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Coco Fusco

Editorial— "Cuba: The Fading of a Subcontinental Dream"

In the spring of 2009, during the 11th Havana Biennial, a recent art school graduate named Hamlet Lavastida stenciled a quote from a famous speech by Fidel Castro on the steps of Galería Habana and called his piece *Intellectuals Without Words*. The quote reads:

> The existence of an authority in the cultural sector does not mean that one should worry about abuses by that authority. Who would want, or who would desire for this authority not to exist? If we continue with that line of thought we might begin to wish that there were no militia or police, that there were no state power.

The quote is from "Words to the Intellectuals," a speech Castro gave at Cuba's National Library in June 1961 to an audience of illustrious literary figures. It included the well-worn phrase "within the revolution everything, against the revolution nothing," that instantly became the benchmark of Cuba's cultural policy regarding expressive freedoms. Though the phrase reads as an absolute commandment, it is vague, and perhaps purposely so. Who sets the border between inside and out is not made explicit. What exactly constitutes antirevolutionary expression is also not specified. The lack of concrete detail gives the mandate a plasticity that has facilitated arbitrary decisions and sweeping dismissals ever since.

Fidel Castro gave his speech in the aftermath of the first major censorship case of the Cuban Revolution—that of the documentary short *P.M.,* made by Sabá Cabrera Infante and Orlando Jiménez Leal.[1] The film shows a largely black crowd of Cubans socializing in a bar in Havana's port area, and lacks the moralistic voice-over that came to characterize the revolutionary newsreels of the Instituto Cubano del Arte e Industria Cinematográficos (Cuban Institute of Cinematographic Art and Industry—ICAIC). Authorities at ICAIC decried that the directors were celebrating counterrevolutionary activities associated with tourism, organized crime, and prostitution. The country was in an uproar over the Bay of Pigs invasion and the severing of diplomatic ties with the United States. Fidel's speech was supposed to put an end to the fracas that ensued when the film was confiscated. Although the speech at the library was followed by a long discussion, the publications of the proceedings left out the retorts and entreaties made by several Cuban intellectuals.[2] For the purposes of politics and posterity, Fidel got the last word. The filmmakers in question chose exile, as did several of the writers whose publishing outlets would soon be shut down.

Lavastida's piece alludes to an historical moment in which filmmakers lost their film and intellectuals were left without words by drawing our attention to the irony in Fidel's rhetorical question about public trust in the state's administration of revolutionary justice. A phrase that was

originally designed to suggest mass approval for state authority becomes a hint that generalized fear exists about speaking out against abuses by the state. Lavastida created the piece for the same biennial in which Tania Bruguera first set up her open mic for *Tatlin's Whisper* at the Centro Wifredo Lam, and subsequently faced public excoriation for supposedly offering a platform to counterrevolutionaries. Not surprisingly, Lavastida's stenciled words were removed shortly after they were installed. While contemporary Cuban art abounds in popular phrases and double entendre, the political right to speak publicly and the authority of the state were unwelcome subjects during an international event that showcases Cuba's artistic talent and guarantees a significant influx of cash.

Intellectuals' words have been prized symbolic currency throughout the course of the Cuban Revolution. The state's legitimacy has been inextricably tied to the promotion of mass literacy and its role as a cultural laboratory. Cuba credits itself as a progenitor of the Latin American literary boom of the 1960s, as the launching pad for the New Latin American Cinema, as the root origin of salsa music, and the home base for the Caribbean's finest art cadre. During the 1960s and '70s, when most Latin American countries broke diplomatic ties with Cuba, the support for the Revolution bestowed by an international cadre of literary luminaries substituted for diplomatic alliances. Even today, Cuba's most powerful export is culture—perhaps not in hard economic terms but as symbolic capital that attracts tourists and counters its critics' claims about a lack of civil rights. Because officially recognized artists in today's Cuba are part of an economic elite that earns money in hard currency, travels frequently, and owns property, they are usually the last to complain about a lack of freedom.

Most Cuban intellectuals and artists say little about political rights, but they have been subject to restrictions as to what they can do and say in public and whether they can represent their country abroad since the Revolution began. Those who ruffle feathers by speaking out risk professional suicide, imprisonment, and exile, and rarely find support among their peers. They face a formidable apparatus and the incredulity of foreigners who see Cuba as the embodiment of utopian leftist ideals. In the 1960s and '70s, the state sought to excise "bourgeois" tendencies among intellectuals educated before 1959, to root out the sectarian tendencies of academics who published journals critical of centralized state socialism, to undermine cultural activities that focused on minority identities or religion, and to survey artists who fraternized with foreigners. To that end, in the 1970s, Cuba experimented with placing all culture under direct control of the Communist Party, blacklisted many well-known intellectuals, criminalized "Western" influence, and developed pseudoscientific categories to pathologize "excessive" intellectualism and homosexuality. By the 1980s, the cultural sector had acquired its own institutions and cadres of "experts," and younger generations that had been educated within the revolutionary system began their professional lives and ushered in what is widely considered a cultural renaissance. The decline of socialism at the end of the 1980s destabilized Cuba economically and left the country politically isolated, which led to another backlash against intellectuals and artists who were clamoring for reforms and greater autonomy. During the economic crisis of the 1990s, the Cuban government countered the impact of a mass exodus of artists and intellectuals with a peace offering to those who stayed—they could earn hard currency and travel, provided that they did not rock the boat politically. From time to time, artists or musicians would fall out of favor, but in general, they maintained their distance from opposition political activists, who were considered US-backed mercenaries by Cuban authorities. Visual artists turned their attention to sales and travel, writers who wanted to publish fiction about societal problems sought out lucrative foreign contracts, and rappers who drew large crowds but had no ties to government agencies became the principal mouthpieces of dissent. More recently, the nonconformist worlds of disaffected youth subcultures, dissident bloggers, self-taught artists, and politicized rappers are the principal sites of oppositional cultural practice and demands for greater expressive freedom. Their increasing visibility abroad and the stridency of their voices may be emboldening what has for a long time been a rather timid intellectual milieu reluctant to speak out against state censorship and repression.

In the past year, since Barack Obama and Raúl Castro announced that their governments would begin a dialogue aimed at restoring diplomatic relations after more than fifty years, there has been constant public discussion of what this will mean for Cuban society and culture. Many of Cuba's critics, inside and outside the country, have pointed to the reality that Raúl Castro has made no promise of any internal political change, that his reforms up to now have been economic and insufficient to bring about needed change, that the rate of detention of political opponents has risen dramatically, and that illegal immigration has skyrocketed. Those facts have not stopped foreign visitors from expressing quixotic expectations that Cuba's entire political system would change overnight because of a reopened embassy and an increase in tourism. The Cuban government continues to assert its sovereign rights and insist on the permanence of its political system, which is ignored by foreign journalists who endorse the Obama Administration's plans for renewed ties, and frustrates the country's internal opposition.

During the past year, several confrontations between Cuban artists and the government have received an unusual degree of attention from the foreign press. One could argue that these cases represent "business as usual" for Cuban authorities that are always keen to limit

public expression of social criticism and keep culture away from any kind of oppositional political activity, particularly when delicate political matters are on the table. One might also argue that some Cubans intellectuals and cultural producers are capitalizing on the international media attention that Cuba currently receives to thrust their concerns into the global media sphere while they can.

The most widely publicized case was that of artist Tania Bruguera, who returned to her home country last December with a hastily devised plan to restage *Tatlin's Whisper* in Havana's Revolutionary Plaza—a project that was never authorized, never realized, and for which she was detained briefly and then forced to wait for seven months before having her passport returned. Street artist Danilo Maldonado Machado was also arrested in December 2014 on his way to Havana's Central Park to let two pigs loose with the words "Fidel" and "Raúl" painted on them. He spent ten months in prison awaiting trial before being released, during which his friends carried out an extensive media campaign that led to his being named a Prisoner of Conscience by Amnesty International. Last summer, the prize-winning film and theater director Juan Carlos Cremata-Malberti mounted a production of Eugene Ionesco's *Exit the King* just as the Cuban and American embassies were reopening—and the play was shut down after two nights. When Cremata-Malberti published his critiques of the state's censorship on opposition blogs, his contract as a theater director was unceremoniously cancelled. The Cuban film institute also recently blocked a film scripted by leading Cuban novelist Leonardo Padura from being shown and another film based on a novel by Pedro Juan Gutiérrez from being produced on the island.

It remains unclear whether the presence of foreign media is increasing public expression of critical views by Cuban artists, pushing the state's hand in exercising control, or simply drawing international attention to the routine tussles between an authoritarian state and the citizens who for the most part enjoy a privileged status as long as their nonconformist tendencies are not perceived as politically inspired. The broader silence of the Cuban public as to their political aspirations and their opinions about culture still stands. Despite frequent media speculation as to what kind of political transitions Cubans may want for the future, there is a complete lack of regard for the history of attempts by Cuban intellectuals to advocate for the democratization of the Cuban system from within. In that sense, the Cuban government has succeeded in erasing history by classifying all political activism as illegal, mercenary, and counterrevolutionary, and by selectively omitting politically oriented art from institutionally produced histories.

The texts gathered in this issue of *e-flux journal* reflect upon the censorship of Cuban artists that has taken place in the shadow of the political negotiations between the island and the United States. They are the words of Cuban intellectuals who have chosen to respond to erasures brought about by overzealous state authority, a politics of complicity among Cuban artists, and the strategic blindness of Cuba's enthusiasts.

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Coco Fusco is an artist and writer, and a professor at the Cooper Union School of Art.

1
To view *P.M.*, see https://vimeo.com/21580685

2
For more details about the censorship of the film, please see Orlando Jiménez Leal and Manuel Zayas's *El caso PM: 14 minutos que duran medio siglo* (Editorial Colibri, 2012).

Ernesto Hernández Busto

The Forbidden Symbols

1.

The funniest moment of the only movie that Caetano Veloso ever made, *O Cinema Falado* (1986), is a scene in which Brazilian actress Regina Casé parodies the gestures and body language of Fidel Castro.[1] Within the collage of an avant garde film-essay, the parody is a humorous parenthesis that alternates between quotes from Heidegger, Guimarães Rosa, Thomas Mann, Gertrude Stein, combining with popular dance and music scenes, the visual grammar of Cinema Novo, and an entire paraphernalia of juxtaposed monologues suggested, as Caetano once admitted, by Guillermo Cabrera Infante's novel *Three Trapped Tigers*.

To show language as performance, and to take on topics such as politics, sexuality, art, and the avant-garde sensibility, are some of the intentions of the film, which was not as well received as its director expected. However, it is curious that in the film's arsenal of connotations, there was a place reserved to parody the tropical Ubú, to demonstrate all the grotesque codes of his discourse, the performative essence of the *caudillo*.

This is something exceptional within the Latin American avant-garde world, which for a long time has venerated the symbolic capital of the Cuban Revolution.

Actress Regina Casé mimics Fidel Castro's body language in Veloso's O Cinema Falado (1986).

2.

For decades, Fidel Castro's image and attributes were taboo in Cuban art. Any type of parody was forbidden. Any allusion was severely censored or punished. Up to the late 1980s, no Cuban artist dared to take the most explicit image of power beyond propagandistic or official art.

The symbols and messages of power were a space

reserved for praise and propaganda. In 1968 at the National Painting Expo, when painter Antonia Eiriz dared to show her piece *A Tribune for a Democratic Peace* (an expressionistic vision of an empty podium with microphones among starkly grotesque faces) she received an almost immediate response from José Antonio Portuondo, who accused her of making art "not in agreement with revolutionary principles." The effect of such words from one of the cultural commissars of the time was devastating: all around Eiriz a wall of silence arose, and one of our greatest painters was forced to leave her teaching position in 1969, and stopped painting for more than twenty years. In the end, she emigrated to Miami, where she died of a heart attack in 1995.

