente *PM* que procedía de la línea de la Revolución el causante que fue el caucho y por lo tanto se produjo una fricción que contribuyó a que se sintiera la necesidad de tener este encuentro con Fidel, que sobre todo también hubo un momento, o sea, que se estaba dando el primer paso para el congreso que iba a dar nacimiento a la UNEAC.

RGN: El Primer Congreso Nacional de los Escritores y los Artistas en Cuba (18–22 agosto 1961) dio luz a la UNEAC. ¿Cómo surgió la idea de fundar una institución como esta? ¿Cuál era su motivación?

GP: Realmente la idea no era totalmente nueva, a finales de los años 30 había habido un primer proyecto de fundar una institución que reuniera a los escritores y los artistas, para defender sus intereses, aunque no tuviera un carácter gremial o sindical. Era un modo de defender los intereses de la cultura cubana. Ese proyecto fracasó, o sea, ese primer intento.

RGN: Yo he leído el libro llamado 45 Años Después.

GP: En aquel momento a nadie le pareció mal que hubiera una organización donde los artistas pudieran reunirse e intercambiar, que pudieran de algún modo tener una voz como artistas y que pudieran también patrocinar sus propios proyectos, de modo que la idea de la UNEAC _____ que ese congreso de agosto de 1960 tuvo una amplísima participación.

RGN: Después que se decidió fundar la organización ¿fue necesario obtener la autorización de otros comités gubernamentales?

GP: No, bueno, en esa época las cosas se producían con mucha espontaneidad, entonces se produce ese congreso, que yo recuerde, una de las cosas que se discutió fue el reglamento, las _____, los estatutos, y, por lo menos yo me recuerdo de que una de las discusiones más calientes tuvo que ver con el carácter selectivo que debía tener la UNEAC, y en ese sentido decide que sus miembros tuvieran una labor de creación activa, con otras organizaciones profesionales que existían y existen, que era para los graduados universitarios de determinadas carreras, que tenían que presentar un currículum, de obra de trabajo. Eso fue una de las cosas que se discutió.

RGN: ¿Cómo la UNEAC obtuvo sus edificios?

GP: Bueno, la UNEAC obtuvo esa autonomía, bueno, el estado cubano le asignó el presupuesto, determinados recursos para que pudiera desarrollar su trabajo, así es como se funda la editorial de la UNEAC que existe todavía, las revistas que yo mencionaba, se organizan exposiciones de artistas plásticos, se ejecutan determinados proyectos en paralelo a lo que hacían las instituciones del gobierno.

RGN: ¿Qué tipo de estructura financiera se estableció?

GP: En aquel momento que yo recuerde había, bueno, eso habría que precisarlo con gente que estuvo más metida en ello, había un presidente, que en este caso era Nicolás Guillén, había, yo creo que varios vicepresidentes. Yo recuerdo que estaba [José] Lezama Lima, y estaba [Alejo] Carpentier, como vicepresidentes, no recuerdo si había artistas de otro género; e inicialmente hubo una, estaba organizada en secciones, había una de artes plásticas, una de música, y otra de literatura, y creo que poco después una de teatro. Muchos años más tarde se creó la de cine, radio y televisión. Había además un equipo de dirección en el momento inicial, después de pasar a hacer otras cosas, los llamados 'secretarios'. Bueno, era gente más joven, como Lezama y Carpentier, que se ocupaban del aspecto más ejecutivo, y desde el primer momento estuvieron Lisandro Otero y Roberto Fernández Retamar. Eso es de lo que yo recuerdo de la etapa inicial, en ese momento yo colaboraba bastante, pero no estaba en la dirección de la UNEAC, trabajaba en la universidad y en la biblioteca nacional, colaboraba un poco con la UNEAC, pero no estaba en la vida cotidiana de la UNEAC. Y en aquel momento, por eso funcionaba en parte como un club, era un lugar que tenía la gente para encontrarse, había muy pocas oficinas, por lo tanto había espacio para eso, había en aquel momento una cafetería excelente y muy rápidamente hubo tiendas en donde se podía adquirir materiales para artistas, libros, revistas, había una biblioteca también y muchos de esos espacios pues, con el andar del tiempo se fueron perdiendo, y a medida que esta organización fue creciendo, porque además en aquel momento inicial nada más existía.

RGN: ¿El gobierno dio ayuda económica? ¿Los miembros pagaban las cuotas?

GP: Sí, unas cuotas muy modestas, y las siguen pagando, o por lo menos deben pagarlas. Una cuota de 2 pesos al mes.

RGN: Además de la consideración de su papel revolucionario ¿qué temas estéticos preocupaban a los artistas durante los primeros años de Revolución?

GP: En primer lugar, Cuba tuvo un protagonismo internacional muy importante. Había una tendencia a simplificar la historia, y reducirlo todo a la Guerra Fría entre los Estados Unidos y la Unión Soviética, y eso ciertamente estaba allí. Pero en los años 60, Cuba, de las cosas importantes que se estaban produciendo en el mundo era el proceso de descolonización, los movimientos de liberación nacional en África y Asia y por lo tanto un pensamiento que se articulaba alrededor del tema de la descolonización, el tercer mundo, el subdesarrollo, etc., eso por una parte; por otra parte estaban las distintas tendencias estéticas que venían caminando desde antes, algunas de ellas se reflejaron en las polémicas de la época. Yo recogí algunas de estas polémicas en un libro que se publicó sobre la polémica sociedad de los años 60, en ellas se planteaba por una parte como decía antes la liberación de la Vanguardia frente a algunas posturas que calificaban los movimientos de vanguardia como una expresión de la dictadura inicial, etc, etc.; toda una polémica bastante fuerte en cuanto a las fuentes de la vida cultural que por una parte estaban los que pensaban que teníamos que apropiarnos de todo lo que viniera culturalmente de la herencia _____ y de quienes defendían la posición ortodoxa desde la existencia de las dos culturas: la cultura proletaria y la cultura burguesa. Estaba también dentro de estas contradicciones aquellas que tenían que ver con el papel del arte. El arte debía ser reflejo de la realidad, con un carácter en cierto modo didáctico

y que expresara la distancia de la realidad con todos sus elementos contradictorios. En esta polémica, bueno, tuvo un papel de mucho peso, por una parte el aspecto más complejo que tenía que ver con la función del arte, el tipo de arte que teníamos que auspiciar y divulgar, que tuvo el centro de la polémica entre Alfredo Guevara y Blas Roca, que había sido antes de la Revolución el secretario general del Partido Socialista Popular, del Partido Comunista, y que en aquel momento dirigían el periódico, *Hoy*, y tenía una sección que se llamaba 'Aclaraciones' donde los escritores escribían y consultaban sobre los temas más diversos. Este fue un poco el clima de estos años donde se entremezclaban consideraciones artísticas, estéticas, filosóficas, y teóricas, dentro del campo del marxismo. Era una etapa en la cual es también por lo menos en Europa occidental se iba produciendo una autonomía creciente de los partidos comunistas respecto alineamiento que venía de la URSS, entonces en el interior de estos partidos y también en la izquierda que les resultaba cercana, se estaba desarrollando un pensamiento que también tenía sus características propias en el plano de la estética.

RGN: ¿Conoce si existen los datos sobre el dinero que fue asignado a la cultura en los 60 y la proporción que esto representaba en relación al presupuesto nacional?

GP: Bueno, yo no tengo idea. Realmente nunca he tenido un acercamiento particular a los presupuestos, me imagino que en alguna parte debe de existir documentos porque estas cosas son oficiales. No sé si en la faceta pública, oficial aparecen o aparecían los presupuestos que se iban aprobando año por año; yo tuve un mayor grado de acercamiento a estas cifras en los años 80, en la época en que yo percibí el Consejo Asesor de Armando Hart, cuando fue Ministro de Cultura y realmente yo allí veía las discusiones sobre presupuestos pero como a mí eso no me tocaba de cerca, bueno, no lo registraba mucho, pero tengo la impresión de ya en aquel momento no eran cifras importantes, pero tampoco tengo la referencia de la proporción que eso podía tener con el presupuesto general de la región.

