

CUBA: THE INTELLECTUAL DEBATE

OR

THE LITTLE WAR OF EMAILS

2007

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INTRODUCTION

In January and February 2007, a series of texts circulated through emails among many Cuban intellectuals. This came to be known as “The little war of emails,” or “The Intellectual Debate.” These emails formed a virtual historic debate on Cuba’s cultural policies over the previous forty-eight years. It’s important to remember that in 2007, Internet access was extremely limited in Cuba; hence, much of the debate took place among Cubans in the diaspora who had normal access to the Internet.

The email exchange followed the appearance on several television programs of Luis Pavón Tamayo, Armando Quesada, and Jorge Serguera, all of whom were closely involved in designing and enforcing the rigid cultural parameters that negatively affected so many Cuban writers and artists in the 1970s, a period that came to be called “The Five Grey Years” although it lasted longer than five years.

The digital magazine *Consenso* collected this email debate and posted it online. We at TranslatingCuba.com are working email by email, author by author, volunteer translator by volunteer translator, to translate these emails into English, in order to provide an invaluable resource to observers and scholars of Cuba.

Appearing here are those who wrote from within Cuba and those who joined in from abroad, the signatures of leading figures as well as those of the unknown, along with no shortage of pseudonyms. These texts are, in many cases, written in the “formalized” language of intellectual debate. They also include numerous references to people and events not always introduced or explained here. And, of course, they are rich with “Cubanisms” and playful use of the language. All of this is a huge challenge to our volunteers, and we are all doing the best we can. We welcome comments, corrections, and clarifications.

That said, there are many who have questioned why we are even bothering to translate “these old emails that no one cares about.” Because WE care about them and think they are a critical resource for a broader understanding of Cuban history.

Now, in 2022, we are also organizing and publishing these emails on Wikimedia, under the category “Cuba: The Intellectual Debate.” We hope this will allow additional access for academics and others interested in Cuba, and in the use of digital media in countries where censorship impedes the expression of ideas.

ABELARDO ESTORINO

Translated by Regina Anavy and Gustavo Loredó

One night I passed in front of the television and saw an old man with a sour but still familiar face sitting there. The announcer said his name and I was surprised. I didn't know if he was alive or dead; it had been a long time since we heard his name, and we had all forgotten him. It was healthy for us to forget his moments of power when he put in danger all the work that was done to build a different culture with renewed breath. If he's dead, we shouldn't even remember him, and luckily for us, we won't hear his voice again nor will he sign new edicts. If he's alive, allowing his voice to be heard, it means we will again suffer persecution, fear and lies. For these and many more reasons that other colleagues have put forward, I support your statements.

ABELARDO MENA

Translated by Regina Anavy and Gustavo Loredó

We must never return to the past. That “they will not pass,” as the Spanish Republicans used to say, depends on our loud voice. It’s curious to see how new technologies help to polarize a common sentiment. Is the ICRT the visible image of a return to the past desired by some? We have to keep shouting.

Those who make the decisions are letting us play, but remember that the most obvious ways of controlling power—at least in Havana—have changed. What’s worrying is that there is no will to expand intellectual influence beyond the closed preserve of UNEAC [National Union of Writers and Artists of Cuba], or even those who went on our behalf to the Ministry of Culture meeting. Desiderio mentioned to me that Fonet might intervene at the next conference, which people would attend to get a book. I suggested to him that the book be transmitted via email, so that it would be accessible to more people. But I fear, like Orlando, that the book will be like *Criterios*¹ and that you can buy only one at a time. I hope it was a multi-reproduced book in the provinces; they are still in the Middle Ages. I don't think it's a matter of intellectual debate but one of civil rights. The policy of the pressure cooker—electric and Chinese²—has allowed us since the Nineties to play spin the top in *La Gaceta* [the *Cuban Gazette*, a UNEAC journal of art and literature], *Temas* [*Themes*, a magazine dedicated to arts and letters] (serenely overwhelming) etc., but such freedom on parole is not allowed in the working world. Total destruction is a luxury that we intellectuals don't allow ourselves, and it has even less communicative effectiveness in current conditions. In this, Fidel will always have the advantage over us.

I still think that beyond the evocative and painful character of these reviews, a “black book” of the *pavonato*'s “practices of cultural violence” should be compiled, including both the names of the victims and of those individuals who, because they were sons of bitches, had been persuaded, or had it inside them to begin with, were capable of exercising such violence on their contemporaries, and from whom, like Sautie, we haven't yet heard a convincing explanation. Rather, they hide behind “obeying orders,” like the South American military under Operation Condor.³ We need a conceptual disassembly of the implacable “social engineering” that the Revolution implanted in the country, an extra-economic radicalism to which we still pay tribute when we speak of a “new society” or a “new man.” More than such novelties, we need common sense and socioeconomic structures that really work. We have the floor.

¹ *Cuba en Sucesion: Criterios y Opiniones de un Refugiado Cuban, 2007-2009*, by Mario Riva Morales.

² Translator's Note (TN): Fidel's “Energy Revolution” forced Cubans to buy Chinese pressure cookers and refrigerators.

³ TN: Operation Condor was a cooperation agreement between U.S. intelligence services and right-wing dictatorships in South America, designed to eliminate leftist elements in their countries.

Abelardo Mena to Pedro Pérez Sarduy

Dear Pedro,

If Desiderio's answer is measured, yours is downright clumsy. This is not a sports competition, nor do I read in the *Criteria*s message any intention to demean the person who asks, in addition to the fact that 11,000,000 Cubans, plus the 3,000,000 outside Cuba, have every right to express their opinion, whether they are revolutionaries or not, aesthetic or not, illiterates or candidates for the "Yes I Can" movement in Caracas.

He who doesn't know also has the right to participate. In a controversy, the points of view represent not only people but also ways of seeing and reading the world, so that when you oppose the *pavonato*, or the acute fear of intellectuals (and also of the people, who aren't saints), or even are alerted about a possible manipulation of the invitations to the *Criteria*s assembly, much more than a personal position is being analyzed. That is why your call for restraint and a lot of intelligence seems to demand more patricians "made in UNEAC or MINCULT [the Ministry of Culture]" than the normal people who discuss the Selective ⁴ in Central Park. If the patricians have to shut themselves up to discuss the nation, things are not going well in Denmark (and I hope Desiderio does not misinterpret me here).

Best wishes, Abelardo Mena
January 28, 2007

Abelardo Mena to Eduardo Jiménez

Dear Eduardo, Wouldn't it make more sense to propose to Cuban society the word EVOLUTION instead of Revolution, and COMMON SENSE instead of Marxism? We have had so much SOCIAL ENGINEERING, and so much IDEOLOGICAL SATURATION, that a bit of normality, the lukewarm and boring daily normality, would sell better than big words.

P.S. And incidentally, a belated but sincere recognition of Colina for *24 x segundo*⁵. That program and *Historia del Cine [History of Cinema]*, by José A. González, made me dream of cinema.

⁴ TN: The Baseball Selective Championship is played in Cuba every year. Central Park in Havana is where fans meet to discuss the games.

⁵ TN: Enrique Colina was for many years the director of a popular television show, *Veinticuatro por Segundo* (There are 24 frames of a film projected per second in cinema.)

ABILIO ESTÉVEZ

Translated by Regina Anavy and Gustavo Loredo

Dear Ones,

I think that the fact that I live in Barcelona doesn't save me. Remember that I experienced it first hand, because I accompanied Virgilio Piñera in the worst period of his life. And his death was not just any death, but a slow murder. So I know what the *pavonato* was, and more than once I have said that "the five gray years" is, as Desiderio says, a euphemism (or a mockery). It was neither five years nor gray. A decade of horror. In my naivety, I thought that those ghosts (not because they're sad, less dangerous) would never reappear.

Imagining the abominable ones, Pavón et al., honored on television, makes me want to move a little further afield, to Wellington, for example, the capital of New Zealand. Desiderio's text is very good. Arrufat's is very good and forceful. I don't know if I can be of any use to you. I think not, since years ago I got tired (or fatigued) and turned my back. But in any case, here I am, in good company, because I live right next to the Sagrada Familia.

January 29, 2007

ALBERTO ACOSTA

Translated by Regina Anavy and Gustavo Loredó

They were very painful mistakes and injustices, and they were very damaging to Cuban culture and its creators. Which cannot be forgiven. An unfortunate *Impronta*. Hopefully it was by distraction and not by intention.

ALFREDO GUEVARA

Translated by Regina Anavy and Gustavo Loredó

Nothing makes a Revolution and its protagonists, the revolutionaries, stronger than to never allow an injustice. The National Union of Writers and Artists of Cuba [UNEAC] interprets and assumes the ethical lessons from Martí and Fidel of preventing, with the exercise of its authority and prestige, the impunity from abuse of power that led some people from State television to trample on its ethical obligations by trying to promote a strategy that contradicts the Revolution's cultural policy, a policy of respect and exaltation of the freedom of creation and intellectual work, and of the intellectuality that makes it possible. It's true that television has been an effective means to bring the political-pedagogical message of our great communicator to everyone. However, it's also true that from some level of that institution, probably due to belligerence and arrogant ignorance, Fidel's passionate desire to raise the cultural and intellectual level of our people, enhanced by the Revolution's high achievements in the field of education, has been deeply hurt.

This country has over 12,000,000 inhabitants, with more than 800,000 university students and hundreds of thousands of people educated at a higher-than-average level. It's a country without illiterates. In which education is general up to the ninth grade. The people are the ones who deserve to be and should be the real protagonists of the Battle of Ideas. At the same time, from national television, which has been usurped at certain levels, there is a campaign against this battle that exalts vulgarity, imitates the worst of the programming promoted by the Empire and attempts to destroy language that reflects clarity, structure and expression of thought. Why, and on what basis? We don't know.

I ratify more than subscribe to the Declaration of UNEAC, and I hope that the rights of the Revolution and its cultural design won't be usurped and prevented from continuing. I do this calmly but with an underlying urgency. In the first bastion for the Battle of Ideas, there should be no gravediggers. Belligerent ignorance and mediocrity are the Revolution's worst internal enemy. The highest authorities as well as the Ministry of Culture and the Party know first-hand about my direct expression of indignation from the first instance about the repeated harassment of the Cuban intelligentsia, which, ironically, the Revolution itself awakened by educating them. Knowledge is the most important asset in society, the greatest spiritual, social and economic wealth we have and the foundation for our future.

What has happened lately is an affront not only to Cuban intelligentsia and our culture in its artistic expression; it is also a trap set out of belligerent mediocrity and ignorance for Fidel and Raúl, a game of interests bent on confusing and dividing. I welcome the challenge that is now focused on the Declaration of UNEAC, aimed at preventing it. I shall repeat with that Declaration: "The antidogmatic and creative policy of the Revolution, inspired by Martí, with the participation of Fidel and Raúl in *Words to the Intellectuals*, is irreversible."

AMBROSIO FORNET

Translated by Alicia Barraqu e Ellison

The Gray Quinquennium: Revisiting the Term

1

It seemed that the nightmare was something out of a remote past, but the truth is that when we awoke, the dinosaur was still there. We have not known—and perhaps will never know—whether the absurd media response meant an insidious rescue operation, a capricious expression of cronyism, or a simple display of irresponsibility. It doesn't matter. Seen from today's perspective, the chain reaction it provoked—one of whose links is this cycle we've begun—was a suicidal act. It threw down the gauntlet without having the slightest idea of the adversary's level of coherence, nor of the solidity of a cultural policy that has established itself as an irreversible phenomenon through a practice that has lasted now for three decades. Having fairly won this battle—I don't dare say war, because the *pavonato* is not so much the expression of a political tactic as it is a worldview based on suspicion and mediocrity—we can open a path to reflection by telling ourselves, simply, that what's happening is relevant. We have proof of this in the Ministry of Culture's decision to support Desiderio's initiative, coinciding with Abel's, in terms of filling the information and analysis gap that until now has prevailed on the issue of cultural—I would say “anti-cultural”—policy in the first half of the Seventies.

Incredible as it may seem, the person who directed the program *Impronta*, dedicated to Pav n—whose script had been written by a colleague—assured us that she didn't know who he was or more precisely, that she didn't know what imprint he had left on Cuban culture during his tenure as President of the National Cultural Council. Nor would she know later, because it was carefully covered in a mantle of silence during the program. It wouldn't do to mention a rope in the house of the hanged man. Well, we hadn't yet come out of our stupor when a little voice began to hammer in our ears: Why is this so hard to believe? How could the young director have known? Have you, the old folks who lived and suffered through that period, written a book or a pamphlet, published a series of articles, or given a series of talks on the subject? In recent years there have been denunciations of individual abuses, perverse displays of prejudice and cynical explanations from the victims in interviews, articles, and speeches accepting awards, but the analysis of the phenomenon was always postponed, as well as other things that deserved to be discussed, all of them for the same reason: to not endanger unity. Along with the historical validity of our national project, unity is the only thing, in effect, that guarantees our superiority over our enemies and adversaries. But just as we shouldn't forget, in a permanently besieged country like ours, that insisting on discrepancies and disagreements is the same as “giving arms to the enemy,” neither should we forget that pacts of silence can be extremely risky, because they create a climate of immobility, a simulation of unanimity that prevents us from measuring the real magnitude of the dangers and integrity in our ranks, where loquacious opportunists often slip in.

We already know where such drills and maneuvers led in Europe and especially in the USSR, where, I believe, even the militants themselves—among them many work heroes

and descendants of war heroes—had been definitively demobilized by bureaucracy and routine. Without being a specialist in the matter, I dare to answer the unfathomable question: Why didn't the workers, and especially the communist militants, come out to defend the Revolution in the USSR? Very simple: because they didn't receive guidance from above. We need to stand firm in our trenches—which, of course, aren't the best place to exercise democracy—but that doesn't mean that we can afford to abandon the practice of criticism and self-criticism, the only exercise that can rid us of triumphalism and save us from ideological deterioration.

2

I don't want to tire you with ramblings and opinions that many of you share and that could take us off the subject. As suggested by the title of my presentation, proposed by Desiderio, I want to discuss the motives and events of the Gray Quinquennium. I invented this description for methodological reasons, trying to isolate and describe that period by what seemed to me to be its dominant features, and by the contrast it offered with the previous stage, characterized by its color and its internal dynamics (although not exempt, as we shall see, from frustrations and surprises). But before we continue with the subject matter, I would like to clarify a couple of points. In the first place, from where I speak; that is, from what life experience, from what ideological and political position I project my views and reviews on the subject, and in general on the problems of the culture, its production and its reach, with a special emphasis on narrative literature, which is the only field I know from my own experience. I am coming forward to say this because I'm afraid to say something that may be incomprehensible or strange to some of the young people present. I come, obviously, from a world that marked my position with respect to many of these problems: the world of pre-revolutionary Cuba, the former republic. From a very young age I wanted to write. I didn't dare say that I wanted to be a writer because this was a profession without a professional profile that could attract suspicion or derision. "I didn't tell anyone that I wanted to be a writer," José Soler Puig confessed to a friend, "because people laughed and even thought that it was a job for faggots."

And Virgilio Piñera, in a public message addressed to Fidel in March 1959, said: "We Cuban writers are 'the last card in the deck'; that is, we mean nothing economically, socially, or even in the field of letters. We want to cooperate shoulder to shoulder with the Revolution, but for this to happen, we need to be removed from the miserable state in which we are struggling." As you can see, the profession's self-esteem was very low. Perhaps the anecdotes told by vain or boastful writers irritated or amused their *confrères* in the intellectual cliques of Madrid or Paris, but here they were tales of extraterrestrials, since the writer literally did not exist outside the circle of his closest friends and the four cats that read *Origenes* (lucky cats, by the way). It still seems to me a miracle that two years after Virgilio's message, I was already editing *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* and a book on testimonials from the Sierra Maestra children in the Ministry of Education, under the direction of Herminio Almendros, and very soon also Proust, Joyce, and Kafka at the *Editorial Nacional*, under the direction of Alejo Carpentier. From this perspective, it became clear to us that an alliance between the political and artistic avant-gardes was beginning to consolidate. The Revolution—the

real possibility of changing one's life—appeared to us as the political expression of the artistic aspirations of the avant-garde.

So when the specter of homophobia began to appear and then, masked, that of socialist realism, we were quite confused. What did my sexual preferences (or a pilgrim's vision of a virtuous and virile artist, always ready to sing the national glories) have to do with such a profound phenomenon as the Revolution, which had truly changed the lives of millions of people, which had taught the illiterate how to read and fed the hungry, which didn't leave a single child without education, which promised to wipe out racial discrimination and *machismo*, which put in the bookstores, at the price of fifty cents or a peso, all the universal literature, from Homer to Rulfo, from *Daphnis and Chloe* to *Mi tío el empleado* [*My Uncle the Employee*]?

We, the young people who believed we were the heirs and representatives of the avant-garde in the artistic and literary field, couldn't commune with that vision, which was a serious problem, since in dogmatic circles the idea that aesthetic discrepancies hid political discrepancies was gaining ground. As for the rest, they couldn't ignore that assuming new responsibilities also meant discovering their own inadequacies. If they suddenly had the chance to address millions of potential readers, wouldn't they wonder what they could write, or how to write? Or, in the case of publishers, what they could publish? "What everyone understands is what the leaders understand," as Che said, ironically. Do I write "what the people like," thus leaving it stuck at the lowest level, or "what I like," so that people will refine their tastes and one day become as cultured as I am? Populism, paternalism, elitism, high culture, popular culture, culture of the masses or for the masses—the dilemmas and ideological ghosts, in short, that began to cross our path, almost always catching us off guard. What I mean is that you have to have a little patience, because it's impossible to speak of the Gray Quinquennium without referring to the origins of certain conflicts that were incubated in the Sixties. I will only refer to those that, as mentioned, touch us more closely; others, such as the microfaction, for example, go beyond the limits of our issue (although they are still related to it, because sectarianism was a generalized evil among the intellectual and political cadres most directly linked to the field of ideology).

3

Socialist realism—literature as pedagogy and hagiography, methodologically oriented towards the creation of "positive heroes" and the strategic absence of antagonistic conflicts within the "bosom of the people"—produced in us, my petty-bourgeois friends and myself, the same reaction of someone who finds a fly in a glass of milk. Among the Cuban narrators, no one that I remember had accepted the invitation, but the newly created *Imprenta Nacional* [*National Imprint*] was profusely publishing Soviet novels (some respectable, by the way, like those of Sholokhov and Alexander Bek—*Volokolamsk Highway* and *General Panfilov's Reserve*, actually two parts of the same epic—that accompanied many militiamen in the frequent mobilizations of those times). In any case, as a young intellectual with no more political ideology than the *fidelista* (I used to say at the time that I had become a Marxist by listening to Fidel on television), I

already had two things absolutely clear: go back to the past? It wasn't going to happen. Use a Konstantinov manual as a cultural model and an aesthetic norm? No way.

But I wouldn't want to fall into the same thing that we criticize, and I know that when it comes to defending our truth, our point of view, we are usually as categorical and dogmatic as our adversaries. Socialist realism was not "inherently evil"; what was intrinsically perverse was the imposition of that formula in the USSR, where what could have been a school of thought or another literary and artistic trend suddenly became an official, mandatory doctrine. Of the different functions that literature and art can perform—aesthetic, recreational, informative, educational—the commissars moved the latter to the fore, to the detriment of the others. What the people and, in particular, the working class needed was not just to read—to open up to new horizons of expectations—but also to educate themselves, to assimilate through reading the norms and values of the new society.

This admirable purpose—admirable in theory, and all the more so since its foundations went back to the Enlightenment—didn't take into account that "if art educates (I allow myself to quote Gramsci for the umpteenth time), it does so as art and not as educational art, because if it's educational art it ceases to be art, and an art that denies itself cannot educate anyone." We didn't even suspect that the inheritance of scholastic Marxism was so strong in our midst, or at least among some intellectuals from the Popular Socialist Party, but one of our most brilliant and respected essayists, Mirta Aguirre, wrote in October 1963:

"Today, in the hands of dialectical materialism, art can and must be an exorcism: a form of knowledge that contributes to sweeping away the dark shadows of ignorance from the minds of men, a precious instrument for replacing a religious concept of the world with one that is scientific, and a Marxist catalyst for the defeat of philosophical idealism."

One felt tempted to ask: can and should all of this be art? Or, with a certain nonchalance: is that all that art can and should be? Had we done this, it wouldn't have been long before we discovered that our confusion had a murky class origin, because what really happened was that certain ideas were "in precarious condition and on their way to extinction," and certain intellectuals and artists, "instead of focusing on getting rid of their own ideological vestiges of a collapsed society" stubbornly insisted on justifying them.

In reality, what we saw was that under this rigid and precarious model of artistic orientation, the dividing line between art, pedagogy, propaganda, and advertising was becoming blurred. The funny thing is that capitalism produced tons of publicity and propaganda without even mentioning it, cleverly disguised under the labels of information and "entertainment," but socialism was young and inexperienced. In the famous debate in December 1963 between Blas Roca and Alfredo Guevara on the showing of several films (*La Dulce Vida* [*The Sweet Life*], by Fellini, *Accattone*, by Pasolini, *El Ángel Exterminador* [*The Exterminating Angel*], by Buñuel and *Alias Gardelito*, by Lautaro Murúa), Guevara referred to the newspaper column by Blas Roca,

a very respectable man in other regards, as a column that superficially addresses the problems of culture and cinematographic art, in particular, by reducing their significance, not to mention their function, to being mere illustrators of the revolutionary work, seen by the rest in its most immediate perspective.

It goes without saying—because in politics, as Martí said, what is real is what is not seen—that these aesthetic disputes were part of a struggle for cultural power, for control of certain areas of influence. This became evident in 1961 with the controversy about *P.M.* and the subsequent closure of *Lunes de Revolución* [*Revolution Monday*], which led to the creation of *La Gaceta de Cuba* [*Gazette of Cuba*] a UNEAC literary publication that still exists today. The *P.M.* controversy turned out to be historic because it gave rise to “Words to the Intellectuals,” Fidel’s speech that fortunately has served since then—except during the dramatic interregnum of the *pavonato*—as the guiding principle of our cultural policy. *P.M.* was a modest, free-cinema essay, a documentary by Sabá Cabrera Infante and Orlando Jiménez Leal that had been shown almost unnoticed on television in a program sponsored by *Lunes de Revolución*; that is, by Carlos Franqui and Guillermo Cabrera Infante. The two—Franqui and Guillermo—had a great concept, a modern and dynamic vision of art, literature, and journalism, as evidenced by the newspaper *Lunes de Revolución* and its literary supplement, *Lunes*. But both also had a major flaw, given the circumstances: they were visceral anti-communists, hating anything that smelled of the Soviet Union and the PSP [Popular Socialist Party]. ICAIC [the Cuban Institute of Art and Cinema Industry] had refused to show *P.M.* in movie theaters, which sparked controversy. One would say that at some point both the ICAIC leadership and the PSP intelligentsia brought these dramatic questions to the top leadership of the government: who will make films in Cuba? Who will institutionally represent our writers and artists? The answers were obvious.

But something had slipped from our hands, because in the second half of the decade things happened that would have dire consequences for the normal development of revolutionary culture: the establishment of the Military Units to Aid Production (UMAP), for example, which lasted three years and left a few scars, and the institutional rejection of two award-winning books in the UNEAC literary competition, *Los siete contra Tebas* [The Seven Against Thebes], by Antón Arrufat, and *Fuera del juego* [Out of the Game], by Heberto Padilla, not to mention passing anecdotes, although symptomatic, such as the climate of hostility that was aroused among some officials by the appearance of *Paradiso* (1966), by Lezama, due to its supposed exaltation of homoeroticism (it was even said that the volume had been removed from some bookstores).

The unfortunate UMAP initiative, the idea that both young homosexuals and religious people—especially Jehovah’s Witnesses, who rejected the use of weapons out of conviction—would do their military service in work units, not combat units, was clearly related to the macho vision of those bourgeois parents who sent their most fractious or timid children to military schools to “become men.” I remember telling the friend I alluded to earlier, when he asked me about discrimination against homosexuals in Cuba, that this attitude had nothing to do with the Revolution; it came to us from the olden days, through the double path of Judeo-Christian morality and ignorance, but that

perhaps the emotional climate of the besieged city—which included the constant exaltation of virile virtues—as well as the obsession to straighten out so many crooked things from the old society, led us to want to straighten or rebuild the homosexuals, who, not for nothing, have always been described with euphemisms as “inverts” or “misfits.”

I totally reject the idea, because it seems cynical and inaccurate to me, that this naive or stupid willfulness had something to do with the aspiration to forge a “new man”—one of the dearest longings of man, even before Christianity—just as it was articulated in our context by Che and as we repeated, alluding to Plato’s *homo homini lupus* [“man is wolf to man”]—often cited by Marx—when we spoke of a society where man was not man’s enemy but his brother. Now, I am convinced that the unhealthy degree that homophobia reached, as an institutional policy, during the Five Gray Years, is an issue that concerns not just sociologists but also psychoanalysts and priests; that is, those professionals capable of looking fearlessly into “the dark depths of the human soul.” Nor would it hurt to reflect on the repressive or “disciplinary” methods invented by the bourgeoisie and so well studied by Foucault in a chapter of *Discipline and Punish*.

4

The books by Padilla and Arrufat were awarded prizes in the UNEAC competition and were published with a prologue in which the institution put its disagreement on record: they were works that “served our enemies,” but now they were going to serve other purposes, one of which was “to openly raise the ideological struggle.” It was then, between November and December 1968, that five articles appeared in the magazine *Verde Olivo* [*Olive Green*, the Cuban Armed Forces magazine]. They were attributed to Luis Pavón Tamayo, an unprovable conjecture because the author used a pseudonym: the infamous Leopoldo Ávila, whose name was never claimed by anyone. The first article exposed the conduct of Guillermo Cabrera Infante, who just a few months ago, in the magazine *Primera Plana* [*Front Page*] in Buenos Aires, had declared himself a staunch enemy of the Revolution, after serving it energetically for several years as Cultural Attaché in Brussels. The two articles that followed were aggressively dedicated to Padilla and Arrufat and the last two, to problems of the intellectual circle, among them the level of “depoliticization” that, in Ávila’s opinion, our writers and critics suffered.⁶

I don’t need to elaborate on the tense climate that prevailed in those months, because a group of colleagues, as many Cubans ([Roberto Fernández] Retamar, [Edmundo] Desnoes, and I) as Latin Americans (Roque Dalton, René Depestre, and Carlos María Gutiérrez), in a kind of round table that we held in May 1969, had already presented our ideas on the matter, and what we discussed was first published in the *Casa de las Américas* magazine and later in Mexico in *Siglo XXI* [*Twenty-First Century*], under the foreseeable title of “The Intellectual and Society.”⁷ The ideological tournament

⁶ They were collected by Lourdes Casal in *The Padilla Case: Literature and Revolution in Cuba* (see note 15).

⁷ Cf. Claudia Gilman: *Between the pen and the rifle. Debates and dilemmas of the revolutionary writer in Latin America*. Buenos Aires, Siglo Veintiuno Editores, Argentina, 2003.

announced by Ávila was hinted at in occasional skirmishes but had gradually acquired an increasingly international character due in part to the attacks on the Revolution by various intellectuals in Europe—Dumont, Karol, Enzensberger—and in part because the English critic, J.M. Cohen, one of the jurors who awarded Arrufat and Padilla, decided to participate in the debate in his own way. Added to this was the appearance in Paris of the magazine *Mundo Nuevo* [*New World*], directed by the Uruguayan critic Emir Rodríguez Monegal; very soon his compatriot Ángel Rama denounced *Mundo Nuevo*, following a report in *The New York Times* that it was a front for the CIA.”⁸

In the opinion of the specialists, the ultimate goal of *Mundo Nuevo* was to dispute the power of Casa de las Américas to convene a forum and undermine the image of the “committed” writer or artist that the Cuban Revolution had been proposing as a model for the intellectuals of our America.⁹ It was this model, by the way, that served as the reason or pretext for the famous “Letter to Neruda” that at the end of 1966 we circulated to all corners of the Continent, and it was also the one that prevailed a year later in the Preparatory Seminary of the Cultural Congress of Havana, where it became clear that a large part of our intelligentsia was developing, from Martí and Marxist positions, a decolonizing thought, more linked to our reality and the problems of the Third World than to the Eurocentric ideological currents on both sides of the Atlantic.

