

Five Notes on Alternative Thinking in Cuba/Post '59

Madeline Cámara Betancourt

University of South Florida

Contemporary Cuban artists and intellectuals have produced a coherent, extensive, and *rhizomatic* corpus of texts about national identity from inside the Island as well as from abroad, creating the most fascinating mix. Even when coming from the social sciences, ideas are often coined by resorting to metaphoric language. From the concept of *choteo* (joking), created by Jorge Mañach in 1928, to describe the Cuban aptitude for humor when facing serious business; to the concept of *ajiaco* (stew), created by the anthropologist Fernando Ortiz in 1944 to describe the mixture of different cultures and races in Cuba, theories and images have been used indistinctively as working tools to define Cubanness. In that sense, I hope that my brief presentation about Cuban identity can be a useful exercise for all of us. Today my focus will be on some cultural, political, and literary events and practices. I consider them as “crossroads” that have generated alternative thoughts in the quest for a national identity in Cuba/post-'59, if this “chronotrope” is accepted. Even though “as a woman I have no country”—borrowing Virginia Woolf’s phrase—, Cuba is my homeland, so—as a woman—I disclaim objectivity in my approaches. The following five notes are portable umbrellas to get your attention for the next half hour.

Note I: Creating under Censorship or *bajo presión*

It is still inexplicable for people not familiar with Cuban political culture what caused the extreme reaction from the government to the exhibition of *PM*, a short film produced in 1961 by Sabá Cabrera Infante and Orlando Jiménez Leal. The film, in a neorealist style, was only giving

a glimpse into Cuban night life. But its “uncritical” approach to the libidinal chaos that Havana nights could be, was considered a “counterrevolutionary portrayal” of Cuban society and soon the film was forbidden for public distribution. Let’s quote the so-called *actas* (minutes) directly from the transcription made by the Cuban Institute of Cinematographic Art and Industry (ICAIC, for its Spanish acronym). As the language of censorship has its unique flavor, I refrain from the sin of translating this piece and I read in Spanish:

REPUBLICA DE CUBA
INSTITUTO CUBANO DEL ARTE E INDUSTRIA CINEMATOGRAFICOS

- TEXTO DE LA COMUNICACION ENVIADA POR EL ICAIC
A LA ASOCIACION DE ESCRITORES Y ARTISTAS.

La Comisión de Estudio y Clasificación de Películas del ICAIC, considerando que la cinta denominada "P.M.", técnicamente dotada de valores dignos de consideración, ofrecía una pintura parcial de la vida nocturna habanera que, lejos de dar al espectador una correcta visión de la existencia del pueblo cubano en esta etapa revolucionaria, la empobrecía, desfiguraba y desvirtuaba, decidí, en uso de sus facultades, prohibir la exhibición de la película mencionada dentro del territorio nacional.

Esta decisión, que ha parecido justa a altas autoridades del Gobierno Revolucionario y a distinguidos intelectuales y artistas, ha suscitado también entre otras personas descontento y, aún más, el temor a que la medida entrañe un posible ataque a la libertad creadora en el terreno de lo estético.

Ante este hecho, el ICAIC, a la vez que mantiene la vigencia de la resolución que prohíbe la presencia de "P.M." en nuestros cines hace saber que está presto a rectificarla tan pronto exista una solicitud en tal sentido, firmada por cualquier organización de masas del pueblo cubano: CTC, FEU, Asociación de Jóvenes Rebeldes, Federación Democrática de Mujeres, etc.

A este fin, el ICAIC proyecta ofrecer exhibiciones privadas de "P.M." ante las organizaciones mencionadas, así como ante la UIE, las Milicias Nacionales Revolucionarias y cualquier otra cuyo nombre se le sugiera.

El ICAIC opina que nadie más autorizado que estos organismos populares para determinar si la prohibición de "P.M." es una justa medida de protección del prestigio del pueblo de Cuba en estos instantes o, por el contrario, una decisión antidemocrática y mutiladora de la libertad de expresión de los artistas de nuestro país. La Habana, mayo 30 de 1961.

ACUERDO ADOPTADO POR LA COMISION DE ESTUDIO Y CLASIFICACION DE PELICULAS.

La Comisión de Estudio y Clasificación de Películas con fecha 31 de mayo de 1961, de acuerdo con las facultades que le concede la Ley, dictó prohibiendo la exhibición de la película "P.M.", realizada por los señores Sabá Cabrera Infante y Orlando Jiménez, por considerarla, en este Año de la Educación nociva a los intereses del pueblo cubano y su Revolución.