RGN: El Primer Congreso de UNEAC ocurrió en agosto de 1961 y el segundo de octubre de 1977. Entre esas fechas ocurrieron muchas cosas incluido el Primer Congreso Cultural de La Habana (1968) y el Primer Congreso Nacional de Educación y Cultura (1971). ¿Cómo describiría el discurso entre los intelectuales durante esa época?

GP: Bueno, entre el '68 y '71 sucedieron muchas cosas, el Congreso Cultural del '68 fue como el final de una etapa. En octubre de ese año [1967] se había producido la muerte del Ché en Bolivia, y bueno, el panorama latinoamericano cerraba casos como... por completo para Cuba, el congreso del '68 era un congreso que tiene esta concepción tercermundista, anticolonialista, etc. que circuló..que fuera _____ crisis continental, con todos esos movimientos, yo recuerdo que muchos de los participantes que vinieron de otros países al congreso del '68 no eran propiamente artistas en el sentido más tradicional, que había muchos GUEI??, de todas las tendencias que había en aquella época, pero también había muchos etnólogos, un grupo importante de etnólogos altamente cualificados, especialistas en cultura africana. Algunos de ellos africanos y muchos de ellos europeos; la gran mayoría especialistas también en cultura asiática. Yo

recuerdo haber compartido mucho en aquel congreso con personas de todo el mundo; yo recuerdo un especialista en cultura china, recuerdo en especial un especialista en cultura de Cambodia, a gente de París, y bueno, por otro lado artistas, como decía, de todas las tendencias. Allí se produjo un incidente muy divertido: la noche en que se inauguraba una galería, en el momento mismo de abrirse la puerta de la galería, el pintor Siqueiros (Jacqueline Lamba / Elisa Claro) que había sido mujer de Andrés Bretón, el papa (padre) del surrealismo, le largó una patada en el lugar donde uno se sienta, al pintor mejicano, David Alfaro Siqueiros, por toda la vieja historia del asesinato de Trotski.

De modo que todo eso hubo en el Congreso Cultural. Pero bueno, el año '67 fue el año de la caída del Ché, el '68 también fue un año de muchos acontecimientos: fue el año de la entrada soviética en Checoslovaquia, fue también el del mayo francés, fue también el año _____ en México (movimiento estudiantil del 68??)... Bueno, todos esos fenómenos iban anunciando, por una parte, una crisis de la izquierda, la entrada de los soviéticos en Checoslovaquia contribuyó a fracturar la izquierda intelectual, el mayo francés se quedó en nada, en aquel momento en Francia había muchas ilusiones, y aquí también se produjeron algunos problemas, uno de ellos a partir de un premio que le concedió la UNEAC al libro de poemas de Heberto Padilla y a la obra de teatro de Antón Arrufat, le siguió una situación interna complicada, y después se complicó aún más cuando Padilla cae preso. Entonces se produce la fractura pública del apoyo a la Revolución Cubana, que le habían dado fundamentalmente muchos intelectuales europeos y latinoamericanos, se publica un manifiesto y a razón de esto una crisis de la nación. Dentro de ese panorama, aquí internamente se estaba viviendo un momento de tensión porque el país entero estaba volcado en el esfuerzo de hacer la llamada 'zafra de los 10 millones', la del año 70, y que era una aspiración que estaba dirigida a dotar de una base económica más sólida a Cuba. Todos estos conjuntos de factores que desembocan en los 10 millones, no se lograron los cambios en la _____ aberración??? de fuerzas internas en España???. Estas posiciones diferentes se habían ido manifestando en los años anteriores, por estas circunstancias van a parar a un desbalance, y ese desbalance va a dar lugar a una redefinición de algunos aspectos de la cuestión práctica de la política cultural al Congreso de Educación y Cultura del año 1971. Como se sabe, se ha hablado hasta el infinito, creo que durante 5 años en realidad se aplicó una política rígida en cuanto a la publicación de libros y sobre todo tuvo su efecto mayor en el ambiente del teatro, donde las cuestiones ideológicas se mezclaron también con temas como homofobia, etc, etc. Esta situación se mantiene hasta 1976, en que a finales de año al crearse la asamblea nacional, se designa la asamblea nacional, y el consejo de ministros y Armando Hart se hace cargo del Ministerio de Cultura. Esto, como digo, fue a finales del '76, a principios del '77 Hart tiene un encuentro con los escritores y artistas, o sea con la gente de la UNEAC. Él hace un discurso que marca una apertura en el ámbito de la creación artística y que fue ciertamente muy bien recibido.

RGN: ¿Cómo fueron las relaciones entre los intelectuales creativos y el gobierno revolucionario durante el quinquenio gris?

GP: Bueno, las relaciones en lo que se refiere a MIER?? como institución, yo creo que la UNEAC siguió subsistiendo, marcó sus publicaciones, pero de algún modo también marcaba el sello de esta política nacional. El carácter de las publicaciones tuvo también

este sello.

Por lo demás, yo creo que las relaciones con el estado, con el gobierno, bueno, por una parte la gente las tenía de una manera más directa con las instituciones, con las cuales estaba vinculada, quiere decir que como tampoco la aplicación de todo esto fue uniforme, con un clima de más tolerancia en ámbitos como la Casa de las Américas, tenía una tradición en cierto sentido, y la aplicación más rígida estuvo en todo aquello que dependía del Consejo Nacional de Cultura.

Por otra parte, ya en lo que se refiere, digamos, a las acciones más misivas??? (nocivas, dañinas??) a las personas, que tuvieron lugar en el medio teatral, algunos artistas apelaron por vía institucional, apelaron al tribunal de justicia porque habían sido separados de su trabajo y aprovecharon además que se estaba organizando el 13er Congreso de la CTC, que fue el último congreso obrero organizado por Lázaro Peña, que había sido dirigente obrero histórico desde la etapa del Partido Comunista, el PCP, del antiguo partido comunista. La apelación por vía judicial que llegó al Tribunal Supremo, tuvo un fallo a favor de los artistas, y por otra parte en la asamblea de la ciudad Turista????, a la cual asistió Lázaro Peña y en la que se le fueron planteando todos los problemas que había. También tuvo una respuesta positiva por parte de Lázaro Peña, quien dijo que esto era una violación de la legalidad socialista y que él iba a intervenir en este sentido. Cuales fueron los elementos decisivos que dieron lugar al cargo yo no podría decirlo, pero sé que hubo un conjunto de factores que condujeron a la instauración del Ministerio de Cultura y de poner al frente del Ministerio de Cultura a Armando Hart, que era una personalidad con una jerarquía política importante en aquel momento, y que además había tenido una trayectoria a relación con intelectuales, también por una razón personal, ya que estaba casado con Haydée Santamaría, quien había tenido mucha relación con los intelectuales cubanos relacionados con la Casa de las Américas y otros latinoamericanos relacionados también con la Casa de las Américas.

RGN: Entiendo que en 1967, Fidel sugirió que los derechos de autor debían ser abolidos. ¿En qué sentido?

GP: No, en temas de derechos de autor no tiene nada que ver con eso, en temas de derechos de autor se produce más atrás, en los 60, y tiene que ver con este mismo proyecto descolonizador del que hablaba. Se planteó Fidel que la gente tenía que tener acceso al conocimiento mundial acumulado. Los países del Tercer Mundo tenían derecho a eso, y que por lo tanto nosotros íbamos a publicar todos los libros que consideráramos importantes que habían salido en otros países sin cumplir con los requisitos de los pagos por derecho de autor. Entonces surgió una colección, una editorial que se llamó 'Ediciones Revolucionarias', la cual fotocopiaba libros históricos con portada y todo publicados por cualquier editorial, sobre todo en lengua española. Y bueno, a través de eso circularon aquí miles de ejemplares de libros importantes, que tenían que ver con temas históricos, de economía, sociedad, antropología, y bueno, también de literatura, sin pagar derechos de autor. Y la otra parte de eso era que nosotros anunciáramos nuestros derechos para estar en paralela condición.