The magazine *Pensamiento Crítico* [*Critical Thought*] and the excellent catalog of social science publications already produced by the recently created *Instituto del Libro* [*Institute of the Book*] also played an important role in this daring process that we called “consciousness raising” or “cultural decolonization,” and to which, of course, none of the famous manuals recently imported from the USSR could contribute anything. The Cultural Congress of Havana was held in January 1968 with the participation of hundreds of intellectuals and artists from all over the world, in a climate of revolutionary optimism that objectively, however, was reduced to its minimum expression by the fact that barely two months before, Che had died in Bolivia, thereby frustrating the birth of the great project of continental emancipation that began to take shape in 1959. Meanwhile, the international prestige of Cuban culture had grown thanks to the professionalism and creativity of artists and writers, on one hand, and the cohesion and dissemination work carried out by the Casa de las Américas and ICAIC on the other. The culture was thriving; there was cinema, ballet, graphic design, theater, music (with the emergence of Nueva Trova), the Folkloric Ensemble, and literature (this last with two emerging modalities: nonfiction novels and narratives of violence. Observing such a panorama, anyone could have said, alluding to Ávila’s diagnosis: “If all this is the product of a depoliticized intelligentsia, may God come and see it.”

5

⁸ On the *Mundo Nuevo* controversy, see Casa de las Américas, no. 39, Nov.-Dec., 1966. See also the exhaustive study by María Eugenia Mudrovic: *New World: Culture and Cold War in the 1960s*. Rosario, Beatriz Viterbo, 1997.

⁹ Cf. Claudia Gilman: *Between the pen and the rifle. Debates and dilemmas of the revolutionary writer in Latin America*. Buenos Aires, Siglo Veintiuno Editores, Argentina, 2003.

I would like to be able to conclude here the general scheme of prehistory—seen from the more or less fair, more or less distorted perspective of a participant who, naturally, tends to look out for himself—but I’m afraid that the rodeo is not over yet. There are still factors, let’s put it this way, objective and subjective, national and international that must be taken into account in order to get to the point later. So, I ask you, please, a little more patience. What happened with *Fuera del juego* after its publication was something we now see as the prelude to the “Padilla case.” He continued leading a more or less normal life and announced (I don’t know if it happened) a recital at UNEAC of poems in a book he was preparing that would bear the suggestive title of *Provocaciones* [*Provocations*]. Don’t think badly of it; he was alluding to an observation of Arnold Hauser in the sense that works of art are just that, challenging invitations to dialogue. In December 1968, Padilla even held a skirmish with Cabrera Infante in which he rejected his support and accused him of being a “counterrevolutionary who tries to create a difficult situation for those who have not taken the same path.”¹⁰

Due to a character problem, Padilla could not remain in the background for long; he took advantage of a poll by *El Caimán Barbudo* [*The Bearded Caiman*] to attack publishers because they were interested in *Pasión de Urbino* [*Urbino’s Passion*], the recently published novel by Lisandro Otero, while they “ignored” *Tres tristes tigres* [*Three Sad Tigers*], by Cabrera Infante. We heard every so often that he was very active as a spontaneous consultant to foreign diplomats and journalists in transit through Havana, whom he instructed on the most dissimilar topics: the fate of socialism, world revolution, and young Cuban literature. And one fine day in April 1971, unfortunate rumors reached us, which were later confirmed as fact: Padilla had been imprisoned—for three weeks, according to some; for five, according to others—and that he was going to make a public declaration at UNEAC.

This turned out to be a pathetic *mea culpa* and a hasty inventory of incriminations against friends and acquaintances, both absent and present. Knowing Padilla as we knew him, knowing that his long experience as a Moscow press correspondent had made him an incurable skeptic—to the point that even under the tropical sun he felt haunted by the ghosts of Stalinism—it was hard to believe that his statement, which was so reminiscent of the painful “confessions” of the Moscow trials, was not formulated as an encrypted message, intended for his colleagues around the world. Be that as it may, the truth is that the message, a self-fulfilling prophecy, reached its destination. When news of Padilla’s arrest reached Europe, the mechanism on this side of the Atlantic that would lead to the First National Congress of Education and Culture had already been set in motion.¹¹

¹⁰ Cf. Heberto Padilla: *Answer to Guillermo Cabrera Infante*, in *Index* magazine (Madrid), Dec. 1968, p. 9, and *Primera Plana* (Buenos Aires), no. 313, December 24 1968, pp. 88-89. (It is reproduced in *The Padilla case: Literature and Revolution in Cuba*. Documents. Sel., Pr., and notes by Lourdes Casal. New York, Ediciones Nueva Atlántida/Miami, Ediciones Universal. In the introduction (pp.5-10), Casal recounts those events and situations that, in her opinion, ultimately led to the case in question.

¹¹ Cf. Padilla’s speech at UNEAC can be read in *Casa de las Américas*, no. 65-66, March-June 1971, pp. 191-203.

Indeed, on April 9, 1971, an open letter appeared in *Le Monde*, a Paris newspaper, that various European and Latin American intellectuals addressed Fidel to express their alarm at the arrest, which they saw as a possible outbreak of sectarianism in the Island. It was like getting into the lion's cage without taking the proper precautions. I wouldn't be surprised if it was that letter— and the unusual fact that Carlos Franqui, now converted into a zealous prosecutor of the Revolution, appeared among the signatories— that precipitated the decision to convert the announced First Congress of Education into the First Congress of Education and Culture.

The Congress was held in the salons of the Habana Libre hotel between April 23 and 30. In his closing speech, Fidel accused “those arrogant and overbearing bourgeois liberals,” the instruments of cultural colonialism, of intervening in our internal affairs without having the slightest idea of our real problems: “the need to defend ourselves from imperialism, the obligation to care for and feed millions of children in schools. You have to be absolutely crazy, numb to infinity,” he said, “cut off from the reality of the world” to think “that this country's problems are the problems of two or three lost sheep [those who strayed from the correct path],” or that someone from Paris, London, or Rome could set themselves up as judges in order to dictate policies to us.” For now, intellectuals of this type would never return here as jurors in our literary competitions, nor as collaborators in our magazines.¹²

Seen from the current perspective, the reaction may seem excessive, although consistent with a whole policy of affirming national identity and sovereignty; in any case, the truth is that the situation as a whole marked a breaking or cooling point between the Revolution and numerous European and Latin American intellectuals, who, until then, considered themselves friends and fellow travelers.¹³ Retamar's essay, *Caliban*,¹⁴ written just two months after the Congress closed, continues to be a mandatory reference, as the revolutionary manifesto of the moment—which, by the way, transcended it to become a Third World cultural manifesto.

The country was then going through a period of accumulated tensions, among which stood out the death of Che, the Soviet intervention in Czechoslovakia, which the Cuban government approved albeit with great reluctance, the so-called Revolutionary Offensive

¹² Cf. Fidel Castro: *Discurso de clausura del Primer Congreso Nacional de Educación y Cultura* [Closing Speech of the First National Congress on Education and Culture], in Casa de las Américas, no. 65-66, March-June, 1971.

¹³ The situation escalated with a “Second Letter” on May 20, 1971. (Reproduced in Lourdes Casal, *El caso Padilla...[The Padilla Case. . .]*, op. cit. in Note 15, pp.123-124.

¹⁴ TN: Retamar, Roberto Fernández, et al. *Caliban: Notes towards a Discussion of Culture in Our America*. The Massachusetts Review, vol. 15, no. 1/2, 1974, pp. 7-72. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/25088398.

of 1968, a premature process, an unnecessary expropriation of small and private businesses, and the failed 1970 Harvest of the Ten Million, which, despite being “the largest in our history,” as the newspapers proclaimed, left the country exhausted. Subjected to the imperialist economic blockade, in need of a stable market for its products, especially sugar, Cuba had to radically define its alliances. There was a greater rapprochement with the Soviet Union and the European socialist countries. In 1972 the country joined the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CAME), which would structurally link our economy to that of the socialist camp.

7

From the Congress of Education and Culture, a transformed CNC emerged, headed by Luis Pavón Tamayo, and none of the leaders, as far as I remember, had natural ties to the avant-garde.

The links of continuity had been carefully broken or at least reduced. Judging by their actions, the *pavonato* was precisely that: an attempt to dispute the power or rather to remove from power those groups that until then had been dominant in the field of culture, and who apparently were not, with few exceptions, “politically trustworthy.” Only those who belonged to autonomous institutions headed by prestigious figures, such as the previously cited cases from the Casa de las Américas and ICAIC, were saved—although with rather limited power. We know that in this type of conflict, not only are esthetic discrepancies or personal phobias settled but also—perhaps above all—questions of power, the control of mechanisms, and the hegemony of rhetoric. It’s enough to take a look at the situation of the publishing houses, theaters, magazines, galleries, and other spaces for the promotion and dissemination of artistic and literary culture in the Sixties to realize that the most important groups that dominated the culture, directly or indirectly, were the ones that we considered avant-garde.

An obtuse official could say what he liked about Farralúque [a character in *Paradiso*] or the theater of the absurd, but *Paradiso* and *La soprano calva* [*The Bald Soprano*] were there, close at hand; he could reject pop or *La muerte de un burócrata* [*The Death of a Bureaucrat*,] but Raúl Martínez and Titón¹⁵ remained, engrossed in new projects. In 1970, to celebrate Lezama’s sixtieth birthday, a long interview appeared in *Bohemia* (reproduced in *Cuba Internacional*), a whole dossier of tribute in *La Gaceta de Cuba*, and the volume of his complete poetry (to date) published by the Instituto del Libro in its collection *Letras Cubanas*.¹⁶

If I had to summarize what happened in two words, I would say that in 1971 the relative balance that had favored us until then was broken, to our detriment, and with it the consensus on which cultural policy had been based. It was a clear before-and-after

¹⁵ TN: Raúl Martínez (1927-1995) was a Cuban artist known for his pop-art portraits of Cuban politicians. “Titón” was a nickname for the Cuban film director, Tomás Gutiérrez Alea.

¹⁶ See interview by Joaquín G. Santana, article by Benito Novás, texts by Lezama, and bibliography in *Bohemia*, January 1, 1971, pp. 4-15, as well as a tribute in *La Gaceta* (no. 88, December 1970) with texts by Armando Álvarez Bravo, Reinaldo Arenas, Miguel Barnet, Pablo Armando Fernández, Belkis Cuza, Reynaldo González, and Rosa I. Boudet.

situation: at a stage in which everything was consulted and discussed—although agreements were not always reached between the parties—that of the *úkases* [orders of the Tzar] followed: a cultural policy imposed by decree and a complementary one of exclusions and marginalizations, turning the intellectual field into a wasteland (at least for the carriers of the virus of ideological diversionism and for the young people prone to extravagance; that is, fans of long hair, the Beatles, and tight pants, as well as the Gospels and the Scapulars).

We were all guilty, indeed, but some were more guilty than others, as could be seen in the case of homosexuals. Not only political suspicions weighed on them, but also scientific certainties, perhaps derived from some positivist manual from the late nineteenth century or from some precept of the Chinese Cultural Revolution: homosexuality was a contagious disease, a kind of leprosy incubated in class societies, the spread of which had to be prevented by avoiding contact —not only physical, but even spiritual—of the plagued with the most vulnerable sectors (the young, in this case). In other words, there were tensions and disagreements, but things were not so simple: what publishers and magazines published, what galleries exhibited, what theaters premiered, and what ICAIC filmed served to show that we were the ones who pulled the strings of the “cultural industry,” and to what extent our discourse turned out to be hegemonic, despite the rejection and suspicions that it aroused among those professional ideologues whom we used to piously call “the guardians of doctrine” (headed by a senior official of the Party who, according to rumors, was the political godfather of Pavón).¹⁷

As incredible as it may seem to us today—in effect, the dream of reason engenders monsters—, it’s not unreasonable to think that this was the foundation, let’s call it theoretical, which served in 1971-1972 to establish the “parameters” applied in the high-risk jobs, such as teachers and, above all, those who worked in theater. It had been concluded that the simple influence of the teacher or the actor on the student or the adolescent spectator could be risky, which explains that in a commission of the Congress of Education and Culture, when addressing the issue of the influence of the medium on education, it was ruled that it was not “permissible for recognized homosexuals to gain a prestige that influences the formation of our youth through artistic quality.” Furthermore: “The cultural media cannot serve as a framework for the proliferation of false intellectuals who seek to convert snobbery, extravagance, homosexuality, and other social aberrations into expressions of revolutionary art.”¹⁸

In the centers dedicated to teaching or theater, the workers who didn’t respond to the demands or “parameters” that would qualify them as trustworthy individuals—that is, revolutionaries and heterosexuals—would be relocated to other work centers. The cleansing or “parametration” process would be carried out under the strict supervision of an improvised commissar known since then in our milieu as Torquesada (who not long ago, by the way, appeared on another television program, although not as an

¹⁷ And probably the hierarchical superior regarding the so-called “sphere of ideology.”

¹⁸ Cf. “Declaration” of the First National Congress of Education and Culture, in Casa de las Américas, no. 65-66, March-June 1971.

honoree). You will be pleased to know that although at that time there were still no Marielas¹⁹ in our environment capable of discussing the phenomenon rigorously and sensibly, there were, of course, courts willing to enforce the law. Through their respective unions and protected by the Labor Justice law, the parametrized took their appeals to the Supreme Court, which ruled, in a historical and unprecedented case, that “parameterization” was an unconstitutional measure and that the claimants should be compensated.

I need not add that prejudices about sexual conduct were compounded by prejudices about intellectuals, especially since many members of the “lettered city” [an allusion to *La Ciudad Letrada*, by Ángel Rama] thought they were the “critical conscience” of society and their social mission was to judge. We already know that since ancient times, writing and related activities correspond to the particular conditioning of societies divided into classes and castes, and that, therefore, we must do everything possible—beginning with literacy—to at least reduce the resulting inequalities. But to pretend that these inequalities can be eliminated by the stroke of a pen, and even more, that the functions carried out by intellectual and manual workers are interchangeable, suggests demagoguery or nonsense.

I remember that a journalist who was visiting the country’s cane fields at that time exhorted the workers by exclaiming, with sincere or feigned enthusiasm: “You should write, *macheteros!*” I would have given anything to see the faces of the aforementioned, and I imagine a possible response: “And you should come cut cane, asshole!” Because manual workers also have prejudices, which tend to emerge as soon as they notice signs of demagoguery or moral duplicity. From our old, inherited society comes the notion that each and every one of us, or most intellectuals and artists—at least those who don’t engage in really lucrative activities—are a class of “parasites.” That a governing center of culture contributed to reinforcing this prejudice was an unforgivable display of self-righteousness and incompetence.

In any case, the CNC was very clear that the “old” had to be sidelined—including those who were barely forty years old at the time—because we were already contaminated, in order to hand over cultural power to the young so they could exercise it through experienced and politically reliable cadres. Very quickly, a network of “literary workshops” charged with training new writers was established throughout the country, and it gave an energetic impulse to the *Movimiento de Aficionados*.²⁰ It was what the *guajiros*, alluding to an artificial maturation process widely used in our fields—or at least in my time—called “ripening with carbide.” They were in a hurry, and the generational replacement couldn’t fail.

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¹⁹ TN: A reference to Mariela Castro Espín and her work in the National Center for Sex Education (CENESEX), for the rights of the LGBTQ community.

²⁰ TN: The Movement of the Amateurs, young writers and artists sponsored by the Ministry of Culture.

I think that at last—finally!—we are in a position to address the topic suggested by Desiderio as a starting point for the debate. I am almost finished with what I want to say.

In the avalanche of e-mails that were arriving in these days, there was one from the Santiago writer, José M. Fernández Pequeño, now a resident of Santo Domingo, that helped me to specify an important piece of information: when did I start using the denomination “Five Gray Years” to mean that phenomenon that today we also call the *pavonato*? “I believe I was present at a defining moment for the crystallization of the Five Gray Years label,” says Pequeño, evoking the narrative encounter that was held in Santiago de Cuba in November 1980 (and with whose materials, by the way, I prepared a brochure entitled *Forecast for the Eighties*). In Pequeño’s opinion, it was a question of conjuring up the memory of that “despicable period,” still so close, to be able to “move on and grow as people and as writers. A dividing line had to be drawn, and in that sense I think the name was useful.”²¹

I remember that I was letting it drop here and there, in passing, in meetings and encounters of UNEAC and the recently created Ministry of Culture, and I also remember that it produced different reactions, of acceptance or rejection, depending on my interlocutors’ work background. But the first time I used the term in writing was in 1987, in a literary criticism text published in the Casa de las Américas magazine. It said, in discreet footnotes: “The bureaucratic tendencies in the field of culture that appeared in the Gray Quinquennium (note that I didn’t specify the meaning of the term, as if it were taken for granted) came to a halt, but they didn’t impede the later development of different literary currents.” And later: “The Gray Quinquennium, with its emphasis on didactics, favored the development of the detective novel and literature for children and adolescents.”²²

There were elements that objectively, in my opinion, contributed to making the period gray, because the “emphasis on the didactic” placed literary creation in a subordinate, ancillary position, where there was hardly any space for experimentation, play, introspection, and formal research. But here I must open a parenthesis so as not to sin, like the adversary, from dogmatism and simplification. Supported by some university professors, the CNC had slipped into the ears of young writers the malignant suspicion that socialist realism was the aesthetic of the Revolution, an aesthetic that dared not speak its name, among other things because it was never officially adopted in any instance by the Party or the government.²³

²¹ José M. Fernández Pequeño: *Gris, gris, ¿el quinquenio gris* [*Gray, Gray, the Gray Quinquennium?*] Electronic message dated January 18, 2007. (I am grateful to Aida Bahr, one of the organizers of the Encounter, for verifying the date.)

²² Cf. A.F. “Sobre Las iniciales de la tierra” [“On the initials of the earth”], in *Las máscaras del tiempo* [*The masks of time*]. Havana, Editorial Letras Cubanas, 1995, pp. 56 (n.4) and 62 (n.12).

²³ For example, among the Theses and Resolutions approved by the First Congress of the PCC in 1975, there is not a single mention of socialist realism, although numerous passages reflect the conviction that it is ideology that governs the entire process of production and evaluation of the work of art. Especially significant is the passage about “the nexus of socialist art with reality” and “the quality of the living and

And as not all were young and not everything was under the control of the CNC and its neophytes, the Gray Quinquennium, as a temporary space, was also the time of publication or gestation of some of our masterpieces, such as Carpentier's *Concierto barroco* [*Baroque Concert*] and *El pan dormido* [*The Sleeping Bread*] by Soler Puig. It would be the latter's son, by the way—Rafael, who sadly died in a car accident—who would announce with two books of stories, halfway between one stage and another, that something new was happening in Cuban narrative. And already at the end of the decade some young people—I quote a comment of mine from those years—“updated the discourse” of our narrative, reinserting it into the line of development of the Latin American narrative, thus paving the way for the works of the Eighties that were born “from that desire for renovation, both at a discursive and a thematic level.”²⁴

In other words, by then the deleterious effects of that normative aesthetic that so diligently promoted workshops and university professors had already begun to evaporate. I dare say that in 1975, the *pavonato*, as a project of cultural policy, was dying. But if it's true, as I believe, that the defining characteristic of that stage is the binomial dogmatism/mediocrity, the decline in power couldn't mean its total disappearance, because mediocre and dogmatic people exist everywhere and tend to become diligent allies of those political corpses that even after death win battles.

I have no qualms about apologizing to so many colleagues who, having suffered firsthand the abuses of the *pavonato*—the cruelest of which was undoubtedly their civil death as professionals, sometimes for prolonged periods—consider that the term Gray Quinquennium is not only euphemistic but also even offensive, because it minimizes the dimension of the grievances and therefore reduces the responsibility of the guilty. Most of those *compañeros*—not all of them “parametrized,” by the way, some simply “punished” for their ideological deviations, which were corrected by hard work in agriculture or in a factory—propose the alternative term of “Black Decade.”²⁵ I respect their opinion, but I was referring to something else: to the cultural atmosphere that I have been describing, in which revolutionary enthusiasm was also programmed and what had been a search and a passion became goals to be achieved. If the indicators change, it's logical that the chronological boundaries and pigmentations change as well. If instead of defining the *pavonato* by its mediocrity I define it by its malignancy, I would have to see it as a dangerous and grotesque phenomenon, because there is

dynamic reflection of which Lenin spoke” (in contrast to realism as a photographic copy). Do not forget, moreover, that Che's condemnation of socialist realism, in *El socialismo y el hombre en Cuba* [*Socialism and Man in Cuba*], was categorical. (Cf. *Sobre la cultura artística y literaria* [*On artistic and literary culture*] in Theses and Resolutions of the First Congress of the Communist Party of Cuba. Havana, Department of Revolutionary Orientation of the PCC, 1976, pp. 467-510, and esp. 506.

²⁴ Cf. A.F.: “Las máscaras del tiempo en la novela de la Revolución cubana” [“The Masks of Time in the Novel of the Cuban Revolution”] in *Las máscaras del tiempo* [*The Masks of Time*], ed. cit., p. 29.

²⁵ If I'm not mistaken, the first to do so was the poet César López, interviewed by Orlando Castellanos. See “Defender todo lo defendible, que es mucho” [“Defend everything that is defensible, which is a lot”], *La Gaceta de Cuba*, March-April 1998, p. 29.

nothing more fearsome than a dogmatic person pretending to be a redeemer, and nothing more ridiculous than the pronouncements of an ignorant professor.

There are events of the period—even at the end of the period—that can be considered crimes against culture and even against patriotism, such as the veto imposed in 1974 on the publication in Cuba of *Ese sol del mundo moral* [*That Sun of the Moral World*], by Cintio Vitier, an essay reminiscent of Martí and Fidel, that explains like few others why the vast majority of Cubans are proud to be so. As good guardians of the doctrine, the censors immediately warned that it wasn't a Marxist view of Cuban history. So it appeared first in Mexico rather than here; in fact, it took twenty years to be published in Cuba, whether from dogmatic inertia or simple editorial apathy.²⁶

Perhaps premature process, perhaps even an unnecessary expropriation of small businesses and private businesses, and the failed 1970 Harvest of the Ten Million, which despite being “the largest in our history” as the newspapers proclaimed, left the country exhausted. Subjected to the imperialist economic blockade, in need of a stable market for its products—especially sugar—, Cuba had to radically define its alliances. There was a greater rapprochement with the Soviet Union and the European socialist countries. In 1972 the country joined the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CAME), which would structurally link our economy to that of the socialist camp.

9

Perhaps we have never heard such a unanimous sigh of relief in our midst as the one that was produced in front of the television screens on the afternoon of November 30, 1976, when, during the closing session of the National Assembly of People's Power, it was announced that a Ministry of Culture was to be created and that the minister would be Armando Hart. I think Hart didn't even wait to take office to start meeting with people, old and young, militants and non-militants. He didn't ask if one liked the Matamoros²⁷ or the Beatles, if he appreciated realistic painting more than abstract, if he preferred strawberry to chocolate or vice versa; he asked if one was willing to work. I had the impression that the lost trust was quickly reestablishing itself and that consensus was once again possible.

I remember commenting to my friend Agustín Pi²⁸—the legendary Dr. Pi—how surprising this sudden change of atmosphere was, and when I assumed he was going to tell me about Hart's impeccable revolutionary career or his intellectual merits, I heard him say, with a vocabulary that had already fallen into disuse at that time: “Hart is a decent person.” I think it was at that precise moment that I had the absolute certainty

²⁶ Cf. Cintio Vitier: *Ese sol del mundo moral. Para una historia de la eticidad cubana. [That Sun of the Moral World. For a History of Cuban Ethics.]* Mexico, Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 1975. The Cuban edition was scheduled for publication by Ediciones Unión in 1987, but various factors—among them the beginning of the Special Period—postponed publication until 1995.

²⁷ TN: The Trio Matamoros was a Cuban trova group.

²⁸ TN: Agustín Pi was the founder of the Casa de la Américas.

that the so-called Quinquennium was indeed a five-year period, and that it had just ended. It is not that tensions, those conflicts of opinion or interests that never cease to surface in a living culture disappeared definitively—I remember that in 1991 we were still immersed in one of them—but that the relationships were always one of mutual respect, authenticity, and interest in the normal development of our culture.

I thank you for your attention and your patience. I hope my ramblings have served at least to offer the youngest the information and perspective that they probably lacked. I recognize that the information is still very panoramic and the point of view very limited, but here I myself propose— following Desiderio’s suggestion—to provide the framework for a possible debate. I repeat that in my opinion our culture—today as much or more than ever—is a living thing. For reasons of age I often recall the past, but it is an exercise that I hate when it threatens to become obsessive. Sometimes, speaking to foreign audiences about our literary movement, I meet people, generally men, who insist on asking me only about events that occurred thirty or forty years ago, as if after the “Padilla case” or Arenas’ departure by way of the Mariel boatlift, nothing would have happened in our midst. I call these types of curious people Philosophers of Stopped Time or Egyptologists of the Cuban Revolution. But when evoking the Gray Quinquennium, I feel that we are stuck upside down in something that not only concerns the present but also projects us strongly into the future, if only because of what Santayana said: “Those who do not know history are condemned to repeat it.” That danger is precisely what we are trying to ward off here.

Havana, January 30, 2007

AMIR VALLE

Translated by Regina Anavy and Gustavo Loredó

The Matter from the Other Shore

Amir Valle to Desiderio Navarro

In October 2005, I said at the Frankfurt Fair that for a couple of years Cuban intelligentsia had been noticing a stealthy return to the sad gray years (which were not a five-year period, as is well-known now). A journalist asked: and what did the intellectuals do? I made a joke to avoid answering that question, because the reality drags us back to that silence to which Desiderio refers and which, in some cases, was pure conformity; in others, pure fear; and in a few, opportunism of the worst kind and even complicity. Today, unfortunately, we all know full well that there are still a few Pavóns operating in the national culture.

Hopefully, as Arturo says, this backroom uproar will make us reflect and create an open space (and a free one, above all) where many things that have happened in our culture (especially in the last decade) can be clarified; things that, by the way, have not even had the intellectual reflection they deserve (and again, reflection and criticism, when they did take place, were done in the shadows).

I hope that here, in this debate, we will stop using euphemisms, pretty little words and intellectual phrases that obscure the needed clarity, and that we will learn to call things by their name. There is already much evidence that the so-called “errors” were not such, since they satisfied a well-designed strategy of power to keep at bay an intelligentsia that, I hope we all remember, played an essential role in the most important revolutionary movements of the twentieth century. In 1959, with one blow, the intelligentsia lost its social importance for generating independent and plural thought. I hope the time comes when whoever has been guilty of those disasters and more that have been committed (and are still being committed) won’t try to absolve himself, pass the buck, or thoroughly muddy the waters. That guilt—let’s be clear—begins with Fidel and extends to all the Pavóns that we know today. This, among other things, should be elucidated clearly and fully.

Amir Valle in response to Arturo Arango

I totally agree with you, Arturo. And to avoid misunderstandings, because I consider my position a bit uncomfortable and because I think I have transparently said what I think about this matter, I am someone who is limited to “listening” to the email. I trust that, among all of us, an adequate solution will be sought to the many things that are stated here and that, although we might not like it, will go beyond the issue that gave rise to it, although everything is related to that broad scope (and necessarily plural although some seem to forget it) which is Culture. And I trust that these debates and, I hope, their results, will continue to reach me.

Thank you also for pointing out something very important: there are many young writers (and others not as young as I) who also have the right to express their opinions, their support, and their disagreement. I myself, in these two days, have received several personal messages from some of them that should be heard (Ángel Santiesteban and Ena Lucía Portela, for example, to name only the best known).

A hug from cold Berlin,
Amir Valle

Reflections on Scaring Away the Fear

Let's think, colleagues, let's think. Let's stop looking only at the past and notice the cultural history of the country from 1959 until the moment I write these lines. Walking with blinders, like the old draft horses, looking at the ground and aching from the exhaustion experienced, is very convenient for those who have silenced our voices in all these years, be they *fidelistas*, *llanusistas*, *aldanistas*, *pavonistas* or, as some say, adapting to the new airs of politics, *raulistas*.

The reappearance of certain sinister characters from a part of the dark Cuban cultural history of the last forty-eight years, in spaces and times with a large audience, is not the result of a "symptom of something" as some say in the messages of the present debate, nor are they announcements of a return to evil, as others have written; much less that predatory tyrannosaurs have been unearthed from the arts and letters in Cuba. What has happened forces us to put aside euphemisms, naivety, and discriminatory blindness. This is what I was referring to in one of my messages when I asked that we begin to call things by their name, together, in a plural, respectful and inclusive dialogue. What we must be clear about, then, is that what happened is simply more of the same and responds to the so-called "Cultural Policy of the Revolution" that we have suffered all these years.