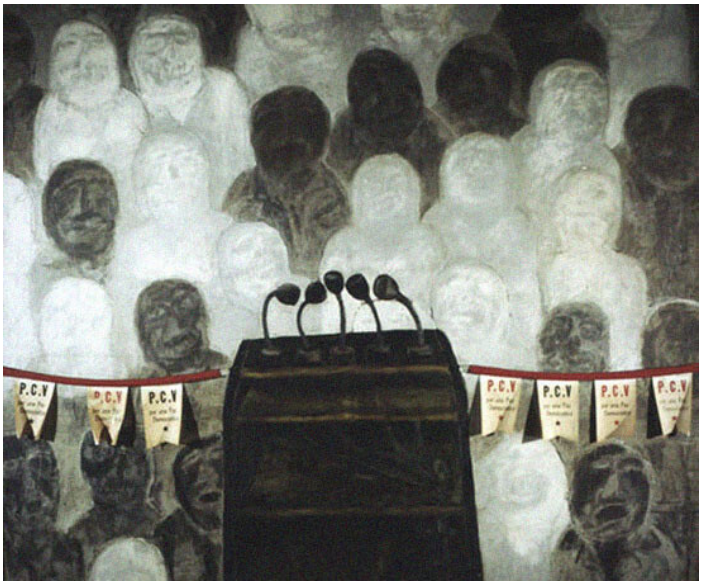
Toward the end of the 1980s, this situation began to change. Several artists (Arturo Cuenca, Carlos Cárdenas, José A. Toirac, Tomas Esson, René Francisco, Ponjuán, Pedro Alvarez, Juan Pablo Ballester) managed to overcome institutional resistance in order to gain access to the forbidden symbols and circumvent censorship. As Osvaldo Sánchez has explained so well, in what is called the "Generación de los Ochenta" (the 1980s Generation) the modernist ego competed with the dictating power of the state, and for a while exerted some type of civil authority that was not in opposition to an intense process of individualization.

Many times, there existed a space of ambiguity, as with the jokes of Carlos Cárdenas or the ironic *Parábolas* (Parables) of José Angel Toirac, in which Fidel Castro's image nonchalantly advertises Cannon or some Cuban cigars (images that were ironic as well as prophetic: later, Fidel's likeness would be used to advertise everything from beer, to a sales website, and even to a steakhouse).[2] The ultimate extreme of this ludic ambiguity has been well explained by Gerardo Mosquera when he talks about Aisar Jalil Martínez, whose physical resemblance to Fidel Castro allowed him to paint irreverent self-portraits full of double entendre that no one, including art critics, had the audacity to point out, so as not to be accused of projecting their own "politicized" vision. This is evasion as a trope.

Then came exile: a way of freeing the discourses and old fears. By 2007, when Glexis Novoa introduced a Fidel Castro body double in the show "Killing Time" (Exit Art, New York) and unfolds his performance *Honorary Guest*, the space for ambiguity was minimal.[3] What prevailed were mockery and grotesque. The avant-garde has demonstrated again that Ubú can serve as readily available and significant material for art. The exorcism had been consummated.

3.

If in the 1980s the other side of the conversation was the state through its institutions and intermediaries, in the



Antonia Eiriz, A Tribune for a Democratic Peace, 1968.

succeeding generation—the one that Sánchez has called "Generación Jinetera"[4] (a name that has shown itself to be extremely true and visionary), and that Gerardo Mosquera has called "the noxious weed" (for its capacity to thrive in unfavorable conditions)—what mattered was to talk to the market beyond Cuba's borders. Legitimacy is now somewhere else; the "Special Period" has also devastated the value of the work. To gain legitimacy one has to assimilate in a postmodern fashion, recycling topics from the 1980s, diluting the modern project into inane eclecticism. From irony and satire, we move to cynicism.

Now that that market allies itself again with the state, it begins to reproduce a much more dangerous and powerful kind of censorship than that which people tried to circumvent in the 1980s. When the digital newsletter *Cuban Arts News*—a project of the investor, collector, and mogul Samuel L. Farber—reproduces the police logic of Cuba's Ministry of Culture and avoids mentioning the thwarted performance of Tania Bruguera at Revolution Square (*El Susurro de Tatlin* [Tatlin's Whisper]), or when *Art on Cuba* magazine, conceived for American tourists to the island, skips the most controversial topics of Cuban artistic discourse, there is an alliance between the interests of the market and the criteria of political adequacy that were challenged in the 1980s.

Speaking of the "Tania Bruguera affair," it is also alarming to see famous artists, intellectuals, even representatives of the previously nonconforming generation, assuming as their own, or even giving argumentative value to, the logic of the political police ("Well, she had been warned, she knew what was going to happen to her"—a response that is one step away from the corollary that justifies not speaking out in support of someone censored and violated: "She asked for it"). As if this was not the very definition of an aesthetics and philosophy of doing

José A. Toirac, Eternity, 2000. Oil on canvas.

(Bakhtin). Of course Tania knew, just as Antonia Eiriz knew in 1968, and just as the Generación de los Ochenta artists knew. It is important, both in art and in life, to defend the right of the artist to question political power and challenge censorship.

That someone like Luis Camnitzer could say that Bruguera's situation, detained in Cuba, is not so bad since she can still visit graffiti artist Danilo Maldonado at the Valle Grande prison, makes one harbor dark ideas of possible conceptual actions, like leaving Camnitzer without a lawyer and without a passport in some other country with a judicial and police system similar to Cuba's.[5] Neither can one understand the praise from the cultural establishment for the "great cultural role of the Havana Biennial" after the piece by Yeny Casanueva and Alejandro González in which they exposed the state security service's surveillance of several cultural personalities and institutions that attended the ninth Biennial in 2006. The Biennial is also part of that terrible confusion of arts and tourism that the 1980s artists mocked so much.

Very few Cuban artists of the Generación Jinetera will not show solidarity toward an artist targeted by the state security services, since this would not only mean repression and ideological ostracism, but also market restrictions; they are unwilling to jeopardize access to collectors, tourist visits to their studios, the privileges granted by the state to their artistic and real estate projects, their permission to travel, and their financial rewards. A malignant fusion of communist and capitalist instruments of power dominate the "postideological" space that Cuba has supposedly become since December 17, 2014.

Bruguera's podium at Revolution Square remained empty, although for reasons different from what Eiriz's images showed at the end of the 1960s. Around that podium there has been a very loud silence that speaks volumes about the machinery of police and institutional control that should not continue to rule the destiny of Cuban art.

4.

When artist Nelson Domínguez opens a show of drawings of Fidel Castro and hastens to add, "to draw Fidel is to draw history … is to draw Beauty," or when Raúl Castro gifts the Pope a painting by Kcho that shows a cross made of boats and a young boy praying before it, one is forced to

think of a time prior to the 1980s when the strategies of dissent and irreverence were legitimizing elements.

Many political experts and art critics like to use the term "post-Castroism" to describe this latest phase of Cuban nihilism. But it is a post-Castroism without a death certificate or artistic legitimacy.

Two things come together in this corpse that refuses to let itself be seen and judged: the people's political destitution, and the taboo around death. Perhaps corpses are not things of the people, but they can be things of artists. Or at least they have been for centuries. The corpse allows the artist to rescue a time undone, and at the same time mock death. In other words: the more an artist fills him/herself with death, the more he/she transcends it. Let us remember Goya drawing among the piles of shooting-squad victims at La Moncloa, Rembrandt attending autopsies to create his two anatomy paintings, David before a freshly stabbed Marat, or Caravaggio turning a dead woman fished from the Tiber River into the Dead Mother of God; or Grünewald, of course.

The Cuban people need to overcome the death taboo and face Fidel Castro's corpse—while also preparing themselves to bury his political legacy. To own this collective need to visualize a corpse could become a revitalizing imperative for Cuban art.

After the Revolution, several Cuban artists lingered over José Martí's corpse. There are notable results of this, like the agonizing *Apóstol* by Elso. A good portion of our Pop art took abundant advantage of the sublimated image of Che, an icon that could never have been "processed" during the guerrilla fighter's lifetime. And there are the 1980s, which show the best of our demystifying instinct. But none of the three currently coexisting generations of artists dares to paint the corpse of the Commander in Chief.

Only a marginal artist, Danilo Maldonado (aka El Sexto), has offered evidence of that mocking spirit with a thwarted piece that is, nevertheless, much more creative than the praiseful tropes of the official artists.

To free two greased-up pigs carrying the names of Fidel and Raúl in Havana's Central Park is not only an action full of blaspheming humor, but also a project that gathers together a group demystifying connotations that already seem like part of a forgotten archive. [6] One can only imagine the spectacle of that *kermesse*, with citizens running after the elusive swine (a symbolic animal in Cuban culture, signifying both salvation from hunger and a scapegoat), or the dilemma of giving political significance to the national ritual of sacrificing pigs.

Translated by Ernesto A. Suarez

Ernesto Hernández Busto is a Cuban essayist living in Barcelona. From 2004 to 2013 he edited Penúltimos Días, one of the websites of record on Cuban affairs. His most recent book is *La Ruta Natural* (Vaso Roto, 2015).

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1
For a clip of this scene, see https://youtu.be/ZiRYcCwAI70 .

2
See https://youtu.be/tEbtEwm1SLw and https://youtu.be/bzZvsIcPa5U .

3
For video footage of the performance, see https://youtu.be/TvSxnW5kjLU .

4
For Camnitzer's remarks, see http://web.archive.org/web/20150701081328/https://www.coleccioncisneros.org/editorial/debate/contribution/ethical-dilemmas .

5
For Camnitzer's remarks, see http://web.archive.org/web/20150701081328/https://www.coleccioncisneros.org/editorial/debate/contribution/ethical-dilemmas .

Danilo Maldonado Machado (El Sexto)

Letter from Prison

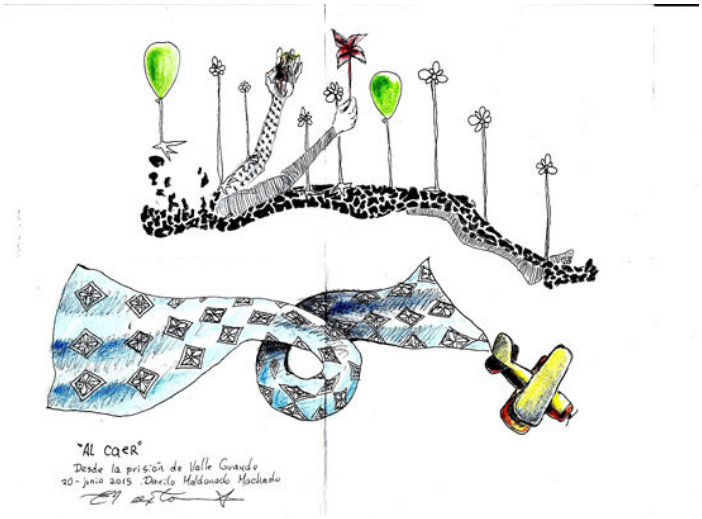
Valle Grande Prison
From “the (solitary confinement) cell”
September 16, 2015

Where I am there is little light. I walk around in my underwear because I don’t want to wear the regular prisoner’s uniform.

At night they give me the mattress for five to six hours.

I only drink water, and there will be no possibility for you all to reply to this letter because I don't want to “burn” my contacts.

Thanks to Lia, Gorki, Antonio, and everyone for helping my mom negotiate things.



El Sexto's drawings made in prison, as posted on the artist's blog.

Thanks to Aylín for the letters, so pretty and so encouraging. I read them as many times as I could. I would like to write you the thousand letters you deserve, but I don’t think I will have enough light, paper, or energy to do it.

This is perhaps my last letter from here, in the solitary confinement cell, and if I survive, you will hear more from my lips. This is why I want to tell you all that I waited too long for this moment of [hunger] strike. We Cubans have waited too long to expel these villains.

Now that I started, I feel that my faith, my determination, and self-esteem are as high as the clouds for having decided to start a hunger strike. I feel proud of being the artist I am, and of creating the art I create for the Cuba that I stand for. That is why I am willing to give my life one hundred times over if necessary.

He who lives without finding something to die for has not

El Sexto's drawings made in prison. This drawing is titled Treason and the Green Pigs.

El Sexto shows his tatoo of Oswaldo Payá on his back. Payá was a human rights activist who died mysteriously in 2012.

found the essence of life.