RGN: Además, entiendo que los derechos de autor estuvieron reincorporados en 1976. ¿Cuáles fuerzas causaron esa revocación?

GP: En 1977 se aprobaron los derechos de autor. Entonces también significa que nosotros cobrábamos pero que estábamos limitadísimos en cuanto a poder publicar libros de autores de otros países, a menos que se llegue a una negociación con el autor que lo autorice, bueno, realmente con la aclaración que son libros que nada más pueden circular en Cuba.

RGN: Estoy interesada en el estado social y económico de los artistas y los escritores en la sociedad revolucionaria, que es una cosa difícil de entender para mí. ¿La mayoría de los intelectuales sobrevivieron combinando sus actividades creativas con los empleos remunerados?

GP: Bueno, después esto tiene variantes, y claro, tiene que ver con la existencia o no de un mercado. Ya en los años '80, por lo menos en el caso de los artistas plásticos, muchos de ellos empezaron a tener un mercado, un mercado estatal que califican los funcionarios del gobierno compraban obras de arte para especular su deterioro??? y empezaron a hacer algunos pagos internacionales. Esto hizo que muchos artistas.. eh.. dio lugar a que se reiniciara la condición de artistas independientes, que bueno, no perciben un salario y también se fue definiendo cómo podía ir pagando lo necesario para tener una Seguridad Social, bueno, todos esos beneficios. Eso se abrió primero en las artes plásticas y también en algunas zonas de la música popular. La otra música culta no tiene esa ventaja porque realmente no tiene esas vías. En otros casos, en lo que se refiere digamos a los actores y actrices, ellos desde el triunfo de la Revolución sí recibieron un salario por su trabajo artístico, porque se reconocían los grupos de teatro, ellos tenían que ensayar y preparar sus estrenos, como también los directores de cine. Esa condición de asalariado existía en general en el mundo del teatro y en el mundo audiovisual. En el caso de los escritores era más difícil ya que son muy pocos los que pueden estar publicando un número de libros que les permita mantenerse. Pero a partir de los 90 se produce un fenómeno muy particular, por una parte es la crisis economía a partir de la caída del mundo socialista europeo, y por otra parte Cuba se convierte en un objeto de curiosidad en determinadas zonas. Todo esto, de repente, se empieza a ver el caso de muchos artistas plásticos, sobre todo aquellos que parecían más contestatarios, hubo invitaciones a museos, galerías y aparece el mercado, y lo mismo sucede con el mercado editorial, y eso ha permitido que algunos escritores vivan profesionalmente de su trabajo.

RGN: Las artes plásticas, ¿hasta qué punto han influenciado las realidades económicas de los artistas?

GP: Bueno, las artes plásticas tienen a mi entender una situación bastante peculiar, por lo menos por la información que yo recibo; hace tiempo que no estoy al tanto de lo que sucede. Pero hay un cierto número de artistas plásticos que evidentemente está apostando cada demanda que pueden recibir del mercado externo, por otra parte el mercado interno es prácticamente inexistente. La mayor parte de las personas no tiene el recurso para estar comprando obras, pero es que además siguiendo una tendencia internacional, hubo una presencia significativa del instalacionismo _____ (es poco común) para una persona tener un apartamento, son cosas de otras dimensiones que requieren mucho espacio y por lo tanto están pensadas _____ o para cierto tipo de

coleccionista, de modo que el destinatario de las artes plásticas es, al menos en lo interno, inexistente.

RGN: En mi país, los artistas y los escritores (especialmente los que no están interesados en el mercado) pueden considerarse como fracasados, porque la cultura no está valorada por el capitalismo.

GP: Los escritores pueden en caso que consigan una editorial en España o en otro país... y también los escritores, internamente, se benefician del pago de los derechos de autor y hay algunos escritores que publican con bastante frecuencia, y algunos que tienen ediciones, impresiones, en fin que tienen un destinatario bastante masivo, y en muchos casos hay quienes pueden vivir como escritores independientes, que publican en otros países, que lo complementan con otros trabajos, que publican en revistas, por otras vías, y tienen un ingreso complementario y en algunos casos viven de sus obras.

RGN: ¿Cómo esto se refleja en la actitud de la gente hacia sus intelectuales creativos?

GP: Yo no creo que la gente tenga problemas con eso. Realmente algunos de los que han ganado dinero son los músicos populares, músicos populares de éxito que tocan en Cuba y hacen giras por otros países, y bueno, disponen de un ingreso que está muy por encima de la población cubana. Yo no tengo la impresión que eso produzca de una manera generalizada una actividad por parte de la población. Ese mismo grupo musical toca aquí y son músicos que ellos reconocen y que bailan y celebran.

RGN: ¿La sociedad ha proporcionado a los artistas algún tipo de prestigio? ¿Son valorados por la sociedad?

GP: Yo creo que hay artistas que son más conocidos y otros menos, pero sí, la profesión de artista está muy prestigiada, a diferencia de lo que ocurría antes, que si en una familia aparecía un artista eso era una desgracia para la familia, era tener a alguien que se dedicara a una cosa inútil, sin sentido. Ahora hay muchos padres que inspiran a que sus hijos sean artistas y que puedan ir a las escuelas de música, ballet, etc. La profesión de artista en este momento es muy respetada.

RGN: Estoy interesada en el esfuerzo de la Revolución por eliminar la laguna cultural que puede existir entre el pueblo y el arte, específicamente a través de los instructores de arte y el movimiento de aficionados...

GP: Realmente, precisamente una de las cosas en las que se fijaban los escritores en parte, y bueno, una de las cosas que planteaban al principio del triunfo de la Revolución era que cualquiera tenía más reconocimiento que ellos. Un escritor que podía dedicar parte de su vida a producir una novela, tenía menos prestigio que un periodista que publicaba una gacetilla en el periódico.

RGN: ¿En su opinión cuáles son los resultados positivos de esta realidad? ¿Cómo describiría las relaciones entre los artistas profesionales y los

aficionados?

GP: Bueno yo diría que los resultados más positivos de esta realidad, es que por una parte no se produce con tanta frecuencia como antes, la frustración en la que se han movido los artistas, el que tiene talento, voluntad, bueno se puede desarrollar venga de donde venga.

Hubo una serie de trabajos que escribió hace varios años Jaime Saruski sobre los artistas plásticos y reconocidos ahora que son de origen campesino, vienen de lugares campesinos, que en otro tiempo no hubieran tenido acceso ni posibilidades, está claro que es el resultado de las escuelas de arte, _____ que ayudaron a muchos de estos jóvenes para que pudieran estudiar, que creo que es un aspecto importante también el nivel que pudo alcanzar sobre todo hasta el inicio de los '90 la difusión de la cultura, por una parte aquí hubo una política cinematográfica dirigida a que la gente conociera lo mejor del cine y eliminar el cine más comercial. Eso dio lugar a que hubiera un público de cine informado, crítico, artístico. Eso disminuyó en los '90 pero bueno por la falta de recursos ya no hubo manera de poner en circulación las películas que en otra etapa se pusieron y por otro lado también había una influencia de la televisión que pone un cine muy malo en general, y programas especiales que van condicionando el gusto. También la política editorial durante muchos años contribuyó a formar un público lector sobre la base de publicar buena literatura universal en grandes tiradas, y durante mucho tiempo se vendieron a un precio muy barato, muy asequible a todo el mundo. Esto también ha sufrido a partir de la crisis económica. No hay recursos para publicar tantos libros ni para hacer tiradas tan grandes y también la venta de libros va _____?? pero mientras que en otros ámbitos que tienen que ver con cosas de la vida cotidiana se ha tenido que plantar _____ en estas cosas estrictamente culturales que mantienen la moneda/ el producto??? nacional; la gente no puede comprar libros a menos que sea alguna exportación, la gente no puede comprar el producto nacional.