As expected, the measure generated discomfort and protests, and Fidel Castro, personally, decided to call for a “Meeting with the intellectuals / Reunión con los intelectuales” to discuss the situation. The National Public Library hosted the famous meetings on June 16, 23, and 30, 1961. This last day Castro pronounced his famous speech, “Words for the Intellectuals / Palabras a los intelectuales,” which has since been a policy reference point on Cuban culture, and I quote: “Within the Revolution, everything; against the Revolution, nothing / Dentro de la Revolución, todo: contra la Revolución, ningún derecho” (quoted in www.min.cult.cu). But who defines the limits of what is within and what is outside the Revolution? Everybody knows the answer but what matters for this talk is the incredible fact that the question, even nowadays, is hovering over intellectual debates about legitimacy (see *La Jiribilla*, <http://www.lajiribilla.cu>, Havana, July 2–8, 2011).

With this in mind, let’s revisit Havana but in 1971, ten years later. The consequences of the bad seed planted are obvious in the best-known literary/political event of the decade: the Heberto Padilla “affair.” A well-respected author and winner of a national literary prize with his book, *Out of the Game / Fuera del juego*, Padilla questioned in his poetry the scale of the commitment required of him as a writer in a revolutionary setting. Here is just a brief quote from one of his poems, entitled “In Hard Times”:

They asked him for his time
so that he [might] join it to the time of History.
...
They asked him for his chest, his heart, his shoulders.

They told him that it was strictly necessary.

They explained to him later
that all these donations would be useless
unless he also surrender his tongue,
because during hard times
nothing could be so useful
for stopping hatred or lies.

And finally they asked him politely
to start moving
because during hard times
this is, no doubt, the decisive test.

(Cited in Chomsky, Carr, and Smorkaloff 488)

Padilla's book was prohibited and the writer was sent to prison momentarily. He was released after a mock trial and after signing a document of self-criticism where he acknowledged being a counterrevolutionary, accusing too his wife and a close group of friends. The event marked a *before* and *after* in Cuba's relations with intellectuals in Western societies. The official face of the Revolution no longer had a long beard—no more *barbudos venidos de la Sierra* but a bunch of autocrats, which reminds us that the cold and cruel pantomime of Stalin's trials could be remade under the plain sun of the Caribbean island. That, for the European taste, was intolerable. But of more consequence for discourses about Cuban identity—and a bitter revenge of Art over History—is that the Padilla affair marks the reawakening of *mimicry in literature* as a discursive strategy among artists for surviving censorship. The situation resulted in the

articulation of a “triple discourse” among Cuban intellectuals discontented with the government. Some artists opted for *mimicry*, others for ostracism (or *inxilio*), and others for *exile*.

Note II: Mimicry, Ostracism, and Exile

Let’s explain the label *mimicry* with an example taken from the infamous *Quinquenio Gris* (“The Grey Years” for literature, 1971–1976), as critic Ambrosio Fornet coined the period. *The Initials of the Earth*, by Jesús Díaz, was baptized by the same critic, Fornet, as *La novela de la revolución* (“The revolution’s novel”). The work was written in those years but censored until 1987. The novel succeeded as a testimony of *Los años duros* (the hard times), and also for describing the main character, Carlos Cifredo, as a literary type, the “New Man” (*el Hombre Nuevo guevariano*), whose ideals are collective rather than individualistic. I was, back then in Cuba, the editor of Jesús Díaz’s novel and we had strong arguments about the merits of the book. It took me decades to understand that indeed the novel achieves in crafting historical raw materials into a playful work of literature that uses parody to critique dogmatism and the cult of leaders. Now you can read the novel in English translation—with a preface by Fredrik Jameson—and reflect on the pages where Fidel Castro is depicted as a *sabelotodo* (a know-it-all), giving paternalistic advice to sugar cane workers. A reader can sense in this passage, hidden in the typical portrait of the good leader, the double message sent by the writer about a man who pretends to be the Father of every Cuban. Did the censors not grasp it, or did they go along with it? Here is one of the advantages of *mimicry*.