But to reflect from that starting point means putting aside old grudges, personal selfishness, wounds suffered and revenge for payback, and thinking about something essential: we are living in a moment in which the destiny of a country is being defined, rearmed, and reformulated, and the intellectuals, if they continue to be divided by all these circumstances, will continue to play the sad role of the lazy ones who remain silent and approve of what others think and decide, which will be an embarrassment for the history of the intelligentsia in a country where we have always been at the head of all the great political and social movements that took place, including the original project of the Cuban Revolution. Even when many of those quarrels, many of those divisions, and many of those hurts are totally justified, we need to be less selfish and think not about our personal pain, not only about what we lost or what was taken from us, but also about the pain and betrayal suffered by the Nation, and the black holes that exist in that Nation due to our intellectual conformity, our fears, and our absences as protagonists of social thought in the last decades.

César López, in an act of absolute honesty, writes: "In the words of José Martí, I am honest and I am afraid." And it's essential to understand that a real analysis of

everything that happened won't be achieved if the fears that have been planted in us aren't recognized, since all the discussion and any reflection will be vitiated by the limitations and self-censorship dictated by fear. As Retamar once said, we should start by asking ourselves: Whom is the cause of our fear? And there is only one answer: the fear has been created by them and doesn't exist where there is no reason for it. So why are we afraid to speak? Why don't we call things by their names and call out the guilty ones? And what's more, if I'm wrong and everything inside the Revolution and its cultural project has been clean, enlightened, pure, why are we so afraid? Is the Revolution exclusive?

The many messages from this debate are the best proof of the exclusive nature of the revolutionary cultural project and the strong impact its precepts have had on the mentality of a large part of the Cuban intelligentsia. What reasons can anyone have for excluding from an intellectual debate those it calls "counterrevolutionaries"? How long must we intellectuals endure this fascist maxim that says that "Cuba is for revolutionaries, the university is for revolutionaries," etc.? Until when are Cuban intellectuals, in an act contrary to our nature, going to be accomplices of assumptions that limit social freedoms? Why should we accept the concepts of "revolutionaries" and "counterrevolutionaries" that have been imposed on us? This weapon has been used in a masterful way by those who have divided us, and, unfortunately, we haven't had the necessary courage to generate a solid, mature, courageous thought that opposes these designs.

In this way, it's very dangerous for me to hear Paquita Armas say that "I don't think, at the moment in which we live, that this is the time to start a debate on this subject electronically," because, in his opinion "The enemy shouldn't be given—as Ché said—even a little bit like that." Is the intellectual who lives in another country, for various and complex reasons, an enemy? Is asking this intellectual (who may well have left due to the *pavonato* and its derivations) to join us in a strategy to prevent the loss of the nation's true cultural values giving arms to the enemy? Do "the revolutionaries" feel so helpless that they have to resort to hiding their mistakes in order to survive the enemy? With those simple words, surely without realizing it, Paquita Armas brings up a thorny issue: he is committed to stopping the debate via email to prevent "inconvenient ears" from finding out about this disastrous truth, in the same way that Cuba denies free and open access to its citizens so that they can't discover many other truths that haven't been told and that circulate freely on the Internet. It's more of the same exclusivity: the Internet and the information that is found there is only for revolutionaries, but in this case, as Orwell said in *Animal Farm*, "All animals are equal, but some are more equal than others." This is a privilege that the Cuban government reserves only for some revolutionaries who are more revolutionary than others.

How is it right to continue excluding those who think differently from the increasingly necessary process of "thinking about Cuba"? And even more: How long will this process of nurturing the thought of the Nation's citizens be the privilege of a few who, from power, impose what should be thought about something on everyone? How long are we going to mock José Martí, that intellectual whom so many set up as an example,

forgetting that he made it very clear with his thought that the Homeland belongs to everyone, that it's an altar, not a pedestal, and that it's not anyone's fiefdom or pulpit?

The Intelligentsia, United?

I don't remember nor do I know of any other time since 1959 that something similar has occurred in Cuban cultural history: intellectuals coming together, beyond their many differences, beyond their shrines and personal wars, in a unanimous and just cry against an unprecedented event that, due to the political and cultural experience of these years, shouldn't surprise anyone.

But that indicates something: the Cuban intelligentsia has never been united.

Waldo Leyva in his message says, "If we don't stop these demonstrations, the unity which we have achieved with so much care, personal sacrifice, and dedication ..." And I ask, as I said in one of my messages: "Don't you think that if we had taken the same position at other times, the many setbacks, exiles, and silenced events that occurred in the last two decades could have been avoided? I hope that this event isn't something temporary for the intelligentsia to oppose its voice and criteria to a phenomenon of the past that caused damage, and that this unity serves to review other phenomena that have happened and are happening.

"There has never existed any unity, Waldo, quite the contrary. The cultural policy of the Revolution has continued to exclude those who have thought differently, those who have opposed it, or those who haven't joined it. We can all and each one give thousands of examples. And if one can speak of "unity" in all these years, then we should speak of the imposed unity and the rebellious unity. Yes, there has been a unity of those intellectuals and artists alongside the Revolution and its project of Culture. But beware: it's an imposed and exclusive unity, because if you aren't there, you simply won't be part of the Culture, which has imposed very rigid rules that shouldn't be violated. In that unity are those who believe in the Revolution, those who live at its expense, those who join the bandwagon to see what share of the cultural cake they can eat, and those who find no other way. It's a false unity, vitiated by the totalitarianism and discrimination imposed by the political project, a unity in the shadow and under the aegis of power.

And there is another unity that is free and somehow rebellious. That complicit, conspiratorial, irreverent, but always silent unity that we all share when we know that power doesn't listen to us. There, within its frameworks, is a thick and explosive breeding ground for the true variants of social thought that will prevail in Cuba in the future that we all know is coming (or so we told ourselves in those moments of complicity, remember?). This is a hopeful unity, even if it's proof of the fear that they have instilled in us all these years. It's a unity against power.

The Levity of the Symptom

Shortly before I sat down to write these reflections about Cuba and from those other countries where Cubans inhabit their own Cuba, which no one has been able to take

away from them, several messages arrived asking: Do you know anything about the meeting with Abel? And I answered: I know nothing, but don't hope for much; nothing will happen. I know clearly what will happen there. Abel will side with the intellectuals cited to discuss the problem. As always, he will get around awkward moments with his jokes and puns (Abel is a man with an excellent sense of humor, don't forget, and that's a very useful weapon for politicians). In the end he will promise to "channel" the matter, ask for responsibilities, etc. And that will be the end of it.

As the waters become rough, perhaps some poor devil will charge the ICRT with the blame. And they could even have an announcer read an apology for the "mistake." Nothing more. We all know that the ICRT and the Cuban press have always been institutions directly controlled by the higher echelons of power on the island. Those who have led it are men of the first confidence of that power, and I hope that no one forgets that the current director is a man with the rank and bearing of a military man who came out of the army, led by the person who today temporarily presides over our country: Raúl Castro.

Let's call things by their name, colleagues. They are going to give us, again, a pig for a hare. And what's worse, as some have said in various messages, this is nothing, you have to be prepared for other things that may come. Expecting a public apology from those who made those programs and (beware) broadcast them at prime time (not just any time), is naive. The People who saw these programs are the same ones who, in the last twenty years, have seen the study programs of their homeland history minimized, manipulated with anti-historical censorship, and illustrated in an embarrassing black and white. For those viewers, Pavón and Serguera are heroes today. And to destroy that offense to intelligence, which is to dress them as heroes on our television (or should I say Communist Party television?), a reconstruction of the sinister events of which they were protagonists and many of you the victims, would be necessary; it would be necessary to explain to the People those now-called "errors" that Ena Lucía Portela simply calls "criminal acts" and that, as I said in my message, I still believe was a well-planned strategy (since then and until today) to keep at bay the intellectuals who had played a decisive role in many critical moments in our history, as those who seized power from Batista knew very well.

The Revolution, colleagues, with the top leader at the helm, has a terrible memory. And those "mistakes" are not remembered; they are eliminated from the books; they didn't exist, and, as I have heard some colleagues on the Left say, "they are smears of the empire." And let's not forget, the process of the "Rectification of Errors," which was carried out by the same authors of those "errors" without acknowledging their own faults (or letting them fall on scapegoats), vitiating whatever "rectification" that process could have had.

How can we allow ourselves to dream that they will relive those "mistakes," precisely now when the country is under the command of the one who was directly behind many of those disasters and who operated the strings of those sad puppets, Pavón, Aldana, and company? As one of the messages says, it's essential to know who gave the order for these programs to be created. But I would add, it's more important to find out what the

policy and strategy were behind these orders. And we will find a clear answer: the policy has always been the same, with nuances, with slight modifications according to the intelligence or stupidity of the Pavón on duty.

If we don't look at the root of the problem, if we don't go to the essence, this symptom will have the lightness of a sigh, and the things that have happened until today will continue to happen. It terrifies me to see how some want to put all the blame only on these fascists turned cultural leaders. Desiderio Navarro says: "Are we really a country with such little memory that we no longer remember the painful situation to which our institutions were reduced by the work of the National Council of Culture?" I'm speechless. And so as not to be the one to say it, I looked for a fragment of the documentary *Seres extravagantes* [*Extravagant Beings*], which tells the story of Reinaldo Arenas and many other "different" ones, including some of you. There, in a gallery, a certain famous person, wearing a hat of guano, says: "In our capital, in recent months, a certain strange phenomenon happened to appear, among a group of the young and some not-so-young, who began to make a public display of their shamelessness. Thus, for example, they began to start living extravagantly, meeting in certain streets of the city, in the area of La Rampa, in front of the Hotel Capri." Can't you guess? Those who were convicted of their "sexual differences" shouldn't forget that speech. And those who want a response from the ones truly responsible for the cultural tragedy experienced in those years and in the later stages up to today have only to look at their continually exalted speeches of those years. They will find amazing things. Many, for finding and commenting on them, have been called "stateless," "mercenaries of the empire," and, at best, "not revolutionary."

We, the Newest

Among all the messages, two particularly caught my attention: those from poets Norge Espinosa and Sifredo Ariel. They, from different positions, came up with two theses: the most offended, they said, obviously must be the ones affected by "that period." They are right, but they pointed out that they hadn't experienced it even though they were "lightly touched by the agonizing hangover" (Sifredo), and "My generation [Norge] didn't have to endure any of these characters. It suffered others, copies of lesser power, whom we have seen enter the rank of non-persons, when little by little the dialogue that they denied themselves began to become more flexible."

I confess that coming from two such lucid friends, these assertions—especially "agonizing hangover" and "dialogue"—annoyed me, and so I would like to expand on and illustrate their words. To what dialogue are you referring, dear Norge, if the only possible dialogue that exists is one that agrees with the dictates of cultural and political power? If you live, dear Sifredo, in that same Havana that I inhabited (and we inhabit) humanly and culturally until a few months ago, how is it possible that you speak of an agonizing hangover?

Let's think. Let's suppose that those gray times are past and that, as some messages say, they can't return to the cultural tranquility of today, tarnished (some admit) by

“imperfections” and “irresponsible acts.” Since Pavón and others were sentenced by the Supreme Court or went into “retirement,” nothing has happened. Perfect.

Seen in this way, who will we blame for the terrible events generated as a result of the well-known “Letter of the Ten”²⁹ written by “drunks and mediocre poets” (remember that document that many signed)?

Who will explain the cultural and police repression suffered by the plastic arts and theatre movement in the late 1980s, which caused one of the most massive cultural exoduses in the country?

Does anyone remember what happened with [the magazine] *Diásporas* and Rolando Sánchez Mejías that led him to write his open letter to *El País* in 1995 denouncing censorship in Cuba?

Does anyone doubt the years in prison suffered, to give a simple example, by Reinaldo Hernández Soto, when, using his right as a citizen, he wrote a letter to Fidel Castro condemning the execution of Ochoa? And more recently, is anyone capable of doubting that there are people in prison today because they think differently, whatever their affiliation, including some journalists and writers?

Abilio Estévez says in one of his messages, “Years ago I got tired (or fatigued) and turned my back.” Has anyone asked the reasons? Have others who “got tired” and left been asked their reasons?

Are they lies, didn’t they exist, the pressures, sanctions, and even expulsions of young Cuban writers for sending their literary works to the magazine *Encuentro de la Cultura Cubana* [*Encounter with Cuban Culture*], where, curiously, other consecrated people on the island publish and, although they receive a slight scolding, nothing happens?

Are they lies, the pressures, the recommendations not to participate, the visits from “brotherly agents” of State Security who “take care of” the Culture for those who published or were friends of the Cuban Culture Collection of Plaza Mayor even before, as I said, Patricia Gutiérrez “politicized” her participation with a speech where the only thing she defended was the right of exiled authors to present their book at the Fair to which she was invited?

Has anyone ever wondered why the names of important Cuban writers and artists can be found today in Europe, the U.S., and Latin America (as Magaly Muguercia says in one of her messages)? Are they all “economic emigrants,” that comfortable category that is usually used in official discourse to hide other migratory causes?

Does anyone believe the Minister of Culture at this point, when he assures us that “in Cuba there is not one single book that is censored”? I won’t give my examples, which

²⁹ A “manifesto” signed by ten Cuban intellectuals in favor of freedom from repression. The official State newspaper, *Granma*, published responses criticizing them by UNEAC members.

rebut such a huge lie, but I can mention a few people who are reading these words. And if censorship doesn't exist, what prevents disseminating and bringing to light in Cuba those fundamental works that today are written by Cubans in many parts of the world? Or are we to believe what everyone says about writers like Reinaldo Arenas or Cabrera Infante, that they don't want to be published until there are political changes on the island?

What "cultural" justifications make it fair to award the National Prizes for Literature and the rest of the arts only to writers who have remained faithful or have bowed to the Revolution, for different reasons? And think about this violated right, despite the fact that many of those who deserve or deserved the prizes wouldn't accept them. Many of us know, from the voices of our cultural leaders themselves, that it responds to a cultural policy that has come, let us say again, euphemistically, "from above,": right, colleagues from the Cuban Book Institute?

Do we have to believe that the pressure, censorship, and repression suffered by those who have been involved for years with the *Vitral* project, the contest and magazine in Pinar del Río, is something out of science fiction? Can Pedro Pablo Oliva, who has just been awarded the National Prize for Plastic Arts, or the writers Raúl Antonio Capote and Ángel Santiesteban—to name just three who are not part of *Vitral*—testify to that?

Wasn't Antonio José Ponte demonized when he decided to question (in the right place; that is, in an assembly before the members of UNEAC) whether UNEAC was a contradiction from its initial foundations? And one should also ask: where was the unity mentioned by Waldo when he was "deactivated" from UNEAC, and why haven't we demanded that his decision to be part of the editorial board of the magazine *Encuentro* be respected? I hope you don't forget, dear Minister Abel Prieto, that meeting at the National Library where you told all the provincial directors of Culture "I had to be careful" with Ponte because he worked for the magazine *Encuentro*, financed by the CIA, and with Amir Valle, because he is working for "that *señora* from whom we don't know what to expect," referring to my work with Patricia Gutiérrez. The same thing that Ponte said, even with stronger words, Paquita Armas has just said in her message: "That this exchange of ideas moves so quickly makes evident the need for a space for dialogue between Cuban artists. UNEAC ceased to be what it was and now there is no place to say what you think." Will we condemn her for those "terrible" words?

Has no one ever thought about the hell that the excellent narrator (and I mean it with all intent) and former student of the Onelio Jorge Cardoso Creation Workshop, Luis Felipe Rojas, is living in right now, for having dared to found, there in Cacocún, the Association of Young Writers of the East, condemned for the "dark sin" of highlighting works censored in Cuba, creating and disseminating independent literary projects because of their disenchantment with official institutions?

And have the independent literary magazines *Cacharro (s)* [*Jalopy (ies)*] and *Bifronte* [*Two-faced*] never been persecuted and censored by the political and cultural power (and even if I don't want to, I must mention my magazine, *Letras en Cuba* [*Writings in Cuba*], and my literary column, *A título personal*, [*On a Personal Basis*], which also

caused them to shut down my email on the Ministry of Culture's *Cubarte* [*Cubart*] network)?

And finally, although this list will surely be expanded by many of you just by thinking a little bit about what has happened in these last two decades, why did they prohibit the screening of the documentary *Arte nuevo de hacer ruinas* [*New Art of Making Ruins*] at the most recent Festival del Nuevo Cine in Havana? The German director, Florian Boschmeyer, has already won several awards at international festivals in Europe and the U.S.

Think about all this, look at your own experiences, and perhaps the answer to the question is quite different: Is the *pavonato* a phenomenon of the past? Have the only people affected been those who lived at that time during the misnamed "Gray Quinquennium"? Are they the only ones who have the right to be offended and worried?

The Changing Waters

Nothing ended, colleagues; everything continues. It's part of the same essence: "Dictatorships, whether of the right or the left, not only try to control the daily life of the individual but also his beliefs and fantasies. Dictatorships don't trust literature, because it allows man to get out of himself, live less as a slave, and savor freedom." That was said by another of those censored in Cuba, Mario Vargas Llosa, who was a friend of some of you and who, we well know, withdrew from the Revolution when he discovered many of the things that I comment on here, since he himself already said very clearly that his exit from the bandwagon of the Revolution wasn't only because of the Padilla Case.

Some of you will say, "Of course, his position is comfortable, he's in Berlin." And who knows. But remember that I also said these things in Cuba and made myself a problem for the authorities. Nobody pays me. I don't belong to any political party. I assume a responsibility that they owe us: to think for ourselves and say what we think, whatever it is. I believe in those dreams of building a better country, a better continent, and a better world. But history itself has shown that dictatorships and totalitarian states do not serve to make those dreams come true.

When someone put on the message list "And the matter has come to the other shore" my chest constricted. I have spent a whole year forcing myself to believe that I am here for different reasons. But I have been banished. I have been asking for an entry permit to Cuba for months, which doesn't go anywhere, despite my claims (and those of my family in Cuba) at UNEAC, the Ministry of Culture, and the Department of Immigration. Can any of you give me an answer as to why? I could write another article as long or longer than this one with my stories that a few people there know, because I tried to sue them demanding my rights, right, Abel? Right, Carlos Martí? I hope you will respond sometime to my many letters, as I hope you will respond sometime, honestly, to this claim that so many intellectuals now make.

What remains to us? To understand that it's necessary to seek that lost dialogue, that active participation of the intelligentsia in decisions and in the political and cultural life

of the country, in a plural, open, and inclusive spectrum. Dear Guillermo Vidal kept many of his friends united for many years, telling us with that look of his, so honest, every time he saw a discussion among our class members (to which he felt attached even though it wasn't his own): "Gentlemen, if they divide us, we're screwed." Don't forget that.

Neither should we forget, as Waldo Leyva says in his message, that we have an "inviolable commitment to the essences of the Nation," which are not, I clarify, those that have been imposed on us until today. Those essences remain the same despite everything that has happened in the last forty-eight years. The essences have been enriched despite us, and our apathy, our fears, our selfishness, and our hesitations have become more complex.

In one of the conversations I had with the President of the Association of Writers of UNEAC, colleague Francisco López Sacha, when I asked him how I could explain to myself the double standards in terms of policy and culturally with which the Cuban Culture Collection was treating the Plaza Mayor publishing house, he told me a story. He told me that General Francisco Franco ordered Dalí to paint a picture for his daughter. Dalí painted a woman with her back facing the sea.

"Is that girl my daughter?" Franco wanted to know when he saw the painting.

"It's your daughter," Dalí agreed.

"And what is the meaning of the sea?" Franco was intrigued. Dalí looked at the painting and smiled before answering.

"It's the changing waters of politics, General."

And so it is, colleagues. Politics, like the waters, change. Politicians, like drops of water, change and go from one place to another, according to the current imposed on them by their wishes and by history. We intellectuals, although we also change, remain, in essence, the same. Let's honor our destiny, let's use our intellect with all the freedom and self-respect that it demands. And without fear.

Berlin, January 11, 2007

ÁNGEL SANTIESTEBAN PRATS

Translated by Regina Anavy and Gustavo Loredó

Dear Brother Amir,

I'm very happy that the debate has been awakened, with all the opinions it arouses, since I think that the culture now has an advantage: it's very clear that the current generation will not keep silent this time. Nor did we. What bothers me is the use of the past tense, because, as you point out, the Pavóns and their leaders still exist. In the end, they were only tools, and maybe they deserve pity, because in one way or another, whatever side you're on, the executioners are also victims. Hopefully, the scorn will help unmask the current hitmen of culture; what's happening now is the same thing that happened then, and no one wants to go up against the government. Today's Pavóns are still in force and require respect until the true leaders give the signal that the lions may eat.

Pavón and his henchmen were abandoned after being used. At least that should be something to think about for those who are now being used, so that before censuring and persecuting, they understand that they, too, will later be thrown into the cage to be devoured.

Hugs, Ángel
January 9, 2007

ANTÓN ARRUFAT

Translated by Regina Anavy and Gustavo Loredó

Shared Concerns

On Friday, January 7, in prime time, Cubavisión showed *Impronta*, a program dedicated, as its title suggests, to creators who have left an “imprint” on the national culture in arts, science, and sports. In this segment, viewers were presented with the media exaltation of Luis Pavón Tamayo, which included photos of him with top leaders of the country, covers of his few books, an ostentatious display of his medals, and an interview about the work he’s doing today. With an almost inaudible voice and shaking hands, Pavón could be heard saying he was “advising” some sort of institution or publisher. After the broadcast of this program, the immense number of Pavón’s victims, hundreds of them happily still living, began to call each other, horrified that Cuban television, more than thirty years after those disgraceful events, which happened under the direction of Luis Pavón Tamayo, now being presented as immaculate, would dedicate part of its precious time and space to one of the most execrable characters, including those from colonial and neocolonial times, in the history of Cuban culture.

There he was, without a doubt, that person who for five long, sterile years, presided over the National Council of Culture from the high tower of the Palacio del Segundo Cabo, which faced the Plaza de Armas. There he was speaking as if nothing had happened, exonerated by the art of concealment from all responsibility for his actions in those years. Neither the commendable text that the announcer read, in which Pavón’s victims who were among the audience learned for the first time of his importance as a poet, nor the muttered inconsistencies of the interviewee made any reference, not for one second, to the ominous past of this person who controlled the governing institution of our culture during those years.

That is to say that they had all drunk the water of Lethe, which gives way to oblivion, and that they expected the victims, on the contrary, would remember their executioner. There he was, dressed in white, the great *parametrador*³⁰ of important artists, now, yes really, the one who persecuted them and expelled them from their jobs, the one who took them before the labor courts, stripped them of their salaries and positions, the one who condemned them to ostracism and social vilification, who populated their dreams with the most atrocious nightmares, who annulled the national dance, who mutilated the plays of the Guignol Theater, who led into exile artists willing to work in their country and within their culture, who persecuted painters and sculptors, stripping them of their chairs and the possibility of exhibiting their works. There he was, the great censor of musicians and troubadours, the one who taught Cuban artists an exercise hardly practiced in our history, that of self-censorship, the inventor and promoter of the mediocrity that filled the entire period with works that, happily, today no one who is selective is interested in remembering, using the critical wisdom that television directors and their ideological leaders have not known how to imitate.

³⁰ The official “parameters” imposed on the cultural sector meant that workers had to be “revolutionary” and heterosexual. If not, they were considered untrustworthy and could be dismissed from their positions.

There was someone who, with an apparently harmless little voice, created and instilled in cultural work, as Desiderio Navarro rightly observes, “styles and mechanisms of direction that have taken decades to eradicate.” These historical facts, concealed by someone’s decision, nevertheless should have been told to the viewers, mainly the new generations who lack information on that period. The victims know them firsthand. Thus the imprint of Luis Pavón Tamayo on the national culture could be judged fairly by everyone. Of course, Pavón is not the only unburied corpse that Cuban television tries to put into circulation, without anyone knowing so far why Cuban television wants to unearth them. Not long ago, the victims of Jorge Serguera, former President of the ICRT,³¹ saw him gesticulate between the candles of a kind of burning chapel, without a muscle moving in his face, about his years as a persecuting leader. He didn’t make excuses either; on the contrary, he exclaimed with pride that he didn’t “regret anything.” His victims, in another sense, have nothing to regret either.

However, these two unburied corpses are not alone. A few months ago in a program on Channel 2, “Open Dialogue,” also occurring at prime time, one of the *ranchadores*³² of the Pavón administration, Armando Quesada, was interviewed. He had been commissioned to take care of “cleaning up” the Cuban theater movement during this period. He did so, of course, for the time his *mayoral* was in power. The only “medal” that Luis Pavón Tamayo really deserved doesn’t appear in the vain collection that the photographers moved to his house, with accompanying lighting technicians and makeup artists, arranging them on a table for a theatrical staging. This “medal” is the one that was won in a fair fight when the Supreme Court ruled against him for “abuse of power” and “unconstitutional” measures against cultural workers.³³ It is his greatest achievement, and the most original: he is almost the only leader of the Revolution who has received it. The various rulings, several in total, largely caused his dismissal; they can be found in the *Gazeta Oficial* [Official Gazette].

Perhaps for a deterministic philosopher, Pavón is not absolutely responsible for his actions as the head of the Council. He is, to a certain and obscure extent, a later victim of the *pavonato*, which he himself implemented. Some truth can be found in such an observation. As in Catholic theology, the stars incline but do not force agency. In modern social doctrines, the circumstances, the complicated fabric of the society of an age, also incline, like new earthly stars, but don’t force agency. In accordance with human freedom, even under the most ironclad conditions, man can refuse, argue, propose various solutions, influence, or at least not exceed violence. Perhaps the fact that Pavón exceeded himself now encourages his victims to find psychological

³¹ Cuban Institute of Radio and Television.

³² The *ranchadores* were the slave hunters in colonial Cuba who worked for the *mayoral*, the overseer.

³³ Armando Quesada worked for Pavón and oversaw Cuban theater. After the ruling that all homosexuals must be dismissed, a group of those who were outside the “parameters” appealed through the union and the labor courts, until the matter reached the Supreme Court, which ruled in favor of the plaintiffs. This resulted in the dissolution of the CNC and its replacement by the new Ministry of Culture in 1976.

explanations. There are desires, pleasures, phobias, and envies that contaminate any decision that is apparently impossible not to fulfill.

When the rehabilitation began of the artists and writers that Luis Pavón Tamayo forever tried to annihilate, and the cultural policy entered the period of revolutionary rectifications, and the victims of the *pavonato* were recognized in their value as creators, the old ex-president approached one of his friends to warn him, with words similar to these: “Don’t get too involved with those who won the national awards, because soon they could all be reversed.” Strange thought for an avowed Marxist: conceiving of historical time as an eternal return.

Another Message from Antón Arrufat

Dear Friends:

I am sending this proposal only to the four of you. It seems to me that, given the energetic reaction of so many Cuban writers and artists to the appearance on the screen of Pavón, Serguera, and now I find out, Quesada, we are in a position to ask UNEAC to demand a public apology from the ICRT for what happened. I think there are enough reasons and strength among us to try. I don’t believe they will apologize, but it would be a way to put more pressure on them.

Hugs, Anton Arrufat
January 9, 2007

P.S. Today I will be in San Antonio de los Baños. If I don’t answer a call or message, it’s not because of abandonment or laziness.

ANTONIO DESQUIRON

Translated by Regina Anavy and Gustavo Loredó

Convenient amnesia is so common Now the guy is a hero! And look. *Impronta* isn't much of a surprise to me. Maybe you think I'm bitter. Probably.

After having seen and experienced so much garbage firsthand, bringing back Pavón hardly surprises me. And of course I remember and resent those years that are so present in my own life. I don't deny that it worries me. In 1971, I was 25 years old and now I'm almost 60; of course it worries me.

ARTURO ARANGO

Translated by Regina Anavy and Gustavo Loredó

Desiderio,

This morning I forwarded you the short email alert that Jorge Ángel Pérez circulated because I was sure that you would react with as much anger as lucidity to the bewilderment he posed. I fully agree with your analysis and, like you, I find it difficult to believe in coincidences. Even if it were by apparent chance, the presence on Cuban television, a few days apart, of Jorge Serguera and Luis Pavón Tamayo must be interpreted as a symptom, and we would commit the grave error of silence if we don't carry out, immediately and by any means, the simultaneous work of complaint and analysis. Because complaining without a great deal of thought, like you're doing, about that past whose scars still survive in Cuban culture, can be useless, as would also be neutral thinking, which doesn't take a stand or confront different points of view.