Entonces el resultado final es que ha habido indudablemente una extensión del público para la cultura y que se ha hecho un esfuerzo muy grande por desconcentrar el monopolio de la Ciudad de La Habana, sobre la base de la subvención, el estímulo, la donación de las instituciones, se ha fomentado la vía cultural en la provincia, básicamente en las capitales de la provincia.

Graziella Pogolotti – English Questions

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed – please forgive my clumsy formulations in Spanish. Would you mind if I record our conversation? Please let me know if you would like to say anything ‘off the record’.

I was interested to learn that you were brought up in an artistic household – could you tell me something about conditions for artists before the Revolution?

Thinking of the years of struggle in the Sierra Maestra, who would you say played a part in convincing the rebel army of the importance of culture to the new society?

When the revolutionary government was formed, who became the cultural ‘commissars’ of the early revolutionary period?

You have spoken about the important and irreversible nature of the cultural policy of the 1960s. During that period, revolutionary cultural institutions were founded and a commitment to culture was evident in government rhetoric. I would be interested to know how these policies came about.

I very much like your description of culture as a space for dialogue and of artists and writers as the soul of the Revolution. The First National Meeting of Poets and Artists in Camagüey (27-30 October 1960) and the manifesto arising from it (19 November 1960) seems particularly significant in developing the debate. How were these aims decided?

As a consequence of these objectives and following the Bay of Pigs invasion and the banning of the film *PM*, were the national library meetings and Words to the Intellectuals. How would you describe the atmosphere at that time?

A few weeks later, the First National Congress of Writers and Artists in Cuba (18-22 August 1961) gave birth to UNEAC. From whom did the demand for unionisation come? What was their motivation?

Once they had decided that UNEAC should be formed, did this need to pass through any additional governmental committees?

How did UNEAC secure its buildings?

What kind of financial structure was established? Did it receive any support from the government? Do members pay dues?

Aside from a consideration of their revolutionary role, what were the main aesthetic themes preoccupying artists and writers in the early years after the triumph of the Revolution?

Are you aware of any data that exist that outline how much money was allocated to culture in the 1960s and the proportion of the national budget this represents?

The First UNEAC Congress happened in August 1961 and the second happened in October 1977. Between these two dates, much took place, including the First Cultural Congress of Havana (1968) and the First National Congress on Education and Culture. How would you describe the discourse between artists and writers during that period?

How would you describe relations between intellectuals and the revolutionary government?

To what extent did artists and writers try to influence cultural policy during this stifling period through public and private petitions to governmental figures?

Can you help me to understand the influences from inside and outside the country that influenced these debates?

I understand that, in 1968, it was suggested that copyright should be abolished on creative works. What effect did the removal of copyright have?

I also understand that copyright was subsequently re-established in 1976 alongside the creation of the Ministry of Culture. What kind of pressures led to this decision?

I am interested in the social and economic status of artists and writers in revolutionary society which is difficult for me to understand. Did the majority of intellectuals survive through a combination of their practice and paid work? Were some artists and writers paid a state salary for their creative work? To what extent has the market influenced the economic realities of writers and artists?

In my country, artists and writers (especially those not chasing commercial success) are often perceived as someone unable to play a productive part in society because the value of culture, as we might understand it, is not appreciated under capitalism. By contrast, what kind of prestige has been afforded to artists and writers in post-revolutionary society and how is this reflected in the attitude of the people of Cuba towards its creative intellectuals?

I am also interested in the attempts to address the traditional gap that exists under capitalism between art and the people, particularly the programme of *instructores de arte* and the *movimiento de aficionados*. How would you describe the relationship between professional artists and *aficionados*?

Roberto Fernández Retamar [English]

The Cuban commitment to culture in building a new society is evident throughout the literature. How did this attitude come about and who was influential in this regard?

Casa de las Américas was formed incredibly soon after the triumph of the Revolution. Andrew Salkey, who visited Havana in 1967-8, cites María Rosa at Casa attributing its creation to Che Guevara – could you shed some insight on how and when the idea to open a pan-American cultural centre first came about?

Who was responsible for drawing up Law 299, which saw the creation of Casa under the auspices of the Ministry of Education?

Did Casa have a constitution? What kind of budget was made available to the new institution and how much autonomy did it have from the outset?

When Casa was established in Havana, it was anticipated that this might lead to the creation of similar centres around the island – did this ever happen?

You have mentioned that the revolutionary prestige of Haydée Santamaría ensured the survival of Casa – could you explain a little about whether this involved a tacit understanding that her institution should be left alone or whether any confrontations occurred?

Apart from Nicolás Guillén, do you know who attended the Primer Encuentro Nacional de Poetas y Artistas in Camagüey (October 1960) and who was influential in discussions?

Considering *Nuestro Tiempo* and early post-revolutionary convergences like the Camagüey (October 1960) and national library meetings, how much influence did artists and writers have on the formulation of cultural policy?

On a biographical note, I understand that, after the Revolution triumphed, you spent some time travelling and teaching in Europe – when did you permanently return to Cuba?

Reading out the statute of UNEAC at the 1961 Primer Congreso Nacional de Escritores y Artistas in August 1961, you mentioned the creation of a new Literary and Artistic Fund – could you provide a little more detail about how this scheme functioned and what it meant for writers and artists?

At the same congress, it was mentioned that a Congress of Latin American Writers and Artists would be convened in Havana in January 1962 – did this take place and, if so, does any documentation exist of this event?

Reflecting on the early years of struggle and contradiction, of enthusiasm, creation, diversity and youth, you have expressed regret that the intensity of the early years of

UNEAC was not possible to sustain. More recently, in the rejuvenated union, you have found that the fire of the early years, instigated by Guillén and his compañeros, has not been extinguished. What happened between these two phases?

Did Che ever respond to your 1965 consideration of his ‘El Socialismo y el Hombre en Cuba’?

In coverage around the 1968 Cultural Congress of Havana, a *memoria* was discussed, but I did not come across one in Havana – was this ever produced?

A considerable part of my study has been dedicated to analysing the various cultural congresses that were convened around the island during the 1960s and 1970s. I understand that the idea for the Cultural Congress of Havana came from artists and writers on the basis of discussions at the 1966 Tricontinental Congress (elaborated during a 1967 meeting held in homage to Rubén Darío). Could you provide some detail about the conversation(s) that took place between creative intellectuals and members of the revolutionary government that led to the decision to host the 1968 congress?

Thinking about the preparatory seminar (25 October – 2 November 1967) that was held in advance of the 1968 congress, Who devised the themes that would be discussed at the seminar and congress? Who decided which international guests would be invited?

In 1969, Mario Benedetti would recount how, ‘Recently, a high Cuban official stated to several foreign juries these words, more or less: “We admit criticism within the Revolution perfectly, but to exercise that right it is first necessary to win it”’ (1969:523). To whom was he referring?

Did you take part in the 1971 congress and, if so, what are your memories of this event?

How would you describe the relationship between creative intellectuals and the revolutionary government (as distinct from the CNC) during the *quinquenio gris*?

To what extent did artists and writers try to influence cultural policy during this stifling period through public and private petitions to governmental figures?

Tony Kapcia mentions a rift that developed between professional and aficionado artists – could you elaborate on this?

Roberto Fernández Retamar [Castilian]

Es evidente el compromiso cubano hacia la cultura para construir una nueva sociedad a través de la literatura. ¿De qué manera surge esta postura y quién tuvo influencia en este aspecto?

Casa de las Américas se fundó inmediatamente después del triunfo de la Revolución. Andrew Salkey, que visitó la Habana en 1967/8, cita a María Rosa afirmando que Casa de las Américas debe su creación a Che Guevara. ¿Podría revelar algunos detalles sobre cómo surgió la idea de inaugurar un centro cultural panamericano?

¿Quién fue el responsable de tramitar la Ley 299, la cual originó la creación de Casa de las Américas bajo los auspicios del Ministerio de Educación?

¿Tenía Casa de las Américas una constitución? ¿Qué tipo de presupuesto estaba disponible para la nueva institución y de cuánta autonomía disponía desde un comienzo?