The term *inxilio* has been used by literary critics to describe a discourse adopted by those who have remained on the Island, creating from a self-marginalized position. It can be traced back in time, and I propose that we consider Julián del Casal and Dulce María Loynaz as the

founders. In the present day, I will consider as the best example in this category the works of María Elena Llana. As a writer, she has kept a notable literary presence since the 1970s, but refusing to be a public figure. She is one of those “rarest” who has managed to maintain a distance from the official milieu on the Island, even when she recently received the national literary prize for her intense lyrical prose. Also, I should include Beatriz Maggi, an essay writer and former professor at the University of Havana, whose teachings on Dostoyevsky and Shakespeare inspired generations of Cuban intellectuals. She still lives and writes in her old *casona* of El Vedado in a voluntary seclusion that transformed her into a myth. My claim here is that artists and intellectuals who have created an aesthetic of isolation should be considered part of the line of alternative thinking in Cuban identity beyond the models offered by State culture.

When introducing the *discourse from exile* we have to remember that since the 19th century, Cuba has had great intellectuals who have chosen exile as a way to escape repression or censorship. As many other writers throughout the world living in that condition, Cubans have kept a presence in their country’s imaginary, even though most of the time their work is not disseminated in the Island. The most eloquent example is the ignorance they have in Cuba about the work done by ethnologist Lydia Cabrera, a necessary complement to Fernando Ortiz’s work on Cuban identity.

As my audience knows, Cuban exile these days is no longer located exclusively in the United States, in communities in Miami or New Jersey, but also in Spain, Mexico, France, the Dominican Republic, Argentina, Canada, Germany, and many other countries of the world. Since I can only give you few examples of how the literature created in exile contributes to redefine Cuban identity, I should take my precious time to call attention to names and works of women and gay writers, so often forgotten in canonical histories on Cuban letters. First, I

mention Nivaria Tejera, who lives and writes in Paris. Her novel *Espero la noche para soñarte, Revolución* (2002, 2010) is remarkable for combining a fierce testimony of Cuba in the sixties as well as a strong philosophical reflection on the position of the artist facing Power. A linguistic tour de force, the novel excels for intertextuality and poetry. From Mexico, which was really her second motherland, I should note that the late Julieta Campos gave us in her novel, *La forza del destino* (2004), the most complete panorama of Cuban historical memoir in a sophisticated polyphonic text that makes visible the complexities of the Republican era (1902–1958), so often misunderstood or manipulated in literature published in Cuba. From the poetry genre, I have no doubt that the strongest voices are Isel Rivero and María Elena Cruz Varela (one is living in Madrid, the other in Miami), writers who validate in their poems the marginalization of the “Other”: women, fools, prostitutes, dissidents, in Cuba as well as in exile and the rest of the world. It seems unfair as we are talking about authors in exile whose writings contribute to alternative thinking about Cubanness, not to mention Reinaldo Arenas as the *heraldo negro* (the Black Messenger) of the Mariel Generation, named after the Mariel boatlift of 1980. In his novels, he questioned Cuban nationalism and *machismo*, and condemned homophobia and dictatorship. His predecessor, I believe, was Severo Sarduy, who is credited for the use of a neobaroque style in redefining Cuba’s racial components, bringing attention to the often excluded presence of Chinese culture on the Island. Arenas died in New York; Sarduy, in Paris; both are suitors for the legacy of the most important 20th-century Cuban writers: Virgilio Piñera and José Lezama Lima, who lived and died in Havana, in *inxilio*.

Finally, I have to create another category to acknowledge here a new wave of writers living on the island in an open confrontational position with the regime. Some of them are positioned as political dissidents, but others are just amateur journalists who have taken over

cyberspace by assault as their way of pushing the limits for freedom of expression. They should be called *guerrilleros*. Yoani Sánchez is the best known but there are many anonymous others who call themselves *blogueros(as)* (bloggers). I will describe them quoting Orlando Luis Pardo Lazo's web post: Cuban "bloggers are functioning as a kind of guerrilla underground. They work as independent agents whose existence heralds a civic re-activation that will modulate the Revolution's *Realpolitik*" (Pardo Lazo). His words may be proven right, but for the moment they are perceived as a threat by the State, a situation that is better understood after downloading the video called "leaked chat of a cybercop" (<http://www.desdecuba.com/generationY/>, February 15, 2011).

Note III: Feminisms in Cuba: What Is in an S?