We are living through a time as difficult as it is intense, and I am convinced that the direction that the country takes in the more or less immediate future is everyone's responsibility. The Cuban intellectual field, in my opinion, has become more complex in recent years, and, alongside an obvious right-wing thinking inside and outside of Cuba, there coexists a complacent position (a pragmatic right?) in which market opportunities are mixed with the official preference for attitudes of obedience and silence. "If they let me earn money in peace, I will keep quiet or applaud wholeheartedly" seems to be a frequent motto these days, fueled by the dissemination enjoyed by those who always agree and the usual contempt for those who, from the left and the revolution, prefer to think (and often disagree). Both sides, the belligerent right and the passive or pragmatic, can be a fertile ground not just for the resurgence of figures whose political capital, even for reasons of age, is very worn out, but for a type of thought that persists in our culture.

Thanks for the provocation. I would like your message to immediately trigger a really productive reaction, where matters more interesting than the number of candles on a television set are discussed.

With a hug, Arturo Arango
January 6, 2007

Another Message from Arturo Arango

Friends and *compañeros*:

The signs, the symptoms, are always complicated and diverse, and I think we're wrong if we only see (and condemn) some and ignore others. While these two appearances were taking place on television, in another area of reality the National Prize for Social Sciences was awarded to Fernando Martínez Heredia, *guevarista*, *fidelista*, *marxista*, one of the intellectuals who has most lucidly analyzed the Cuban history of the twentieth century. He is one of the founders and the director of the most important *Cuban*

Journal of Social Sciences, someone who is consistent to the point of pain with his ideas, who is always placing his thought in terms of action towards a future that he began to imagine when he was still in Yaguajay and that he still trusts. You also have to read this sign and accompany Fernando in his endeavors. Accompany him as he has always wanted his intellectual companions to do: attending to his words and disagreeing with him, listening to him and discussing. And if all this happens in front of a bottle (not of water), so much the better.

Arturo Arango
January 7, 2007

Arturo Arango to Desiderio Navarro and Reynaldo González

Desiderio, Reynaldo: I address this letter to you (although I send it to all those who, in one way or another, have been involved in this backlash), because I find it more comfortable to think that I am talking to two than to imagine that I'm speaking in front of a crowd. The debate, as expected, has exceeded its initial borders. I did it myself by adding the reading of the award to Fernando Martínez Heredia. Last night Desiderio spoke to me about another matter that, coincidentally, is also addressed in a compendium that I just received, containing many texts that I did not know; more explicitly, in the letters of Magaly Muguercia and Amir Valle. I mean the question of who should participate in the debate, or who has the right to participate in the debate. I shall try to give some ideas, perhaps disjointed:

Although we aren't the first to go down this road, yes, as far as I remember, it's the first time that such an important dialogue with so many voices has taken place by email. That condition, in itself, makes it roll like a snowball. The two texts that I have sent have reached people who are not even on my address list. I don't think it's bad. It's something dictated by circumstances, and we should take it into consideration. Don't those who live outside Cuba already belong to the corpus of Cuban culture? Doesn't their possible exclusion contradict the spirit of everything that we've done here to include everything concerning Cuba and its culture, which is scattered throughout the world? If we decide that this is a debate only "among revolutionaries" aren't we saying that those of us who live inside the Island are so, and those outside are no longer so, automatically? Doesn't a writer like Abilio Estévez, who suffered like few others from the consequences of the *pavonato*, have the right to participate? Does this problem concern only those who, because of their age, experienced it? Is it something from the past that doesn't involve or threaten the present and the future? I confess that if there's anything that alarms me at this moment it's that very few young people have expressed their opinion. I suppose they look at us thinking: what are these old men up to?

Although those of us who are participating belong to the field of artistic and literary culture, the period of dogmatization that we call the *pavonato* affected the entire country. Although my mother, my mother-in-law, my neighbors, don't know who Luis Pavón is, they were also harmed by him. Of course, I know that in a debate of these characteristics, two sides are not formed: those who denounce and those who are denounced. Between them there are different positions. In this particular case, the fact

that someone believes, like me, that the program dedicated to Pavón was a mistake doesn't imply that we both think in the same way. We can agree, if only on that point.

I am also aware that inclusiveness drags in the bad apples. There will always be an opportunist who joins in, someone who was on the side of the repressors in the 1970s and now puts his hands to his head, scandalized; also those who, from comfortable positions, cloud the debate, water it down, and we can't rule out the presence of the occasional provocateur. But, I insist, everything that happens is inevitable, and perhaps not all bad. Of course, as long as we speak with transparency, as the vast majority of those who participate have done so far, and are able to separate the chaff from the grain, the end of all this will be useful. That is, we must take care that the snowball follows the path that we choose, and not let it be diverted, so that, instead of clearing out the weeds, it destroys with its weight what we have already achieved.

Hugs,
Arturo A.

Arturo Arango to Orlando Hernández

Orlando: I have been immersed in this controversy for five or six days and, frankly, I am now quite saturated. Since yesterday I have only managed to forward the messages that reach me to those who may find them useful, without replying to the sender. But yours was extraordinary. We have to seize the moment and shouldn't do it by lamenting, passing the buck, or by apologizing, (which is also imperative), but, essentially, by refocusing our thinking and knowledge, and by unleashing our dormant strengths.

My hug, Arturo Arango

Arturo Arango in response to Orlando Hernández

Dear Orlando:

Obviously, this is an issue that moves on many levels, but the main one is that of politics, always so complicated. Indeed, without being called upon for discretion, I find that those of us who participated in the two meetings almost immediately lowered our tone, or shied away from the public debate. There is also a high dose of saturation, as I told you before. And, between us, different attitudes and expectations. The scope of such a process is always equal to the result, not the sum, of the expectations. There were agreements, in the second meeting, and explanations. To a lesser extent, for my expectations (but greater or absolute for others), the assurance that what happened, although it wasn't naive, wasn't a conspiracy and, moreover, that something similar won't happen again and that the ideological extremes of that which, by reduction, we call the *pavonato*, will not return.

What you saw from *Criteria*s is another result, which should be extended. I am not telling you how simply because some of those involved may not yet know of proposals that have to do with spheres that are under their direction. In summary, for the

moment, the conviction that it is necessary to study, know, and disseminate the processes that form Cuban cultural policy in all its contradictions was established as an agreement. And not just from the Seventies. For me, it is one of the most encouraging conclusions. There will also be everything else that is foreseeable: sanctions, information, etc.

In my opinion, there has also been an implicit result, which is happening among us for the first time, and which has set a precedent: the way the debate was established, the proportions of which we are not yet able to calculate. The mobilization, denunciation, and exchange of ideas by email has made it possible, for example, that you and I are exchanging opinions right now, after many years without speaking. Without speaking out of laziness, because everyday life leads us down different paths. But this is a lesson that we have all learned. And when I say all, I mean all. It is also important that no one has questioned the legitimacy of the method and that even those people who tried to silence it in their messages were criticized.

This afternoon I was returning home with Omaidá. A neighbor, a man in his forties at most, a former sportsman and rowing coach, greeted me warmly. He told me something about the candles and the television. It became obvious to me that he knew, but I thought he wanted to tell me about the messages that circulated about the Alfredo program. Before my gaze of indifference, he almost quoted the last line of my first message. And then he said, "I totally agree with you. You can count on my support." I was puzzled. I started by talking to you about politics. I mean the purest and hardest. It seems to me that the messages from abroad, as of the 11th, also caused contractions in some, and it's explainable. I wrote to Lichi thanking him for his letter.

Some of those messages bothered me as much as Pavón's appearance. They are closer to me. But I thought answering them was a mistake. Lichi was in a better position to do it. It wouldn't seem that he was acting out of fear, regret, opportunism. They are the interferences, the dirt that must also be cleared from the debate. Now I think that this impulse must not be allowed to decline, that it must be directed towards other areas, and that communication shouldn't be lost. As I wanted to tell you with the example of my sportsman neighbor, all this that we are writing to ourselves moves and infiltrates those other layers that also form the culture.

Your message, this same one that I answer, reached me in several ways. One of them, forwarded by Pineda Barnet. His answer is, I think, a reflection of the fact that for everyone, to varying degrees (depending on more or less skepticism), it is obvious that we have taken some step.

In the end I don't know if I have answered you or not. It's one download, then another.

Hugs, Arturo Arango

AVELINO VICTOR C. RODRÍGUEZ

Translated by Regina Anavy and Gustavo Loredó

Beyond Cyberspace

Dear Augusto,

I thank you very much—also the others, but above all you, the most systematic at least for keeping me abreast of many of the details raised in these singular beginnings of 2007 in terms of topics, which, in my opinion, in effect, are fundamental not only for Cuban culture but also for all of our current society; even, I would say, to save the best of the Revolution from its most dangerous enemy: the internal one (invariably masquerading as revolutionary), and thereby continue to contribute to the most hopeful lights in other peoples of the world.

I hadn't written to you before because I am the antithesis of the fisherman in a troubled river, which, unfortunately, is so abundant. You know that, today as yesterday, in these as in other social conflicts, they are not all those who are and they are not all that they are, and I hate to be confused with those who don't pretend to be more than 'the protagonist. But, of course, it cannot be a reason for the rivers to stop churning when it's essential to fertilize the land. On the other hand, I have too much respect for many of those who have closed ranks, and who, even if they don't know it, have been my teachers. Nor can this be confused with the pseudo-culture that also exists, where what counts is not what is said or done, but who says it or does it.

Entertainment is often confused with show business, and I detest the first and admire and respect the second a lot. So many great voices have been raised in order to teach and help us grow, especially with a talent that no one should lack, humanism. Some of them, moreover, were very hurt, and with good reason, since whoever tries to misrepresent the human and revolutionary thirst for justice as resentment or revenge of any kind, especially when they try to avoid the sad, horrible, and even irreparable setbacks that abound in History, becomes a natural ally, accomplice, and promoter of those who did so much damage and, even worse, of their current outbreaks.

Finally, I don't think it's appropriate to arrive at the wrong time, and even when I think there are things to say, the waters seem to calm down when new voices are incorporated, in a very irregular concert and not always with the necessary harmony. In this sense I remain calm within myself because I have already said what, in my opinion, remains to be said here on various platforms beyond cyberspace (in fact this is the first time I touch on these topics in emails, and, sincerely, I hope I don't repeat myself). I was often fine alone, without even waiting for any chorus with all its just dignity, for months and years before, systematically in my daily work, which I think is always our best weapon. However, if you estimate it as a contribution, I leave you full authority to incorporate it into the collective discourse.

The program with Papito Serguera bothered me (it was the one I saw of those mentioned) but it didn't surprise me; it wasn't even the thing that bothered me the most. I will explain myself below, because if unity, support, and new arguments are required to win a cause as just as it is urgent, here I humbly and modestly send you my analyses, the product of my subsequent experiences as another generation from that one, nuanced above all through my work as a researcher around, it is true, such a silenced moment, and what we could call, at least, current echoes.

As for those who will or will not intervene in the debate, I think, as Martí would say, let arms be open to all those of good will. That has to be the only proven condition: goodwill. Outside the country and all over the world (if it were not for the context and that obsolete label of "definitive exit" it would not be so painful to say it), there are Cubans and even non-Cubans who don't cease to make substantial contributions. Not a few have had to flee through similar situations like the ones we are dealing with, many essential and almost expelled. There are also, without the slightest doubt, those who did a lot of damage with the greatest hypocrisy and opportunism and then literally deserted (I would call it "treason" because what's unforgivable for me is those who have climbed over the works and lives of others). And today they intend to return to fish once more in troubled waters, always for their personal benefit.

At a certain point, there was talk of the "intellectual cowardice" that, in effect, existed. In the first place, I believe it's still there (at present, hopefully not in the future), inside and outside Cuba. It's not just a past to be remembered but also a present to be resolved. Also, it's unfair to place on the same scale the cowards who also took advantage of the situation to promote their own work and maintain social positions with those others who were simply the victims or who at least refrained from harming others, for which they are generally ignored, or at least were for many sad years, beyond five years and for decades.

Within the country we also have them of all kinds: many essential, genuine, even brave, and the cowards; and those others who haven't left for the simple reason that they know that they are more comfortable here and are still masked. One of the texts on which I insist most with my students is that anthological essay on our literature, *Máscaras Políticas/Political Masks* by Félix Varela, as current as it is insufficiently promoted. Another coincidence, or "simple" myopia of those in charge of this promotion in bookstores and curricula? Already in the difficult years of Varela, before and today, there have been and are such characters, cowards in one way or another; and of course, they are specimens without any originality, not at all exclusive to our society or to our process, but one of the universal humanoid misfortunes. But that doesn't invite benevolence toward "those from here"; quite the contrary, on behalf of the best not only of our culture, but of our humanity and humankind.

I also think that this debate concerns not only those (for one reason or another, in one way or another) who are blessed with a computer and—even more—with email in our country, not only artists and intellectuals, since the objectives of analysis include them, but go far beyond the government's cultural policy, even though I consider it essential for the entire system, which in fact is society, in so far as culture isn't only ministerial,

administrative, and not even institutional Culture, but is already recognized as the very spirit of all without exception, welcoming everyone with good will. It wasn't my generation that suffered directly from the so-called gray five-year period, but I think that, distinctively, the affectations reach everyone. I am the son of a painter of that generation (Manuel Couceiro Prado, who was also a promoter, teacher, scholar, critic, and among the artists with the most recognized and genuine anti-Batista revolutionary trajectory when he suffered torture, a fighter before and during the entire revolutionary process, who indisputably deserved the Combatant Medal among other merits). I remember in my childhood home that Papito Serguera was a name that was frowned upon not only by artists and intellectuals but even by popular mockery.

For reasons of age, I cannot give more details, but I do remember my father dying of a heart attack in November 1981 (long after that gray five-year period), fighting against extremists and opportunism within UNEAC itself (some of whom, shortly after, left the country, a cycle of gloomy irony that every Cuban, unfortunately, recognizes), with an attitude of confrontation toward high-ranking officials of yesteryear that won him their honorable antipathy. Consequently, even more than 25 years after his death and despite being considered among the flagship painters of those decades (protagonist in the Antibienal,³⁴ the University Booth,³⁵ the Nuestro Tiempo Cultural Society,³⁶ UNEAC, the National Council of Culture, the first Artists in the Communities Project, in artistic education, the Antillano Group,³⁷ etc.), it is difficult for any of his work to leave Cuba due to its patrimonial value, and many works are aging, almost hidden in the depths of the National Museum.

Even today, he has never been included, not even with one single work, in the exhibition halls, without the necessary promotion that would redound to the well-being of all Cuban culture, due to the rich variety that would be made explicit in our national palette in terms of personalities, styles, trends. This means that the abuse of power through personal hatreds for having been questioned and the intolerant confrontation not only reached the year 1981 but its damage also continues 25 years later, and it is that damage that opposes and completely misrepresents the cultural policy of the Revolution, which was never that; it is irreversible, but not in the hands of those officials who have manipulated it and manipulate it in the different institutions, levels, and sectors according to their own ego, causing serious damage to the image and to the revolutionary process itself.

³⁴ An alternative pictorial exhibition to the Bienal proposed by the governmental Institute of Culture to honor José Martí in his Centennial (1953) but sponsored by the Spanish Franco regime. Both exhibitions, the Bienal and the Antibienal took place between 1955 and 1956.

³⁵ The University Booth was a booth for cultural activities (painting exhibitions, theater, etc.) set up in Central Park of Havana by the Culture Department of the Federation of University Students (FEU) in the 1950s.

³⁶ The Nuestra Tiempo Cultural Society, created in 1951 and directed by the Popular Socialist Party, was formed to bring together leftist artists and intellectuals in order to study the roots of Cuban culture and Marxist philosophy.

³⁷ Grupo Antillano was an association of artists in Havana 1975-1985.

Rather than defining that it IS irreversible, I believe that we must fight so that it is not reversible, distorted by dogmas, the cliques, extremists, intolerant people of all kinds, egocentric, opportunistic and other humanoid miseries, neither before nor now. For my part, I continue to trust the authentic cultural policy of the Revolution, according to which the promotion of the best values of our culture (not only my father's) doesn't depend on the efforts of family members, nor on the exclusive cliques of officials according to sympathies or antipathies or personal prejudices of any kind or various cultural insufficiencies. I continue to trust the true promoters and the deepest and most courageous scholars of our culture. I don't believe at all that the injustice around my father has been an isolated event, with the silence about names that simply, due to their approaches at one time or another, didn't suit these same extremist cliques. How many other important names in our culture will we be ignoring, who nevertheless complete the hidden rainbow of Cuban culture in each historical moment? Science (with due ethics and rigor, inseparable) is there for this, to revalidate these names, which is to further enhance our culture and ourselves beyond all prejudice and other regrettable interests, and I trust in it, for my father and for others.

And it's not an isolated event, when many of those who committed atrocities in one way or another have remained in one position or another or have been punished "upwards," as the popular voice recognizes, not without foundation: in some way it recalls that historical document of our struggles, *Son los mismos* [*They are the Same*], although sometimes they aren't exactly the same people, many of whom would not want to undergo a more detailed analysis of such periods in question. I mean there were Pavón, Serguera, and others, but this doesn't diminish their personal guilt at all. If they flourished, it was, in the best of cases, because they were allowed to, which is inconceivable in what an authentically Socialist State should be. How could what was happening in plain sight get out of hand?

The most worrying thing is that there are these characters, although with other names, and the truly revolutionary thing to do at every moment is to confront them. Cyberspace has proven to be a noble but insufficient weapon. I have written about this for the first time online, and I don't think I'll do it again since, systematically in my daily work, I have been taking other stands that have occupied me more (without any demerits for the present), based on urgent battles like this one that concerns us all now. Above all, happily today we are occupied with so many, and of such great value. The debate must be extended to other forums, of which perhaps the one at the Casa de las Américas on January 30 was only the first, I hope happily, since the fact of entry by invitation has been a very regrettable and dangerous (we trust that it was not malicious) limitation, despite the justifications, with greater or lesser logic. But it should not just be cut off but should channel everyone's participation, for the sake of the authentic solutions we seek.

These debates demonstrate, among other things, that history writes itself, whether they want it to or not, and despite the most reactionary censorship (even more reactionary since it pretends to call itself revolutionary, which is the worst of counter-revolutions), our role will remain in it for better or for worse. Impunity is, in the best of cases, quite relative sooner or later, and those who today are apparently not victors also objectively already have their story that one day will come to light. These debates need to be taken

into account when one really wants to rectify errors, which are often horrors because they are repeated and indolent, and are necessary precisely so that the cultural policy of the Revolution remains irreversible and doesn't depend on prejudices and limiting subjects which contain an abundance of that internal enemy (opportunists, climbers, cliques), who do so much damage when they commit atrocities in the name of the Revolution itself and prostitute it according to their personal interests, their own ignorance and humanoid, egocentric pettiness, with arrogance and imposing authoritarianism.

There are no "unhealthy degrees of homophobia," as I also read; homophobia (natural daughter of heterosexuality, which is not the same as heterosexuality, and our entire environment from the womb degenerates into a heterosexualist pseudo-culture with more or less homophobic borders: the family, the community, the school, the media, etc.) It is, by definition, unhealthy. It can be more or less pathological and harmful, but it is always pathological and harmful, just like racism, and like all other types of discrimination, incompatible with what a communist should be, including a revolutionary, since homophobia (yes) is weighed down by the worst of the most retrograde previous societies.

Of course, within the revolutionary process there are stages, periods, and contexts, but they can't become dogmas. There was talk of the gray five-year period for other decades—from when to when? If we judge by homophobic repression, could it be added to Manzanero's song, as a decade of more than 30 years? And of course it has antecedents, even long before the Triumph of the Revolution, but it's precisely those disastrous antecedents that the Revolution is expected (and continues to be expected) to break with, so its analysis focuses on the expectations that it generates itself to end this inherited deformation, not to cradle it. I don't agree that they underlie Cuban culture, but rather the pseudo-culture.

Our idiosyncrasy (thus dogmatized and vilified in my opinion) also has numerous examples of tolerance and acceptance historically given, even more than in other peoples "of similar idiosyncrasies" such as Spain where, however, gay marriage is approved of today, or Brazil, whose soap operas have become the best sex education classes that our people receive in subjects like this, if we remember from Cecilia and Laís and Sandro and Jefferson to Eleonora and Jennifer, and Ubirazi and el Turco. By the way, am I the only one who feels a story is badly told, or perhaps cut, about these homosexual relationships in the current Brazilian soap opera *Señora del Destino* [*Señora of Destiny* ^]? It would be very painful to confront it with the original, which by law is supposed not to be violated in this way, and with many other examples from other Latin American cultures and "similar" idiosyncrasies.

In all cases, as revolutionaries, we must always look and direct ourselves towards the best and not towards the worst; revolutionaries who do nothing but look back are what I call "torticollis revolutionaries." I am outraged when they make it look like Cuban culture is the most retrograde in this respect. For me these are unpatriotic statements, because in very humble contexts and with little academic preparation there have been and are, enough human values to give multiple examples of tolerance and even

acceptance to others supposedly “better prepared.” No, this is something that cannot be dogma either, since of course, a better cultural preparation should provide better precedents, but it doesn’t necessarily accomplish this. Let’s not be academicist.

There are also those, of course and even more logically, who have a low level of all kinds, including human intolerance, and a high level of all kinds, including human acceptance. The phenomenon is more complex, and we cannot reduce it to titles, but it is pseudo-culture, not culture. Beyond the five-year period and the decade, I hope I was not the only one who heard “The homosexuals should get out!” in 1980, the year of “the University is for revolutionaries”; careers and lives were destroyed for those having mannerisms or suspicions of homosexuality. I had to choose then between continuing to be a militant or continuing being what in my opinion a communist should be, and I didn’t hesitate about the second option. Nor do I accept that anyone can justify himself by saying that that the moment was difficult, because at that very moment there were other attitudes that perhaps demanded greater courage.

Inside and outside the Base Committee, I managed with the help of other crazy people like me, even using chairs as a weapon on a certain very tense occasion (tensions and harm reached such a high degree and even worse and should have been avoided on that occasion, which eventually degenerated into a personal purge) to prevent people within my context from being expelled for suspicion of homosexuality, or for going to religious activities—not even for practicing them but simply for attending them. A colleague was expelled from the UJC³⁸ for having gone to a Roosters Mass.³⁹ Another non-militant was forced to refuse to visit the Convent of San Juan de Letrán, on pain of being expelled from the University. Then some of the girls who directed the process in our classroom for the UJC, with evident lesbian features, called on us men of the Base Committee to go with sticks to hit everyone we saw at Coppelia who had long hair or homosexual mannerisms. The action was frustrated because the men refused, and the girls didn’t go beyond shouting that they would do it personally.

Terror was betrayed in everyone’s eyes. I was no longer on the Base Committee; they had proposed a sanction for “criticizing militants who couldn’t be criticized” (I think the self-denomination itself self-qualifies them) and being “leader of the masses” (I assume it as too much honor for me). My record as a militant had been “lost” and therefore deactivated. This was very convenient for those who directed such a process, whose homosexuality in two of them was revealed shortly after, although in the meantime they wanted to expel a classmate for having gay mannerisms and even managed to take away his student residence (he was able to save his career because we *habaneros* sheltered him in our houses), and another had to skip the year. Not by chance, almost all those who tried to “get out of the way” had the best records.

Other “hunters” still try to conceal their homosexuality (male and female), hiding behind their social positions, although in general today, they (badly) disguise

³⁸ The Young Communist League, the youth organization of the Communist Party of Cuba.

³⁹ Also called the Shepherds Mass, a midnight mass on Christmas Eve.

themselves as free thinkers. I think that poking a finger into sores like the film, *No se lo digas a nadie* [*Don't Tell Anyone*], was very upsetting in Cuba, sometimes to the point almost of aggression. Nothing strange, right? All this and that "Get out," self-betrayed by attacking those who were leaving, wrote another of the saddest periods during the revolutionary process by the harm it did to its image. "Get out" should have been, simply, "Let them go." Attacking them stained the Revolution itself, and that is the true counterrevolution. I don't know if those who extend the "gray decade" include 1980. However, not everything culminated in 1980.

In 1983, personally, I was the victim of a false accusation by a policeman dressed in civilian clothes (worse than worse) in Santa María del Mar. I was talking with another guy about absolutely trivial topics (the day, the sea, *Yemayá*) almost two meters away from each other sitting on the sand, when a mulatto (let's not forget among the humanoid miseries multidirectional racism), after asking for my identity card (not that of the other young man, which shows that there was nothing else between us), said that there was no problem but asked me to accompany him to the station.

He put me in the only empty seat that was left on a bus where all of us were later accused of cross-dressing in a public place and "creating a scandal." I saw some of the girls leave after somewhat intimate conversations with some of the guards, about which everything I say would be speculative; also some boys who were picked up by powerful *papás*, including a military man. Those of us who didn't have *papás* or intimate conversations with anyone spent three nights and days in a cell in subhuman conditions, and I was able to verify that not only in my case was the accusation false, but that many of them didn't know each other either. This had negative and traumatic impacts for each individual and for various family members; some even missed work on Monday, and of course, there was the whole consequent negative political impact.

There was a trial where the question was not whether it was true that we were cross-dressing; the question was whether or not we were homosexual, which I refused to answer because it wasn't the issue of the trial and couldn't be by the Constitution. It wasn't (couldn't be) why they accused us, but because of the false "public scandal." We received a warning letter saying that we could no longer visit the eastern beaches. I had to pay the fine to be able to leave. I hired a lawyer to appeal and to charge the police for the false accusation. The lawyer refused to support me, saying that we would never win a battle against that policeman, whom I never saw again after he took me to the bus. Thanks to a witness, I won the trial months later. I had that satisfaction, although at the high cost of tension, health, and humiliation.

Probably I still have the documents of that embarrassing incident . . . embarrassing not for me, but for those who committed such horror. It wasn't a mistake; it was a horror. Of course I recall it without the slightest shame, with the justice and peace of mind that concerns all who are innocent. It's not possible to live in a context in which any abuse of power can accuse you, even if it's falsely, and that's that. Hence my confrontation, being the only one who appealed; the others, although innocent, were crushed by circumstances. Don't misinterpret this as resentment, but as a critical analysis to which

our history must be subjected due to the current incidents to which no one wants to return.

Even in mid-1984, I was arrested with two friends while leaving the ballet at the García Lorca, where the police waited to choose between the public that left the performance (the ballet was suspect), and they asked me personally whether I lived in Plaza de la Revolución and what I was doing in Old Havana, to which I replied that since the municipalities weren't at war, they couldn't consider me a spy. Thanks to a politician at the relevant station, this time they didn't make us spend the night, and there were no trials or fines, but was it necessary? Did it or did it not cause a lot of harm?

In those same years, a group of young people who were waiting to enter the singing café of the Hubert de Blanck theater were stoned by two individuals out front. They all fled, except Samuel and I, and when they saw that we didn't run, the two individuals hit us. We thought we would face a stupidly imposed battle, one not so dirty, but the individuals hid stones between their hands and metal rings, and I almost lost an eye. The entire theater witnessed the event. The police picked up Samuel and me, and in the patrol car we toured the surroundings until we found the individuals, who already were at Zapata and C. They explained that they had to finish off the fags who were going to the theater, while we explained to the officer that we had been attacked and that we wanted to formally accuse them, me with my bleeding face, only to receive the answer from the smiling officer that if we accused them it would be their word against mine and that anyone could very well speak out against us, ignoring our proposal that the theater was full of witnesses. The best we managed was that they let us go before the attackers could attack us again, as they continued to display their threats in front of the police.

Also in 1985, I ran into a friend, another young and excellent economist whose only crime was to dress fashionably and leave the Casa del Té in Old Havana (in my opinion, its golden age in every sense). He was attacked with cans of trash and chased by the attackers all over Obispo Boulevard. The police appeared only in order to accuse him of "public scandal," although in this case, fortunately, they didn't go beyond intimidation. These are not at all isolated or accidental events, nor do I think I was the most unfortunate of this time period. I know of many other cases all these years, more and less horrible. Who doesn't? I'm sure that if we summoned our combined experiences we would obtain at least one encyclopedia, but the intention (at least now) is not to recap so many unfortunate anecdotes, nor the belated complaint, but to ask ourselves whether these years are not part of the quinquennium, or the gray decade? To what extent would "gray," which ultimately is still a color with the same potential as every other color, be the appropriate adjective for it?

In my younger years of bohemian artist life, I was always studying and working with optimal results, and I've never stopped doing this for one day in my life, which is evident in all my work and my student and professional careers, with excellent results. When the Special Period occurred, the police were the greatest obstacle we had to that stage of life that is so necessary and that so enriches the nightlife (and daytime life) and Cuban culture. Let's remember the glorious years of Gato Tuerto, Pico Blanco del St. John, the cabarets, the genuine heritage of our culture in the hotels that couldn't cope with the

crowds, and I now sadly remember an article in our written press that tried to defend the culture of the cabaret under the title: “The cabaret: a necessary evil.” It was the time of other nightclubs that, even with their limitations, led to the heyday of the Cuban culture of yesteryear, in particular in certain areas of the capital.