A man with ideals of peace and love, who does not wield a weapon to make his opinion prevail, is the man of the future. With his faith and hope, he builds Eden on Earth.

Thanks to everyone for trusting me, and know that if I die, I will die happy if I can take an impression of my time along with me. Laura Pollán and Oswaldo Payá did this while leaving behind a mark of their existence, of their generation, of their responsibility to leave a legacy—a life lesson—for their people: to love what they do, and dedicate their lives to that.

I was born in a humble neighborhood: Nuevitas, Camagüey. My family was very poor. I lived in Arroyo Arenas from the age of 4; in Charritas, Güira de Melena, Covadonga in Las Tunas: currently a country field without electricity; in Guáimaro, Camagüey and Arroyo Arenas, La Lisa. And I was lucky enough to live in Vedado many times. My daughter, Renata María, was born in England but lives in Vedado now.

I feel like a globetrotter and I have traveled around a bit, getting to know my country and my culture, which I love. That is why I raise my voice to denounce what I feel is wrong.

I visited Holland for three months. I lived in The Hague, 45 minutes by train from fabulous Amsterdam. I studied and lived at Miami Dade College, in the United States, for three months as well.

All those places taught me to relate quickly to my surroundings—that the most important thing is to have friends, to love, to respect, and not to do to others what we do not like done to us.

I learned to rise up before the powerful.

Today my art is respected mainly because I believe in it. I respected it and gave it—and still do—all my strength, dedication, affection, and love. Although I was misunderstood, and perhaps I still am by some, when those who surround you see how much you love and how much you are capable of giving and how much you respect your art and that of others, then they start to value it.

But first we must create an altar of consecration in our hearts, and everyone else will gain respect for what we do little by little: that recognition is my legacy.

Someone said that all of humanity clears a path when they see a man who knows where he is going.

This could be my last piece, and I have titled it *Calling Attention* or *The Awakening of the Inner Wizard*. Each one of us has an inner wizard. May this little drop of my existence touch your hearts and may it light its flame and awaken that inner leader. Be aware of this gift of life, and rise up against evil.

Someone said: "The world is not this way because of those who do evil, but because of those who allow it."

I dedicate this piece to my mother, my little daughter, Renata María, to all who support me, all who contribute a grain of sand for Cuba's freedom. To all the Ladies in White of the world, and especially the Cuban ones: no more violence against women! To the memory of Laura Pollán, Oswaldo Payá, and Orlando Zapata Tamayo.

The day I first grabbed a can of spray paint in my hand was the day I decided what to do with my life.

May it be so.

And with faith and conviction: *Freedom or death. To die for art is to live*.

Hugs,

El Sexto

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Translated by Ernesto A. Suarez

Danilo Maldonado Machado (aka El Sexto) is a Havana-based, self-taught street artist. In December 2014 he was arrested for attempting to stage a performance in

Havana's Central Park with two pigs whose backs were adorned with the names FIDEL and RAUL. He was imprisoned for ten months without trial and released in October 2015.

Iván de la Nuez

Apotheosis Now

1.

Fatherland or Death. With the Revolution Everything, Against the Revolution Nothing. The Future Belongs Entirely to Socialism. The Most Beautiful Land (according to Columbus). The First Free Territory in the Americas (according to Fidel) ...

These absolutes have not disappeared from propaganda or persuasion, from the dreams or nightmares of Cubans, but it is good to know that this Caribbean island has for some years now slowly abandoned "Life" in capital letters, as well as the bombastic all-or-nothing speeches that have characterized its politics, its culture, and its language.

At the beginning, maximalism in official discourse worked, and even contaminated segments of the opposition and the exile community. For the followers of official discourse promising an epic Life in capital letters, Cuba seemed to be limited to whatever originated from Revolution Square or the White House, fortresses in charge of playing military marches that barely allowed any murmur beyond the Cold War soundtrack.

Whether as Party cadre or critics, those who uttered soundbites tended to pay little attention to the Cuban masses they claimed to represent, to those Cubans who continued to move forward and evolve within their given circumstances. That was the silent society that tried all those years to dignify survival and to relax the ironclad dictionary that defined them sometimes as mere extras in a theme park called Revolution, and at other times as perfect beings programmed in the laboratories of the New Man.

Fidel Castro addresses a crowd in Havana, 1963.

Some of that went to a better place, by official decree, this past December 17, 2014, the day that many Cubans venerate Babalú Ayé (or Saint Lazarus, for the Catholics). That day, Barack Obama and Raúl Castro put aside their

respective monologues and tried a duet, albeit not completely in tune, to notify the world of their imminent diplomatic relations. A small step for mankind, but perhaps a giant step in the history of equalization.

The schedule that established free elections in Cuba, and subsequently the end of the American embargo, culminating in the reopening of embassies, was abruptly dynamited as soon as the whole process was put into motion.

That December 17 may perhaps be remembered by history as the day when Cuba officially began to operate in lowercase. It was ground zero from which an island trapped—for better or worse—in its exceptionality took on the journey that would position it closer to normal life than to historical epic. The negotiations welcomed Cuba to the current world of globalization, of market without democracy, and of the universalization of a Chinese model that long ago stopped being exclusive to that country.

For Cuba, the "enemy" turned into "the neighboring country." For the US, a country on the list of sponsors of terrorism turned into an economic partner for the immediate future. This semantic transformation has been described by Cuban journalist Carlos Manuel Alvarez in an article in El Malpensante encouraged by the hope that a change in official discourse would prompt the language of ordinary Cubans to change too. For Alvarez, once that bellicose encyclopedia was put behind us, Cubans would become "a tribe that buries its dialect."

Among the direct consequences of that burial, one must point to the elimination of the translators, the intermediaries—the European Union, Mexico, the UN, and Switzerland, all of whom were taken aback by the announcement. One must also point to the surprise of the "brothers of twenty-first century socialism," whose shock was immortalized in the face of Nicolás Maduro, petrified after the announcement.

Nearly the entire world celebrated the New Deal between Cuba and the United States as the definitive burial of the Cold War. However, it could be thought of as the opposite: both contenders, far from burying the Cold War, decided to recover its effectiveness to deal with a chaotic world. Faced with Venezuelan instability and the growth of drug trafficking, failed states and the European crisis, the situation in Ukraine and terrorism, the threat of Islamic State and the buoyancy of China—not to mention falling oil prices—a return to the diplomacy of the bipolar era would have advantages in confronting a geopolitics without a compass.

Fidel Castro makes a speech at a military parade and rally, Jose Marti Revolution Square, Havana, 1965.

2.

The waning of that epic Life in capital letters can also be seen as an erosion of the monopoly of the state over our lives—an erosion of its control of information, entertainment, food, school, health care, and the possibility of travel. A tide of TV "paquetes," restaurants, academic tutors, street vendors, nurses, trips to foreign countries, and the trading of almost anything imaginable have managed to make the country dynamic and overturn the rituals of everyday life. 1 Thanks to or despite the state, Cuba assumes the trajectory of other Caribbean countries that prop up their social welfare with the more or less official and more and more buoyant private sector (note that we are talking about the Latin American country with the highest level of state ownership of its economy).

One only has to think about the internet in Cuba, which is slower than broadband and under state control. In spite of this, a perverted version of networking has become common practice, whether for business, surfing the web, or downloading files. Cuban internet users give themselves a freedom that the state does not grant, but that it also cannot impede (at least not completely).

Around that famous December 17, in the midst of the open-air political forum that the country had become, someone suggested a graffiti with two possible variations. One: "Down with Raúl, long live Fidel." The other one, the opposite: "Long live Raúl, down with Fidel." Like the imminent US invasion—this time unarmed—that would supposedly solve all the country's problems, that imaginary graffiti was obviously an exaggeration. But it also conveyed something true about the perception of both a reformist Raulism and a revolutionary Fidelism. Whatever the revolution may have been, and whatever was left of it, it has been closed for repairs, so much so

that troubadour Silvio Rodriguez has proposed taking away the letter "R" and adopting "Evolution" to save the original project.

3.

The "Raulist reforms"—as they are called even in official circles—are not designed to change the political model. Their immediate objective is an adjustment of the system to connect it to the market economy, to relax Cold War–era emigration policies, to reestablish diplomatic relations with the US, and to change the emphasis of official discourse from the importance of sacrifice to the benefits of work. That is, the goal is to tune up Cuban socialism for the twenty-first century without compromising the power held by the elite, and without extending the liberalism tolerated in the economic field to the political field. If in a previous era the Cuban government elected to follow the Soviet model, today it is following the Chinese model.

But in a country ruled by reforms, the opposite of reform is not counterrevolution, but counter-reform. And this detail is key to understanding the political spectrum generated by the new rules. This spectrum is a broad and contradictory field that includes, without a doubt, the government's bureaucracy, but also a right-wing opposition and exile community that have banked on things staying the same. There is also the so-called moderate opposition, which sees the possibility of a transition negotiated with the state in these changes. We can also include a large portion of the dissident Left, which is interested in discussing the new political and economic models, especially insofar as the latter is likely to deepen inequality. Even from the arts, which are normally sheltered by a protectionist bubble, criticism has been swift.

The most notorious case has been Tania Bruguera's attempt to stage a public performance. But the graffiti artist El Sexto's work also opposes the status quo, though he made less of a media impact. Both were arrested. In another field, the theoretician Desiderio Navarro has developed campaigns against the sexist and racist advertising of the new economy, while the artists José Angel Toirac and Reinier Leyva Novo have returned to the original discourse of the Revolution to compare its leaders' current actions to their revolution-era rhetoric. If the sessions of the Cuban parliament are impossible to stomach, improvised debate in homes, around merchant stalls, and on street corners has turned the island into an unofficial forum where people discuss everything from the best ways to leave or stay in the country, to the latest frivolities of the new jet-set, to the inflated prices of nonrationed food, to the latest TV series. It doesn't matter if the series was smuggled in from abroad in a paquete, or aired on state television, like the series Vivir del Cuento, which keeps tabs on the contradictions of a country in which favoring change or trying to sabotage it are no longer tied to specific political orientations. (There are many revolutionaries who want to change things, and then there are the nouveaux riches who will earn the greatest return on their investment if everything stays the same.)

The counter-reform movement has incomprehensible moments, demonstrating that immobility is not exclusive to the bureaucracy. It is difficult to understand those representatives of the exile community, which has traditionally emphasized the importance of the US to Cuban politics, who have not aligned themselves with the reestablishment of diplomatic relations.

Raúl Castro and Obama pose for the media before meeting behind closed doors at the UN General Assembly, September 2015.

4.

There is no debate over whether capitalism is today's universal system—even North Korea is exploring its version of the Chinese model. And there is no doubt that capitalism only works for capitalists. Today's system is a kind of "selective capitalism" in which governments pass legislation favoring certain capitalists, but not all—only those who show loyalty. This capitalism has very little left of the classical liberalism celebrated by Adam Smith in *The Wealth of Nations.* Selective capitalism has its origins in the South American dictatorships of the 1980s and in Deng Xiaoping's Communist China, models that David Harvey identified as the origins of neoliberalism. Another important chapter in the story of selective capitalism can be found in the transitions of the old communist societies to the "free market," with their shock therapies and the emergence of oligarchs from the ruins of the old regime. Yet another chapter can be found in the Arabian Gulf countries, where the marriage between oil and monarchy continues to seduce the West. The United States, Europe, and Russia are increasingly inclined toward this version of "capitalism for the party faithful" in which the state functions as either a director of operations, a mediator, or a mere subordinate. In this model, a capitalist is not evil by virtue of being a capitalist, but only for not sufficiently

supporting the government's priorities. And conversely, for these capitalists, governments—even despotic dictatorships—are not evil as long as they allow them to act as they wish. Some theoreticians speak of "heritage capitalism," others of "One percent capitalism," and others of "speculative capitalism." I prefer to call it a "piñata" (a word used in Nicaragua to describe a landgrab scheme by the Sandinista government in 1990), since only those who accept the terms are allowed to pull the strings.