Cuando Casa de las Américas se estableció en La Habana, se esperaba que esto llevaría a la creación de centros similares por toda la isla. ¿Sucedió esto último?

Usted ha mencionado que el prestigio revolucionario de Haydée Santamaría aseguró la supervivencia de Casa de las Américas. ¿Podría explicar si lo anterior supuso un entendimiento tácito de que su institución debería tener total autonomía o de si hubo algún tipo de confrontación?

Aparte de Nicolás Guillén, ¿sabe quiénes asistieron al Primer Encuentro Nacional de Poetas y Artistas de Camagüey (octubre 1960) y quiénes intervinieron en esta discusión?

Teniendo en cuenta Nuestro Tiempo y las tempranas convergencias post-revolucionarias, como Camagüey, y también las reuniones en la biblioteca nacional, ¿cuánta influencia tenían los escritores y artistas en la formulación de la política cultural?

«Las Palabras a los Intelectuales» funcionó tanto como sumario de los encuentros en la biblioteca nacional en junio de 1961 como una manera de definir las prioridades culturales. ¿De qué manera se definió su contenido con prioridad? ¿Hubo alguien en particular que ayudara a preparar este discurso?

Como comentario biográfico, tengo entendido que después del triunfo de la Revolución usted pasó algún tiempo viajando y enseñando en Europa. ¿Cuándo volvió usted a Cuba de forma permanente?

Durante la lectura del estatuto de la UNEAC en el Primer Congreso Nacional de Escritores y Artistas de 1961, usted mencionó la creación de un nuevo Fondo Literario y Artístico. ¿Podría proporcionar algunos detalles del funcionamiento de este programa y lo que significó para los escritores y artistas?

En el mismo congreso se mencionó que se iba a convocar en La Habana un Congreso de Artistas y Escritores Latinoamericanos en 1962. ¿Tuvo lugar este congreso finalmente? Y, en ese caso, ¿existe alguna documentación del evento?

Considerando los primeros años de lucha y contradicción, de entusiasmo, creación, diversidad y juventud, usted ha expresado cierto arrepentimiento sobre el hecho de que aquella intensidad de los primeros años de la UNEAC era imposible de mantener. Más recientemente, usted ha descubierto con este rejuvenecido unión que el fuego de esos primeros años, provocado por Guillén y sus compañeros, no se ha extinguido. ¿Qué ocurrió entre esas dos etapas?

¿Respondió el Che a su estudio en 1965 sobre «El Socialismo y el Hombre en Cuba»?

Una parte considerable de mi estudio la he dedicado al análisis de varios congresos culturales que fueron convocados por toda la isla durante las décadas de los 60 y 70. Entiendo que la idea de organizar el Congreso Cultural de La Habana tuvo su origen en las discusiones de artistas y escritores durante el Congreso Tricontinental de 1966 (y elaboradas durante el homenaje a Rubén Darío que tuvo lugar en 1967). ¿Podría facilitar alguna información detallada sobre las conversaciones que tuvieron lugar entre los intelectuales y los miembros del gobierno revolucionario que les llevaron a organizar el congreso de 1968?

Pensando en el seminario preliminar (25 de octubre – 2 de noviembre 1967) que tuvo lugar como preámbulo al congreso de 1968, ¿quién o quiénes concibieron los temas que serían tratados en el seminario y posterior congreso? ¿Quién decidió qué figuras internacionales serían invitadas?

En la cobertura mediática del Congreso Cultural de La Habana de 1968 se menciona una “memoria”, pero no logré encontrarla cuando estuve en La Habana. ¿Llegó a producirse esta memoria?

En 1969 Mario Benedetti expresaba que «Recientemente, un alto oficial cubano ha expuesto las siguientes palabras (aproximadas) a varios miembros de jurado extranjeros: «Admitimos perfectamente las críticas dentro de la Revolución, pero para ejercer ese derecho es necesario ganarlo en primer lugar»». ¿A quién o quiénes se refería?

¿Tomó usted parte en el congreso de 1971? y, en ese caso ¿qué memorias guarda de ese encuentro?

¿Cómo describiría la relación entre los intelectuales y el gobierno revolucionario (y no la CNC) durante el *quinquenio gris*?

¿En qué medida intentaron influenciar los artistas y escritores la política cultural durante este periodo sofocante de peticiones públicas y privadas a personajes públicos del gobierno?

Durante la década de los 70 se habló sobre la creación de un Museo de Arte Latinoamericano. ¿Qué ocurrió finalmente con este proyecto?

Tony Kapcia menciona una división que se desarrolló entre artistas aficionados y profesionales. ¿Podría entrar en más detalles sobre esta división?

Alfredo Guevara [English]

Which precedents did you look at when creating ICAIC, particularly the activities of the Department of Cinematographic Dissemination?

In your 2007 conversation with Leandro Estupiñán Zaldívar, you mention a summary of the conflict with Carlos Franqui around *P.M.* that was requested by Fidel Castro in spring 1961 – would it be possible to see a copy of this correspondence?

During the same conversation, you make it clear that the PSP developed ideas about cultural policy during the 1950s that it had a chance to implement after the Revolution. Why did the revolutionary government give so much control over culture to the PSP given that the party failed to dissolve its Comisión Cultural?

Las Palabras a los Intelectuales functioned both as a summary of the meetings at the national library in June 1961 and a way of defining cultural priorities. To what extent had its content been defined in advance and was anyone particularly influential helping to draft this speech?

I understand that you were present at discussions around the ten-point plan that was devised by the Consejo Nacional de Cultura in 1962 – could you tell me a little about the priorities underlying this plan and who was influential in formulating it?

Do we know definitively that Blas Roca was the author of the ‘Clarifications’ column?

Did you ever reply to Vincentina Antuña’s letter (*Hoy*, 20 December 1963)?

How would you describe relations between ICAIC and the CNC in the 1960s and 1970s?

A considerable part of my study has been dedicated to analysing the various cultural congresses that were convened around the island during the 1960s and 1970s. I understand that the idea for the Cultural Congress of Havana came from artists and writers on the basis of discussions at the 1966 Tricontinental Congress (elaborated during a 1967 meeting held in homage to Rubén Darío). Could you provide some detail about the conversation(s) that took place between creative intellectuals and members of the revolutionary government that led to the decision to host the 1968 congress?

What was discussed at the preparatory seminar for the 1968 Cultural Congress of Havana? Who devised the themes that would be discussed at the seminar and congress? Who decided on the list of invitees?

Did you take part in the 1971 congress and, if so, what are your memories of this event?

How would you describe relations between ICAIC and the CNC in the 1960s and ’70s?

Alfredo Guevara [Castilian]

¿Qué antecedentes observó a la hora de crear el ICAIC, en particular con respecto a las actividades del Departamento de Divulgación Cinematográfica?

Durante su conversación con Leandro Estupiñán Zaldívar en 2007, menciona usted un sumario del conflicto con Carlos Franqui sobre *P.M.* solicitado por Fidel Castro en la primavera de 1961. ¿Sería posible tener acceso a una copia de este intercambio?

Durante esta misma conversación, usted manifestó que el PSP había desarrollado algunas ideas sobre política cultural durante la década de los 50, las cuales tuvo la oportunidad de implementar después de la Revolución. ¿Por qué motivo el gobierno revolucionario concedió tanto control al PSP sobre la cultura teniendo en cuenta que éste último había fallado en disolver su Comisión Cultural?

«Las Palabras a los Intelectuales» funcionó tanto como sumario de los encuentros en la biblioteca nacional en junio de 1961 como una manera de definir las prioridades culturales. ¿De qué manera se definió su contenido con prioridad? ¿Hubo alguien en particular que ayudara a preparar este discurso?

Tengo entendido que usted estuvo presente en las discusiones sobre el plan de 10 puntos concebido por el Consejo Nacional de Cultura en 1962. ¿Podría detallar alguna cosa sobre las prioridades subyacentes de este plan y sobre quién o quiénes influyeron en su formulación?