When discussing alternative thoughts we have of course to include women's creativity. And we have to start by referring to the mother of all feminists on the island: Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda (1814–1873). She was called "The Pilgrim" because of the way her life was divided between two worlds; she anticipated transnational themes and styles with a life and work split between Spain and Cuba. She was the first woman to write creating the sense of *lejanía* (being away from Cuba). Listen to her poem "Al partir" (1841): "¡Adiós, patria feliz, edén querido! [Good-bye, happy fatherland, beloved Eden!] ¡Doquier que el hado en su furor me impela, [Wherever fate in its fury might drive me,] Tu dulce nombre halagará mi oído! [Your sweet name shall caress my ear!]" (quoted in Cámara, 13).

If we bear in mind, as Deleuze and Guatari have said, that "the signifier is merely the deterritorialized sign" (206), we can argue that when Avellaneda replaced these "visions" of the *patria* (fatherland) with the ethereal materiality of the sound, the signifier that signifies the

country—“Cuba”—is sloughing off its territoriality entirely, giving to Cuban identity her first metaphor of freedom.

But let’s talk now about what happened later in Cuban history. Having obtained independence from Spain, Cuba’s situation changed with the coming of modernity and industrialization to Latin America. As an active part of the society, the more unconventional white and liberal part of the Cuban feminists became “suffragists,” fighting for the right for women to vote, a right they obtained as early as 1934. In the 1930s and 1940s, Cuban feminism was rich and diverse, as Lynn Stoner has argued: from the so-called liberal feminism represented by Mari Blanca Sabás Aloma (1901–1983), to the more politically engaged forms as represented by Ofelia Domínguez Navarro (1894–1976), who was in prison for her notable activities in opposition to dictator Gerardo Machado. All this said, I notice that we should not overestimate the impact of Cuban feminists in the Republican era (1902–1958) since these women subordinated their “ideological agenda” to the nationalistic spirit that dominated Cuban thought after the U.S. military intervention frustrated the Cuban struggle for independence from Spain.

In the revolutionary era (from 1959 to the present), this nationalist spirit is still in place and has been amply manipulated by the government and even by the Federación de Mujeres Cubanas (Federation of Cuban Women, FMC). The official feminist agenda has to bear the demands made in the name of a socialist morality, most of the times enunciated by the voice of the FMC. As Dora Calcagno, a prominent leader of this organization, said in a speech in the 1980s: “la Federación no lucha por reivindicaciones feministas, sino que tiene por meta el avance de la Revolución” (“The FMC does not fight for a feminist agenda, but for the success of the Revolution”) (quoted in Séjourné, 187).

Having mentioned that, I also have to point out how even from institutional spaces some Cuban women, with access to the media, learning centers, and even sections of the Cuban Communist Party, have done everything possible to promote a feminist agenda within the space allowed by the Revolution. Mirta Rodríguez Calderón's journalistic work is probably the best example. In 1993, 170 women from the field of communication came together to create MAGIN, a movement best representing an alternative position within the official government position, but in the name of unity the group was dissolved in 1996. Later, in the academy, professors, critics, and researchers founded the Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda Chair to advance literary criticism with an orientation towards gender.

Nevertheless, it is within the arts where we can perceive more freedom of expression. In graphic arts the woman's body has been the weapon for a feminist discourse. Marked by her exile, Ana Mendieta was the pioneer in creating body-nations, performances that reflect about self-identity in relation to natural environments traditionally defining Cuban insularity: the sea, the sand, the coast, the *ceiba* tree, etc., but she was able to cut them off from their romantic aura. Years later, think about how the naked bodies in Tania Bruguera work with "the feminine" essence to transform it into a social construction beyond the traditional representation in demand, as in her installation "Lo que me corresponde" (1995), exhibited in her own house in Havana. From a joint perspective of race/gender/religion/identity, the most relevant group of paintings is the one created by Belkis Ayón until her death in 2003. She dared to combine male Abakuá traditions, the myth of Sikán, from the Yoruba, with personal portraits.

Performances also reached the stage with their fears and challenges. Two women, Marianela Boán and María Elena Espinosa, were protagonists of the *mise-en-scène* of "The fourth wall / La cuarta pared" in 1980, an allegoric work of art about repression and personal

identity where defiant naked actors dared to play in a small room in the private house of actor Víctor Varela in Havana. Members of my generation, back then, considered attendance a must.