Today's Cuba is not alien to these tendencies. That said, we can expect little in Cuba's future for an economy based on services and entertainment, with tourism exalted as the latest mutation of the old monoculture, while critical thinking and the development of a "knowledge society" are ignored. (It is easy to establish a hair salon in Cuba, but almost impossible to establish a publishing house, and it is much more acceptable to the state for an artist to write these things than for an essayist to do so.)

This makes me think of the well-known saying that Jose Martí uttered to Máximo Gómez, a saying that has been a virtual Sword of Damocles over our failed Cuban democracy: "A nation is not founded, General, as a military camp is ruled." In the face of today's new economy, the phrase is worth updating: "A people is not rebuilt, General, as a new paladar is built."

5.

In her new novel *La Mucama de Omicunlé* (Omincunle's Chamber Maid), Dominican writer Rita Indiana offers us a Caribbean dystopia in which the great perennial topics of Caribbean literature—those of Alejo Carpentier and Lydia Cabrera, those of Aimé Césaire and Antonio Benítez-Rojo—are updated in a plot that unfolds between the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, and Cuba (with the ever-present Haiti shaking up the future like the unburied zombie of a revolution that turned into a catastrophe). The book foresees, by 2024, the drifting of neoliberal states into total corruption, and the drifting of some Bolivarian states into totalitarianism, with a nuclear disaster thrown into the mix. This unfortunate premonition is repeated by Jorge Enrique Lage, a Cuban fiction writer born, like Indiana, in the 1970s, whose dystopia involves a Big Bang bringing forth a Cuba of old slogans and new mafias, of old loyalties and new tribes, united by a highway to nowhere. Painter Alejandro Campins, meanwhile, has produced works about revolution that are closer to Andrei Tarkovsky's *Stalker* than to Raúl Martinez's revolutionary Pop art. Looking at his series *Avalancha* (Avalanche), one does not know if it is our present that looms over formerly sacred spaces, or if those spaces in fact loom over us, further complicating our already uncertain reality. These works of art portray a country whose incomplete utopia dedicates itself to avoiding apocalypse.

Cuba today sees the possibility of a transition from predemocracy to postdemocracy, to something that perfectly accepts the world order. Classical liberal manuals do not provide much beyond this scenario, and we must recognize that among empty words, "democracy" has an important, singular definition—like those garden pots that are as beautiful as they are fragile, and as immobile as they are empty.

John Kerry peers into the interior of an old American car parked in Old Havana, Cuba, August, 2015. Photo: Associated Press.

Now, it doesn't matter whether Cuban socialists claim that the transition to democracy already happened or maintain that it is yet to come. What none of them can escape is that their solutions are already worn out, and that to brag about having discovered the magic potion for the future is simply no longer believable.

The utopian generation has run out of time. The apocalypse generation—those children of the Revolution who came of age with the fall of the Berlin Wall—had no space for themselves. However, the apotheosis generation—the one that has come of age in the twenty-first century—has dimensions of both time and space at its disposal. Let's hope they can find that elusive formula that will allow them to build, against Cuba and against the world, a country in which social justice and democracy are not opposing terms.

Meanwhile—and now that *cuentapropismo* is allowed—many Cubans squeeze out as much liberty as they can by their own means, waiting for the experiments looming over them to yield some results that might benefit their lives.

X

Translated by Ernesto A. Suarez

Ivan de la Nuez is a Cuban writer, art critic, and curator based in Spain. He is the author of *La balsa perpetua* (1998); *Playas* (2000); *El mapa de sal* (2001); *Fantasía Roja* (2006); *Postcapital: Crítica del futuro* (2006); *Inundaciones, Del Muro a Guantánamo: invasiones artísticas en las fronteras políticas, 1989–2009* (2010); and *El comunista manifiesto* (2013).

Juan Carlos Cremata Malberti

Condemn Us, It Does Not Matter: Art Will Absolve Us

First off, I apologize for speaking in the first person.

I usually do not respond, at least publicly, to any critic or spectator regarding the details of the "machinery" of our productions. I have always thought, like García Marquez, that what I have tried to say can be found in what I did. Instead, I learn much more by listening to the different interpretations of what I do, which at times is the result purely of artistic intuition or craft, based on the experience of numerous collective works that I have been involved with over the years. Above all, I insist that there should be a plurality of readings of what I pursue or dream of, and of my obsessions and inspirations as an artist, thinker, and human being.

I am very fond of Pablo Picasso's idea that rather than searching for things, one finds them in the course of making art. That is why I am much more passionate about aesthetic origins than the completion of a creative work. I always try to use the modest plural as opposed to the more frequent and excessive "I" that has become habitual

and abundant in the discourses that for so long have inundated every branch of thinking in our country—mostly in the arts, and especially politics.

But I am compelled to respond to a "hasty" review[1] (read "induced," "commanded," or "dictated," which explains its "hastiness") of the opening performance, this past July 4, of the play *Exit the King* by Eugene Ionesco, performed by our group El Ingenio:

Dear Andy Arencibia Concepción,
cc: All who may feel alluded to

I applaud your seriousness in investigating my work, and I admire the respect you afford me, despite the fact that, evidently, you are struggling, like the rest of your handlers, to maintain your employment situation—in other words, "to keep your job." I understand you.

If I remember correctly, you were present at the meeting in which I was obliged to appear in front of the "top brass" of the National Council of Live Arts to be told about the cancelation of the season. And now, I have no doubt that many of the opinions found in your article are those expressed, although through much harsher epithets like "treason" and "political pamphlet," by none other than Gisela Gonzalez, the president of National Council of Theater Arts in Cuba.

I do not know which came first: hers or yours.

In any case, your deep and speedy study sheds more light than the the absurd and unintelligible note that suddenly appeared in *CUBARTE* about the changes in programming at the Tito Junco stage of the Bertolt Brecht Cultural Center, which did nothing but try to hide gross censorship. Instead, you are more intelligent and sane. Your analysis is respectable although conditioned.

I am, believe me, more than grateful for your effort to shine some light on that indecipherable nebula of what we try to create. I am also grateful for your praise, your compliments, and your superlatives, to which I hope to respond with humility.

Nevertheless, your article is at the same time slightly unjust and inexact, even though you have the right as a critic—but not as a researcher—to comment in such a closed-minded and categorical way on an artistic phenomenon while only taking into account its opening function.

In art, as in any other subjective matter, or even in medicine (which is backed by science), what seems good for you does not have to seem good for others.

If you had gone to the Sunday show, you would have found a moment that, although in essence the same, was different from that of the opening on Saturday. I usually tell

my friends that it is better to attend the last shows, in which the actors and the crew have already tested, and more than savored, an experience that gains richness and cohesion with every performance.

This is all the more true when the work our group develops depends so much on that interaction with the audience that your comment refers to, and in which there is more than the "choteo" that you diligently point out. There is also the manifest intention to rescue a very Cuban way of performing—almost lost or misplaced-censored-by-force-for-more-than-fifty-years—that used to characterize all of Cuban vernacular theater, with its practice of employing political satire to comment on what goes on in the country.

Obscene, excessive, irreverent (not to be confused with disrespectful), iconoclastic, rebellious, and sometimes vulgar or crass language floods our countryside and cities—I'm not sure if you pointed this out. Indeed this seems to be the language generated by the "new man" who is forged in this chaotic society that is imposed on us.

Theater is a life event, as is well known. It is catharsis, commotion, tremor, and disturbance, above all in its relation to the spectator. Whether it is for or against. It would be worse to go to a show and return as if one had never gone. Is that what you were looking for? Gallant and constant praise of the status quo? A pretty, naive, and inoffensive musical? Criticism of that which is allowed to be criticized? An interpretation of our history without questioning our present and much less our future? Restricted independence? Rationed freedom?

WWhich stamp in the rationing book sets me free? How much emancipation do I get this month?

They are selling free will! Hurry, it's almost gone!

We could point out that, a few years ago, the same Council of Theater Arts—shielded behind an alleged "respect for a

change in programming"—suppressed our immensely successful production of La Hijastra (The Stepdaughter) by Rogelio Orizondo, even though many of the Council members had never even seen it. The Council cited disproportionate, frustrating, and malicious comments made about the play—comments that were silenced immediately when a few months later, Raúl Castro himself pointed out the same social indiscipline in the country that the play had criticized.

Raúl can say it in a speech, but the theater cannot. We were not authorized to expose it. Raúl was applauded, of course. Who dares contradict him?

We were condemned to exile from the same stage to which we returned four years later, only to experience exile again—the same punishment, with same sentence, with the same penance.

And even worse.

We did fourteen performances of *La Hijastra*. We were only able to put on two of *Exit the King*. Previously, there was a tiresome scandal regarding our production of *El Fridgidaire* by Copi.

It is their third attempt to silence us. And the third time's the charm. This time, the decision is final. The offense to the powerful is now beyond salvation. No more, that's it! You shall not pass! You have gone too far!

You cite a number of theater groups that you regard as dignified and paradigm-setting (you should have also mentioned the excellent Argos Teatro, Teatro de las Estaciones, Teatro de La Luna, and Teatro Tuyo, among a very few other examples). In contrast to these groups, one could cite the work of more than a dozen other theater groups in which metaphor and artistic poetry are nowhere to be found—work that walks toward the radiant poverty that one of our more media-friendly leaders was bragging about.

What can be said about a nausea-inducing profusion of senseless events whose only objective is to sell our art abroad? Or about the hundreds of genuine "political pamphlets" we have to endure daily in real life and on television? Or about the thousands of massively wasteful public demonstrations in which bad taste, inefficiency, falseness, and senselessness are promoted?

Not long ago, an admired and recognized Cuban writer, also harassed from time to time, pointed out how badly educated we Cubans of today are when it comes to the practice of tolerance.

The most important part—and I know you will agree with me, although you will do so silently, since you cannot express it openly—is that the National Council of Live Arts has every right to express its objection to a production

within its jurisdiction. But this does not exclude the fact that its ruling in this case is immoral, medieval, and incomprehensible, for it will never have a valid explanation, no matter how many arguments, "technicalities," and fancy words they use. It is the abusive use of absolutist power wielded in the cruel exercise of vile censorship.

I silence you to make myself heard. And only me. Me. Me. And me. And nothing else shall be heard.

This is behavior typical of a kingdom, a dictatorial regime, or simply a "chieftainship."

Blatant nepotism. Open and shameless arbitrariness.

Where is the possibility for others to express their opinions? Who has the right to decide what others must think, create, or feel? What right does anyone have to dictate how others think?

These are different times, my dear colleague. A pandemic of freedom floods our senses. If someone disagrees with what we do, there is no worse response than

condemnation and forced muteness, than penance by ostracism, than the purging of all knowledge and the elimination, in one single blow, of our artistic freedom of expression, of our right to make mistakes, of our will to argue and even dissent—which does not mean, although it could, opposition.

Our intention with this production was to talk about resistance to change—about the very scathing obstinacy that shows itself in the Council's erratic decision.

It is not absolutely and unconditionally true that we intended to refer to a monarch or leader at all. We consciously tried to avoid doing this, although we knew quite well that the contemporary sick reading of the piece would go in that direction. The actor playing the role of King Berenger I deployed the gestures of the great French comedian Louis de Funes to embody him, instead of researching characters closer to our everyday life.

You can say and state what you want. You can do so because you have all the means to control and broadcast it. You read the work and took the risk. You neglected the staging. However, what is not sensible or judicious, and what goes against the sensibility of the century in which we live, is the useless effort to silence others, to decree or dictate a persistent and stubborn silence.

There exists no absolute right to do this. You can only impose it by force. And when there is force, reason wanes. It is helpless against terror.

In the name of "national socialism" we are restricted, repressed, punished, gagged, trampled, and hidden. This is an all-powerful fascism. Pure, absolute, and comprehensive. It is the same force that burned books and stigmatized races, sexes, colors, and even thoughts. It is also apartheid. As Fassbinder would say: "fear eats their soul."

It is very clear to me—as I have learned since birth—that to be a revolutionary is to not be obedient, to not abide by the letter of everything that comes from "above." That is to be a sheep. In other words: that is to be "sheepedient."[2]

From above come the things of God, and you don't even pay attention to them. May He forgive you all.