They asked us intimidatingly, what we were doing at 10:00 at night in a park, with our poems, our guitars, our street improvisations, which in short was a particularly creative stage of my life (I was among the founders of the Association of Young Artists of Cuba in 1986). The 21st century was beginning, and Culture Ciudad de La Habana asked me to do research to determine why the nightlife of La Rampa had ended. It almost seemed like a joke. Between the bad transport, everything in dollars (until then strongly penalized and suddenly revered) without implying better service in the long run, nothing was still open 24 hours as required by all nightlife and metropolitan areas, and on top of that the police. What could you expect?

Another battlefield that occurred almost daily during (at least) the entire decade of the '90s took place at each Latin American Film Festival, exactly every time a film was projected in which gay themes were known or suspected, which until then had been censored. It was difficult to understand when the police (sometimes, the cinema administration itself) actually helped organize this activity, generating all kinds of annoyances, inconveniences, often humiliations, while a solidly massive and highly heterogeneous public, far beyond all sexual orientation, had always shown an interest in these shows, which had a good reception, without discrimination, among people who were disciplined and motivated. A similar incident happened at the Karl Marx Theater when the Beatles movie was first announced, in which the police came to “stand guard” as if the public were a cell of violent murderers, which together with the unnecessary delay of the theater administration, provided a dismal track record that motivated me to write a theatrical piece (“A Young Man Named Beatle”) that, despite having already obtained a National Prize in Children’s Theater, was not promoted by the same Dramaturgy Workshop to which I still belonged.

Haven’t you read from time to time and during all these years, even at the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st, in our written press where what is published must be selected very well, a small, harmful article by “indignant moralists” who have called for crusades against the “perverts” of the Malecón, of La Rampa, of Coppelia? Didn’t you hear about Operation Dignity barely in 2005 and 2006? A popular but very credible voice (since nothing is ever officially published about this) recounts that Mariela Castro herself had to go to liberate them; and it’s almost a paradox, or a reaction, that while Ambrosio Fornet, Desiderio Navarro, and others debated these issues at the Casa de las Américas on January 30, 2007 (a date that will undoubtedly go down in the history of our culture as a more consistent application of our cultural policy), the homophobic police raids were raging again, and they returned to the Malecón to pick up all the alleged homosexuals (let’s not ignore the mistakes) on whom they had already imposed warning letters and fines when they were picked up on Zapata and C.

Personally, I was on Saturday in “the areas” of the Malecón, which now seem to be like the old clubs, where sitting was “by couple” (meaning heterosexual couples). Let’s also

include the politically counterproductive and anti-Havana measure, according to which the person who is in the capital without residing there is returned to his province, and various fines of hundreds of pesos are imposed. As a traditional *habanero*, I feel offended by that measure, which only (de) generates regionalism and the worst feelings in people, according to which we *habaneros* reject those of other provinces, which is absolutely distorted. These measures often are taken by people who officiate in the capital but who obviously don't represent the richness of the entire national culture with which our capital has historically been nurtured and shaped, with as much hospitality as can be, despite the fact that they have imagined another image, perhaps due to measures and regulations like the ones that now bother us: measures directed mainly against young people, mainly men suspected of prostitution, homosexuality, etc.

None of which justifies such an antipolitical and false solution, while the new and very correct slogan "capital of all Cubans" flourishes everywhere: an incredible contradiction. Is none of that part of the quinquennium or gray decade? At least as echoes or nefarious inheritances they must be evaluated. Of course it's much easier to talk about the past than about current problems, but it's much more revolutionary to face and try to solve current problems, just so no one else can continue to betray the cultural policy of the Revolution, nor its best ideals that have cost so much blood and sacrifice.

To all the above we must add within our own sector, artistic and aesthetic intolerances, impositions of personal tastes, elitism, populism, dogmatic and egocentric reductions of "the Cuban," and even racism, if we remember the multi-directionality of racism. That is why I said at the beginning that, of course, seeing Serguera on television bothered me, and I share the general indignation, but it didn't surprise me, and it wasn't even what bothered me the most. How about the new attempts against any other art or musical taste, against any other group outside the conventions, that recall those hunts against the pioneers of rock, and even the new *trova* . . . worthy heirs of those who also attacked *danzón* before, and who are always against everything new?

Don't we learn from history? Let's stand in front of the John Lennon statue today at 17 and 6 if we need to remember. There are creators (very sad when real luminaries are detected among them) of a pathological egocentrism that would do no harm if it weren't for their animosity to everything "other" for supposedly aesthetic reasons. They would gain much more with greater understanding, if not assimilation, of otherness. I don't want to add the derogatory tones (also televised) against the *blanquitos*⁴⁰ with various adjectives added, against the most genuine and diverse "Cuban color." All it does is promote racism (racism against all color of skin, hair, or eyes is equally dangerous and harmful) and consequently divide what, like Dr. Jesús Guanche, I recognize as "the Cuban ethnos" (one among many in its rich diversity). It weakens our culture and, once more, misrepresents our cultural policy. All this forms part of the same system of dangers, which we must not allow under any circumstances to be re-imposed.

As I said at the beginning, I never expected this massive reaction, and I believe, like Martí, that the best weapon in combat is our own work and our same daily life. In fact,

⁴⁰ Derogatory term for white people.

aware that it is the task of all and among all, I have appealed several times to the National Center for Sex Education itself (when coinciding in events, when inviting them to our joint actions with Culture and in the communities, when proposing a work in 1998 entitled “Homosexual Culture?” to which I never received an answer, although it was successfully hosted for an International Anthropology Symposium), because our society is in need of an anti-homophobic education, as constant and systematic as most, and in all these years, it hasn’t been done. It’s not enough to tell the transvestite or homosexual their rights and welcome them in their institution, or go and remove them from police stations, cells, the fields.

Taking them to said stations and cells should be avoided, as well as unnecessarily disturbing them when they haven’t caused any disorder. And let’s clarify that the mere fact of considering “disorder” in a homosexual as something that is not evaluated in a heterosexual is homophobia, against which we must fight. It is homophobia not to allow to homosexuals what heterosexuals are allowed, like shaking hands or a kiss, at least on the cheek. It’s not only transvestites, transsexuals, homosexuality, bisexuality, metrosexuals, etc. but also all of society that must be educated in the rights that we all have to choose our sexuality, and this isn’t done.

At least, not as our country urges, given the antecedents analyzed. In fact, I think that homophobia, like racism, religious differences, and other marginalizations that explicitly harm human dignity should be directly and explicitly condemned in our Constitution, without any ambiguity. I believe that the legal sciences themselves should also take part in this urgent battle, for a more advanced culture of law and duty in our population. I repeat that I never waited for cyberspace to say this, nor for a choir that, moreover, I respect very much and which I’m not afraid at all to join, if necessary. But from the very formation in 1989 of our Cultural Development Program in the Plaza de la Revolución, as a specialist, I was explicit about the sexual culture that they call today (even abuse, I would say, with new dogmas and a certain misrepresentation also against specialties) “integral culture,” and I feel honored for having created since then and from this my little country, a first trench.

In particular, space has been successfully opening up against prejudices, specifically with the subjects of homosexuality and the fight against homophobia, since 1993, from our municipal events to others (I already mentioned the international one of 1998). It has implicitly been present in other works of mine all these years, and we have explicitly accommodated that generational group that, fortunately, in the most diverse disciplines (History, Sociology, Anthropology, Socio-Cultural Studies, Psychology, Biology, Social Communication, and a vast etc.) have been assuming the topic more and more, with less prejudice and in with more variety and bravery.

I speak of this in my own work, although it seems to me that the frontal fight against homophobia is still in its infancy, diapers that we also have to help change. Personally, in my Diploma in Contemporary General History, it was the theme that I developed in Asian cultures and their periphery, and in North America (very well received: in my opinion, it merits that we have to recognize the Department of History of the University of Havana). Its extension to Cuba was accepted in July 2006 by the Union of Cuban

Historians of the City of Havana (with all its co-sponsors, including the Provincial PCC and the Office of the City Historian) and excellently welcomed in its Emilio Roig de Leuchsenring Third Symposium. Later it was given first mention in “Culture and Development” of the City of Havana, the first event of our cultural system in the capital that assumed this theme, which until then was banned year after year. (Here what I recognize as “small homophobias” came to light, especially for misunderstanding, but the support was again unanimous, all of which means that in all these events and sectors there are also the best wills.) Homophobia in the country was analyzed in all these years, with multiple examples of great relevance.

Equally successful was the reception that, once again and as it did in 1998, the Institute of Anthropology of Cuba gave to my new topic, now linked to homosexual and bisexual prostitution, *Los Pingueros y sus Clientes* [*Male Prostitutes and their Clients*], published in its “Memories.” All this shows that we are not alone and that there is further interest and need. Even at the last Caracol Theoretical Event, my work, *Lo que quedó oculto de la Luna* [*What was Hidden of the Moon*], referred to homophobia on Cuban television, basically the unhappy treatment in the Cuban telenovela of the moment, where the debate was cut short supposedly due to lack of time, and I couldn’t express my disagreement with the person who suggested that this was due to the lack of good scriptwriters. I think it’s much more complex and profound; it’s not fair to limit a scapegoat to the lack of scriptwriters.

But we can consider that space in the Caracol a success, and as a result, this anti-homophobic proposal was also very well received (although I noticed more shyness than in previous events), an analysis to be extended to other television and radio examples, where not many things are put on. I agree with Enrique Colina, although I think that to the Cuban examples that he cites we should add excellent examples of non-Cuban and anti-homophobic cinema that has not been shown either, and it would be very good as part of an anti-homophobic education in our population. It is striking in the case of “Brokeback Mountain,” which is not shown on television (almost exceptionally it was shown two or three days in theaters in the capital), that homophobic jokes of very doubtful taste have been promoted on television (Lázaro, in *Los Amigos de Pepito* [*Pepito’s Friends*]: he likes all cowboy movies and would work in any of them, except *Brokeback Mountain*), among other frankly homophobic pseudo humor in our media, some now almost, unfortunately, traditional.

The outrage of intellectuals and artists about the homophobia against them in the infamous UMAP⁴¹ 30 years ago, and beyond the UMAP in the workplace and military units, for aspiring to careers, etc. is very just. It should also include intolerance in religious matters or against correspondence with family and friends abroad, even against fashions, just to cite these examples, but the most important thing is to cut the current tentacles of the monster in time, and this, if we claim to be consistent with ourselves, cannot be limited to cyberspace. Therefore, to finish, I tell you that just two

⁴¹ Military Units to Aid Production were agricultural concentration camps operated by the Cuban government from November 1965 to July 1968 in the province of Camagüey. They were a form of forced labor for Cubans who could not serve in the military because they were conscientious objectors, religious, homosexuals, or political enemies of Fidel Castro.

days ago, this Monday, January 5, at a meeting that the Culture workers in the Plaza de la Revolución municipality held with the First Secretary of the PCC in our municipality and with the President of the Municipal Government Mayra Lasalle, I raised precisely what I was telling you a little earlier: the current homophobic police raids in the streets of our Rampa and Malecón are still happening, even with this just indignation produced by the excesses, mistakes, and horrors from three decades ago.

It is fair to highlight not only the unanimous support of the entire Assembly, but particularly the receptivity of both senior leaders of life in this territory. I made it clear, of course, that this must not happen in any corner of revolutionary Cuba, but at least they with their powers should stop the police here in their radius of action and call for it in the rest of the country, as the best application of our cultural policy. They said they didn't know the facts but they took note; of course, they proposed to verify first if it hadn't been the kind of public disorder that the police must always combat beyond all sexual orientation, to which I replied that it was necessary to define what homophobic repressors would understand by "public disorder," a concept that cannot be changed according to sexual option. But the condemnation of homophobia, and above all, its application in the name of the Revolution, the PCC, or any military body was unanimous. And this is urgent to achieve on every Cuban corner, and for all of Humanity.

I'm not saying that with this we have won the battle, but I'm indicating, since there was talk of intellectual cowardice, that the battle cannot remain in cyberspace. The "chorus of the worthy" and the "little war of e-mails" are more than valid; I would say they are historical. Also, in each space of every individual, the battle must be daily and without quarter, at all levels, and only the masked counterrevolutionaries are those who can doubt that this battle is not "within the Revolution." Quite the opposite: it is urgent for the survival of the Revolution itself. I trust our Minister of Culture; I trust UNEAC and the most authentically advanced of our artists and intellectuals; I trust the most genuine cultural policy of our Revolution; I trust the best of our leadership and of all our people, without whom we would not achieve anything, so that far from setbacks, the future that we are building in the present becomes more and more of all, and for the good of all, as Martí dreamed.

Do with these lines what you want; I leave them in your hands and forgive me for delegating them to you like this. I value you enough for that and trust your judgment as to what I can contribute with these experiences and consequent reflections, that it's not simply part of what, in truth, threatens to be a hemorrhage or digital avalanche. I believe that we must save the best of all this and, above all, avoid damage, effectively and constructively. My solidarity and affectionate and respectful greetings to all those of good will in this battle, especially to you and Reynaldo González, who, I suppose, remembers me, with all my love,

VELY
Avelino Víctor Couceiro Rodríguez
February 7, 2007

BELKIS CUZA MALÉ

Translated by Regina Anavy and Gustavo Loredó

Although the debates around the situation of intellectuals and artists in Cuba are always interesting, this time I didn't have the slightest interest in opening my mouth because neither Luis Pavón (alias Leopoldo Ávila) nor the fat Quesada nor Papito Serguera deserve that I waste my time naming them. Unfortunately they have survived while many of their victims have not.

Everyone knew in the cultural environment of the 1970s that Luis Pavón and the others responded only to the policy of Fidel Castro, the only one who for almost five decades has dictated and repressed not only culture, but also the entire Cuban society. Nothing was done in Cuba that didn't have his approval or was not by his order. Pavón then responded to the army, led by Raúl Castro, but everything emanated from the commander-in-chief. The UMAPs, the attacks by Leopoldo Ávila in the *Verde Olivo* [*Olive Green*] magazine, and the parameters under which cultural policy was implemented were all conceived and engineered by Fidel Castro. It was he who named as "rats" those 75 renowned intellectuals who dared to protest the arrest of Heberto Padilla and then denounce the poet's self-criticism, carried out under police pressure.

These protests now by certain writers on the island before the tribute to Pavón and group have only one purpose: to defend what has effectively cost them years of suffering and humiliation. Some of them are victims now rehabilitated, because as a result of the Padilla case they ended up in factories or, in the best of cases, in subordinate jobs in libraries.

And it should be clarified that if they fell out of favor then, it was simply and merely because at some point or other they spoke out against the revolution, with the aggravating circumstance that some were homosexuals and State Security didn't stop setting traps for them, thus creating new crimes. Of course, they were never dissidents because, except for Antón Arrufat—part of this group now—who wrote *Los siete contra Tebas* [*The Seven Against Thebes*] and was awarded in 1968 along with *Fuera del juego* [*Out of the Game*] by Heberto Padilla, which provoked the ire of the repressors, the others were limited to commenting in hushed tones or with foreign writers visiting Cuba about the political situation at that time.

Most of those who now write agitated messages of protest have risen up the ranks in official Cuban culture, some to high levels. They are "national prize-winners" for literature, constantly traveling abroad on official missions or invited by universities and institutions around the world. They have published their books in Cuba and abroad and have even obtained international awards rigged by the Cuban government. Suddenly, all that is in danger, and fear makes its appearance.

But did you hear any of them raise their voices when two years ago the 75 writers, journalists, and dissidents who are still in prison today were imprisoned, except for a few who have been released? What have they said then and now? Who then defended his colleague Raúl Rivero? Has anyone dared to ask for justice for Dr. Oscar Biscet? Who

denounced the imprisonment of Reinaldo Arenas, René Ariza, Heberto Padilla? Or the execution of the writer Nelson Herrera, or years later the outrage and imprisonment of María Elena Cruz Varela and Tania Díaz Castro? Or who protested when at the end of the sixties Virgilio Piñera, and many other writers, were separated from the UNEAC, that “shell of figurines,” as Heberto Padilla called it at the time? No, those national literature awards only serve so that some can believe they’re truly great writers. So that Antón Arrufat can sing the praises of the Minister of Culture who returned him to the fold as the prodigal son, or Carilda Oliver Labra loses her memory.

In one of those texts written from Cuba, Reina María Rodríguez, “the girl on the roof,” says that Heberto Padilla asked to return to Cuba several times and was always denied permission. If that had been true, she would be talking about something that I don’t criticize, since exiled Cubans have been traveling to Cuba since 1978, but it was not like that in the case of Heberto, who never requested such permission. He knew very well what this would mean to him: a political game that didn’t interest him.

On the contrary, Reina María Rodríguez was the emissary who tried to “seduce” Heberto with the idea that he should visit Cuba. After that congress in Sweden, she never tired of playing the game that was clearly assigned to her by State Security. It was she who made arrangements, encouraged by *la Cantante*, the singer, a sinister character who was then hanging around Heberto. I know very well that each and every one of these official writers maintains close contact with the State Security agents.

And I’m not talking through my hat. At the UNEAC headquarters, while I was working there in the editorial office of *La Gaceta de Cuba* in 1975, I and all the others were required to attend a tribute to the officers who “attended” the writers and artists. And what would not be my surprise to discover that everyone present greeted their “partner” with hugs and winks.

Reina María Rodríguez has twice won the Casa de las Américas Prize, has published all her work in Cuba, has traveled non-stop, even to the United States, and her rooftop is more popular than the well-known house of Marina⁴² in Havana in the 1950s. Heberto Padilla is dead and can’t refute Reina María Rodríguez, but I’m not going to remain silent now, when I see how they intend to continue dirtying his memory. Because going to Cuba in the circumstances that “the girl on the roof” was looking for was a surrender to the regime that humiliated and imprisoned him. It was not the first time that Heberto received emissaries from Cuba attempting emotional blackmail. Let each one say what he wants about Luis Pavón and his cronies. It’s a good way to know what people are really thinking, here and in that “velvet exile.”

January 26, 2007

⁴² A house of prostitution.

BELKIS VEGA

Translated by Regina Anavy and Gustavo Loredó

Hello, Gustavo,

Thank you for sending me the discussion. I don't know how to join the analysis, but I feel that I need to do it. If you can, send this opinion to whoever you want. Although I confess that it is difficult for me to express myself and organize my ideas in this way, I don't want to stop doing it because I think that the resurrection by television of those who we believed to be corpses cannot be allowed without a reaction of rejection. I want to add my considerations to those who have made their analyzes so far. Deep and well-argued reflections have been written, and it's important that they don't stop here.

I was studying Design when Pavón was president of the CNC and Armando Quesada was in charge of Theater and Dance, and I remember perfectly the tragedy of the *parametrados* and the almost total destruction of some theater groups, as well as the censorship in the field of literature. I was personally familiar with this, since I was involved in University television, and, as such, was one of the scriptwriters and assistants for the television program *6 and 30 p.m.* These "orientations" were cultural, in relation to the treatment of art and literature on television, with the personal additions of Papito Serguera.

I will never forget the impression of almost conspiracy that one felt when reading Lezama or Dulce María, the sad memory of finding Cintio Vitier and Fina García Marruz working hours in a cubicle at the National Library, exposing yourself to being pigeonholed as an ideological diversionist because you liked the Beatles and not the Casino or Mozambique,⁴³ the possibility that your friends would have their hair cut in the middle of the street or you would have to lower the hem of your skirt to be able to enter school. Someone told me a few months ago that Armando Quesada was working on television, and I didn't want to believe it. He now resurrects himself as the protagonist of programs along with Serguera and Pavón. I didn't watch the programs but what I have read here is enough for me. I think it's really regrettable and more than regrettable, it's worrisome.

I think that we are in an internal ideological confrontation between a Marxist, revolutionary thought versus a flattened, pamphlet thought. That is why I also believe that the debate should not be limited to this exchange of emails. As Zenaida says, it's time for voices to be raised and heard!

Another Message from Belkis Vega

Look at the past from the present. I believe that this has been a principle for most of the Cubans who have been participating in this debate.

⁴³ Casino and Mozambique were Cuban dance rhythms in vogue during the sixties and seventies. Others that followed were promoted by the Government to fill the void left by international youth music, which was considered "ideological diversionism" and therefore banned.

Ever since I can remember being able to reason I have been hearing the same paralyzing phrase repeated over and over again: “This is not the time; this is not the place ...”

As for those of us who believe that being a revolutionary means being transformative, nonconformist, and critical, we have also procrastinated by waiting for that time and place that never arrives. And always for the supposedly noble and unifying but also paralyzing purpose of not giving arms to the enemy, without realizing that a paralyzing stagnation is a very efficient weapon.

It happened to me one more time last week when I tried—naively?—to bring some of the concerns that we are exchanging to the theoretical debate that was taking place at the Television Festival. It happened that it was neither the time nor the place. I think many of us are no longer willing to wait any longer. I think that we have lost many things in this waiting; life has passed us by in this waiting.

I remember that during the most critical years of the special period, a friend told me that each Cuban should be asked if he wanted to continue living in Cuba and if the answer was affirmative, give them the party card directly. It seemed like a very good idea. I think that most of us who are still here have proven again and again that we are interested in the social project of the Revolution, in its broadest sense: as a humanist project that aims to rescue and defend human dignity and develop a society that meets the growing needs of its men and women. This seems elementary but many have forgotten. Neither our society is perfect nor are any of us. It’s essential to talk about mistakes, assume them, reflect on them, and try not to repeat them.

I have always wondered who has the right to decide that they are the guarantors, the censors, or the classifiers of what is revolutionary or not. It’s very easy to look up a dictionary and remember what the definition of revolutionary is. Sheep are not revolutionary. Men and women with a vocation for sheep would never have raided the Moncada barracks. To propose this, you had to want to transform the world. It was necessary to dream big to storm the sky.

I read Colina’s writing and went through the list he makes of Cuban films not shown on television. I also recalled how many of the filmmakers who began directing at the Hermanos Saíz Association Workshops in the 1980s are no longer here. And I remembered my recent sleepless nights when I tried to find a proposal so that the analytical, reflective, and critical works of some of the young Cuban filmmakers didn’t remain in the space of a sample; so that these young people could find their space in our Cuba—that of all Cubans—and not have to look for it in other latitudes like so many.

It hurts me, it lacerates me, I don’t understand the exclusive policies.

Knowing the mistakes, analyzing them, learning from them. Being dissatisfied, wanting to be better, criticizing what was badly done to amend it, respecting and taking differences into account. Does any of this sound “not revolutionary”?

A few months ago, a Miami television channel showed the incomplete documentary *De buzos, leones y tanqueros* [*Dumpster Divers, Pickers and Scavengers*] made by young Cuban filmmakers studying at the Instituto Superior de Arte. This documentary had been recognized in some festivals in our country and selected by specialized critics as among the most significant made in 2005. Channel 41 of Miami television held a manipulative debate on its content. The director of the documentary wrote to the channel stating that he considered this manipulation a violation of his rights. Many people in Cuba found out from comments about that showing in Miami that this documentary existed and tried to see it, but the documentary is not shown publicly; it circulates “underground.” Something similar happened with Eduardo del Llano’s fictional short, *Monte Rouge* and with other works; these are just two examples.

And I always wonder if it is not much more beneficial to bring these works to a public debate. Show them on television, make a panel where the creators of the works can debate opinions with journalists and other people. In short, are we going to continue extending the controversy about our reality, the one we live every day, until we get a right time and a suitable place that never appear?

There are many works that are made within the revolution by Cuban artists and writers who are HERE and who have every right to have their own voice and to draw attention to aspects of our reality to which a solution MUST be sought.

Criticism, self-criticism; jumps from the quantitative to the qualitative, unity and struggle of opposites: these now seem like Martian words and phrases for many in our country.

Where have the principles of dialectical materialism gone? Those that not even our young people study anymore. Not even the fall of socialism in Europe has made me think that Marx was wrong in his formulations. History has proven that it is much more complex to apply Marxism to everyday life than to theorize it. But out of curiosity I would very much like to know how many people in our country today know what characterizes a society as socialist. Any of us at any time can expose ourselves to being questioned as revolutionaries by some officials who claim to have the right to catalog the revolutionary and the non-revolutionary and who confuse the dogmatic with the revolutionary.

It’s no secret to anyone that all this generates self-censorship, and I think that all of us have self-censored a lot. There are battles that we have won when we have defended our works and our positions in a courageous, energetic way and with solid arguments. The examples that Colina exposes referring to the film *Alice in Wondertown* or the refusal of the ICAIC filmmakers to the decision to be unified with the ICRT are proof of this.

The controversy must come out of our emails. I think it is essential to find a way for these debates to spread and open up participation. I think that this analysis of the gray five-year period that began here and will be deepened with Ambrosio Fornet’s conference and subsequent exchange should serve as a starting point to re-appropriate

our own history, go forward and find many opportunities here and now where we Cuban men and women can reflect on our reality in order to transform it.

Reflections Provoked by the “Loving” email written by Paquito de Rivera to Fefé Diego

Some would be better off keeping quiet ...

And I don't say this because of intolerance, much less because I don't respect difference in thought.

I say it simply because I think it's better to keep quiet up when you cannot express thought with consistency and respect for others.

It's really a pity to find such a big contradiction between musical talent and the ability to disclose ideas with a minimum of argumentation and depth.

A few years ago I was at the Miami International Film Festival, exactly the year in which the festival bravely decided to show Fernando Pérez's film *la vida es silbar* [*Life is to Whistle*], widely interpreted as critical of the Castro regime], exposing it to the punishment of losing part of its financing by showing a work by a Cuban from here.

After the exhibition of the films, you could attend jazz concerts in a hotel—I think it was the Sheraton. Well, there I was one night willing to enjoy the musical talent of Paquito de Rivera and what was my astonishment to hear him make unpleasant and vulgar jokes about the situation of the child, Elián González, whom his family in Miami didn't want to return to his father.

Never in Cuba did I hear Paquito oppose the UMAP or criticize Marx or question the socialist definition of the Cuban Revolution.

As much as I have tried to remember, I don't remember any “courageous” position of Paquito de Rivera against all the terrible things that according to his list have occurred in our country.

I don't even remember that he tried to criticize the Stalinist stage of the USSR, since he didn't dare criticize “the terrible” things that were happening around him.

It seems that at that time he assumed the same attitude as the rest of the Cuban writers and artists “who have so irresponsibly supported such a bloody regime,” according to what he says. I don't know then what courage he is talking about. Or courage for him is to insult in a public email an exceptional musician like Carlos Santana for deciding to have a T-shirt with the image of Che Guevara.

Neither have I heard that the so-brave Paquito de Rivera opposed the invasion of Iraq or protested about the lack of attention to the victims of Katrina, or perhaps felt some small concern for the African continent. It's more probable that all this seems very good to him.

I agree with Boris Iván that it would be better for him to create music, because it seems that using language doesn't suit him. Perhaps if he had stayed in Cuba, he would be able at these heights to reason and write in a more consistent and less vulgar way.

However, I do remember other voices who questioned in their time the stage of Cuban culture that has been the object of debate these days with the participation of many Cubans from here and there.

Some voices were more timid, others stronger. There weren't a lot, not enough, but there were some.

As there have also been voices in other moments that, for example, supported the plastic artists of street art, the filmmakers of *Alice in Wondertown* or of *Guantanamera* and the theater artists of *Manteca*,⁴⁴ when these artists and their works were questioned.

Luckily, more voices are now participating in this necessary analysis of a part of our recent history, and luckily this debate has encouraged the participation of people of different positions and opinions.

Of course something very important is missing, and it's the opening of the debate outside the circle of writers and artists who have email.

I already know, Paquito, that you don't even know who I am or what I do.

I also know that with this email, I'm exposing myself to your insults.

I don't mind. I believe that now the only important thing is to tell you that, luckily for both of us, I'm not interested in being your travel partner, either.

⁴⁴ *Manteca* was a Cuban dramatic comedy, written by Alberto Pedro Torriente and premiered in Havana in 1994. It used symbolic language based on Cuban slang to satirize the figure of Fidel Castro.

“BETTY”

Translated by Regina Anavy and Gustavo Loredó

Hello, Desiderio,

For all those who have followed the debate from the moment it began, for all those who have disseminated messages so that more people can understand and believe—like many of those who write—that everyone, regardless of our height or hierarchy as intellectuals, must have opinions and knowledge of what happens before our eyes, it’s very difficult to accept that the end of this story is cooked up behind closed doors and that we settle for an edited version (as has always happened) of reality.