Other areas of subversion or alternative thinking on Cuban contemporary feminine identity are expressed in the claim for a space for lesbian subjectivity. The topic of lesbianism as a threatening discourse for the controlling revolutionary State has been widely projected in literature, particularly in the books of Ena Lucía Portela and Ana Lydia Vega Serova. It is also captured in the paintings of Consuelo Castañeda and by Albita Rodríguez in her songs. Both are now in exile, still challenging homophobic perceptions. In the area of film and documentary, directors Sara Gómez (*De cierta manera*, 1977) and Gloria Rolando (*1912: Voces para un silencio*, 2010) incorporated in their work controversial racial issues next to gender equality. Recently, Lisette Villa created the *Proyecto Paloma* (the Dove Project) and, in affiliation with the ICAIC, produced documentaries on topics such as domestic violence, transvestism, or AIDS victims, which were previously limited to social science research.

Finally, since we are talking about alternative thinking, it must be said that even when serving the Other—whether the family or the State—during the so-called Special Period, when the material deterioration of the fabric of the nation was so obvious, Cuban women resorted to using natural herbs, physical therapy, spiritual help through Yoruba religion practices (*santería*), the informal economy bartering products for personal hygiene, food, and the infinite variety of home-cooked meals. They created a sort of “communal subjugated knowledge,” if you allow me to borrow the Foucauldian term.

Note IV: A Cuban Postmodernism?

In the 1990s, the arts flourished in Cuba with the benefits of some signs of relative aperture from the regime as well as more financial support for cultural institutions and personal artistic venues. Alternative projects were created, such as the Paideia Group or the magazine *Diáspora(s)* in literature, the *Proyecto Castillo de la Fuerza*, and Volume I, in Graphic Arts, just to mention some examples. But the consequences of the Fall of Berlin were not only ideological but also economic. In the nineties, the country was facing the “Special Period” (*El Período Especial*). The Cuban people were suffering. So were Cuban artists. They had to fight the double edge of a shortage in their subsidies and more sophisticated controls on their creations, since socialism has to be safe against all odds, as the government declared. An old but lucid intelligentsia decided to abandon Cuba, such as the late Manuel Moreno Friginals and Antonio Benítez Rojo. The younger generation has a longer list. Some create and live in in-between spaces, named by them “Third Options.” They were also called the “Children of Guillermo Tell” a decade ago. They headed to third countries beyond Cuba and the United States, and some of them settled in a sort of “velvet exile,” but this neutral position became intellectually impossible and turned, for some of them, into a permanent exile. Today, those who claim Cuba as their main place of residence and stay on the Island still have to negotiate with the Cuban government special permits for emigration and for working abroad, taking care, at the same time, of the exigencies of the market and the unstoppable commercialization of the arts. These particular circumstances have created a new sort of transnational Cuban artist, *the nomad*, living and creating between two or three countries. One fine example is Carlos Garaicoa, who recently exhibited at the University of South Florida, thanks to an invitation from Graphic Studio.

After the collapse of the Berlin Wall and the world it represented, winds of postmodernism with its lucid strategies of dismantling “great narratives” began to blow on the Island that was—as never before—left wandering, what was wrong with us? Debates in favor and against the applicability of the term “postmodernism” in Cuba have to be placed in the broad framework of the ideological challenge posed to the Cuban government after 1989 to keep feeding the old utopia of the socialist island. This short presentation cannot summarize the positions the debates generated, some of them still in place, and cannot even try—due to format and space limitations—to explain the intellectual and political game hidden, in the author’s opinion, behind what could be seen as a theoretical discussion. Suffice it to say then that I subscribe to Catherine Davies’ point of view on Cuban postmodernism when she writes that “these slippery signs are being brought into play in Cuba today—to cover a multiplicity of sins, perhaps, but also to recharge an institutionalized discourse with new signification” (103).

However, not only the tribulations of a culture under censorship influence the particularities of Cuban postmodernist art. Some characteristics generally attributed to postmodern art, such as thinking about national identity in private or personal terms, or conceiving the national in a universal frame of comparison, are two relevant traits of postmodernism *a la cubana*. But these characteristics are rooted in our national culture since its beginnings: in our literary modernism (1882–1900 approximately) and in our avant-garde or *vanguardismo* (1923–1958). From that perspective, the postmodern agenda could be seen as a perfect fit for the later development of main trends already part of Cuban culture. The influential book by Antonio Benítez Rojo, *La isla que se repite / The Repeating Island* (1996) supports this thesis. One has to acknowledge those historical and cultural facts while interrelating with the present, but we also have to remember that, for a country so tied to its national symbols and so in