Our reason for being is to create. And we will continue doing it, even if you try to clip our wings. You will never be able to subdue thinking.

Your rule has been based on mutilating, suspending, silencing, stopping, paralyzing, stagnating, limiting, impeding, depriving, and even causing death.

Our nation is culture. Long live art!

Everything else is cheap and empty politics.

And enough with the hypocrisy that not even you yourselves believe.

X

Translated by Ernesto A. Suarez

All images of Juan Carlos Cremata Malberti's production of *Exit The King*, a play by Ionesco, censored earlier this year in Cuba.

Juan Carlos Cremata Malberti is a Havana-based film and theater director. A recipient of numerous international awards, his 2005 feature film Viva Cuba won the Grand Prix Ecrans Junior at the Cannes Film Festival and his 2001 feature Nothing opened at the Quinzaine de Realisateurs at the Cannes Film Festival.

1
The review, in Spanish, by Andy Arencibia Concepción https://web.archive.org/web/20150712001309/http://www.cubarte.cu/es/articulo/notas-apresuradas-partir-del-estreno-de-el-rey-se-muere/28152 .

2
The original says *ovediente*. The Spanish play on words between *oveja* (sheep) and *obediente* (obedient) is lost in translation.

Orlando Luis Pardo Lazo

Castrolence

Finally he had been left alone. Stooped, his perfect Greek profile had now become like that of a vulture. A kind of unkind condor. Carrion claws dripping with his own feces, a layer of bacteriostatic containment. I'm talking about biology. About beauty, that is. And I am, of course, talking about him.

There is a certain sense of classical wisdom in the birds of prey. Something noble in their adapted gestures of eating cadavers. A symptom that life never ends. These are cynical cycles. A circus. A puppet show for the peanut gallery. You have to bewitch and beguile the masses with something. They cannot be left alone, not even by silence. An act of prestidigitation. A word of faith, of fidelity. And in that he has always been much more than insurmountable. He was him. That was enough for him; that was enough for us.

Pope Francis and Fidel Castro shake hands on Sunday afternoon in September, 2015.

Give me an F, give me an I, give me a D, give me an E, give me an L … What's that spell?

He is not even remotely senile, as his enemies from halfway around the globe and within the island itself will say. He is simply alone, comrades. Alone in body and soul in an unrecognizable world, surrounded by reminiscent faces. An autistic autocrat. Traces of the most intimate totalitarianism of all, from the cradle. The key words from Citizen Kastro: *rosebud, revolution …*

All around, everyone understands the scene perfectly. They smile compassionately at Fidel. They fire fossilized photos with impunity. They feel privileged to attend the final anecdotes of a social process, his Kafkaesque social process. The difference being that, here and now, everyone can steal their way into the castle. Now, nobody wants to escape. It's not cool to abandon the trenches. It's not even profitable. The comandante will have no one to

Alen Lauzán's cartoon of Fidel Castro is captioned "Cuba updates its inoperating system." while the speech bubble to the left states "And everyone, including the counterrevolutionaries can invest." The speech bubble to the right remarks that "Cuba updates its sofware more often than Windows."

write to, but everyone comes to snap a selfie with him. The historic Happy Hour. The piñata of the paternal land in the pillory. Merry marketing, Fidel.

It is also true that everyone appears somehow impatient or perhaps even nervous in their personal style. They know that the Revolution ends with that lingering, cachectic corpse. They know that the consequences will be more physical than they will be legal or lethal. So they enjoy these marvelous moments of preposthumous peace. Every intense instance is an instant materialistic miracle. They say he was a good president because the Cubans who were left believed in Him.

Meanwhile, we crane our necks with morbid curiosity to see the emptied eyes of the Inferior Leader, the Companion in Chief who no longer holds any dictatorial office, the assassinating, amnesiac, ancestral amigo who now is barely able to dedicate himself to touching objects with his finger, suddenly as innocent as that of a baby. It's almost as if we have given birth to Fidel after so many illusions, so much intrigue, such paranoia and paternalism, such remoteness, such tracheal pain, which is where our vestigial spirit lies: in the glands.

After having imposed his jack-booted truth, as an ethical strategy of governance, Fidel now stands before us living in Braille. He sees nothing, and nobody sees him. He needs contact, his forefinger antennas of a Galician fascist, a Fragas forged from a twentieth century that did not end until the year zero or two thousand when Fidel bled his tainted intestinal fluids.

This is why his death will be a tactile one. The Cuban administration of last rights will leave tiny spots on his olive-green skin—textilic tattoos—Castrolic ticklings by the feminine hands of Cardinal Jaime. Jaime loves him. And the parishioners love Jaime with false bliss, a trick of translation, and a dirty smirk. *J'aime*, Jaime.

He is not even remotely that senile, comrades, as we say in order to not feel quite so bad about our presence before him. We are those who are, in any case, that senile. We were always being sensually senile to Fidel. A bit of a retarded people, torpid in the tremendous trick-*and*-treat that was the Utopia upon the face of the Earth. Excremendous. The etymological blockage of no-place. Topless topology. War-blind moles. The era was giving birth to Fidel's heart. Constitutional Cœurism.

A community so common we even applaud the imprimatur under which Fidel possessed us for half a hundred years of solitude. History has hysterectomized us. We renounce myths and histologies. We let him impregnate us in a manger for talented tyrants, where he could be a Caudillo and a Stallion as he wished, a stud in solitary salvation, a satanic saint facing the world first before now turning his back on the worldly.

Fidel embodies an exquisite state of futurity. As always, he got decades ahead of the Cuban people. Fidel is the ghost that, in the next twentieth century, we will become without him.

X

Translated by Ezra E. Fitz

Orlando Luis Pardo Lazo is a Cuban writer, photographer, fiction author, webmaster of "Lunes de Post-Revolución" and "Boring Home Utopics". In 2014 O/R Books published his new Cuban narrative anthology

Sandra Ceballos

Artist Against Artist

Military and cultural officials are not the only ones to blame for the intense scrutiny of artists and the deliberate acts of violence against them that erase them from state media and other systems of dissemination, legitimation, and history. Nor are the art critics and curators the only arbiters who evaluate or devalue, who elevate or bury artists' work. Worst of all are the searing, inexcusable verdicts handed down by the artists themselves. They pit themselves against one another as they warily watch their competitors, always judging them and never tolerating their success (this idea was highlighted during the "Torneo Audiovisual" curated by Giselle Victoria for Aglutinador in 2010). But not all artists behave this way.

Two players compete in the event "Torneo audiovisual," El Espacio Aglutinador, Cuba.

To be fair, I should point out that the arts sector is divided into a number of different groups: those who offer moral and conceptual support, those who engage in philanthropic projects (Artist x Artist at Carlos Garaicoa's studio, PERRO and the Manic Art Museum by myself, and the Art Brut Project by Samuel Riera, among others) in order to support those who do not have the needed exposure and financial means to develop their own work. There are also those artists who have supported alternative events anonymously. And then there are those who dedicate themselves to their personal endeavor while maintaining the dignity and clarity needed to avoid speculating maliciously against their peers.

However, the ones who fear losing recognition (in the form of medals, prizes, exhibitions, grants, and so forth) or the profits earned and the connections made with official Cuban sectors are often the ones who assume the position of moral inquisitor in order to judge their colleagues. A recent example is the abuse and injustice committed against Tania Bruguera and her *... Tatlin*. This

included criticisms and accusations—devoid of any evidence (as always, one has to believe in the emblematic verb)—media take downs, and a complete lack of internal support from her fellow Cuban artists (many of whom had supported her in the past). This is why I am reminded of the Biblical phrase, *He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone* (at her).

There are also those who seek to inject poison through destructive language or invasive texts; their brains being (of course) less than fully empowered. They weave their words together carefully and are willing, if need be, to lie in order to achieve their goals. There are also those apprehensive snipers who will attack on occasion while shielding themselves with pseudonyms as they engage in "cyber gossip," poking at wounds and manipulating minds from the shadows. These are the ones who use their sadly celebrated opinions to wreak havoc, to exclude, and to impose sentences. At the same time, they vehemently demonstrate their absolute conviction that they have been "gifted" with "great wisdom" while appearing to be "humble missionaries of the hopeless." However, they are in fact those who have simply failed to achieve the success they desired because of their own deficiencies or lack of self-management, and therefore, as they age they sift through dissimulation and wave after wave of malicious commentary to ruin the careers of their (preferably accomplished) colleagues, or they attempt by covert means to gain some sort of advantage by arrogantly undermining autonomous, persuasive, and altruistic projects of the sort that are presented at El Espacio Aglutinador. Of course, these snipers do not always hit their intended targets.

According to what I've been told by many people who have witnessed these comments and actions, it is clear that the content flowing from this latter group—the source, the motive, the phantom behind these hysterical tantrums—is based on nothing more than resentment, grudges, ingratitude, personal frustration, envy, and even gender discrimination. Thankfully, God did not grant this limited little group power or fame, common sense, a set of strategic skills, and—fortunately for humanity they lack an army equipped with the latest technology. It is no accident that this discovery has not been a negative one; in fact, it has been enriching for me. Thanks to these necrotic minds trying to sabotage Cuban culture, I'm learning to clear my slate and better appreciate the advantages that have been presented to me along the way. Many thoughts have come to mind, many ideas and summaries that have nourished and strengthened my current ideas and future projects as a creator and curator of events.

One of my future curatorial projects focuses on "El Proyecto G," a 1988 endeavor whose great sin was to be closer to anarchy than orthodoxy. Despite its undeniably effervescent public success, it was a victim of these same sorts of archetypes we see today: it was undervalued by a group of "artists/theorists/scholars" who were the gatekeepers of the so-called institution of art itself. Those judges interacted directly with representatives of the Ministry of Culture and the National Council of Visual Arts, among other institutions of the Cuban revolutionary government. They ultimately determined who would emerge as the "good," the "mediocre," and the "poor" artists of that decade. They assumed they had the key to the truth, while I have to ask myself: Which truth? What sort of purely rational system of evaluation—impervious to the subconscious contaminants of vices both scholastic and traditional, personal interests, and emotional sensitivities, whether traumatic or not—can operate fairly with regards to art? (This notion was demonstrated at the event-competition held at Aglutinador, "Fuerte es el Morro, who I am?" in 2009 and the anarchistic "Curadores, Go Home!" in 2008.)

JuanSí González performs The Artist as Public Man, at 23 y G Park, Havana, 1988.

Now, some of these "pursuers of mediocrity" (that is, those who did not return with major depressive disorders) are, from their various locations in North America and Europe (where they spend part of their time), ferociously and radically criticizing the same officials and the same cultural systems of the Cuban government to which they belonged (and from which they benefited), and which operated (at the time) under their auspices, censoring, suppressing, and destroying Proyecto G, its creators, and others including the artist Angel Delgado (who performed during the exhibition of "El objeto esculturado" in 1990), Arte Calle, and the Castillo project by Real Fuerza. Surprisingly, as time passed (that is, by the early 2000s), the 23 y G Skate Park became (and continues to be) the meeting point for groups of irreverent teens. In doing so they unwittingly give credit to the avant-garde movement from 1988, which established the location as a site of alternative cultural expression. The project's energy and spirit remained, latent yet vibrant; its murmurings transcended dictatorial speeches, and musicians, poets,

visual artists, craftspeople, emo kids, freaks, geeks, preppies, and punks would continue to gather, along with other, newly represented groups. Other voices also have the right to express themselves!

— Cuba, 2015

X

Dedicated to Proyecto G, Arte Calle, Aglutinator, Referencias Territoriales, Memorias de la post-guerra, Antonia Eíriz, Chago Armada, Ángel Delgado, Glexis Novoa, Tania Bruguera, and the other artists and projects who have been the victims of repression.

Translated by Ezra E. Fitz.

Sandra Ceballos is a Havana-based artist and the founder and director of Aglutinador, the oldest independent art space in Cuba. In recognition of her longstanding commitment to artistic autonomy in Cuba, she has received grants from The Prince Claus Fund and the Hivos Foundation in The Netherlands.