Then don’t complain if the people are “mass,” if they don’t know how to identify the new Pavóns when they see them, or if they don’t know the contribution of those who take risks to move things in favor of the development of an advanced social thought that guarantees the future.

I imagine that the idea is not yours, but just as you didn’t accept Pavón on television, you don’t have to give in now to having your quorum chosen by others. It’s a concession that goes against what you stand for.

BORIS IVÁN CRESPO

Translated by Regina Anavy

Message to Enrique Colina

Enrique,

I congratulate you for your always deep and acute reflections. This society, this country, for a while has been needing to change a lot of things in order to improve in various directions. To continue dragging old and hypocritical policies of distribution of the artistic product, old informative and editorial dogmas and archaic cultural patterns will only lead us—even more—to statism, inertia, apathy, and double standards that already suffocate us in any direction we look.

Hopefully those ideological officials of the PCC hear you and are encouraged to do what you propose. And I would tell you even more: if it is not broadcast live, it will be edited by colleagues, not by three but by five members freely chosen in the meeting after that debate and who don't have public or political positions of any kind. And the final edition will not be monitored by the PCC. It would be a true show of confidence on their part towards the Cuban intelligentsia, towards that intelligentsia that they themselves boast so much about when it suits them. It would be an example of a first opening, of a true and controversial round table. And the best gift to the people, to those ordinary people who are always underestimated, but who support them and because of whom they occupy those political positions.

But you know what? I highly doubt it. That would be like asking a coconut tree for ripe mangoes. Already the first negative sign is the evident control of the conference when it is done by official invitations, because now the guests will go by commitment, and those truly interested in attending and who are not invited will be left with the desire. As a friend said, it seems that they bought the fish and now are frightened by its eyes.

Anyway, I wish you luck if you are one of the guests at the Casa de las Américas. Hopefully they won't allow the five-year color to change. Because after everything that has happened up to now (more than 20 years later), if the color had to be changed it would be to a darker gray. And hopefully the elected won't let Ambrosio's conference turn into one more political tribune to repeat "the same phrases, the same words" and thus "fulfill the plan."

A hug, Boris
January 26, 2007

CARLOS CELDRÁN

Translated by Regina Anavy and Gustavo Loredó

Since I heard about Pavón's appearance on television and read the reactions it caused, I have been wanting to write you. If my opinion and the little I have done in theater are worth anything to stop and clarify such a grievance, you have my support and my solidarity. Those of us who do theater in Cuba know how dangerous the situation is. We have a responsibility.

Carlos Celdrán

CARLOS ESPINOSA

Translated by Regina Anavy and Gustavo Loredó

Censorship, are you there? (I)

During the period during when I lived in Madrid, I once received a visit from a friend on the Island. Unable to resist curiosity, he began snooping through the bookshelves (a custom, I have to confess, that I don't like). When he reached a shelf where the cassettes were arranged, he gave me a slightly mocking smile at how surprised he was to find names like Raphael, Los Brincos, Formula V, Massiel, Cristina y los Stops, Charles Aznavour, Los Bravos. I explained to him that it was simply the music that was a fundamental part of my sentimental education, in the years when I was a high school student and, later, pre-university.

Then, the only way to listen to those songs in Cuba, or at least in the country town where I lived, was the radio. Tape recorders and stereos were things you couldn't even dream of, and there was the added problem of how to get the cassettes and tapes. I remember that one of the friends with whom I used to go out and meet had a sister in Havana who was married to a Greek sailor. Thanks to that, she got a tape recorder that she took to the parties that we sometimes organized. It was a hulk as big as it was heavy and was carried like a suitcase—one of those antiques that today can only be found in thrift stores, those second-hand stores that are so abundant in the United States.

Many years later, when I had the opportunity for the first time to buy the cassettes (CDs would still take a long time to appear) with those old songs, I wanted to give a belated gift to that boy I once was who could never have them. Listening to them again outside the Island must have been a way of surrendering myself to the intoxication of nostalgia ("This bread has the taste of a memory," says Humberto Saba in a verse). But it also led me to find things that I didn't expect. I pride myself on having an excellent memory, and I could repeat the lyrics of the songs while they were playing on the stereo. In some cases, however, there were verses that I was sure I hadn't heard before. In *Ding, Dong, the Things of Love*, one of the many numbers that the Argentine Leonardo Favio popularized in Latin America, was this: "She is fragile, tender and sweet / Lucky me that I found her / I am thinking and smiling / for me there is God." I noticed something similar in *When you Come Back*, by the Spanish group Los Mitos. In the version that we got to know through the island's radio stations, it didn't appear: "At night I pray / and I ask the Lord for your love. / But I feel fear, / fear that I am going to lose you."

Both are examples of censorship, that first cousin of the medieval inquisition that is related to power, repression, and manipulation. In both cases, the censors' scissors were directed against religious ideas, one of the black beasts of Castroism during the sixties and part of the seventies. That same reason was the one that caused all the songs of Juan and Junior to be disseminated and popularized in Cuba, except one: *In San Juan*. The lyrics couldn't be more candid and naive, since it must not be forgotten that it was written under the also inflexible surveillance of another dictatorial regime. But in the anticlerical crusade unleashed in the new Cuba, things like: "The portico in the church of San Juan / and the wooden saint in front of you / they became my friends / and they

were my witnesses / the day our love was born. / The saint smiled good-naturedly / and I looked at you a little embarrassed / saying few things / simple and loving. / One day we wanted to get married / in San Juan.”

From those operations of amputation of inconvenient contents, the Happy Heart, of the Argentine Palito Ortega, was able to escape. As it came to us through the version of the Spanish Marisol, we were able to hear and hum “and I ask God that I never miss you.” It would have been a bit difficult to explain to Comrade Antonio Gades, the singer’s husband at the time, why such an ideologically innocuous phrase would be censored for Cubans, while in Franco’s Spain, on the other hand, Joan Manuel Serrat could deal with themes of social criticism in his songs and record a complete album with the poems of Miguel Hernández, who died in prison, and Massiel and Fernando Fernán Gómez were allowed to represent a show with songs by Bertolt Brecht and Kurt Weill.

These are just a few examples that illustrate the censorship that was applied to music. To these I want to add one more: on the island’s radio stations the song “When I Left Cuba” by Luis Aguilé was never allowed. Although it is not explicitly said, it can be interpreted that whoever is singing had to leave his homeland for very serious reasons: “When I left Cuba / I left my life, I left my love. / When I left Cuba / I left my heart buried.” But so far I have referred to censorship of specific lyrics and songs. At other times, the attack by the guard dogs targeted performers and groups. For example, at one point the recordings of Raphael, Julio Iglesias, Santana, and José Feliciano, among others, stopped being scheduled. Regarding the reasons why the latter was banned, I remember hearing this explanation: he had publicly declared that he would rather be blind in Puerto Rico than be able to see, if he had to live in Cuba. I am convinced that the anecdote is apocryphal, but will not deny that it is very credible. But both in the case of Feliciano and in the case of other artists, what we mentioned was no more than pure speculation, gossip. As Roberto Madrigal points out in his novel *Zona congelada* [*Frozen Zone*], the list of those who were censored was only known by word of mouth, never in written form, “because good censorship is like that; it doesn’t clarify its purposes so that uncertainty is added to terror.”

But before continuing, I think it’s pertinent to speak in a general way about this crime that, in general, is justified by invoking the notion of the collective good. The term censorship comes from the Latin *censura*, which means to estimate, assess, evaluate. How did it take on such a different meaning later? This is explained if it is remembered that in ancient Rome, the responsibility of the censor and that of the person in charge of the census were closely related. The censors were officials appointed to preside over the *census*, that is, the registry of citizens, with the purpose of determining the duties that corresponded to them within the community. The task of what today we would call the censor consisted of keeping control of the inhabitants; that of the censor, to classify and control the products that come out of people’s minds (books, ideas). Both census and censorship were (are) forms of surveillance. And in the specific case of the second, it represents a mechanism used to impose prohibitions or restrictions on people or ideas that can upset the established order.

Absolute Impunity to Censor (II)

Art and literature have had to grow up on more than one occasion under despotic regimes. But as George Orwell has often pointed out, the despotism of other eras was not as severe as the totalitarianism that various countries suffered during the 20th century. This is because in the former, the repressive system was always inefficient, and the classes that ran the control and regulation apparatuses were usually corrupt, apathetic, and even half-liberal. This has nothing to do with the high level of perversion and efficiency with which the censoring institutions of totalitarian regimes, particularly the communists, functioned. A simple fact can give a remote idea of the proportions that this machinery reached: in the former Soviet Union, 70,000 bureaucrats supervised the activity of 7,000 writers. In other words, each author was assigned ten proofreaders.

In those countries, censorship also enjoyed absolute impunity. As the prescriptive and restrictive controls were concentrated in the hands of the State, the intervention of the censors didn't need to be justified or declared, as it was part of the practical and operational routine. Publishing houses, art galleries, museums, newspapers and magazines, television channels, radio stations, theaters, printing houses, and film studios also belonged to the State. That guaranteed, for example, that when the original of a book was disapproved, its publication was impossible. In this sense, it should also be noted that only the act of writing or creating a work that, for some reason (it didn't matter if that reason was artistic or political, since the aesthetic and the ideological were not separated), didn't please the commissars, it constituted a crime for which one could be convicted or punished.

In 1974, the Cuban writer and playwright René Ariza (Havana, 1940-California, 1994) was sentenced to eight years in prison, of which he served five. Unpublished stories, plays, and poems of his were discovered by the police in the luggage of a young Spaniard, and that was enough for him to be taken to court for "writing enemy propaganda." And I draw attention to that detail: just by writing it. That is, in his case, like that of other authors who were sentenced to prison or expelled from the university (Carlos Victoria, Rafael E. Saumell, Manuel Ballagas, Leandro Eduardo Campa, Esteban Luis Cárdenas, Daniel Fernández, are some names that come to mind), the penalty was based not on the crime, but on the intention. The punishment was applied, therefore, *a priori*, before the works could cause the alleged damages that were attributed to them.

I keep a copy of Rectoral Resolution 89/73, which has the signature of Hermes Hernández Herrera, then Rector of the University of Havana, stamped at the end. It refers to the disciplinary file followed by Daniel Iglesias Kennedy, a student at the School of Modern Languages of the Faculty of Humanities. As stated in the document, the Investigative Commission created to analyze his case (it was made up of two professors and a student representing the Union of Young Communists) requested a copy of the novel *Esta tarde se pone el sol* [*This Afternoon the Sun Sets*], which Iglesias Kennedy had presented for the Casa de las Américas Award that year (1973).

The opinion was that said work "is, by itself, proof of the ideological weaknesses of its author and of his participation in antisocial activities carried out by dissolute elements in collusion with foreign agents, since this novel includes autobiographical aspects that reflect participation in such actions, and it can be concluded that the aforementioned

novel is in contradiction with the principles established by the Congress of Education and Culture and with Communist morality.” As an aggravating circumstance, Iglesias Kennedy “has maintained an unacceptable social behavior to graduate from the career he is studying at said Faculty, and although he has obtained satisfactory academic results, his relationships with other students, in the sphere of social and political tasks, have not been equally satisfactory.” All this leads the Rector to declare Iglesias Kennedy “guilty of the acts charged against him” and to punish him “with the measure of indefinite separation as a student.”

There are times when it is very difficult to understand the reasons that lead censors to ban a work. In 1956, the British Board of Film Censors banned a film by Jean Cocteau. Their argument was: “The film is apparently meaningless, but if it has any meaning, then it is undoubtedly reprehensible.” In that category of the absurd, a case that is recorded in the annals of human rights has a perfect place.

In 1983, the People’s Court of Diez de Octubre⁴⁵ and the Court of Crimes against State Security of the People’s Court of Havana sentenced Mario Gastón Hernández to three years in prison. His “crime” was translating a book on Nostradamus’ prophecies, which was considered an attempt to try to spread enemy propaganda. The authoritative opinion of members of the UNEAC was requested, who ruled that the text in question was “diversionist, anti-communist, and anti-Soviet.” A German representative of the United Nations Human Rights Commission called the sentence unusual and stated that Nostradamus had lived in the 16th century. But it is already known that sensible or logical explanations are not valid with the sentinels of society. Paraphrasing Pascal, censorship has its reasons that reason doesn’t understand.

The writers and artists who have suffered the misfortune of living and creating under such dictatorial regimes could well adopt as their motto these words that Beaumarchais expressed through one of the characters in *The Marriage of Figaro*: “As long as I don’t speak in my writings from authority, religion, politics, morals, nor from local people, corporations, opera or other shows, nor from anyone who holds a position, I can write freely what I want, under the inspection of two or three censors.”

Author’s Note: The idea for this work, the first in a series that will continue in the coming weeks, began to take shape in late September and took shape in the following months. Several friends of mine can attest to it, because during this time I have written emails or called them by phone to ask for information, suggestions, data. The output of this first article coincides with the angry and just reactions aroused on the island with the vindication of a sinister commissar made in a television program. The fact that both events now concur is, as is often made clear in the movies, pure coincidence.

It is not, therefore, opportunism on my part, not even a journalistic sense of opportunity. For the rest, for many of the signatories of the protests, the fact that such an execrable character received that media tribute means an attempt to resurrect an ancient story, as *compañero* Fernández Retamar (their *compañero*, I mean, not mine,

⁴⁵ One of the 15 municipalities in Havana City.

God forbid!). For me, on the contrary, it constitutes a problem that, like Monterroso's dinosaur,⁴⁶ was and continues to be, there. So the title of these pages should be taken for what it is, a rhetorical question.

Carlos Espinosa
United States

⁴⁶ Augusto Monterroso was a Guatemalan short story writer, editor, and diplomat. "The Dinosaur" is composed of one line: "When he awoke, the dinosaur was still there."

CARLOS REPILADO

Translated by Regina Anavy and Gustavo Loredo

I have read some of the documents about the presence of Luis Pavón Tamayo on our television, and without really thoroughly analyzing each one of them, just by principle I adhere to the feeling of repulsion by the presence of such a character on our television. Out of a minimum of dignity and shame, if he ever had it, he should have refused to show us his despicable image and thought that only manage to offend us and bring us memories that it will always be better to forget. To forget now only after a rectification of a big mistake.

Carlos Repilado

CARLOS SOTOMAYOR

Translated by Regina Anavy and Gustavo Loredó

Orlando Hernández, receive my greetings.

First let me tell you that we don't know each other but chance caused some emails to reach me discussing the subject of Pavón, and I ask you to excuse my daring in writing to you (your address was in the last message read).

I am just a simple worker of culture, a computer scientist for more details, who wishes in some way to let you know my solidarity with what has been written by you and other colleagues in this regard. As I feel that your feeling is my own, I want to tell you that the issue of the "Pavón case" is already being analyzed or at least discussed among the workers in some of our centers. But what strikes me is that the approach to the matter in question is directed only to appeal to this so-called "email crisis" and not to the conditions that caused it, which would thereby guarantee the continuity of the "work" and "legacy" of Pavón, company, and successors.

In my humble opinion, the firefighters have already left the barracks and the siren will continue to blare for a long time, long after this crackling has been turned off. I say this because until now it has always been like that since I had use of a little conscience. They always make us throw the sofa out the window⁴⁷ and end the matter. Why not keep the sofa, sit on it, and have a dialogue to try to treat these and other multiple problems pending at least one remedy? Without an approach to the problem we'll never have an even moderately satisfactory way out.

I hope that one day the sofa will be justly appreciated and that this will allow us all to live and work under the ideals that gave birth to this revolution.

Regards,
Carlos Sotomayor

Carlos Sotomayor to Orlando Hernández

Dear Orlando Hernández:

I'm grateful for your prompt and unexpected—but timely—reply. I don't have time to spare either, but I think all this exchange and support is useful and necessary. First of all, I wanted to inform you that there is no problem in making this exchange public because there is nothing private about it; nor do I harbor the slightest fear of possible reprisals, after *Guatepeor*⁴⁸ there is no town except Colón, but for that we all have

⁴⁷ Giving the problem a false solution. The saying comes from a popular Cuban joke. A conversation at the bar between two friends: "Yesterday I got home before the usual time and, what do you think I found? Well, my wife making love to another man on the living room sofa!" "How horrible! And What did you do?" "Don't worry, I gave the matter a drastic solution: I threw the sofa out the window!"

reservations. The concern that I mentioned to you is based on a specific fact and what was raised there; of course, my appreciation may be subjective, but what I showed you was what seemed to me to be happening and was going to happen in other places according to what I could see. Several meetings have already been held to solve the matter in question, and different answers have also come out in this regard, but I still think that how things are going or how it is being treated officially leads to the same thing as last year and much more of the same. And I'm not the one shaking my rattle, so if the sofa is not in free fall at the moment, then at least it's already suspended in the air. I believe that the Pavón effect should be analyzed in depth and not remain up in the air: a well-deserved apology, and that's it.

The UEAC Declaration was published in *Granma*, and what it says is in Persian or Chinese for many people. Even workers in the field of culture are oblivious to what happens right under their noses, and why is that? The "Pavón effect" has many facets and is still deeply rooted in our society today. I wonder how things like those that occurred in the so-called "gray five-year period" could have happened, and I see that these are not things of the past: they are still there, latent. I fully share your comments, and that is why I reaffirm that for me the flame will not go out. We must raise high "the torch that gracefully illuminates our ideals" and honor the March of July 26 and the statement, "History will Absolve me." At some point the ideals of this revolution were twisted, and I believe that we must all contribute to making them take their true course. If you want to read the full text of the lyrics of the March of the 26th, then click on this link, <http://www.radiohc.cu/moncada/letracancion26.htm>.

Well, I was telling you that I was a simple worker of culture because it is simply what I am and what I consider myself. I think that my opinion should not be annulled by others for this reason, nor that others make decisions for me as you say, but that is how it happens today. And my modesty is due to the fact of recognizing in you and many other colleagues the virtue that is achieved with a lot of work to express clearly and coherently the ideas that many fail to put together to make themselves understood, and people like that are always necessary to understand each other and find consensus. And this is natural and healthy in any fairly "civilized" society. So we also have the opposite, the artificial and catastrophic, which is when someone with that gift and virtue (although the opposite has been seen many times) manages to move above the rest, ignoring criteria, wills, everything, and imposes his own law; and this resulting character would be what I would call a big *pavón*.⁴⁹ So, let's say NO to the Pavón effect.

On Tuesday the 30th I will be present at the conference unless the sea reaches Batabano.

Regards, Carlos
January 20, 2007

⁴⁸ *Guatepeor* is a play on words: Leaving Guate-mala (Guate-bad) to fall into *Guate-peor* (Guate-worse). The meaning is to make a problem worse by trying to find a solution, or "The remedy is worse than the disease." Colón is the main cemetery in the city of Havana.

⁴⁹ This is a play on words, since a *pavón* is a peacock, meaning someone who shows off and struts around.

CÉSAR LEAL

Translated by Regina Anavy and Gustavo Loredó

César Leal to Waldo Leyva

Friend Waldo:

Was it perhaps in the 1970s, when the Constitution of the Republic of Cuba contained a clear reference to the “unbreakable” friendship with the former USSR and there was no UNITY within the Cuban nation? I think that after more than eleven years in power, it would be naive to infer that the revolutionary leadership did not yet have a cultural strategy. Later, even, from the Congress of Education and Culture held in those years, and where the “Gallego” Fernández⁵⁰ was the spokesman for the simplistic idea that the culture generated in the capitalist countries was corrupt and flawed and had nothing to contribute to the contemporary intellectual thought.

Therefore, those who were his *epigonos*⁵¹ would have nothing to do here: It would be interesting to investigate who “Gallego” Fernández was the spokesperson for! I remember that it cost my friend and teacher Servando Cabrera Moreno his first heart attack; also, that José Llanusa⁵² and Pavón were the visible tip of the iceberg of a cultural policy consciously instrumented to “control”—excuse the euphemism—the development of Cuban culture during that so-called “Gray Period,” during which, incidentally, artists and writers also stood out—at least formally—who disagreed (a dangerous word!) with the Socialist Realism that it was trying to impose.

I believe that a broader review of that artistic period is required, in all senses, to know the causes and justifications for figures like Pavón to be placed in the highest position in the “direction” of the development—or involution—of Cuban culture. This resulted in many artists and writers, whether homosexual or not, having to opt for exile abroad, while others were ostracized.

It was a shame that Pavón was redeemed and exalted on Cuban television, but he has not been nor will he be the only one: the ghost of the '70s has been haunting the country for a long time; seeing is believing, brother! But let's think positively and hope that the nonsense doesn't repeat itself.

César Leal Jiménez
Independent artist

⁵⁰ José Ramón Fernández Álvarez (1923-2019) was Vice-President of the Council of Ministers, a deputy in the Cuban National Assembly from 1976, and a member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Cuba.

⁵¹ Less distinguished followers or imitators.

⁵² José Llanusa Global (1925-2007) was the first director of the National Institute of Sports and Physical Education, Commissioner of Havana, Minister of Education, Vice President of the Council of Ministers, and Deputy to the National Assembly of People's Power.

César Leal to Jorge de Mello

Brother Jorge:

I met Orlando Hernández for the first time when we were on our humble vacation at Villa Coral, remember, right?

I am glad that he has taken sides, despite the apathy and pessimism of which he speaks. What is difficult for all of us to admit is that censorship and suspicion against intellectual thought has always been a model followed by known extinct socialist systems, which denotes an inexcusable fear of the search for another truth that is not the one that they hold. As you know, in capitalist countries there is also censorship and self-censorship,= but because all the mass media are not in state hands and they have more democratic constitutions that do not exclude anyone, at least in the text, there is greater freedom of expression.

This is a truism, which I point out perhaps in a very direct and pithy way, but it has been what reality has shown. The problem comes when men try to play the role of gods on earth. They proclaim that they don't make mistakes, and if they do, they argue that they did it with the best intentions. And we already know what the road to hell is paved with! That has been the problem of Marxism-Leninism; as Jean Paul Sartre said, it claims to be "open" to all phenomena and explains everything, but in truth it is closed within its system of conceiving and explaining the world and the relationships between men. That is why I believe in God Jehovah—although I am not a Witness of—and I do not believe in false messiahs and wolves dressed as lambs. The Bible, with all the contradictions that unbelievers attribute to it (for that God gave us free will) is very clear in its content on this matter.

Well, colleague and friend, this little rant is just to tell you that I received the message from Orlando that you sent me, and that I really liked it, because it was sensible, intelligent, and well written.

Another hug and blessings for all of you.
César Leal

Another Message from César Leal

Let's also remember that José Llanusa and Pavón were the visible tip of the iceberg of a cultural policy consciously orchestrated to "control"—excuse the euphemism—the development of Cuban culture during that so-called "Gray Period" during which, incidentally, artists and writers also stood out who—at least formally—disagreed (a dangerous word!) with the socialist realism that it was trying to impose. I believe that a broader review of that artistic period is needed, in all senses, to know the causes and justifications for figures like Pavón to be placed in the highest position in the "direction" of the development—or involution—of Cuban culture. This resulted in many artists and writers, homosexual or not, having to opt for exile abroad, while others were ostracized. It was a shame that Pavón was redeemed and exalted on Cuban television, but he has

not been and will not be the only one: The ghost of the '70s has been haunting the country for a long time; seeing is believing, brother! But let's have a positive mind, and let's hope that the nonsense does not repeat itself.

CÉSAR LÓPEZ

Translated by Regina Anavy and Gustavo Loredó

In moments of rage in which I was almost foaming at the mouth and perhaps the rest of the nine orifices of the human body, after the occasional telephone conversation with colleagues who were equally irritated, angry, bewildered, and full of shame at the media nonsense, may it be just that and so on! I received your profound and courageous reflection as a state of cultural, historical, ethical, and certainly political warning. Thank you, friend, for thinking and acting. Count on me and my glimpses of thought in a firm attitude and ready to undo the mess that seems to advance dangerously, but I communicate to you, with José Martí, that “I am honest and I am afraid.”

Hugs of recognition and alertness.
César López

Words at the inauguration of the XVI International Book Fair

Dear Friends:

As the afternoon leans to the west, memory leads to some Argentine verses by Rafael Obligado, and to overcome the sorrowful shadow over the Pampa, the country has been summoned as a guest of honor; precisely, the Argentine Republic.

Now, the fact that two Cuban intellectuals share the dedication does not mean that this book festival is limited to them.

The invitation to the word leads to general culture, to all its manifestations, to the place where the Book rules without exclusions of any kind. And since Poetry is creation and creation is fundamentally Poetry, I allow myself to affirm that this Fair is dedicated to all Cuban creators, because Cuba, Island or poetic Archipelago, begins its consolidation from the territory to become a Nation and finally reach the high category of Homeland with Poetry. “And all night they heard birds passing by,” says the Admiral⁵³ in his journal and affirms it, not to discover us, but to find a world and at the same time find himself in the area where, as now, the afternoon is leaning. Sweetly to the west. And it does not stop being its own world and ours.

We said that this creative totality, of the word, inserted in time, found its space in Cuba. With *Espejo de Paciencia* [*Mirror of Patience*]⁵⁴, and without ignoring the discovery of the poem *Florida*⁵⁵, the poets have sustained our nation, homeland, verb, waters, lands.

⁵³ Christopher Columbus, in his Journal, 1492.

⁵⁴ *Espejo de Paciencia* is a poem written in 1608 by Silvestre de Balboa, clerk of the town hall of Santa María del Puerto del Príncipe. It is considered the first Cuban literary work. The poem tells how the residents of the town of Bayamo faced the attack of the French privateer Gilberto Girón in 1604, defeated and killed him. The work exalts the faithful and courageous character of its Cuban settlers.

⁵⁵ *La Florida*, an epic poem by Alonso Gregorio de Escobedo, about the early Spanish presence in the U.S.

And when we say poets, we include storytellers, thinkers, historians, economists, musicians, dancers, painters, and sculptors. Men and women of good will who have built our home, the house, the city, the country for us. That is why the expansion, which more than generous has to be historic, wants to include all Cubans so that this Sixteenth Book Fair is total and ecumenical and thus overcomes any limitation that our culture may have shown, endured, and suffered over the years.

An admiring arc that starts in José María Heredia (and does not stop taking into account precursors such as Silvestre de Balboa, Alfonso de Escobedo, Manuel de Zequeira, Manuel Justo de Rubalcaba, and Manuel María Pérez Ramírez) and reaches Raúl Hernández Novás and Angel Escobar, and it would not ignore the great poets of the 19th and 20th centuries with full and finished work and life. And to the thinkers, novelists, playwrights, firmly situated in Cuban culture, where the same would be Cirilo Villaverde and Ramón Meza as Ezequiel Vieta and Alejo Carpentier. On this bridge are the names that hardly have to be enumerated, but some buzz in my ear: Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda, Joaquín Lorenzo Luaces, José Jacinto Milanés, Plácido, El Cucalambé, Manzano, Luisa Pérez de Zambrana, Julia Pérez Montes de Oca, Mercedes Matamoros, Juana Borrero, Julián del Casal, Mendive, and the high summit of José Martí.

Throughout the twentieth century the poets insist: Boti, Poveda, Agustín Acosta. Emilio Ballagas, Mariano Brull, Eugenio Florit, Nicolás Guillén, Dulce María Loynaz, Regino Pedroso, Samuel Feijóo, Dora Alonso, José Lezama Lima, Virgilio Piñera, Gastón Baquero, Eliseo Diego, Jesús Orta Ruiz, and others and others and others. Rolando Escardó, Roberto Branly, Baragaño, Fayad Jamís, Heberto Padilla, Luis Suardíaz. We must not apologize for insistence! And Hernández Catá, Carlos Montenegro, Lino Novás Calvo, Lydia Cabrera, Enrique Serpa, Félix Pita Rodríguez, Enrique Labrador Ruiz? How José Soler Puig accompanies us! And Fernando Ortiz, Mañach, Moreno, Fraginals. Among our letters are Antonio Benítez Rojo, Guillermo Cabrera Infante, Calvert Casey, Reynaldo Arenas, Severo Sarduy, Miguel Collazo, Jorge Luis Hernández and Jesús Díaz.

The book is the bearer of the word; it reaches the verse and thus ascends again and as always to Poetry. Word and Poetry that as reality and symbol force us to look, vigilant, with open eyes, at History. And as an inescapable reference I remember, we all remember, Juan Clemente Zenea, so close in his place. We are looking at him. Victors in time. Here in his space. In the time. Alert on his path. The poem. The Word and Poetry. “And you were repaired where your mother was raped.”⁵⁶ Saint John of the Cross points at us, whispers, and shouts. To make us aware that this warlike and disgraceful place where the poet, Poetry, was humiliated, with this party that would have seemed impossible in another era, remains clean and must be kept that way forever.