¿Se sabe por cierto si fue Blas Roca el autor de la columna ‘Aclaraciones’?

¿Llegó usted a contestar la carta de Vicentina Antuña (*Hoy*, 20 de diciembre de 1963)?

Una parte considerable de mi estudio la he dedicado al análisis de varios congresos culturales que fueron convocados por toda la isla durante las décadas de los 60 y 70. Entiendo que la idea de organizar el Congreso Cultural de La Habana tuvo su origen en las discusiones de artistas y escritores durante el Congreso Tricontinental de 1966 (y elaboradas durante el homenaje a Rubén Darío que tuvo lugar en 1967). ¿Podría facilitar alguna información detallada sobre las conversaciones que tuvieron lugar entre los intelectuales y los miembros del gobierno revolucionario que les llevaron a organizar el congreso de 1968?

Pensando en el seminario preliminar (25 de octubre – 2 de noviembre 1967) que tuvo lugar como preámbulo al congreso de 1968, ¿quién o quiénes concibieron los temas que serían tratados en el seminario y posterior congreso? ¿Quién decidió qué figuras internacionales serían invitadas?

¿Tomó usted parte en el congreso de 1971? y, en ese caso ¿qué memorias guarda de ese encuentro?

¿Cómo describiría las relaciones entre el ICAIC y el CNC en las décadas de los 60 y 70?

Armando Hart [English]

The Cuban commitment to culture in building a new society is evident throughout the literature. How did this attitude come about and who was influential in this regard?

While I have data about the financial contribution that was made to education, I have not been able to establish how much money was allocated to culture. Would you be able to give me an idea of the money that was invested in culture in the 1960s and 1970s (as compared to the pre-revolutionary situation) and the proportion of the national budget that this represented?

Considering *Nuestro Tiempo* and early post-revolutionary convergences like the Camagüey (October 1960) and national library meetings, how much influence did artists and writers have on the formulation of cultural policy?

I am particularly interested in the socio-economic status of artists and writers in revolutionary society. Could you tell me a little about how creative intellectuals were paid a salary by the state?

Perhaps you could elaborate on how the reorganisation of the Copyrights Institute in 1961 and beyond played a part in guaranteeing artists and writers a decent income.

Reading various internal documents, it seems clear that the PSP had formulated certain thoughts about cultural policy before the Revolution that it had a chance to implement after 1959. Why did the revolutionary government decide to give so much control over culture to the PSP and its *Comisión Cultural*?

'Words to the Intellectuals' functioned both as a summary of the meetings at the national library in June 1961 and a way of defining cultural priorities. To what extent had its content been defined in advance and was anyone particularly influential helping to draft this speech?

A considerable part of my study has been dedicated to analysing the various cultural congresses that were convened around the island during the 1960s and 1970s. I understand that the idea for the Cultural Congress of Havana came from artists and writers on the basis of discussions at the 1966 Tricontinental Congress (elaborated during a 1967 meeting held in homage to Rubén Darío). Could you provide some detail about the conversation(s) that took place between creative intellectuals and members of the revolutionary government that led to the decision to host the 1968 congress?

Thinking about the preparatory seminar (25 October – 2 November 1967) that was held in advance of the 1968 congress, who devised the themes that would be discussed at the seminar and subsequent congress? Who decided which international guests would be invited?

In his autobiography, *Llover sobre Mojado*, Lisandro Otero refers to a series of crisis talks that you held with artists and writers in 1965. Would you share your recollections of

these three meetings?

Why was Luis Pavón Tamayo appointed as President of the Consejo Nacional de Cultura when it was known that he had authored the Leopoldo Ávila articles?

Did artists and writers continue to share their concerns with you during the *quinquenio gris*?

What eventually prompted the creation of the Ministry of Culture and what role did you play in devising the structure that would be implemented via Law 1323?

Did any of the personnel of the CNC transfer over to the Ministry?

Armando Hart [Castilian]

Es evidente el compromiso cubano hacia la cultura para construir una nueva sociedad a través de la literatura. ¿De qué manera surge esta postura y quién tuvo influencia en este aspecto?

Mientras que tengo datos de la contribución financiera a la educación, no me ha sido posible establecer la cantidad que fue asignada a la cultura. ¿Sería posible que usted me facilitara la cantidad aproximada que fue invertida en cultura durante las décadas de los 60 y 70 (en comparación con la situación pre-revolucionaria) y qué proporción del presupuesto nacional representaba?

Teniendo en cuenta Nuestro Tiempo y las tempranas convergencias post-revolucionarias, como Camagüey (octubre 1960), y también las reuniones en la biblioteca nacional, ¿cuánta influencia tenían los escritores y artistas en la formulación de la política cultural?

Tengo particular interés en el estatus socio-económico de artistas y escritores en la sociedad revolucionaria. ¿Podría explicarme qué tipo de salario recibían los intelectuales del propio Estado?

Quizás podría entrar en detalles en cómo la reorganización del Instituto de los Derechos Autorales a partir de 1961 contribuyó a garantizar unos ingresos decentes para los artistas y escritores.

Tras leer varios documentos internos, parece obvio que el PSP había formulado ciertos pensamientos sobre la política cultural antes de la Revolución, los cuales tuvo la oportunidad de implementar después de 1959. ¿Por qué motivo decidió el gobierno revolucionario otorgar tanto control sobre la cultura al PSP y su Comisión Cultural?

‘Las Palabras a los Intelectuales’ funcionó tanto como sumario de los encuentros en la biblioteca nacional en junio de 1961 como una manera de definir las prioridades

culturales. ¿De qué manera se definió su contenido con prioridad? ¿Hubo alguien en particular que ayudara a preparar este discurso?

Una parte considerable de mi estudio la he dedicado al análisis de varios congresos culturales que fueron convocados por toda la isla durante las décadas de los 60 y 70. Entiendo que la idea de organizar el Congreso Cultural de La Habana tuvo su origen en las discusiones de artistas y escritores durante el Congreso Tricontinental de 1966 (y elaboradas durante el homenaje a Rubén Darío que tuvo lugar en 1967). ¿Podría facilitar alguna información detallada sobre las conversaciones que tuvieron lugar entre los intelectuales y los miembros del gobierno revolucionario que les llevaron a organizar el congreso de 1968?

Pensando en el seminario preliminar (25 de octubre – 2 de noviembre 1967) que tuvo lugar como preámbulo al congreso de 1968, ¿quién o quiénes concibieron los temas que serían tratados en el seminario y posterior congreso? ¿Quién decidió qué figuras internacionales serían invitadas?

En su autobiografía, *Llover sobre Mojado*, Lisandro Otero menciona una serie de charlas de crisis que usted mantuvo con artistas y escritores en 1965. ¿Le importaría compartir algunos detalles que recuerde de esos tres encuentros?

¿Por qué fue elegido Luis Pavón Tamayo Presidente del Consejo Nacional de Cultura cuando se sabía que había sido el autor de los artículos de Leopoldo Ávila?

¿Continuaron los artistas y escritores compartiendo sus preocupaciones con usted durante el *quinquenio gris*?

¿Qué provocó finalmente la creación del Ministerio de Cultura y qué papel tuvo usted en la creación del sistema que fue implementado con la ley 1323?

¿Hubo algún miembro del personal del CNC que se trasladara al Ministerio?

Ambrosio Fornet [English]

Firstly, on a biographical note, I was interested to learn that, after the triumph of the Revolution, you worked on the cultural page of *Revolución*. How would you describe the climate around *Revolución* and *Lunes* at that time?

Apart from Nicolás Guillén, do you know who attended the Primer Encuentro Nacional de Poetas y Artistas in Camagüey (October 1960) and who was influential in this discussion?

In 2004, you described how, in the 1960s, intellectuals ‘were able to create with total autonomy thanks to autonomous institutions and a type of patronage – state subsidy – free from the exigencies of bureaucracy like that of servitude to the market’. Could you provide a bit of detail about these subsidies – who qualified for them, how much they were paid, etc?