Enrique Colina Alvarez

On Censorship and Its Demons

During the past fifty-six years, censorship in Cuba of works of art and the cultural practitioners who produce them—justified as a defense of the Revolution—has paradoxically resulted in a boomerang effect against the political prestige of the revolutionary process. From the beginning, that revolutionary process encouraged and developed the artistic expressions that underpin and reinforce our national identity, ensuring the continuity of the positive legacy of this time in our history. If we were to tally up the rectifications and retrievals of works and cultural figures once stigmatized and branded as counterrevolutionary (which led to their being condemned to political ostracism) by leaders and officials of a rigid and dogmatic orthodoxy—an effort that has occasionally been interrupted by corrupt, opportunistic, or simply inconvenient actions within the vertical power structure—the list would be a long one. Today, the injustices committed during the so-called Gray Five Year Period are officially recognized, and any making of amends, reparations, and appropriations of their legacy has taken place for the most part only after the authors have already died or have emigrated.[1] But for those who had to leave because their works criticized, exposed, and denounced the intolerant, authoritarian tendencies of the bureaucratic system, to be "rescued" meant you were already dead.

Luis Pavón Tamayo (Cuban state official who ruled with an iron fist during the Grey Five Years 1971-76), stands at the head of the table. Under Pavón culture was administered directly by the Communist Party and many artists and writers were blacklisted. He published attacks on writers in Verde Olivo magazine under the pseudonym Leopoldo Avila.

Criticism is a means of understanding the truth, and it is inherent to any artistic endeavor that explores, investigates, and scrutinizes human conflicts in social, political, and economic terms both historically and in their current reality. And being intolerant of criticism has been

and continues to be a symptom of fear in confronting the responsibilities of a bureaucratized power structure that has made mistakes, committed excesses, and deviated from its original revolutionary and liberal impulses. There were mistakes and foolish remarks motivated at some times by impatience and good intentions, and at others by willful blindness in a sea of chimerical stagnation; an inability to adapt and restructure the utopia in accordance with the pressing requirements of a reality in need of an objective, sensible, and balanced assessment of the causes of its flaws and shortcomings so as to correct them. Instead, and despite the recurring calls for rectification and public critique of how badly things have been done over these past fifty-six years, the attention is always directed at the phenomena rather than the causes.

The absence of systematic critique in informed media, which is itself subjected to castrating censorship, has forged the sacred, untouchable nature of the vertical decisions made by power. Attempts to mask this are made through participatory consultations during which the "makeup" is retouched and reapplied. There is a sense of stagnation in public awareness and an ideological exhaustion regarding the worn-out, propagandistic character of a state media that turns its back on the reality of a dull and lifeless future, provoking an apathy and escapism for those who are worried about ideological diversionism, and the superficiality and banality of the entertainment consumed in " *paquetes*," i.e., computer games, reggaeton music, and so forth.[2] This loss of values—the rudeness, vulgarity, the lack of discipline in public behavior—is also the result of not having nurtured and promoted independent judgment and healthy rebelliousness as part of civic education, as Che Guevara encouraged us to use against all liars and opportunists who tout their dictates of discretion, caution, and restraint in our nonconforming citizens' forms of expression. There are legitimate disagreements regarding the civil right to express an opinion without it being repressed by fear of the consequences of a critical viewpoint appearing "in the wrong place, at the wrong time, and in a politically incorrect manner."

Many works of film, theater, and visual arts have contributed to confronting us with this wall of silence that is protected by the ideological gatekeepers who censor and condemn those same works in the name of the Revolution, when in fact those gatekeepers are undermining the pillars of humanism in our society. Movies, plays, sculptures, and paintings—not to mention the period of prohibition suffered by the best exponents of the Nueva Trova movement in Cuban music, who ultimately became the most authentic voices of the Revolution—have suffered the brunt of this reactionary hangover that shuns the debate of ideas.

Contradicting the appeal submitted to the highest levels of government to take on reality with a critical, honest, and ethical commitment, recognizing that a unanimity of opinion is just a simulation, the authorities recently launched a series of attacks on a writer whose literary and journalistic work is an example of seriousness and sincerity in recognizing our current material and spiritual needs. In addition, he is a genuine exponent of what it means to be a committed and authentic Cuban. I'm speaking, of course, of Leonardo Padura, and I'm referring to the foolish banning of the film inspired by his novel, *Return to Ithaca*, during the Havana Film Festival. Several months later it would be screened during French Cinema Week, though that was hardly an admission of an arrogant prior mistake. The banning was foolish because it shamelessly exposed the fangs of the crouching, dogmatic beast, and discredited not only the ban itself but also the power it represents. Clearly this intolerant behavior demonstrates not strength but weakness, a disease in the intellectual and political bones of one who cannot engage in an open and responsible debate with reasoned arguments that would contribute to a climate of trust in which to seek solutions to the problems that artists point to in their works. Or that would prevent us from continuing to repeat the sad story of encouraging a form of "revolutionary" combativeness prone to muzzling thoughts and converting reasonable caution into the sickly paranoia being produced in our country. A change in health comes not just with the intention to have everything remain the same, but really by taking aim at eliminating this inability to look at ourselves in a disconcerting mirror, to acknowledge our imperfections, and to question the historical, systemic deficiencies in the structure that encourages them.

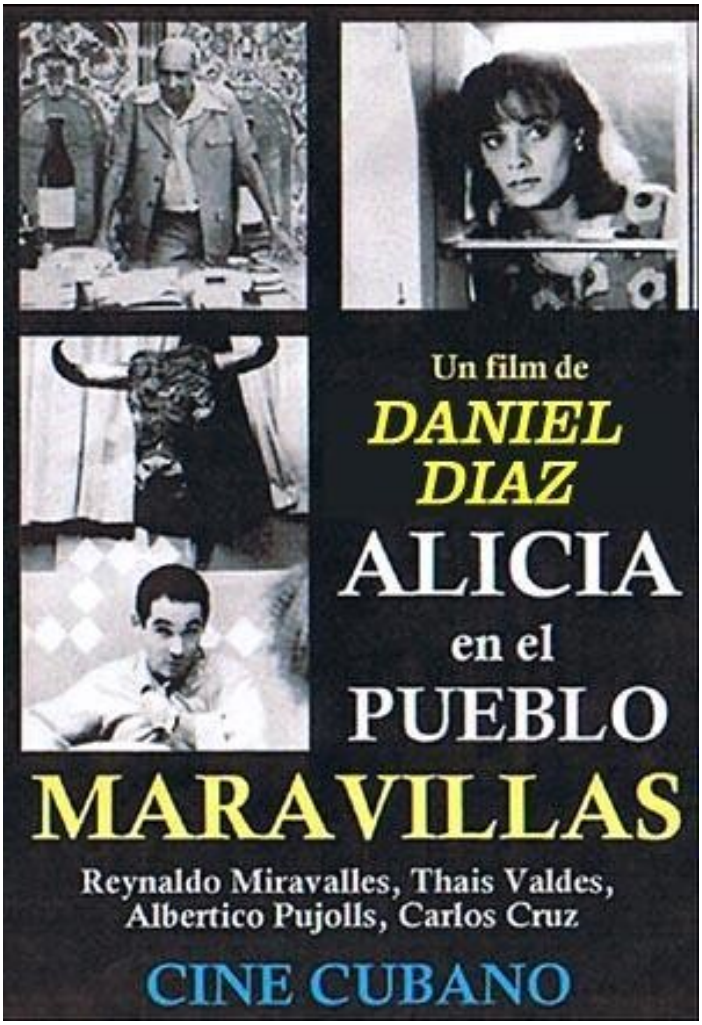
Meeting November 2015 at ICAIC to discuss censorship of Juan Carlos Cremata Malberti. Cremata, standing, has his mouth covered with tape and holds the phone.

And with that, I finally arrive at the original reason for writing these words: the banning of a play directed by Juan Carlos Cremata and the suspension of his work as a theater director. I recall when Cuban theater reached the heights of its splendor at the time of the triumph of the Revolution, only to then suffer that purge, known as the

"parametrization," whose aberrant and repressive prejudices resulted in frustration, ostracism, and exile for artists who were enriching our cultural heritage with their art.[3] I don't think I'll tell the entire story or mention those who were crushed by that purge, which I see as truly shameful and counterrevolutionary, and which only brought discredit upon the Revolution. Certain extremist decision-makers interpreted the aspirations of creating a New Man as being equivalent to forming obedient, dogmatic robots filled with reactionary prejudices, and while they may be embattled today, they have not been exterminated. Nor will I pause to argue about the play in question, with which one can agree or disagree, and which you can choose to enjoy or not.

I would simply like to point out that I consider it inappropriate for some—who are not artists themselves and who have contributed nothing to the national culture—to once again set themselves up as judicial inquisitors who, having hitched themselves to an ephemeral authority, decide to frustrate the career of an artist, a creator whose work in film and theater is part of our own cultural heritage. There may be disagreements, and at any time a theater director can decide whether or not to stage a work, whether or not to suspend or continue a production, but the anomaly here is this: If there was prior supervision with regard to its content and staging, why should censors be involved if a situation arises after the work's premiere? In Cuba, the theater is sponsored by the Ministry of Culture, and it responds to a cultural policy whose range should be as broad as its understanding of the discerning abilities of a national audience whose educational, political, and cultural levels are officially recognized. So, why censor the adaptation and staging of a play that, in and of itself, is highly provocative and thus perfectly compatible with the function of a work of art that aims to break down taboos, to move us, to call us to think, to take sides either for or against what it proposes? Do we or do we not have an educated public committed to the ideas and principles of the Revolution, one able to draw its own conclusions on whether to accept or reject it? What truly constructive sense is there in exclusionary censorship, other than to control the debate between those who perform the artistic activity and those who are potentially subjected to that same arbitrariness?

Twenty-five years ago, when censures were issued against Daniel Díaz Torres's film *Alice in Wondertown*, and instructions were issued for Party militants to attend the Yara Cinema screening one block away to "quell any counterrevolutionary expressions," an official notice appeared on the front page of *Granma*, the official newspaper of the island's Communist Party, announcing a decree by the State Council to place the Cuban Institute of Cinematographic Art and Industry under the supervision of the Cuban Institute of Radio and Television. This meant that the national film institute lost its relative autonomy in making political decisions about the films it produced. The ICAIC's relative autonomy had until then,



A poster for the film Alice in Wondertown by Daniel Diaz, famously censored in 1991.

made possible the release of a series of movies and documentaries which today could be seen as diagnostic of the ills that only worsened during the so-called Special Period in Time of Peace, to the point of sounding the alarm for the urgent need for the changes we enjoy today. At that time, the filmmakers got together to protest the ruling that disqualified the film and its director and dissolved the Cuban Institute of Cinematographic Art and Industry. The film itself was not counterrevolutionary, nor were the director or any of us who readied ourselves in defense of that artistic space with critical proposals, all of which were aimed against reductive, authoritarian, bureaucratic controls exactly like that which caused the *desmerengamiento* of the Socialist Block.[4] Directors like Santiago Alvarez and Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, among others, endorsed this critical trajectory through their own work, a trajectory that always faced harassment and repudiation by the guardians of the pristine and uncontaminated chalice of an ideology with no supreme saviors, no Caesars, no bourgeois, no God. Today it might be seen as a bit controversial, that endorsement of the

practical application of dialectics. And, thanks to this resistance from his peers, he was able to continue a kind of filmmaking that never turned its back on reality and which, to this very day, maintains its rebellion against bureaucratic *ukases* and *diktats.*[5]

That spirit of rebellion is also manifest in our protest against the attempt to exclude us from making decisions regarding the proposed restructuring of the Cuban Institute of Cinematographic Art and Industry[6] and our insistence that a law be enacted guaranteeing the recognition of independent production and of a film institute to promote and protect the national cinema instead of monopolizing and controlling it, because that's all we have. That effort has gone on for two years.

The Cremata case falls within the ideological debate that has defined the destiny of a process that needs to maintain the historical memory of its reason for being alive in order to stop committing the same mistakes that harm our valuable cultural treasures. It is a critical thermometer that no amount of censorship can completely shut off as long as we are able to act in accordance with our civic duty.

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Translated by Ezra E. Fitz.