denial of its exile community, postmodernism with its challenges of the unified sign, as well as its disbelief in geographic identity, could be considered a threatening alternative way of thinking. Nevertheless, in Cuba, academics and creators are reflecting on or applying a postmodern perspective. These discourses (both scholarly and artistic) stand for an “engaged and humanist art,” principles that have been inculcated through education in four generations of Cubans. If we are allowed to apply here a “hermeneutics of suspicion,” we can also say that those characteristics could be conditioned by the regime to admit the circulation of certain types of postmodernist discourses without confronting in irreconcilable terms the main principles of socialism, the official ideology on the Island. We have to remember that a sophisticated censorship State apparatus is not only about what cannot be said, but also about what has to be said. Then the *engagé* and humanist aspects of Cuban postmodern art, which is so attractive (and exotic) around the world now, could also be seen as a sort of compromise from the Artist who “plays” the Censor, and somehow vice versa: a necessary—for both parts—middle ground.

Note V: What Happened When Foucault Visited Havana?

Power does not reside in one place. In a few words, power does not reside with the Castro brothers only, although the philosopher did not express it in those words. Foucault did say quite clearly that against power there is not one center of resistance. Intellectuals on the Island are very aware of this. One of these spaces for resistance is what the Frenchman called discursive communities. In Cuba, they were born during the 19th century with the *Sociedad de Amigos del País*, on the pages of *La Habana Elegante*, in the *tertulias* (literary salons) held at the residence of the Borrero family, and in meetings held by the group *Orígenes*. But, it is obvious, they may

have been carved out before, during the 17th century, following the creation of universities in Cuba or the arrival of the Jesuit religious company to the Island in 1556.

This type of association based on the uses (and also abuses) of language provides a privileged space for creating cult knowledge, alternative knowledge, marginal cultural practices, and are, in fact, reactions to the control exercised by State over speech. These are—I think—niches belonging to intellectuals, in the history of contemporary Western thought, who searched for spaces to get together to think, discuss, and sometimes act against the coercion against freedom of expression.

To take two distant and dissimilar points in the arch within the confines of discursive communities in Cuba is an irreverence that can only be tolerated in an open conversation like this one. I invite you to follow me in a comparison—based on the concept of discursive communities—between the literary group *Orígenes*, created in Cuba in the 1940s, and a musical movement known as hip hop or *raperos* that has taken the streets of Havana nowadays. Under this umbrella I want to provide a new understanding for the creation of the literary gatherings of the *Orígenes* group in the Church of Bauta, convened under the pretext of a succulent lunch offered by Padre Gaztelu and where the conversation was naturally focused on Catholicism as well as the heterodox ideas professed by the leader of the group: José Lezama Lima. These meetings stretched as rhizomes in the musical evenings while Julián Orbón played the piano at his Vedado home, accompanied by other individuals with similar perspectives invited to join the group. This is how they were exposed to the Spanish philosopher María Zambrano and, where, at the stroke of midnight and after a few glasses of good whiskey, *Orphism*—the paths that should follow the soul—as well as *Las eras imaginarias*, both Lezama's poetic system of Zambrana's poetic logic were discussed. I believe this range of

expressions—where the intellectual and the emotional were not excluded—generated over the years a metaphorical *corpus* that would serve as a definition of key concepts such as *lo cubano* (Cubanness), later developed by Cintio Vitier, a member of the group; *insularidad* (insularity), which would occupy pages by Lezama Lima as well as exchanges with Juan Ramón Jiménez; and *Cuba como patria prenatal* (Cuba as a prenatal fatherland), created by Zambrano. These alternative thoughts should not be forgotten when talking about Cuban identity. They are enough to appreciate the benefit of continuing to seek in the archives of the affective memory of a nation.

But for the young, who now seek Cuba through the 140 twitter characters or in the chords of popular music, I invite them to think about the role of hip hop as a musical discursive community, a new means of expression of the resistance of Cuban youth to the more conservative aspects of the system. The criticism made by the lyrics of these songs does not support the ambiguity of the neo-Baroque metaphor. The message is direct, even abrupt, and this isn't particularly an expression of Cuba's hip hop, but rather the practice established internationally by this musical genre. This form is very convenient for those seeking to communicate everyday truths.