A considerable part of my study has been dedicated to analysing the various cultural congresses that were convened around the island during the 1960s and 1970s. I understand that the idea for the Cultural Congress of Havana came from artists and writers on the basis of discussions at the 1966 Tricontinental Congress (elaborated during a 1967 meeting held in homage to Rubén Darío). Could you provide some detail about the conversation(s) that took place between creative intellectuals and members of the revolutionary government that led to the decision to host the 1968 congress?

Thinking about the preparatory seminar (25 October – 2 November 1967) that was held in advance of the 1968 congress, who devised the themes that would be discussed at the seminar and congress? Who decided which international guests would be invited?

Did you take part in the 1971 congress and what are your memories of this event?

In 1969, you described how the creation of UNEAC would subsume all writers and intellectuals, giving them private ownership of the terrain of high culture in the midst of a Revolution which did not believe in private property – can you explain a little about the consequences of this paradox?

In condemning sectarian policy, you refer to certain dogmatic elements – whose only merit lay in the fact that they had introduced a certain scholastic form of Marxism to the island, through the re-publication of famous manuals – could you provide a little more detail about the manuals that were re-published and who was responsible for this?

I have read that Edith García Buchaca was dismissed from all her posts by 1964 – what brought about her fall from grace?

When were Carlos Lechuga, Eduardo Muzio and Lisandro Otero appointed to the CNC?

Why was Luis Pavón Tamayo appointed as President of the Consejo Nacional de

Cultura when it was known that he had authored the Leopoldo Ávila articles?

In 2007, you described how, from 1971, none of the CNC leadership ‘had organic relations with the vanguard. The nexi of continuity had been carefully broken or reduced to a minimum’. What motivated this strategy?

I understand that, in March 1974, the CNC was restored as a central organisation under the Ministry of Education, depriving it of its autonomy – what prompted this decision?

What can you tell me about Jorge Serguera and Pavón’s sidekick, Torquesada?

You retrospectively discern that the ideological turn advocated by Ávila had gradually been acquiring a more international character, contributing in part to the attacks on the Revolution by various intellectuals from outside the country. Were Ávila/Pavón’s views disseminated internationally on his initiative or were they picked up on by sections of the bourgeois (and, perhaps CIA-sponsored) press?

During the Casa round-table discussion in 1969, you mentioned that ‘while it was popular knowledge that the forces of sectarianism had attempted to empower themselves using state resources to turn the revolutionary leadership against the intellectuals (by turning differences of approach to cultural problems into ideological differences with the Revolution), it was less well known that they had attempted the same process against the cultural policy of the Revolution’. Could you explain what you meant by this?

In 2007, you mocked the ‘the pious Guardians of the Doctrine (headed by a high functionary of the Party who, according to rumours was the political godfather of Pavón)’. Who were the guardians in general at this time and the high-ranking godfather in particular?

How would you describe the relationship between creative intellectuals and the revolutionary government (as distinct from the CNC) during the *quinquenio gris*?

To what extent did artists and writers try to influence cultural policy during this stifling period through public and private petitions to governmental figures?

Were there some grey areas within the grey years that permitted certain experimentation?

Ambrosio Fornet [Castilian]

En primer lugar, y como comentario biográfico, me interesó averiguar que tras el triunfo de la revolución, usted trabajó para la página cultural del periódico *Revolución*. ¿Cómo describiría usted la situación que rodeaba los periódicos *Revolución* y *Lunes* en aquella época?

Aparte de Nicolás Guillén, ¿sabe quiénes asistieron al Primer Encuentro Nacional de Poetas y Artistas de Camagüey (octubre 1960) y quiénes intervinieron en esta discusión?

En 2004 usted describió cómo en la década de los 60 los intelectuales «podían crear con total autonomía gracias al apoyo de instituciones autónomas y a un tipo de mecenazgo – la subvención estatal – que los libraba tanto de las exigencias de la burocracia como de las servidumbres del mercado». ¿Podría proporcionar más detalles sobre estas subvenciones: quiénes tenían acceso a ellas, qué cantidades obtenían, etc?

En 1969 usted explicó también que la creación de la UNEAC iba a incluir a todos los escritores e intelectuales, otorgándoles propiedad privada en el terreno de la alta cultura en plena Revolución, cuando ésta no creía en la propiedad privada. ¿Podría facilitar más detalles sobre las consecuencias de esta paradoja?

Una parte considerable de mi estudio la he dedicado al análisis de varios congresos culturales que fueron convocados por toda la isla durante las décadas de los 60 y 70. Entiendo que la idea de organizar el Congreso Cultural de La Habana tuvo su origen en las discusiones de artistas y escritores durante el Congreso Tricontinental de 1966 (y elaboradas durante el homenaje a Rubén Darío que tuvo lugar en 1967). ¿Podría facilitar alguna información detallada sobre las conversaciones que tuvieron lugar entre los intelectuales y los miembros del gobierno revolucionario que les llevaron a organizar el congreso de 1968?

¿Tomó usted parte en el congreso de 1971? y, en ese caso ¿qué memorias guarda de ese encuentro?

Al condenar las políticas sectarias, usted hace referencia a ciertos elementos dogmáticos – cuyo único mérito se basa en el hecho de haber introducido cierta forma escolástica del Marxismo en la isla, a través de la reimpresión de famosos manuales. ¿Podría proporcionar algún detalle sobre estos manuales que fueron reimpresos en aquella época y quién o quiénes fueron los responsables de su reimpresión?

He leído que Edith García Buchaca fue destituida de todos sus cargos en 1969. ¿Cuál fue la causa de este contratiempo?

¿Cuándo fueron nombrados Carlos Lechuga, Eduardo Muzio y Lisandro Otero como miembros del CNC?

¿Por qué fue elegido Luis Pavón Tamayo Presidente del Consejo Nacional de Cultura

cuando se sabía que había sido el autor de los artículos de Leopoldo Ávila?

En 2007 usted describe cómo, desde 1971, ninguno de los líderes de la CNC «había tenido relaciones orgánicas con la vanguardia. Los nexos de continuidad habían sido cuidadosamente rotos o reducidos al mínimo». ¿Qué motivó esta estrategia?

Tengo entendido que en marzo de 1974 la CNC fue restablecida como organización central bajo el Ministerio de Educación, privándola de su autonomía. ¿Qué provocó esta decisión?

¿Qué puede decirme sobre Jorge Serguera y el cómplice de Pavón, Torquesada?

Usted percibe retrospectivamente que el cambio ideológico mantenido por Ávila había adquirido gradualmente un carácter más internacional, contribuyendo en parte a los ataques a la Revolución por parte de algunos intelectuales fuera del país. ¿Fueron difundidas internacionalmente las opiniones de Ávila/Pavón por propia iniciativa o fueron percibidas por la prensa burguesa (y quizás financiada por la CIA)?

En 2007 usted se burla de los «Guardianes de la Doctrina (encabezados por un alto funcionario del Partido que, según rumores, era el padrino político de Pavón)» ¿Quiénes eran los guardianes en esa época y en particular, quién era el padrino político que encabezaba este grupo?

Durante la mesa redonda de Casa de las Américas en 1969, usted menciona que «Todo el mundo sabe que las fuerzas del sectarismo intentaron apoderarse de los resortes estatales para volverlos contra la dirigencia de la Revolución; lo que muy pocos saben es que también trataron de apoderarse de los resortes de la cultura para volverlos contra la política cultural de la Revolución». ¿Podría explicar lo que quiso decir con esto?

¿Cómo describiría la relación entre los intelectuales y el gobierno revolucionario (y no la CNC) durante el *quinquenio gris*?

¿En qué medida intentaron influenciar los artistas y escritores la política cultural durante este periodo sofocante de peticiones públicas y privadas a personajes públicos del gobierno?

¿Hubo áreas grises durante los años grises que permitieran cierta experimentación?