And in the same way that those creators gave themselves to the Word and sometimes had to die for it, now, as an ethical and aesthetic obligation, we raise the libertarian mandate of knowledge and honor through books. The Sixteenth Book Fair that could be

⁵⁶ Quote from the *Cántico Espiritual*, the poetic version of the Song of Songs, by Saint John of the Cross (1542-1591), mystical poet of the Spanish Counter-Reformation, canonized by the Catholic Church.

dedicated to so many authors and books that were, are, and will be in our lives. Listing their names would not be overwhelming, but discretion imposes a certain modesty. The centuries are repeated from the seventeenth to the twenty-first in which we live. Let this Fair and those to come be dedicated to those creatures, women and men, who support the Homeland at all times, through joys and troubles, successes and mistakes, and insist on remaining in what unites us beyond artificial, mechanical, and exploited borders.

And if the amplified extension of the honor at the Fair for Cuban writers is affirmed, wouldn't it be necessary to proclaim something similar and equivalent with respect to the Countries? It is a joyous honor that Argentina is the guest country, but this does not make us forget the sister republics of our America. Martí illuminates and dictates perpetual lessons. And this, Our America, proudly shows its origins and its constant History. From José Hernández and his Martín Fierro y Sarmiento and his Facundo to Julio Cortázar, the country gives rise to the broad culture that will be and is now present at this Fair, breathing the air of America as a whole and open to the world, to the Universe, to achieve what some still consider unachievable. The possible for the impossible. Knowing that the perfect does not exist, but there is constant perfectibility.

The Fair is ecumenical, comprehensive, humble, and superb at the same time. Its goal, or one of them, is to open the doors of delightful knowledge to every creature within our grasp. If reading is taught to overcome illiteracy, the immediate obligation of the peoples is to provide books so that those who can do it have elements for their culture and constant improvement and joy. For their lives. That's the reason for the Fair. As in the biblical quote, this feast of action and celebration fulfills a goal, mission, destiny: "Lift up your eyes and look at the regions, because they are ready for harvest."

And it is not about the exploitation of many for the benefit of a few, but about the full dignity of man. Of the human creature. Thank you all. Book Fair, the Fiesta has begun and is significant.

César Lopez, Havana
February 8, 2007

CIRA ROMERO

Translated by Regina Anavy and Gustavo Loredó

What nonsense about Luis Pavón on television. How many wounds open again before that deplorable image! When I saw the program I knew perfectly well that what is happening was going to happen. Voices must be raised in anger. There is no other alternative. I congratulate those who have done it publicly. Too bad none of that is published.

Cira Romero

CONSENSO DIGITAL MAGAZINE

Translated by Regina Anavy and Gustavo Loredó

Consenso on The Intellectual Debate

“The state of exalted anger,” aroused by the television appearances of Armando Quesada, Jorge Serguera and Luis Pavón Tamayo, three officials linked to the anti-cultural policy applied in Cuba since 1971, has become a debate and reflection by a large group of intellectuals. This is no coincidence; the insults and overt reflections are based, in addition to the innumerable victims of the “parametrization,” on the words of Fidel Castro: “Within the Revolution, everything; against the Revolution, nothing” converted into cultural politics, as well as the absence of the authentic exercise of debates of ideas and the consequent lack of training in these matters. As an expression of a phenomenon of reflection and debate, the facts discussed in this extensive exchange of e-mails are part of the *raison d'être* of the *Consenso* Digital Magazine, for which reason we feel obliged to offer our own criteria in the heat of so many (and all) the issues that are exposed.

As was logical, the attack, which was initially directed against three cultural officials, took, in the political context of uncertainties that Cuba is experiencing and due to the long duration of these and many other silences, paths that reached even those most responsible for such a dismal policy. Regardless of one or other debaucheries, a reflection of the high accumulated pressure, the most reasonable pointed to the essence of the problem: the method known as *pavonato*, whose causes and consequences are still present, as evidenced, among others, by the case of Antonio José Ponce. However, once the passions have been unburdened, the debate must have as its central objective the good of the Nation, which is the good of all. Therefore, a measured and inclusive analysis is required that fosters an essential change in Cuban culture, which in turn implies a change in our society; a change in which everyone must participate without exclusion: victims and perpetrators, rulers and ruled, those from inside and outside the Island, witnesses and insiders. A shift that spans from the cultural elite to the deteriorating domestic economy.

We must all contribute arguments that build bridges of encounter. Therefore, any attempt to paralyze the debate, to pigeonhole it or to limit it, must be rejected. The debate, absent until now, is a manifestation of culture, and culture is an indispensable condition to keep abreast of the times, as Ortega y Gasset expressed. The essence of the issues that are being discussed these days in what some have called the “little war of e-mails” does not lie in the three television programs, but in root issues of the Cuban nation whose connotation is deeper than what it seems at first glance. That is why any attempt to stop the debate aims to reaffirm that harmful principle that holds that the repressive cultural policy is irreversible.

Today, the time to share indignations belongs to the past, because what it is about now is to demolish the possibility of maintaining the methods that affected and still affect

Cuban culture and society in general. On the other hand, insisting at this point in the parametrized expressions about supposed intellectuals “in the service of the enemy” or that the critical opinions of some of them respond to an “annexationist agenda” constitutes in itself an attempt to preserve the parametrization.

The problems that have affected and continue to affect intellectuals are the same ones that lacerate, affect, and limit the rest of society in one way or another. For this reason, in the processes of change, a place corresponds to all Cubans, intellectual or not, revolutionaries or not; because revolution and change are not synonymous: revolution supposes a violent and radical transformation that inevitably brings great damage to a significant part of those who voluntarily or involuntarily plunge into its spiral. Change, more generally, is a process inseparable from human dignity, love, solidarity, ethics, freedom, and reconciliation on the basis of the minimum that unites us, which is everyone’s business, although in the search for solutions, the intelligentsia has a determining role, because it constitutes the critical conscience of the nation. In this sense, “Emilio’s Way,”⁵⁷ which a part of Cuban intellectuals have for the current exchange of ideas, shows that other means are forbidden to them and that therefore they must get to work to achieve something that is such a vital need for the health of Cuban society: the development of spaces that promote the free expression of plural thought.

The first condition of culture—the cultivation of the human in man, the way in which a society creates and recreates values to satisfy its material and spiritual needs—lies in freedom. When this is suppressed or limited, regardless of the reasons given for that, the lives of millions of people are affected, and, therefore, this constitutes a crime against culture. In Cuba, institutional and ethical deficiencies, restrictions on rights and freedoms, intolerance, exclusions, and physical and verbal violence determined a framework conducive to undermining human dignity. In the name of that tarnished dignity, it is imperative to democratize the culture, and the events that are occurring are symptoms that time of waiting for such an undertaking has run out.

For Cubans, the right to participate as subjects in the cultural, political, and economic processes of the country; to freely think, express, and disseminate ideas; to associate with our fellow human beings autonomously; to leave and enter the country without the need for permits; to decide and participate in the type of education we want for our children; to live decently on our wages; to freely access information and communication with the rest of the world are, among other things, important aspirations that await their materialization. The current debate that has arisen among Cuban intellectuals from all the “shores” indicates that these pending needs cannot continue on the waiting list.

The juridical-cultural setback represented by the limitations to political plurality and civil rights contained in the current Constitution—concisely declared irrevocable—must be reversed. The law against “ideological diversionism” must be abolished. Ethics, which in Cuba has historically been the conduct of minorities, requires its conversion into generalized conduct as a foundation for personal and social fulfillment. Therefore, an

⁵⁷ *Emilio’s Way* is a movie about a father discovering his deceased son’s spiritual journey by following in his footsteps along the Santiago de Compostela trail in Spain.

ethical rearmament is essential and should and must be present from politics to culture, from personal relations to public relations, from practical actions to civilized language, and that is impossible without the free participation of the intellectuals and all the people.

Plurality, an expression of the diversity that characterizes us, is absent in the debate in Cuba today. Exclusion and ignorance of the different have reached the point of trying to carry out a social project—paraphrasing the singer-songwriter Pedro Luis Ferrer—“with a single truth and a single thought.” Cuba is plural by nature; recognizing it and facilitating its manifestation is the responsibility of the rulers and the duty of all. The discussion of intolerance of difference should, as one of the participants in the controversy stated, include the debate about the difference in political opinions. That’s how comprehensive a serious and responsible intellectual debate on culture must be. *Consenso* also regrets that, due to the omission of the official press, the Cuban people remain ignorant of this debate.

Taking into account the reasons expressed, the *Consenso* Digital Magazine, founded in December 2004 as an autonomous space for reflection and debate of Cuban progressive thought, to examine and discuss our reality, without fear of the truth or the consequences of saying it, calls on all those interested, even those who do not agree with us, to freely express their opinions on our page and to direct the current debate towards the basic questions: What country are we? What country do we want for ourselves and our children? What should we do to achieve it?

Editorial Board of *Consenso* Digital Magazine

Miriam Celaya González, Dimas Castellanos Martí, Marta Cortizas Jiménez, Rogelio Fabio Hurtado, Eugenio Leal García, José Prats Sariol, María Cristina Herrera, Byron Miguel.

CUBARTE CRITERIOS

Translated by Regina Anavy and Gustavo Loredó

Information from Cubarte at the request of the Centro Teórico Cultural Criterios in relation to its next Cycle of Conferences.

As we reported last Wednesday, in search of more space for the attending public, we decided to move the conference on “The Gray Quinquennium: Revisiting the Term” by Ambrosio Fornet, scheduled for next January 30, from the headquarters of the Center, with capacity for about 120 people, to the Che Guevara Room of the Casa de las Américas, with which we quadruple the capacity.

However, given the great interest in attending expressed by a growing number of people and institutions from various sectors, and in order to ensure that our writers, artists, and intellectuals in general can be present in the still-limited space, we have decided to reserve the entry, through invitations, for members of the UNEAC, the AHS, the UNHIC, and the UPEC; professors and students of the ISA, the Schools of Art and the Faculties of Arts and Letters and Social Communication of the UH; researchers from the CITMA Council of Social Sciences and the Martin Luther King Center, as well as specialists and cadres from the ICRT and the institutions of the Ministry of Culture.

The Criterios Center, as it is known, lacks personnel to make lists and distributions, for which we put the responsibility of the distribution in the hands of the UNEAC and other interested cultural institutions, which will take place in the next few days. Only 300 invitations have been sent to UNEAC.

The texts of the conferences by Ambrosio Fornet and other announced personalities will be disseminated by email immediately after each meeting and subsequently collected in a book.

People who are interested in receiving the texts by email should send a message to criterion@cubarte.cult.cu with the Subject as: CICLO.

Please excuse me if you receive this message more than once in more than one way. The disclosure of the same is appreciated.

January 25, 2007

DECLARATION OF THE UNEAC SECRETARIAT

Translated by Regina Anavy and Gustavo Loredó

The Cultural Policy of the Revolution is Irreversible

The UNEAC Secretariat shares the just indignation of a group of our most important writers and artists as a result of the recent broadcasts of three Cuban Television programs: “Open Dialogue,” “La Difference” [*The Difference*], and, in particular, “Impronta” [*Imprint*]. From them, an intense exchange of opinions was generated. From outside Cuba, some honestly intervened in the controversy; others, obviously working in the service of the enemy, have wanted to manipulate it and take advantage of the situation created. Once again, those who pretend to see ambiguous positions, fissures, or opportunities for their annexationist agenda in the debate between revolutionaries will be definitively frustrated.

On January 9, a meeting of the UNEAC Secretariat was convened with the creators who had initially participated in that exchange to evaluate the facts and agree on a response. The fundamental concern of the colleagues gathered there was that the aforementioned programs could respond to an intention and express a tendency alien to the cultural policy that has guaranteed and guarantees our unity. It was of the utmost importance to have the most absolute support of the Party leadership from the first moment. On January 12, the ICRT Presidency provided us with a detailed explanation of the initial results of an analysis of these programs. It was revealed that they did not respond to agency policy and that serious mistakes had been made in their creation and implementation. In the discussion, it became clear the need to work together—the ICRT, the UNEAC and cultural institutions—in the promotion through the media of works and creators that express the authentic intellectual and artistic hierarchies of Cuban culture. We will not be divided by clumsiness or by those who want to take advantage of them to harm the Revolution. The cultural policy of Martí—antidogmatic, creative, and participatory—and of Fidel and Raúl, founded with “Words to the intellectuals,” is irreversible.

UNEAC Secretariat

DESIDERIO NAVARRO

Translated by Regina Anavy and Gustavo Loredó

Dear friends and colleagues:

Suddenly, more than thirty years after his dismissal, Luis reappears in the public sphere. Pavón, ex-President of the National Council of Culture during the euphemistically called “Five Gray Years,” in neither more nor less than an entire National Television program dedicated to “his cultural imprint on Cuban culture.”

Now, is what we saw and heard yesterday the imprint of Luis Pavón on Cuban culture?

Or is he another who irreversibly damaged the lives of great and less-great creators of Cuban culture, “parametrized” in one way or another? Who prevented the creation of many artistic shows and the dissemination of many literary and plastic works in Cuba and abroad? Who forever deprived us of countless works because of the almost inevitable forced self-censorship that followed the ruthless '60s? That filled a whole period with a terrible national literary and artistic production today justly forgotten even by its own glorifiers and award-bestowers of yesteryear? Who flooded us with the worst of the contemporary cultures of the countries of Eastern Europe, depriving us of the knowledge of the most creative and profound of these? Who, in the short or long run, conditioned the resentment and even the emigration of many of those non-revolutionary but not counterrevolutionary creators, whose alarm Fidel had tried to dispel in “Words to the Intellectuals”? Who created and instilled Neo-Zhdanovian styles and mechanisms of direction and cultural work that has taken decades to eradicate, as “normal” as they came to be? Are we really a country with such little memory that we no longer remember the painful situation to which our cultural institutions were reduced by the work of the National Council of Culture? A situation that Cuban humor captured at that time in a trio of parodied sayings: “If you don’t listen to the Council, you don’t get old.” “There is no strength in the Union,” and “In the House of the Americas, there is a wooden knife.”

It is true that Pavón was not at all times the prime mover, but neither was he a mere executioner out of due obedience. Because to this day an important question has not been raised and cleared up: how many wrong decisions were taken “higher up” on the basis of the information, interpretations, and evaluations of works, creators, and events provided by Pavón and his relatives of the time, on the basis of their diagnoses and prognoses of supposed serious threats and dangers from the cultural milieu?

If it is about valuable cultural imprints in Cuban journalism, it is necessary to show the ones like those of that man of letters, Agustín Pí, who, in that same period, from his modest position in the *Granma* newspaper, helped those of worth who were “frowned upon.” He could and did manage to make the cultural pages of *Granma* as least closed as possible at all times and didn’t turn at all, like so many other Cuban publications of the time, into a wasteland of mediocrity and opportunism.

In my article *In medias res publicas* [*In Public Matters*] I talked about the responsibility of politicians in the limitations of the critical role of the intellectual—especially in the years when culture was led by Luis Pavón—but that is only half the problem. The other half, deserving of a symmetrical article, is the responsibility of the intellectuals: without the silence and passivity of almost all of them (not to mention the complicity and opportunism of not a few) the Five Gray Years or the *pavonato*, as many called it then, would not have been possible, or, in any case, it would not have been possible with all the destructiveness it had. With few exceptions, among the intellectuals, heterosexuals (including non-homophobes) ignored the fate of gays; the whites (including the non-racists), the fate of the vindicated blacks; the traditionalists, the fate of the avant-garde; the atheists (including tolerant ones), the vicissitudes of Catholics and other believers; the pro-Soviets, the fate of the anti-socialists and the non-Moscow Marxists, and so on. It is worth wondering if this lack of individual moral responsibility could be repeated today among the Cuban intelligentsia.

It is therefore necessary to ask ourselves responsibly without delay: why precisely at this singular moment in the history of our country, when all our people are awaiting the convalescence of the Commander-in-Chief, is there that sudden glorious media resurrection of Luis Pavón with a generous iconographic display of select old scenes with the highest political leaders, and this just days after the no-less-sudden television reappearance of Jorge Serguera, who from the presidency of the ICRT, made a perfect political-cultural duo with the CNC during the Five Gray Years?

“Happy is the man who comes to know the causes of things.”

Desiderio Navarro
January 6, 2007

Message from Desiderio Navarro to Reynaldo González

Dear Rey:

You can count on me for the collective elaboration of that document, but it seems to me that we should expect other reactions like those of the three of us in the next few hours or days, which could reveal other angles of the problem and greatly enrich that document (and, incidentally, give us an index of the sensitivity and current attitudes of the intelligentsia in this regard). I’m talking about “days” because I take into account that many people only have access to email from their workplace, that is, from Monday.

Do you agree, or do you think there are reasons to rush?

A hug,
Desiderio
January 6, 2007

Another Message from Desiderio Navarro

And, in addition to what happened with Quesada, which I also find out now, there was about two or three months ago, a whole program of the Educational Channel dedicated exclusively to exalting the transcendental importance of the National Congress of Education and Culture for Cuban culture, but I saw it only as a lonely swallow, outrageous but isolated. Now I see that it's not. Let's talk about that proposal tonight (I'm leaving now in the opposite direction, from Los Naranjos to Havana). Even if the ICRT didn't accept it, it would force them to remove the mask of "impartiality" as the mass media of the nation, and it would be very clear that they abuse this informational instrument of the State to advocate a cultural policy contrary to that of the Ministry of Culture—one could say with property, if not with much quantitative exactitude, the cultural policy of a "small group."

A hug, Desiderio
January 8, 2007

Dear Loly:

I am enclosing the letter that, in response to one sent to me by Zenaida Romeu, I also sent to the members of the UNEAC Secretariat and other friends who participated in the debate (s) caused by the three sudden reappearances, in a short period of time, of those three nefarious characters of Cuban cultural policy in the three programs, with the exclusion of any mention of Pavón's years as President of the CNC in a program about his "cultural imprint." As you will see, there I speak of numerous objections on my part (shared by Arturo Arango) to the writing of the document. I had the opportunity to present them immediately in another meeting with the Secretariat, and I can tell you that among them were some of those that also appear in your Open Message to the UNEAC Secretariat:

"It is not a question of a "group" of intellectuals who protest. Its relatively massive character and its lack of articulation due to ties of friendship, generation, aesthetic orientation, etc. doesn't allow them to be spoken of as a "group" but, at most, as "a great number of intellectuals; I added that it was not only a question of some of "our most important" intellectuals, but also of many others equally or less important who immediately added their voices and reasons; that the lack of any mention of the true concrete cause of the intellectual indignation, that is, the sudden reappearance of these three nefarious characters of Cuban cultural politics, after 30 years, in three television programs so close in time, would make people, the millions in the street, wonder what had happened that was so bad in those programs: an attempt at another live wedding? Sexual indecency? Corruption, bribery? A counterrevolutionary comment or joke? and so on, many other questions about possible attacks against the irreversible cultural policy of the Revolution, thus leaving in the shadow the figure of these characters and the concrete political meaning of what happened and placing the teams of the three programs that, collectively or not, could have been complicit with external ties, or mere adherents of directions from higher levels (which people are inclined to believe in your case), or clumsy ignorant people with initiative and naivety (which almost nobody believes in the case of *Impronta* and *The Difference*)."

What I couldn't stop saying personally to the President of the ICRT is that I don't believe in lack of control as an explanation for the three incidents, because I have more than one personal experience to find out, as you can remember, when you kindly invited me to participate in the program "Open Dialogue" in a discussion about mass culture—a topic on which I have written and spoken so much—, they imposed on you the condition that I not participate in the live program but that my intervention be recorded three days before to be reviewed, eventually approved by management bodies, and only then mechanically juxtaposed on the live dialogue of the other three participants (Julio García Espinosa, among them), to which, of course, I refused, indignant.

Control is what there is too much of in the ICRT for everything that is not racism, homophobia, mockery of people's physical defects, the Yankee cult of Oscars, Grammys, MTV, etc. as supreme instances of world artistic appreciation; nostalgia for prerevolutionary kitsch, the cult of artistic ancestry and lineages, New Age ideology in its various manifestations, the cult of millions won in contracts, ticket offices or auctions, and of media fame, as criteria for artistic success; militant defense of banality from neoliberal relativism and consumerism, and many etceteras.

But just as being in the CNC in the '70s did not mean sharing its cultural policy (I myself worked in it between layoffs and layoffs), I know that being in the ICRT today doesn't mean approving all that policy or, if the euphemism is preferred, that lack of control. Receive my cordial greetings and my wishes for success in your stay in Gijón.

Message from Desiderio Navarro to Zenaida Romeu

Dear Zenaida:

I agree with you and thank you very much for including me among the recipients of your letter. Now, in the text of the Declaration it is stated that in the two meetings a consensus response was sought with some of the protesters (in fact, with the first ones, chronologically), which is totally and absolutely true. But neither I nor Arturo Arango, nor other authors of protests, participated in the subsequent written formulation of that response, nor in its final review and approval, which explains that, as it should be, only the UNEAC Secretariat signs it, and not any of the protesters, none of whom is a member of the Secretariat. Unfortunately, the wording gives the impression that we are co-signers of the document, despite the fact that some of us—as far as I know so far, at least Arturo Arango and I—have numerous objections to make to the text itself, the formulation of which does not reflect the frankness, depth, and firmness with which, with names and surnames, facts, dates, and the corresponding qualifiers, these topics were discussed in those two meetings, meetings of which UNEAC, our UNEAC, can be very proud and would have nothing to hide. As a member of the National Council of UNEAC and as a member of the ranks, I trust that what happened will be corrected.

With kind regards,
Desiderio Navarro

P.S. I have just read this letter to Arturo Arango, and he fully agrees with its content.

Another Message from Desiderio Navarro about the National Prize for Social Sciences to Fernando Martínez Heredia

Friends and colleagues:

Arturo Arango's recommendation to also pay attention to the National Prize for Social Sciences awarded to Fernando Martínez Heredia is so pertinent that I followed it seven days before he formulated it in his message today, and therefore several days before the television "biography washing" that concerns us. Here is the message I sent to Fernando on the 31st, as soon as I heard the good news. There, as will be seen, in addition to celebrating the intrinsic value of Fernando's work and struggles, the Prize was read as a symptom of fruitful possibilities.

Unfortunately, the two events that Arturo juxtaposes in his message—the Prize of Fernando and the Epiphany of Pavón—must be considered antagonistic signs, and not contradictory, since they have very different institutional and political-cultural origins and not a same origin that would be fickle and thoughtlessly contradicting itself or naively trying to reconcile the irreconcilable.

And now, to share that bottle and the stubborn revolutionary dreams with Fernando!

A hug, Desiderio
January 7, 2007

Dear Fernando:

I just found out, from Guanche's magnificent text in *La Jiribilla*, that you have been awarded the National Prize for Social Sciences. Honestly, it is one of the few great joys I have had this year. In culture, and even more so in cultural politics, justice takes a long time; *eppur si muove* [although it does move] and finally arrives. To put it in the words of that Althusser of our youth, this award honors the Ideological Apparatus of the State and opens up new hope in these times full of fertile possibilities and insidious dangers.

Those who saw in the semantic-lexical resemblance a family relationship between the names *Criterios* [*Criteria*] and *Pensamiento Crítico* [*Critical Thought*] were not mistaken. Those who saw a relationship of catalysis in the irruption of *Criteria* only seven months after the disappearance of *Critical Thinking* were not wrong either. In the history of the cultural struggles of the Cuban Revolution, both editorial endeavors will always be united by the desire to practice and preach Martí's ethos of grafting the world onto the trunk of our republics and the Marxist ethos of radical criticism. As I told Abel⁵⁸ about three years ago, in a meeting with Fowler⁵⁹ and Reina María in his office, I do not lose hope that a Cuban magazine of social thought will appear today, *mutatis mutandis*, like *Critical Thinking* that even bears its name and be directed by you. What

⁵⁸ Abel Prieto, Minister of Culture.

⁵⁹ Victor Fowler Calzada (Havana 1960), a Cuban poet, essayist and researcher on cultural issues.

an encouraging sign of health, strength, and renewed ideological and cultural youth that would be for a socialist Revolution. What an announcement it would be of that critical and creative socialism that your essay work lucidly and passionately advocates and prefigures! Then, dear Desiderio, keep dreaming until the end of time.

Dear Fernando, it's a joy to be certain that you will not be absorbed by any Canon and that you will use all the symbolic capital that this award gives you in your permanent efforts to do what Marx would really do now.

A fraternal hug and the wishes of a 2007 full of new achievements for you and Esther.

Desiderio
January 7, 2007

Another Message from Desiderio Navarro

Companions and friends, this is unheard of. The ICRT not only doesn't apologize, but rewards the director of the program with her appearance in the stellar program of the afternoon, the same one whose job responsibility—if not political intentionality—had been in evidence in recent meetings.

This will cause widespread outrage of unpredictable magnitudes and results. Who is behind all this provocation? What microfraction, what small group? If there is no official condemnation, no one will believe that they do not have the blessing of the highest echelons of the Party. It's necessary to think very well about a deserved but prompt response to this lack of respect for all of us who met twice last week at UNEAC, starting with the Minister of Culture, and to all of us who, inside and outside of Cuba, have waited for the concrete results of that meeting and to which we gave a vote of confidence to the Party and UNEAC. A hug in these crucial moments of Cuban culture and society.

Desiderio Navarro's Response to Orlando Hernández

Dear Orlando:

It seems to me that there are some somewhat unfounded and unfair statements in the final paragraph of your letter to Arturo Arango, which I reproduce here:
I have just received an invitation from Desiderio for a conference on *Criterion* "The Five Gray Years: Revisiting the term" by Ambrosio Fornet as part of the Cycle "The cultural politics of the revolutionary period: Memory and reflection," where you will also make an appearance. It seems very good to me, of course, but I am also concerned that this is becoming a debate of an academic, "terminological" type, and so on. Outside of this message from Desiderio, I have hardly received any new messages, only the text from Amir and the discussion between Rosa Ileana and Desiderio. And the article in *El País*, of course. Anyway, is there nothing new to say or is everything said? Hopefully, it is neither.

How can you say, not that you are worried that “this will turn into, or could become” a debate of an academic, ‘terminological’ type, etc., but with a durative gerund and all, that you are concerned that “this is becoming” such a debate? The last meeting at the UNEAC on the matter ended the day before yesterday at seven or eight at night, and already yesterday at 11:10 at night I was circulating the electronic message with the invitation for a whole series of conferences that I had put together in the last 27 or 28 hours. I believe that seldom has a Cuban academic cultural institution reacted as quickly as *Cristerios* to the urgencies of Cuban intellectual life as now. There are still weeks until that conference, which would be the first, and can you already say that this is becoming an academic, “terminological” debate? It seems to me that you are quick to prejudge.

Now, is an academic debate on that period of Cuban cultural policy and its aftermath, survivals, and recurrences harmful or unnecessary? Isn’t the absence of research and academic events, of an entire academic literature and not merely essays on the subject, with its descriptions, analyzes, interpretations, explanations, and evaluations one of the main causal factors that allows, among other things, that that period and the phenomena of that period that survive or revive in subsequent ones remain so unknown or unexplained for so many generations who didn’t experience it as young people or adults, as we have seen in many messages these days?

On the other hand, who said that academic debate supposes the silencing of all extra-academic debate on the same topic? In the first place, even if it wants to, it has no way of silencing them since it has no power or technological means to prevent the exchange and circulation of electronic messages that began a week ago. On the contrary: if the academic debate is serious and not mere pseudo-academic speculation, you have to pay close attention to all the empirical material that comes out in these other debates, all the material of ideas and experiences, of reflections and testimonial sources—which in this case are more than rare, especially because they have been silenced or self-repressed for decades. And the responsibility to continue the discussion of these issues in one way or another, while there are reasons for it, is the responsibility of each and every one of us.

Ambrosio’s lecture is entitled, in effect, “The Five Gray Years: Revisiting the term.” Do you really think that discussing the expression “The Five Gray Years” is a mere superfluous terminological discussion? Of the participants in the electronic correspondence in recent days, myself, in *In medias res publicas* seven years ago, and César López before me—according to what Ambrosio himself told me the day before yesterday—we have questioned “The Five Gray Years” as a period name and as a chronological delimitation. Now, do these questions of expression—and others, such as Rine Leal’s, and with which Ambrosio will surely dialogue or polemicize on the 30th—raise a useless debate of aseptic academic terminology or a crucial problem of historical periodization of cultural politics, in which a position has to be taken before everything analogous that happened with so many creative works and lives already years before 1971 and still years after 1975? Suffice it to remember that the last attempt to impose socialist realism in its most dogmatic Soviet version as official doctrine was made between 1980 and 1983, in the midst of a tense ideological-political struggle between personalities and cultural and political institutions, given the change in the correlation

of forces in the prolonged transition from total control to fighting for positions. None of that is just a matter of words.