To discuss this topic, let's review an interview published in July 17, 2014 in *El Nuevo Herald*. A young rapper, Brian Oscar Rodríguez, alias El Bi, a member of *Los Aldeanos*, a duo who recently visited Miami, answers the question posed by a journalist: "What is the state of the *hip hop* movement on the island?" Bi's response is:

Hip hop is always going through periods of crisis. There have only been small good *flashes* during the nineties. Also, it was a good period of time when we started at the

beginning of 2000, we had *peñas*. The strategy that has now been drawn by the Ministry of Culture in Cuba with the rappers is to institutionalize them. Many rappers who were superconscious and protestors now belong to the catalogue of *Agencia Cubana de Rap*. And many young rappers who see this and are confused, think that this is a way out. From my perspective, the culture of hip hop is a culture of resistance, of the street, and has nothing to do with the cultural policy enforced by the enterprises in Cuba. (*El Nuevo Herald*)

As one is able to discern, this discursive community, this emerging space, which would appear to be a tolerated escape valve, can also be manipulated through the government's cultural policies. Contrary to what took place during the decades of the Cuban Republic—indifference towards culture—, now the Cuban socialist government practices interference in the affairs of culture. Which one causes more damages to freedom of expression? If this question could be stated on behalf of the rhetoric and, one could choose between two evils, which would be the lesser? The texts generated by the *Orígenes* group were at the time considered symptoms of the discomfort that the white Creole culture, led by middle-class intellectuals, felt against aspects of the gross materialism that was accompanied by the expression of cultural modernity in Latin America, but those texts were not, and could not be, absorbed by the State's ideological apparatus. They stood isolated and time has given them their true stature in Cuban culture. By contrast, years later, the socialist system pledged, through guaranteed State support, to allow the development of art, regardless of the group that emerges or the style it proposes, provided it stayed *within the Revolution*. However, given the post-89 economic crisis, State support is only possible by relying on alliances with government-approved foreign investors. Then, what can

and should one promote, who, how, under what conditions? What schisms arise among creators within the Island, not educated in a system of a competitive market-driven art, and how does this affect the discursive community that conforms to the content of their songs? Is the solidarity of the nomads enough to keep alive this rhizome of Cuban culture? These are some of my questions for further thought.¹

In/Conclusion

The situations to which we have alluded: mimicry-writers, *insiliado* and exiled-writers, nomads, artists gathered in small communities to preserve their own language game, all of these have in common that the artist is vulnerable against the State. This is not new and of course not only a situation found in Cuba. Precisely because of the universality of the issue, those who use the “weapons of the weak” in the Caribbean island must be vigilant as how to remove traps that power will always tend them. But I am convinced, and art through the ages attests to it, that time is in favor of those creators who, besides believing in the liberating aspect of art, are also confident in themselves, and in the generation to which they belong. Affinities brought about by election last longer and have better fruits.

¹ I appreciate a question coming from a colleague attending this talk who invited me to extend the concept of discursive communities for a possible dialogue among intellectuals on the island, the diaspora and exile, breaking geographical exclusions and seeking political and aesthetic affinities.

References Cited and Further Readings

- Behar, Ruth, ed. *Bridges to Cuba / Puentes a Cuba*. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1995.
- Benemelis, Juan. *La memoria y el olvido: Syllabus afro cubano*. Kingston: Editorial Ceiba, 2009.
- Benítez Rojo, Antonio. *La isla que se repite: El Caribe y la perspectiva posmoderna*. Barcelona: Editorial Casiopea, 1998.
- Cabrera, Lydia. *El monte*. Miami: Ediciones Universal, 1975 (originally published in 1954).
- Cámara, Madeline. *Cuban Women Writers: Imagining a Matria*. Translated by David Frey. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008.
- Chomsky, Aviva, Barry Carr, and Pamela María Smorkaloff, eds. *The Cuba Reader: History, Culture, Politics*. Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2004.
- Davies, Catherine. "Surviving (on) the Soup of Signs: Postmodernism, Politics, and Culture in Cuba." *Latin American Perspectives* 113.27.4 (2000): 103–21.
- de la Fuente, Alejandro. *Una nación para todos: Raza, desigualdad y política en Cuba, 1900–2000*. Madrid: Editorial Colibrí, 2000.
- Deleuze, Gilles, and Felix Guattari. *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1997.
- Encuentro de la Cultura Cubana*. <http://www.cubaencuentro.com/revista/revista-encuentro>
- Espinosa, Carlos. *El peregrino en comarca ajena: Panorama crítico de la literatura cubana en el exilio*. Boulder, CO: Society of Spanish American Studies, 2001.
- Fernández, Damián J., and Madeline Cámara Betancourt, eds. *Cuba, the Elusive Nation: Interpretations of National identity*. Gainesville: UP of Florida, 2000.
- Fernández Retamar, Roberto. *Calibán and other Essays*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1989.