Enrique Colina Alvarez is a Havana-based documentary film director and film critic. For thirty years, he directed a weekly television program about film culture and criticism entitled *24 X Segundo*. He is a professor at the International Film and Television School in San Antonio de los Baños and the College of Art and Audiovisual Media in Havana.

1
The Gray Five Year Period refers to the period between 1971–76 in Cuba when cultural affairs were administered directly by the Communist Party. Many luminaries of Cuban literature and the arts were relegated to internal exile, unable to publish, work in their fields, travel, or present themselves in public.

2
" *Paquetes*" (literally "packages") refers to flash drives filled with pirated foreign television shows and movies, computer games, popular music, and print media that are sold illegally throughout Cuba. A *paquete* costs 2CUC ($2.50). Cuban state officials frequently speak out against them as crass and immoral, but their widespread popularity has contributed to a decline the in viewing of state media.

3
The " *parametración*" refers to laws and actions taken in the early 1970s in Cuba that essentially criminalized homosexuality and forms of behavior considered antisocialist. Following a 1971 speech by Fidel Castro in which he suggested that artistic and intellectual circles gave homosexuals dangerous opportunities to influence Cuban youth, laws went into effect that led to the expulsion of scores of artists, professors, teachers, and other professionals from their jobs.

4
" *Desmerengamiento*" is a term coined by Fidel Castro to refer to the collapse—or *desmoronamiento* —of the Soviet Union. It stems from the word " *meringue* " and, as with a failed meringue, it implies collapse, for it was the same hammer and sickle that broke down the Berlin Wall. In other words, it went to the disbelief and dysfunctionality of the Soviet model, in which lay—worn out and worm-eaten—the revolutionary essence of its origins.

5
" *Ukas*" is Russian for edict. " *Diktat* " is an order or decree imposed without popular consent.

6
There is the official claim to legitimize institutions eroded by a future that has exceeded its capacity for functional rehabilitation in order to respond to new demands imposed by a present quite distinct from that which motivated its origins. See the documentary *Que me pongan en la lista ...*

Lázaro Saavedra

Tania Wins, Civil Rights Continue to Lose

> "Art is a santería altar that sometimes needs to be fed violations of civil rights."
>
> —Tata Watashi

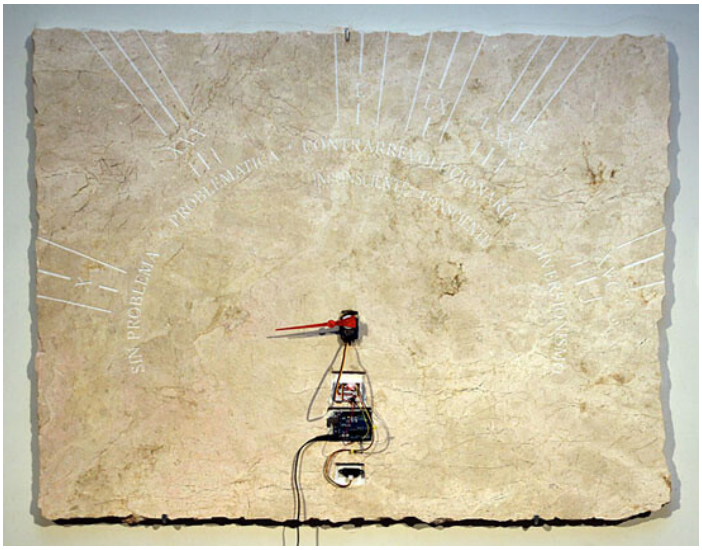
Tania has taken advantage of a specific situation to define a problem by means of an attempt at an "aRtivist" action. She knows perfectly well that there are only two answers to her project: "yes" or "no." Either answer will provide good results that will beef up her artistic CV more than advancing civil rights in Cuba. She knows the game, and she sets it in motion; others have no choice but to become part of the game. From the start she had nothing to lose professionally. Everything was in her favor, whether she was able to realize her performance (aRtivist action) or not. Censorship makes it such that *Tatlin's Murmur* becomes Tania's Noise with all the actors playing their parts according to an existing script: the formation of a new platform, social networks, media coverage, support, alerts, dialogues, negotiations, repressions, detentions, solidarity, liberation, and so on. In spite of all of this, whether the authorities allowed the action or censored it, there would be a *performance*. Tania and her followers would assume the task of explaining and theorizing everything after the fact. In that sense, #YoTambienExijo (#IALSODemand) was a well-devised (or well-intuited) strategy. Its "creative act" consists of searching for, finding, taking advantage of, and stating a problem with two possible "preprogrammed" answers (the old formula of action-reaction), either of which, through a media push, would score points for her career. In Cuba, if any common citizen residing in its territory gets involved in dissident actions or open opposition actions against the government, the negative repercussions in their daily lives are immediate, especially if they are unprotected. For a Cuban artist (and a protected person of note) who spends most of her time outside Cuba and uses the struggle for civil rights as a medium for aRtivism within Cuban territory, a confrontation with the government will have no negative repercussion in a daily life lived outside the government's reach. On the contrary, coming to Cuba is a means of scoring "points" for the "international circuit" of "global" art through a direct confrontation with an authoritarian government. Cuba continues to be a place where interesting things happen. A few months ago, for example, the visible state of the Independent Republic of Havana held a show by Pedro Pablo Oliva that the invisible state of the Independent Republic of Pinar del Río refused to show.[1]

Can someone conceive of a performance in the name of civil rights, knowing beforehand that it will be forbidden, and take advantage of the censorship? The answer is yes,

and Tania just showed that it is possible. She read Foucault a long time ago, and knows that he who controls space controls human behavior. This is applicable to all sorts of spaces, whether it is that of a "public" institution within the artistic system or a public space outside the artistic system. I do not know if the state has read Foucault, but the author's ideas are applicable in our context. In Cuba, the state controls public space; spontaneous gatherings are not welcome. Institutional violence, mostly in the provinces, against any street demonstration considered to be dissident or oppositional attests to that. Only in 1994, during the "Maleconazo" uprising, did the state lose control, briefly, over a part of the capital's public space. One example among many: since the 1990s, Oscar Elías Biscet, in the name of human rights, has tried to operate in the capital's public space and in that of the provinces, to work on the conscience of the common citizen through civil disobedience. The government's reaction against him has been harsh. The street belongs to the state, whether it is called Fidel or Raúl. Let us remember the slogan: "This street is Fidel's!" Tania knew perfectly well that she would not be allowed to realize her piece. Or perhaps she is naive, or suffering from amnesia after having spent so much time outside Cuba that she forgot how things operate inside the country. Does she not remember how they "prevented" her from continuing her independent publication *Memorias de la posguerra* (Post-War Memories) in the early 1990s? Did she forget what happened during the 10th Havana Biennial in 2009 with *Tatlin's Murmur #6*? Did she think that things had changed magically and instantly on December 17, 2014? Did she believe that they would tell her: "Welcome, the square belongs to the people. Let's open all microphones and let all voices be heard. The police are here to ensure that citizens can freely express their thoughts"? I do not believe that.

I agree 100 percent with the ideas in Tania's letter of December 18, 2014 from Vatican City, for reasons that go beyond and precede her letter. In this country, there are many people fighting for civil rights. I think that they would have loved Tania if, when they were being harassed, she had been nearby, making useful art. For them, the struggle for civil rights started long ago, and not on December 30, 2014 at 3:00 pm in Revolution Square. The second-to-last paragraph in Tania's letter reads: "Today, I would like to propose to the Cuban people, wherever they are, to come out on the streets on December 30 to celebrate, not the end of the blockade/embargo, but the beginning of their civil rights." In any case: welcome!

As happened after *Tatlin's Murmur #6* in 2009, Tania will leave Cuba with another achievement on her CV. On social networks both digital and real, she will be criticized and also praised for her audacity and courage. Some critics and curators will feature her in contemporary art texts, exhibitions, and so forth. There will also be Cubans left in this country fighting for civil rights, and as always, there will be thousands of people outside Cuba pushing



Lázaro Saavedra's piece for the Cuban Pavilion in the Venice Biennale etches the dial of Ideologies Detector in stone. From the series, Solidifying What Fades into the Air (1987—2013). Sensor, motor, marble.

them to do so. But he who pushes doesn't get beaten. Let's not confuse the act of pushing with real support from the outside. Many people have been left thinking that #YoTambienExijo was an infantile action in the style of "Hey, you guys, let's go make some noise! And if they arrest us, all the better. Every mistreatment against one's person is a badge of honor!"

#YoTambienExijo was more a provocation than a real advance for civil rights. It told us that the government does not open the microphone so that all voices can be heard, but we've been told this many times already. We're tired of hearing it. Everyone knows it, including the government. A more interesting (and, of course, more difficult) project would have been to find an intelligent way, evading censorship and the formal structures of social control, to create a temporary autonomous zone (TAZ) where it would have been possible to "open the microphones" to hear "all voices." But she failed in her attempt. The voices still wait to be heard. I think that any citizen of this country, including all dissidents and opposition groups, have the right to be heard publicly by all, just as the state does. The challenge of achieving this remains. Other long-standing problems also remain: Are civil rights one of the many media for creating art, or is art a medium to fight for civil rights? Is art or aRtivism a genuinely effective medium to fight for civil rights? What is the ideal of the nation we are building? Tania ends her letter from Vatican City by saying: "Let us make sure that it will be the people who will benefit from this historic moment. The homeland is what causes us pain." But we all know that what really hurts any artist is not being able to live off his or her art, and some artists' threshold for pain regarding the homeland comes very occasionally and capriciously. What really hurts them is having their toes stepped on.

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Translated by Ernesto A. Suarez

Lázaro Saavedra is a Havana-based artist and professor at the University of the Arts in Cuba. He exhibits internationally and is the 2014 recipient of Cuba's National Arts Prize.

1
In September 2014, Cuban painter Pedro Pablo Oliva's solo exhibition titled "Utopias and Dissidences" in Pinar del Rio was censored. See http://www.elnuevoherald.com/noticias/mundo/america-latina/cuba-es/article2185709.html .

Antonio José Ponte

The Putinization of Cuban Art

The contemporary art biennial that took place this past summer in Havana has been called the "Biennial of the Thaw." The US market tuned in, and many Cuban artists living abroad returned to the island to exhibit their works. With the legitimacy that the label of contemporary art accords to certain gestures, there was an Obama look-alike strolling through the city, a sandy beach right in the middle of the Malecón, and a Facebook "Like" icon the size of an official government propaganda billboard.

It had been dubbed the "Biennial of the Thaw" not only because it took place during the restoration of relations between Cuba and the United States, but also because there were artists who were trying to give these negotiations a bit of a push to accelerate history. As such, the steps Obama was taking were understood as a foreshadowing of the journey to Cuba that the President promised he would make by the end of his term. Umbrellas and deck chairs on the sand dumped on the Malecón were a preview of the urban transformations that will be sweeping across the island. And the Facebook sign suggested a level of access to the internet that does not yet exist in Cuba.

As politically imaginative as they may seem, the artists participating in the Biennial were unable to elaborate a defense of artistic and civil liberties, and they were silent in the face of the censorship and repression of their colleague, Tania Bruguera, who had returned to the country some months before to stage a performance in the Plaza de la Revolución. That was to be her way of speeding up the thaw: installing a microphone where only the official monologue can be heard, in order to allow any citizen to express themselves. State Security officers didn't let her get to the plaza; instead, they took her away, confiscated her passport, and for over half a year left her in judicial limbo, with the island as her jail cell.

When the Biennial began, Bruguera chimed in with her own opening ceremony. She began reading aloud, in the living room of her home in Havana, from *The Origins of Totalitarianism* by Hannah Arendt. She invited her colleagues to join her, along with any other willing participants, and yet no Cuban artists came, with the exception of Levi Orta and the critic and curator Gerardo Mosquera.

The people who did show up were government officials and menacing mobs of State Security officers disguised as citizens who subjected her to an act of repudiation. Bruguera discovered she had been banned from virtually all galleries and museums. None of the people who had invited her to the Biennial's opening ceremonies protested against this. They didn't withdraw their exhibits, they didn't stage a walkout, and they didn't make a single public complaint.[1]

This disregard for violations of basic rights is not, of course, limited to visual artists in Cuba. The previous

A “Like” from Facebook, by the artist Alexander Guerra, appears on the Malecón.