Appendix E: Towards a National Culture Serving the Revolution, November 1960

[Castilian Version – English Version to follow]

Los intelectuales, escritores y artistas cubanos, queremos afirmar por este medio nuestra pública responsabilidad creadora ante la Revolución y el pueblo de Cuba, en una época cuyo sentido profundo es el de la lucha unida para alcanzar la completa independencia de nuestra patria como nación.

Estamos seguros de que el triunfo de la Revolución ha creado entre nosotros las condiciones necesarias para el desarrollo de la cultura nacional; una cultura liberadora, libre en sí misma y por tanto capaz de servir y estimular el avance revolucionario.

Nos parece que la unidad de propósitos y destino de los intelectuales cubanos contemporáneos es obvia en la obra tanto como en los esfuerzos de divulgación cultural realizados por ellos, a lo largo del periodo revolucionario abierto en el derrumbe de la tiranía, así como en los años de la lucha que lo precedieron.

Esto hace que, identificados a plenitud con el transformador alcance y la lejana proyección de la Revolución Cubana, nos parezca inaplazable definir criterios y fijar posiciones entorno a los cuales pueda realizarse la unidad y coordinación de nuestros esfuerzos.

He aquí los puntos de vista que mantenemos:

- La cultura cubana, forjada en la lucha contra la Colonia primero y el Imperialismo después, se vio agredida desde el exterior tanto como menospreciada en nuestro propio suelo. Esa cultura fue deformada en todos sus manifestaciones, desnacionalizada y sustituida por los gustos y modos yanquis. Por otra parte, el carácter atrasado de la economía del país, debido a factores diversos; que iban desde la monoproducción azucarera, con un mercado único, hasta la estructura semifeudal de la sociedad, creó condiciones miserables de vida, que afectaron siempre de modo negativo a todos los sectores populares, sin olvidar los artísticos e intelectuales.

Las más nobles actividades humanas se vieron sofocadas y empobrecidas por un bajo comercialismo. La enajenación de numerosos y decisivos medios de difusión cultural, que fueron acaparados como propiedad privada por empresarios monopolistas, a quienes movía el afán de lucro, limitó la independencia del intelectual, del escritor, del artista. Éstos se vieron desprovistos de elementos materiales tanto como de libertad de espíritu para desarrollar su obra creadora, exponerla y difundirla.

- La instauración creadora del Poder Revolucionaria del Pueblo, al reivindicar la plena soberanía de la patria y superar las condiciones descritas anteriormente,

abre ante nuestros ojos las más amplias perspectivas de creación. Esto nos da los medios de participar conscientemente en el desarrollo de la cultura nacional y revolucionaria.

- Ésta es la revolución del pueblo cubano, tanto de los artistas, escritores e intelectuales, como de los obreros y los campesinos: una revolución que nos libera de toda servidumbre.
- La Declaración de La Habana es a nuestro juicio la respuesta histórica del pueblo cubano propio sentido de nuestra Revolución, dicho documento se convierte en acta y programa de todas las fuerzas progresistas de América Latina. Tiene por ello el mayor apoyo y la más firme adhesión de los intelectuales, escritores y artistas cubanos.
- Nuestro programa inmediato es el siguiente:
 - a. Recuperación y desarrollo de nuestra tradición cultural, rica en contenido humano y escamoteada al pueblo por la acción colonial e imperialista. Ella debe servir de enlace entre nuestro siglo XIX y nuestro siglo XX.
 - b. Conservar, impulsar, depurar y utilizar nuestro folklore, riqueza espiritual del pueblo cubano, que la Revolución reivindica y revalúa.
 - c. Consideramos que la crítica sincera y honesta es indispensable para situar y mejorar la obra de los artistas y los intelectuales.
 - d. Debemos esforzarnos por alcanzar una plena identificación entre el carácter de nuestras obras y las necesidades de la Revolución en avance. El objetivo es acercar el pueblo al intelectual y el intelectual al pueblo, sin que padezca por ello la calidad artística de nuestro trabajo.
 - e. El intercambio, el contacto y la cooperación de los escritores, intelectuales y artistas latinoamericanos entre sí, son vitales para el destino de nuestra América.
 - f. La humanidad es una. Nuestro patrimonio nacional se integra en la cultura universal, y está contribuye a su vez a nuestros fines nacionales.
- El artista escoge la forma que considera más eficaz para expresarse.
- Convocamos por este medio a todos los artistas, escritores e intelectuales cubanos a un próximo Congreso Nacional, que nos una en la obra de la cultura, del servicio del pueblo y la Revolución.
- Del destino de la Revolución depende el destino de la cultura cubana.
DEFENDER LA REVOLUCIÓN, ES DEFENDER LA CULTURA.

Towards a National Culture Serving the Revolution [English translation by the author, consistent with MINEX, 1962]

Cuban intellectuals, writers and artists hereby wish to affirm our public creative responsibility to the Revolution and the people of Cuba, in a period in which the deep sense is that of united struggle to achieve the complete independence of our country as a nation.

We are confident that the victory of the Revolution has created among us the essential conditions for the development of national culture, a liberating culture, capable of encouraging revolutionary progress.

It seems to us that the unity of purpose of contemporary Cuban intellectuals is obvious in their work as much as in their efforts to spread culture among the people throughout the revolutionary period opened by the destruction of the dictatorship as well as during the years of struggle that preceded it.

This means that, fully identifying with the transformative scope and the far-reaching influence of the Cuban Revolution, it seems to us urgent to define criteria and establish positions around which the unity and coordination of our efforts can be realised.

Here are the views we hold:

- Cuban culture, forged in the struggle against first colonialism and then imperialism, was attacked from the outside as much as ignored on our own soil. That culture was distorted in all its manifestations, de-nationalised and replaced by Yankee tastes and modes. Moreover, the backward character of the country's economy – due to various factors, ranging from sugar mono-production, with a single market, to the semi-feudal structure of society – created miserable living conditions, which always negatively affected all the popular sectors, not forgetting artists and intellectuals.

The noblest of human activities were suppressed and impoverished by base commercialism. The alienation of numerous and crucial means of cultural dissemination – which were seized as private property by monopolistic businessmen, motivated by an eagerness for money – limited the independence of the intellectual, writer, artist. They were deprived of material elements as much as of freedom of spirit to develop their creative work and display and disseminate it.

- The creative establishment of Revolutionary Power of the People, to vindicate the full sovereignty of the country and overcome the conditions described above, opens our eyes to the fullest perspectives of creation. This gives us the means for consciously participating in the development of national and

revolutionary culture.

This is the revolution of the Cuban people, the artists, writers and intellectuals, as much as the workers and peasants: a revolution that frees us from all bondage.

- The Declaration of Havana is, in our opinion, the historical response of the Cuban people's sense of our Revolution, said document becomes a record and programme of all the progressive forces in Latin America. Therefore, it has the greatest support and the strongest commitment of Cuban intellectuals, writers and artists.

Our immediate agenda is as follows:

- a. Recovery and development of our cultural tradition, which is rich in human content and was wrested away from the people by the colonialists and imperialists. Culture should serve as a connection between our nineteenth century and our twentieth century.
 - b. To preserve, encourage, purify and utilise our folklore, spiritual wealth of the Cuban people, which the Revolution is liberating and re-evaluating.
 - c. We consider sincere and honest criticism indispensable to the work of artists and intellectuals.
 - d. We should try to achieve full identification with the character of our works and the needs of our advancing revolution. The purpose is to bring the people close to the intellectual and the intellectual close to the people, which does not necessarily imply that the artistic quality of our work must thereby suffer.
 - e. Exchange, contact and cooperation among Latin American writers, intellectuals and artists are vital for the destiny of our America.
 - f. Mankind is one. Our national heritage is part of world culture, and world culture contributes to our national aspirations.
- The artist chooses the most effective way to express themselves.
 - We hereby summon all Cuban artists, writers and intellectuals to a forthcoming National Congress which unites us in the work of culture, of serving the people and the Revolution.
 - The fate of the revolution depends on the fate of Cuban culture. TO DEFEND THE REVOLUTION IS TO DEFEND CULTURE.