- Henken, Ted. "En busca de 'Generación Y.'" *Buena Vista Social Blog*. Ed. Beatriz Calvo Peña. Valencia, Spain: Aduana Vieja, 2010.
- Hutcheon, Linda. *The Politics of Postmodernism*. London and New York: Routledge, 1989.
- Ichikawa, Emilio. "El disloque ideológico de la posmodernidad cubana (Una mirada desde La Habana)." *Apuntes Postmodernos 2* (2000): 47–58.
- Instituto de Literatura y Lingüística de la Academia de Ciencias de Cuba. *Historia de la literatura cubana*. 3 vols. Havana: Letras Cubanas, 2002–2010.
- Jameson, Frederick. "Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism." *Social Text* 15 (1986): 65–88.
- La Jiribilla*. <http://www.lajiribilla.cu>
- Kutzinski, Vera. *Sugar's Secrets: Race and the Rethorics of Cuban Nationalism*. Charlottesville: U of Virginia P, 1993.
- Lezama Lima, José. *La expresión americana*. Havana: Letras cubanas, 1993.
- Mañach, Jorge. *Indagación del choteo*. 3rd ed. Havana: Editorial del Libro Cubano, 1955.
- Mateo, Margarita. *Ella escribía postcrítica*. Havana: Editorial Abril, 1995.
- Moreno Fragnals, Manuel. *Cuba/España, España/Cuba*. Barcelona: Mondadori, 1995.
- Moore, Robin. *Nationalizing Blackness: Afrocubanism and the Artistic Revolution in Havana, 1920–1940*. Pittsburgh: U of Pittsburgh P, 1997.
- Morales, Esteban. *Desafíos de la problemática racial en Cuba*. Havana: Editorial Ciencias Sociales, 2008.
- Mosquera, Gerardo "An Indescribable Adventure: The New Cuban Art." *Transition* 87.10.3 (2001): 124–36.
- . "Los hijos de Guillermo Tell." *Poliester: Pintura y No Pintura* 1.4 (1993): 18–27.

- El Nuevo Herald*. "Contestatario rapero cubano Brian Oscar Rodríguez, 'El Bi,' visita Miami." 27 July 2014. <http://www.elnuevoherald.com/2014/07/27/1808113/contestatario-rapero-cubano-visita.html#storylink=cpy>
- Ortiz, Fernando. *Contrapunteo del azúcar y el tabaco*. Havana: Editorial Ciencias Sociales, 1991 (originally published in 1940).
- Pagés González, Julio César. *En busca de un espacio: Historias de las mujeres en Cuba*. Havana: Editorial Ciencias Sociales, 2003.
- Pardo Lazo, Orlando Luis. "Guerrilla Blogging: A Virtual Democracy Against the Odds." Blog. http://www.thesetimes.com/article/5215/inside_Cuba_guerrilla
- Pérez Firmat, Gustavo. *The Cuban Condition: Translation and Identity in Modern Cuban Literature*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1995.
- Prieto, Abel. "Calibán frente al discurso de la posmodernidad." *Casa de las Américas* 186 (1992): 134–36.
- Rojas, Rafael. *Isla sin fin: Contribución a la crítica del nacionalismo cubano*. Miami: Ediciones Universal, 1998.
- Sarduy, Severo. *Escrito sobre un cuerpo*. Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 1969.
- Sánchez, Yoani. "Generation Y." Blog. <http://www.desdecuba.com/generationy>
- Séjourné, Laurette. *La mujer cubana y su quehacer en la historia*. Mexico City: Siglo XXI, 1980.
- Stoner, Lynn K. *From the House to the Street: The Women's Movement for Legal Reform, 1898–1940*. Durham: Duke UP, 1991.
- Torres, María de los Ángeles. *By Heart / De Memoria: Cuban Women Journeys in and out of Exile*. Philadelphia: Temple UP, 2003.

Zambrano, María. *La Cuba secreta*. Ed. Jorge Luis Arcos. Madrid: Ediciones Endymion, 1996.

Zayas, Manuel. "Actas de censura de PM." Blog. <http://manuelzayas.wordpress.com>

Zurbano, Roberto. *Los estados nacientes: Literatura cubana y postmodernidad*. Havana:

Editorial Pinos Nuevos, 1995.