December, during the International Festival of New Latin American Cinema in Havana, the French film *Return to Ithaca* was censored. Cuban author Leonardo Padura, who wrote the screenplay, adapting it from one of his novels, asked the director Laurent Cantet not to speak out, and he also kept silent. And when the film community publicly condemned the censorship and Cantet thanked them in an open letter, Padura remained silent. He has created the figure of a victim of censorship who avoids any association with those who risk themselves by defending him.

All these signs suggest the emergence of a new class of artists in Cuban culture. Those residents both inside and outside the country who enjoy sufficient economic solvency to not depend on the regime, who count on a second nationality to support them, still behave as if they have drawn no lessons on freedom from these very advantages. They defend their economic privileges above anything else … even (as we have seen in Padura’s case) over their own work.

They take their works of art to Cuba or publish their books there for the benefit of those people who can read and attend exhibitions, not to curry favor with the regime. That’s what they say, at least. But being unscrupulous soon makes them complicit with the authorities, and their silence ensures that censorship and repression will continue to operate smoothly. They are at once the stars and extras in art festivals that, ultimately, are always crushing someone.

By being ready to usher in the future, these artists are helping to form a relationship with political power that is not unlike Vladimir Putin’s regime in terms of the way it controls the world of Russian art. Unlike Putin, however, Raúl Castro does not need to shell out much in the way of money in order to buy artists. He uses the US market and its appetite for discovering all things Cuban. An entire fleet of American curators land in Havana and—regardless of where they live or how well they’re doing—Cuban artists return to the island. It’s understood that Cuban art is what you buy on the island, in situ, paying for the value added by the spirit of the place. Cuban art is bought as a souvenir of a historical moment, and the regime takes its cut for providing the premises, which is their island. And from these transactions, the artists’ commitment to submissiveness follows.

With the Biennial over, and after having read Arendt aloud in Havana, Bruguera has begun plumbing the Cuban government's repression of political opponents as a source of future work. She has been beaten and arrested by State Security forces on a number of occasions, and she remains at risk of being brought before a judge with a mind full of preconceived rulings. In such a case, it is unlikely that her colleagues would reach out to support her, focused as they are on the process of Putinization their own art is undergoing.

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Translated by Ezra E. Fitz.

This article originally appeared in El País

Antonio José Ponte is a writer and codirector of *Diario de Cuba.*

1
Since the original publication of this article the Cuban government dropped its case against Tania Bruguera and returned her passport, and she returned to the US in August, 2015.

Amaury Pacheco del Monte

Alamar: An Oblique Approach

Every presence poses a conflict, he said one afternoon through his mysterious block of teeth, confidently and methodically chewing …
Extension: estranged …

What Alamar is today—that estranged extension—springs from the La Noria ranch owned by the Velazco family. La Noria, "the watermill," a word which itself embodies cycles, a machine whose buckets extract pieces of history chained to time, as the sound of its toothed wheel leaves us a howl.

A municipality to the east of Havana, its construction began in 1958. It was originally designed as an exclusive suburb for the bourgeoisie and well-paid laborers. Later, after the triumph of the revolution, its fate took a sharp turn. In the Sixties, it became a residential area for foreign technicians. It was not until '71, that the Alamar Plan came into being. A Soviet-style urban development project, Alamar began with a rush of workers who arrived with the microbrigade movement and set it up as a model residential area—the only one of its kind in the country. Alamar was visited by presidents, heads of state, and delegates representing other Socialist countries of that era. It represented the idea of the construction of the new man, a product of the revolution, who would conform to strict codes of conduct established by the authorities of civil society.

The poem is born to be projected into the next Era …

This housing complex stood in East Havana, as seen from a 1962 photograph. Photo: Roberto Segre.

A maquete of the Alamar plan offers a birds-eye view. Photo: Roberto Segre.

First Movement

This city was founded on red ferriferous soil. Erosive soil lacking in groundwater, dreaming amidst rivers, mountains, the sea and her reefs, masculine and feminine, unmistakably blue, a mirror into which the sky stares for long periods of time. Where the vegetation was broken by the repeated blocks of apartments. I think the never-silent founder and prominent player in the burgeoning real estate industry, Guillermo Alamilla Gutiérrez, had a vision … he pictured, perhaps, the magnificent image of a Royal Poinciana tree (native to the region) in full bloom, before realizing that among the letters of his own name along with those of his dear Margarita, a space of experimental resonance opened up to reveal Ala-Mar: Ala, the wing, a bold new motif completely distinct from the idea of the alligator that hangs over the island; and Mar, the sea, in whose waves he saw wings.[1] And just like that, the image was struck in the ether. Dr. Alamilla went after Margarita like Faust following his beloved. He forgot those lands in much the same way that Margarita forgot him, but not before leaving us with a gateway opening to the south, streets paved over an aggregate base, sidewalks, curbs, drains, and technical works like electricity, running water, and the heart which fed the entire housing development: El Batey de Alamilla. He named the areas where the building would take place: Alamar Olimpo—the panoramic view, the river estuary, La Habana, the Capitolio, can be seen from here; Alamar Residencial—within walking distance of the mountain and the coast; Alamar Costa Azul—the blue here tending to transform the reef on an imaginary scale under the Caribbean sun, perhaps because the place itself was imagined as being for pleasures of all kinds. The founder's dreams expanded upon the obsession of various presidents, who had been planning on developing Eastern Havana as far back as 1908. In 1925, Gerardo Machado launched the Atlantic City Project, in which lands around the site of what is now Alamar were sold to wealthy Havana residents, upper-class Americans, and Hollywood stars. Later, President Prío Socarrás tried only somewhat successfully to take it back, before General Fulgencio Batista, in conjunction with the Italian Mafia (Meyer Lansky and Lucky Luciano, among others), undertook the project and managed to complete the construction of the Harbor Tunnel. This facilitated and gave meaning to the plan—initially put forth by the engineer Dionisio Velasco—of constructing a chain of hotels along the North Coast as far as Varadero.

But as the song says, the comandante showed up and ordered everything to cease.

> *Buildings as ugly as decrees the Angel (hand of stone) said, once upon a time, while smoking a cigar. 100,000 inhabitants from here to there and beyond: diasporas of the continents.*

Second Movement

It all began with Máximo (the administrator of the metallurgical factory called Socialist Vanguard) whispering to Fidel Castro about the workers' grumblings regarding the lack of housing. From that, the Alamar Plan was hatched. The revolution enters with its alchemy and its grand gesture of turning barracks into schools. Everything changed under this procedure: a middle-class Havana suburb was transformed into one for workers and technicians. This was a project supported by the ideology of the New Man and sustained by expressions of exemplary conduct, revolutionary selflessness and dedication. An architectural design reminiscent of the ghettos of Kiev or Moscow. That's how the microbrigade movement of voluntary labor came to be. This time they entered from the north side of the development with their white helmets, pickaxes, proletarian shovels, truckloads of workers, architects and engineers, teachers and students. The brigades were made up of thirty-four men: eight for planned social works, twenty-six for constructing the buildings for themselves, plus others that would eventually delineate a shimmering, monotonous maze. Alamar maintained the same three zones as it had before, but through revolutionary alchemy the bourgeois poetic names were changed to Socialist Realist ones: what was once Olimpo became the Consejo Popular Alamar Alturas, which included zones 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, and 11; what was once Residencial is now Alamar Playa, consisting of zones 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5; and out of Costa Azul came the Consejo Popular Alamar Este, which covered zones 12 through 25 and extended through Micro X as far as Bacuranao.

The first inhabitants of the Plan came from all corners of the country, bringing with them their traditions and

This block of apartment buildings was built by the Microbrigade systems, Alamar, 1970s. Photo: Roberto Segre.

These apartment buildings were built by the Microbrigade systems, Alamar, 1970s. Photo: Roberto Segre

idiosyncrasies. They saw their needs for housing satisfied in good order, but clashed with the prevailing rules and regulations of a newly founded Alamar. The apartments were issued according to total hours worked, but not before purgative meetings during which the contestants' dirty laundry was aired in the sun of partisan morality. Great battles that foreshadowed the way artists and intellectuals would be treated during the gray years. In addition to that, there were the union commissions that conducted visits and monitoring surveys to maintain the established order, resulting in an atmosphere of censorship and self-censorship. Things you were prohibited from owning inside the apartments included pets, saints, plaster casts of religious symbols, and images of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus. Even so, people guarded their protective icons, moving them from the windowsill to the living room as the commissions came and went, despite the fact that there were never any administrative resolutions or bulletins listing these prohibited items.

The aura of Magna work was growing, and refugees from war-torn parts of Latin America were arriving along with their families, as were technicians from the Soviet Union and other European Socialist nations. Over four hundred residences were assigned to them. Within just a few years, Alamar's population swelled to over one hundred thousand. The incipient decade of the Eighties brought with it the oblivion, the key that returns as an indecipherable purpose. The illusion is broken, its days of splendor vanishing like the scent of a flower plucked from the garden. Standards were lost, exemplary conduct and social control gave way to build-your-own shantytowns, which was just another direct response to the urgent need for housing.

Buildings buildings buildings low-cost housing people so many people looking for a place to rest their head silent-restless city … sleep. Buildings buildings buildings

Third Movement

In the late Eighties and early Nineties, this housing development, planted over the remains of another city, became fertile soil. Its tectonic layers of sediment move beyond the bounds of the blueprint that set down for Alamar. Alamar began to draw breath, trying to grasp the inspiration that flowed from her nature, from the layered strata of unforeseen desires and aspirations. We recall that Alamar was not born a living organism but an urban one that evolved socially and culturally in more of a geological than a biological way … it is an experimental monstrosity that calls to mind Mary Shelley's modern Prometheus. This is the period in which the cultural movements that modified the sleeping city's controlled perimeters began to appear. The imprint of artists and poets both local and foreign (Chileans, Colombians, Uruguayans, Argentines) generated intense creative

The rap group Alma Rebelde performs in Alamar at Rap Festival, 2003.

activity and this led to the creation to literary workshops where the written word and the visual arts came together, and they were places that attracted great practitioners of verse. The establishment of an atypical space like the Fayad Jamís Gallery for Art and Literature attracted young people from Havana's various boroughs, who found new expressive resources there, such as the political project featuring the poet María Elena Cruz Varela. The hip-hop movement found a welcome host and reached new heights in this city, with a festival organized by Grupo Uno that brought together designers and artists and gave expression to contrary and alternative voices that galvanized the national discourse. And the performance art group OmniZonaFranca, with their interdisciplinary Poesía Sin Fin, or Endless Poetry, festival, brought the local community into contact with emerging and seasoned poets from within and outside the island. The group that fused writing and performing to intervene in public space created a context for the expression of opinions and to delineate the zones of silence which, years later, I would define as Arte Necesario, or Necessary Art. The phosphorescent trail left by these spirals of creative renewal continues as far as the year 2000. Alamar is a laboratory, a place of heavy rains inundating metropolitan Havana, and attracting attention. There is a rising sun in Eastern Havana. It is true, though, that the fertile abilities of this land to create movements—which take root like wildflowers and are transplanted when they reach middle age—are often drowned out by the prevailing cultural policies. In these cases, the control never truly goes away, and Alamar returns to its arid essence, rooted in its dry, ferralitic soil despite being surrounded by all the infinite waters of creation. Ready to be fertilized once again in the eternal cycle of renovation.

said the Angel
here we live
here we grow
here we connect
with planetary, galactic,
and universal ethers
until they fall
and crash into the meaningless ground ...

X

Translated by Ezra E. Fitz

Amaury Pacheco del Monte is a socially engaged artist, OmniPoet, and founder of the group OmniZonaFranca. Self-educated, he is a creator of Necessary Art (Arte Necesario) and operational poetry for social interventions.

1
Cuba is often characterized as an alligator because of its shape. For example, the Communist Youth has a newspaper called *El Caimán Barbudo* —the bearded alligator. —Ed. note