So, dear Orlando, I believe that the lecture by Ambrosio, father of the creature that has already walked so far, will make the cycle begin *in medias res* [without preamble], or moving from Latin to Creole—in the concrete, oblivious to Byzantinism and very attentive to the relationship between words and things, without academicism, but also without vulgarizations. The rest will depend on the public; that is, also on you. That is why I am very happy that Ambrosio has agreed to participate in this cycle of memory and reflection, and, even more, to initiate it.

Regarding the response of the UNEAC, once again, do not rush and wait for the document that the Presidency of the UNEAC will issue shortly on what happened.

A big hug, brother.
Desiderio
January 14, 2007

Response from Desiderio Navarro to Rosa Ileana Boudet

For those who do not have the access or the time to perform this search on the Internet, I reproduce below the text that in October 2002 I sent by email to the electronic publication *Teatro en Miami*, in response to a sudden attack by Rosa Ileana Boudet in its pages.

The Name of the Rose

It so happens that now Rosa Ileana Boudet, on the Miami website www.teatroenmiami.com, writes what here, from 1994 until her still recent emigration to the USA, she never expressed in a public conference or in writing, although she had, among others, the pages of the theatrical magazine *Conjunto*—directed by her for years until her departure—to give her opinion on any Cuban or foreign theatrical publication. In her endeavor to promptly deliver praise—which she did not write here either, as far as I know—of the relations of the also Cuban émigré Gloria María Martínez (former professor of the Higher Institute of Art installed at a university in Chile) with the work of Patrice Pavis, she considers it necessary to create a dramatic counter-figure residing in Cuba that would have hindered the achievement of the lofty cultural goals for which his heroine would have fought like Prometheus here until her departure. Below I quote a passage from her recent article entitled *Patrice Pavis: His own Gaze*, accessible on the aforementioned website:

“In 1989 [Pavis] participated in the II International Meeting organized by Criterios, celebrated in Havana, invited by Desiderio Navarro, who years later compiled and translated *The Theater and its Reception, Semiology, Crossing of Cultures and Postmodernism*, published in the same collection of the magazine of thought and culturology in 1994, and perhaps still in existence in the Rayuela bookstore of the Casa de las Américas. Navarro has recorded the author’s concern for this “other” Latin

American. Unfortunately, a history of contested translations—and a certain pedantry—prevented the book from bringing us up to date with Pavis at the time of its appearance and from publishing unknown texts in our language belonging to *Le Théâtre au croisement des cultures* [*The Theater at the Crossroad of Cultures*] (1990) or from *The Theater at the Crossroads of Culture* (1992) and *Confluences. Le Dialogue des cultures dans les spectacles contemporains* [*Confluences. The Dialogue of Cultures in Contemporary Theater*] (1992).

On the other hand, the contrast it creates between Gloria María's "artisanal editions" for ISA students (mentioned shortly before by Rosa Ileana) and my anthology in book format attempts to connotatively introduce the semantic opposition "underground," "marginalized"/ "Official" as if *Criterion*, from some position of supreme political power (crazy and laughable fantasy for any connoisseur of Cuban culture in recent decades) had wanted and could prevent Gloria María Martínez from publishing her translations in any of the Cuban editorials of that time (as she published in the Cuban magazines *Conjunto* [*Community*] and *Tablas* [*Theater*]); as if the choppy and eventful history of *Criterion* had not precisely been a history—unfortunately, to a great extent, one-person—of struggles, defeats, frustrations, and small victories against officialized dogmatism and for Cuba's openness to the wide variety of international theoretical thought.

Now, it happens that my anthology of Pavis' general-theoretical work, *El teatro y su recepción* [*The Theater and its Reception*], includes, among others, precisely four of the five general-theoretical texts of the book by Pavis, *The Theater at the Crossroads of Cultures*, namely, *Vers une théorie de la culture et de la mise en scène* [*Towards a Theory of Culture and Staging*]; *Du texte à la scène: un enfantement difficile* [*From Text to Stage: A Difficult Birth*], *L'héritage classique du théâtre postmoderne* [*The Classic Heritage of Postmodern Theater*], and *Vers une spécificité de la traduction théâtrale: La traduction intergestuelle et interculturelle* [*Towards a Specificity of Theater Translation: Intergestural and Cross-cultural Translation*].

The fifth theoretical text, an analysis of the situation of theatrical theory written in 1985, was not included because by 1993 it was already obsolete, and Pavis himself in two footnotes or post-scripts from 1990 stated: "This chapter led me to a degree of subjectivity that I would not like to have to face anymore today," and, regarding his own observations on the theory in the East, "I am glad to see in 1990 that all this belongs to the past."

Furthermore, my anthology also includes Pavis' Afterword, *Vers une théorie de l'interculturalité au théâtre?* [*Towards a theory of interculturality in theater?*] from the book *Confluences. Le Dialogue des cultures dans les spectacles contemporains* [*Confluences. The Dialogue of Cultures in Contemporary Theater*] (of which Rosa Ileana seems unaware that it is not a theoretical book by Pavis, but an anthology of his own writings). In other words, in my anthology I translated and published the "unknown texts in our language" that, according to Rosa Ileana, I prevented from being published.

On the other hand, my anthology, completed in early 1994, encompassed texts published by Pavis not only from 1982 to 1990 (in his last book at the time), but—thanks to Pavis’ own generosity and diligence—even a text published by him in the autumn-winter of 1993 (*Vers une théorie du jeu de l'acteur* [*Towards a Theory of the Actor’s Performance*], Degrés, no. 75-76); that is, until just one month before the conclusion of my work as translator and editor and only six months before the appearance of the printed book (July 1994). Never in Cuba has the appearance of a foreign theoretical book followed so closely in time the initial publication of his works in the original language—and this, moreover, in the worst editorial moment of the so-called “Special Period.” This is how I “prevented the book from bringing us up to speed with Pavis.”

I am not surprised by the “probable ingratitude of men” towards the only person in Cuba who, sacrificing a good part of his research work and his income, has translated from twelve languages and published more than 300 foreign theoretical texts for more than 30 years—among whose authors Pavis is but one along with more than a hundred—so that his Cuban colleagues could have access to exponents of the best of world theoretical thought that otherwise would have remained materially and/or linguistically inaccessible to many of them. I have almost gotten used to that more than probable, verifiable ingratitude of many men—and women.

And I am not surprised by the baseness with which, relying on the non-existent commercialization and scarce international accessibility of *Criteria*s editions, that same person who more than once “ironed out” an article for me when (co) directing the magazine *Revolución y Cultura* [*Revolution and Culture*] as a reliable and diligent cadre of Luis Pavón (President of the National Council of Culture) in matters of cultural information policy during the period that some insist on continuing to euphemistically call the “Five Gray Years” now from Miami resorts to the grossest lies to muddy my work and my intellectual ethics, in its hasty baptismal immersion in the waters of Theater in Miami, *Encuentro en la Red* [*Encounter on the Internet*], and other analogous diasporic publications. For me, let her continue doing her “theater in Miami” with all kinds of false or true diasporic Glories. There will already be a good friend who recommends that you write for yourself a libretto whose “villains” here, dead or decrepit, cannot easily replicate the falsehood of their infamies.

Ay, Gertrude, a Rose isn’t always a rose!

Desiderio Navarro
Los Naranjos, October 24, 2002

Appendix: As a sample of the kind of translation nonsense—inadmissible especially in a theoretical text—whose “challenge” by me Rosa Ileana, there and now, dares to call “pedantry” in order to rescue her heroine, I reproduce below the footnote to page II of the introduction to my anthology. Not even the subtitling in Spanish of North American films by Cuban Television reaches such heights!

• Here is a small sample, formed at random, of a translation of *The classic inheritance of postmodern theater*,” published in Apuntes, Santiago de Chile, 1-101, spring, 1990, pp. 117, 127.

• It says: “Vitez wants to reinvent tradition by removing the mark from it [*en s’en démarquant*].” It should say: “Vitez wants to reinvent tradition by distancing himself from it” (*se démarquer*: “distance yourself from”; here and hereinafter dictionary definitions come from *Petit Robert*).

• It says: “. . . opening [the text and the staging] to a series of contradictory settings, they are cut out [*se recouper*].” It should say: “. . . opening to a series of contradictory settings, they overlap” (recover, pronom., “Intersect. Fig. Occurring simultaneously”).

• It says: “The work that rigorously denies meaning is considered, by this logic, with [*est tenue par cette logique à*] the same coherence and with the same unity as those that were supposed to evoke meaning in another time.” It should say: “The work that rigorously denies meaning is bound by this logic to the same coherence and the same unity that in the past should evoke meaning.” (*être tenu à*: “to be obliged to (an action).”)

• It says: “Postmodernism, conceived as a practice of destruction.” It should say: “Postmodernism, conceived as a deconstruction practice.”

• It says: “This memory is carried out (...) by the recovery [*des reprises*] of phrases.” It should say: “This memory is carried out (...) through repetitions of phrases.” (reprise: “Act of saying again, repeating”).

• It says: “Stockhausen’s music, like Wilson’s theater, is in fact neither remarkable nor respectable [nor remarkable, nor reprehensible].” It should say: “The music of Stockhausen, as well as the theater of Wilson, are, in fact, not capable of notation, nor repeatable.”

• In the same translation from which these samples come, more than one case of conversion of negation into affirmation can be found: “Even the theater of the absurd belongs to modernism (and [not] to postmodernism)”; “The post: ‘of the postmodern’ means [*ne signifie pas*] [does not mean] a comeback movement [flashback]”; of neologisms due to ignorance of the original meaning: “Jacobism” for Jacobinism; “Anamorphis” [*anamorphose*] for anamorphosis—, large jumps.

• “Man no longer has anything of an individual inscribed in history or history that regulates all problems” where it is missing, after the word “or” and instead of the word “historical,” the passage: “historicized by a radical stage treatment, by a socio-historical explanation,” all of them attributable to misprints if they were not multiplied in other translations bearing the same signature (e.g., “From the text to the stage: a difficult childbirth” and others published in *Conjunto* and *Tablas*, Havana).

Another Casual Oblivion of Cuban Television

Dear Friends:

In the program *Mediodía* on television today (Tuesday, February 6), intended to celebrate the Day of Camagüeyan Culture that takes place these days, a segment, prepared by the journalist Aimée A. Margo, was dedicated to presenting the main cultural and historic merits of Camagüey, which began, as it should, by the *Espejo de Paciencia* [*Mirror of Patience*] from which it passed to Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda and Carlos J. Finlay, but, in a somersault to the present (or did I have a black-out?), omitted, under the expression “and others,” any mention of neither more nor less than a Camagüeyan poet of the XX century who is our National Poet, our greatest communist social poet: Nicolás Guillén, and even more, the President-founder, until his death, of our Union of Writers and Artists of Cuba.

Those of us who still hope that Camagüey will completely shed its pre-revolutionary and “pavonian” prejudices, in its local version, “Giordano-Atiénzar,” and take pride at the end of the novelistic and essay work of the internationally famous *émigré-mulato-gay*, Severo Sarduy, we see miles away from that horizon with this step back, which leaves, even more inconceivably and inexcusably, even the great revolutionary poet of Cuba and the world, Nicolás Guillén, out of the historical cultural memory of our city, province, and nation.

With kind regards,
Desiderio Navarro
February 6, 2007

Desiderio Navarro’s Response to the Message Signed as “Betty”

One of the most unfortunate things for me these days has been seeing how people who have been uncritically silent for a lifetime in the public sphere—in assembly, on paper, in email—after cautiously waiting a week or two to see “what happened to me” after my initial letter of condemnation, and after my call to the cycle on taboo topics, join the debate only to question me as a moderate, for not saying or doing this or that—always something that they themselves have never said or done in the Cuban public sphere. And I’m not just talking about the political *jineteras* who, today abroad, never wrote in Cuba even a polemic line like any of those in *In medias res publicas* (2001) or, decades ago, “Literary criticism: also a moral question” (1981); nor did they earn a reputation as “conflictive” by participating in a congress, assembly, or colloquium from the ’70s to today, paying the consequent biographical and intellectual price.

You question me with the following words: “Just as you did not accept Pavón on television, you would not have to give in now to being chosen for a quorum.” You don’t have to be too shrewd a semiotician to see the biased ellipsis operation in that sentence: who is the subject of this action of “choosing”? Who are those “they” you don’t name? By not making them explicit, you create what is called a “place of indeterminacy,” which can be filled by the reader with subjects such as “the bureaucrats,” “the Power,” “the

clique,” “the elite,” “the apparatus,” etc., depending on the suspicions or experiences or expectations of each one. In other words, a symmetrical variant, only in the opposite sign, of the much criticized “Mystery Syndrome.” No less typical of the Orwellian newspeak is its use of implicitness: the verb “give up” has two very different main meanings: one as a transitive verb: “1. to give, transfer, transfer to another a thing, action or right”; and another as an intransitive verb: “2. to surrender, submit.” (D.R.A.E.) The verb “give up” in its transitive form is an action that the subject can carry out on his own initiative and will (such as giving up a seat to a pregnant woman on the bus). However, if you use the verb in its intransitive form: “give in to”; that is, not to offer more resistance to, submit to the will of, capitulate, not resist the pressure, the force of (like giving in to the threats of an aggressor), it implies underneath that there is pressure from a “they” that, again, is not explicit.

Now, Betty, although I have not “yielded to” “having a quorum chosen for me,” at all times I have made it clear that I have yielded the right to “choose a quorum.” As I have explained in messages widely disseminated by email, after having found the Che Guevara Hall and thus quadrupled the capacity for the public, and having seen shortly after that those interested in attending exceeded that capacity, I decided that it was necessary to ensure the participation of Cuban writers, artists, and intellectuals in general, but it also turned out that the number of these who were interested in attending greatly exceeded that capacity, and that was when I refused to play the role of omnipotent czar who would decide unipersonally who could enter and who could not; and I passed that responsibility on to—and here I have made explicit, once again, the “they” of the message with which I informed my decision—the set of numerous cultural institutions of which Cuban writers, artists, and intellectuals are members or workers.

Therefore, it is up to the latter to question or not any decision of the bodies that they themselves have elected in the institutions of which they themselves have voluntarily decided to form part, or even the criteria themselves for making those decisions. Even so, what I did not stop doing was to insist that no diversion of invitations be allowed for favors of secretaries or officials, and that important cultural personalities were not left off the lists, simply because they didn’t have elective positions in the UNEAC or elsewhere, and that critics and researchers from the cultural sector were taken into account above all, which is the natural and habitual public of *Criteria*, a theoretical-cultural editorial center. I am sure that if I had not proceeded in this way, indignant letters would now be raining down on me, not for having made so-called “concessions,” but for having acted in the same autocratic and undemocratic manner that I have criticized in such or such institutions or instances already and which you also seem to want to oppose.

The insinuation, or rather the accusation in advance that non-assistants will receive “an edited version (as has always happened) of reality” is more than offensive, in the case of *Criteria*, and I will not waste time in answering it, because any honest intellectual, Cuban or foreign, who knows about the work of Desiderio Navarro and *Criteria* for 35 years, will find it disgusting and unacceptable. Not to mention how offensive it will be to the speakers themselves. In any case, you, too,—although you have not requested them like more than four hundred people have already done—will receive the texts of the

conferences, if only so that you can scrutinize them in search of some careless trace of the editorial eraser and scissors.

Desiderio Navarro
January 28, 2007

DUANEL DÍAZ

Translated by Regina Anavy and Gustavo Loredó

A public letter has reached my mailbox in which Desiderio Navarro criticizes the recent appearance of Luis Pavón in a Cuban television program that has praised his contribution to national culture. In addition to joining in the deserved repudiation of that obscure censor whose literary work is of no importance, I would now like to share a couple of reflections on Navarro's own denunciation; to point out, above all, the limits of his position, which are, basically, those of the ones who at this stage of the game affirm that freedom of criticism and Cuban socialism are not incompatible.

By placing most of the blame on the official, important as he may be, Navarro largely relieves the revolutionary government of it. "It is true that Pavón was not the prime mover at all times, but neither was he a mere executioner by due obedience. Because to this day an important question has remained without being raised and cleared up: how many wrong decisions were made "higher up" on the basis of the information, interpretations, and evaluations of works, creators, and events supplied by Pavón and his cronies at the time, on the basis of their diagnoses and forecasts of supposed serious threats and dangers from the cultural environment?" he asks, placing the origin—the "base"—of the injustice with the director of *Verde Olivo*, and thus attributing the wrong decisions of the top leadership to the "data" supplied by him.

But it wasn't Pavón who invented Stalinism, nor was he the one who decided to follow it in Cuba: these assessments, which are the basis for the doctrine of socialist realism, had already presided over the critical work of the thinkers of the Popular Socialist Party: Carlos Rafael Rodríguez, Mirta Aguirre, Juan Marinello, José Antonio Portuondo, Nicolás Guillén.

At first confronted with the supporters of other aesthetic positions who claimed for themselves the originality of the Revolution, these Stalinist intellectuals were acquiring more importance in the dictation of cultural policy as the revolutionary government, declared Marxist-Leninist since 1961, was tightening its ties with the Soviet bloc and the limits of revolutionary legality.

Navarro affirms that Pavón's imprint "conditioned the resentment and even the emigration of many of those non-revolutionary creators, but not counterrevolutionaries, whose alarm Fidel had tried to dispel in 'Words to the intellectuals,'" as if between this speech by Castro and the opinions of the First National Congress of Education and Culture there would have been a simple solution of continuity.

Stay in the Branches

To advocate the need to go to the roots and stay in the branches is, thus, the core contradiction of the criticism that Desiderio Navarro already offered in the essay *In media res publicas*. There he points out: "The fate of socialism after the fall of the socialist camp is given, more than before, by its ability to sustain in theory and practice that initial idea of the adherence of the intellectual to the Revolution—like that of any

other ordinary citizen—‘if he really wants to be useful, it can only be a critical adhesion’; for his ability to tolerate and publicly respond to social criticism directed at him from other ideological positions, from those ‘non-revolutionaries within the Revolution’ to whom the famous maxim of 1961 referred.”

Faced with this demand for the right to criticism for revolutionaries and non-revolutionaries from “inside,” it is worth asking where the limit is at which the “counterrevolution” begins. Who establishes the “outside” if not that Maximum Leader in whose dictum of 1961 already existed, in a nutshell, the determinations of 1971? The truth is just the opposite of what Navarro says: the very existence of socialism, before and after the Wall fell, depends on repressing fundamental criticism, since this would melt it like a piece of ice exposed to the Cuban noon. The Revolution does not admit “critical conscience.” To really criticize it, you have to be “out of the game.” Get out of your own language: go from “Fidel” to “Castro.” As long as “Fidel” exists, not only as a physical being but as a concept that provides legitimacy, the symmetry between “politicians” and “intellectuals” suggested by Navarro turns out to be false; in fact, there are no “politicians” in Cuba, since there are no parties or parliament.

Nor do I think that greater resistance from intellectuals would have changed things much in the seventies: more would have been repressed, since the system was an effective machine for producing repressors. More reprehensible than those who kept silent or collaborated at that time are, in my opinion, those who, having been marginalized, became great champions of the regime after being rehabilitated.

On one thing I do agree with Navarro: you have to have memory. Which is why I miss, in his energetic criticism of the profession, a self-criticism, because I can’t forget that, although they have censored his own writings and prohibited the publication of some others, he was still one of the accomplices of that same policy with which the name of Lieutenant Pavón has been identified.

As if he were a contributor to the positivist magazine *Cuba Contemporánea* suddenly mounted by the spirit of Zdanov, Desiderio Navarro wrote: “In no way could the directive system of socialist society allow culture to become that historical factor that, once abandoned to spontaneity and free movement, and thanks to its capacity for inverse action on other social factors, would massively introduce randomness, disorder, disproportion, and discordance in the entire social organism” (“The leading role of the Party Marxist-Leninist in the field of culture,” *La Gaceta de Cuba*).

Duanel Díaz
Spain

Response from Duanel Díaz to Eliseo Alberto Diego

In his email, Eliseo Alberto Diego accuses me, Jorge Luis Arcos, and José Pepe Prats of being unfair, unsupportive, and even opportunistic in our comments published in *Encuentro en la red*. As for me, I would like to reply to this, not without first pointing out that there is no difference, in terms of degrees of reflection, between them and those

of Lichi: ours don't have, as he affirms, the "advantage that the exercise of reflection gives" on "the logical lightness of someone who writes an electronic SOS on the fly"; his is a fully reasoned and developed comment, as well thought out as ours, and at the same time written in the heat of this surprising conjuncture, just like ours.

"When Havana fell silent, some took advantage of the pause to run wild," says Lichi. He may not believe me, but the truth is that my comment was written immediately after reading Desiderio Navarro's public letter. That same day, late in the morning, I posted it on a recently launched blog, and it was the next day, when I had already read some of the messages from Cuba, that Pablo Díaz proposed that I publish it on *Encuentro*. Then Yoyi and Pepe's notes came out, and I was honestly glad that they shared my position. Today, hours before reading Lichi Diego's message, I have been talking at length with Yoyi on the subject. I think what bothered him the most is the fact that some from Havana tried to leave those of us in exile out of the debate, when it is a fact that many of those affected in the '70s are on this side of the pond and that, in a certain way, we have all been affected, since the damage that was then done to culture and the intelligentsia is not overcome by decree. For my part, what bothered me most about Desiderio's public letter was that the harshness with which he criticized intellectuals for not having resisted in the '70s was not accompanied by self-criticism—thus being inconsistent with the memory that claimed—and yes, with a clear purpose—to exonerate the highest authorities of the Revolution.

Indeed, Baquero said that "culture is a meeting place," but that phrase, as long as it does not acquire a concrete interpretation, is an empty and rhetorical slogan, a kind of wild card that works for everything. *Encuentro* has taken it as a motto in the effort to bring everyone together in a necessary dialogue, a debate that the Cuban authorities rejected. All the writings on the issue at hand will be published in *Encuentro en la web*, those signed by those from here and there, by the "revolutionaries" and the "counterrevolutionaries," those of the "right" and those of the "left." Neither *La Jiribilla* nor *Cuba Literaria* will. When *Temas* has published some substantive criticism, it has been, as in the case of Ponte on Martí's essay, to immediately try to disqualify him in the most rude and, of course, counterproductive way. *Criterios* launched an issue a few years ago with theoretical approaches to "North American neofascism," but on the fascist side of the Cuban regime it has not published anything as far as I know.

The thesis that "culture is a meeting place" has been assumed by the Cuban authorities with another meaning: to found a false consensus once, after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the State was deprived of Marxist-Leninist legitimacy and had to make use of the "idealisms" previously rejected. This culture, now conceived not as another terrain of the class struggle but as a "meeting place," defines a space of greater tolerance to the extent that its relative autonomy guarantees that political decisions remain in the hands of those as always. Is pointing this out self-sufficiency? Is it a theoretical pose? Is it Byzantinism?

Lichi says: "He inverts the spyglass to exaggerate his own sentences, those of Duanel, as if the amplification of a truth were enough to sustain it, with which he forgets that, misunderstood, reality seen through a magnifying glass sometimes only serves to distort

it, not to reason with it.” Now, what I am pointing out is not “my” truth, nor is it Prats’ or Yoyi’s, even though they share it; it is simply the truth, something that is beyond political or ethical positions. I do not have to amplify it because it is based on the facts: it was Fidel Castro who delivered the closing speech of the First National Congress of Education and Culture. But Lichi prefers to focus on another passage in my comment. He says: “Díaz is staunchly assuring that the Revolution does not admit ‘critical conscience,’ because in order to truly criticize it, you have to be out of the game. Get out of your own language: go from ‘Fidel’ to ‘Castro.’ As long as ‘Fidel’ exists, not only as a physical being but as a concept that provides legitimacy, the symmetry between ‘politicians’ and ‘intellectuals’ suggested by Navarro is false; in fact, in Cuba there are no ‘politicians’ since there are no political parties or parliament.” The serious thing is not that there are “no parties” but that there is only one, plus an Assembly of People’s Power made up almost entirely of its militants. At this stage of the “party,” after so much of the same on both sides, in Havana and in Miami, the proposal to choose any president or leader won’t bring about any difference as long as the present context persists.

Now, is there a difference between there being no parties and there being only one? By contradicting me and affirming the same as me, it is he who is Byzantine, if not absurd. The difference between “Castro” and “Fidel” that I am pointing out is not without meaning. Taken out of context, in Lichi’s message, it certainly seems artificial, but in my comment it is not at all gratuitous. I insist that while Fidel cannot be called “Castro,” as long as he is not subject, like everyone else, to the scrutiny of public opinion that defines every democratic space, there cannot be an authentic debate in Cuba, although there may be voices that, like Ena Lucía Portela’s⁶⁰, put themselves apart from this fallacious rhetoric.

“What it is about, now, is to add; the one who subtracts, loses. It would be a very serious mistake to be wrong about who our opponent is. If we commit this mistake we can end up becoming our own enemy. With me, those who only see spots on the sun don’t count,” ends Lichi.⁶¹ And I wonder if the sun that would come out if those of us who make a substantive criticism keep quiet will help someone other than that regime that restricts the freedoms of everyone, those from there, who cannot express themselves freely, and those from here, who for doing so are prohibited from entering our country. Who, Lichi Diego⁶² or us, is wrong about who our real opponent is? My opponent is not Desiderio Navarro, much less the other colleagues in Havana: my opponent—Yoyi’s, Pepe’s—is the Castro regime.

Duanel Díaz
Madrid, Spain

⁶⁰ Ena Lucía Portela (b. 1972) is a Cuban novelist, essayist, and writer of short stories.

⁶¹ Reference to Jose Martí: “The sun has spots. The grateful see the light; the ungrateful see the spots.”

⁶² Eliseo Alberto Diego (1951-2011) was a Cuban-born Mexican writer, novelist, essayist, and journalist. He was nicknamed “Lichi.”

EDDY E. JIMÉNEZ PÉREZ

Translated by Regina Anavy and Gustavo Loredó

Compañero(a)s:

I confess that I have been tempted to “intrude,” although since the beginning of this healthy debate it has cost some work for me to write down my opinions. On the one hand, I am not given to the exercise of controversy for the sake of controversy; moreover, at first I felt that the openings by Desiderio and Reynaldo and other interventions, although fair, didn’t overstep the unionist character and could lead to a Byzantine discussion. On the other hand, a few hours later I read the columns/calumnies of the salaried worker Cancio in *El Nuevo Herald*, also those of Duanel Díaz, as well as the (im) partial information of Mauricio Vicent, in *El País*, and I felt anger and nausea: what had to happen, happened.

I’m not allergic to intellectuals residing abroad. I believe that there are also revolutionaries and honest people out there, willing even to give their lives for our country, but it was obvious to me that this opportunity was being used by the right, Cuban or non-Cuban, to try to fan the fire and take advantage. Between 1987 and 1991, I resided in Eastern Europe, and I know very well how the intelligentsia of those countries, in many cases, was manipulated through disinformation, and how, although sometimes justly, their unionist positions facilitated the delivery of socialism. I wondered several times if, as Desiderio pointed out, “in this singular moment in the history of our country in which all our people are awaiting the convalescence of the Commander in Chief,” it was productive to hang out our wash in public. In the end I was convinced that yes, it was, but to make it shine and warm us, not to burn us. Digging up that history and its characters to be taught and to unite is healthy; to spread stench, it’s insane and only causes distancing.

My condition as a writer, a revolutionary intellectual, and a member of UNEAC impelled me to speak out. Not taking sides is inexcusable in a revolutionary and is explicable only in a coward or an automaton, who waits for others to decide. In this regard, I recalled having read that Che, in a meeting of the Ministry of Industries, on March 10, 1962, said:

“There is a tendency to consider man as a number. To treat people as numbers is to reduce everything to very simple expressions and produce automatons, and the Revolution, the last thing it can think about is producing automatons. It has to produce people who are with the Revolution, may it be in the place that corresponds to the Revolution.”

I also remembered that funny story that Che enjoyed telling and that Tirso Sáenz relates in his book, *Minister Che*:

“Question: What is the difference between Renaissance, Expressionism, and Socialist Realism paintings?”

“Answer: In the Renaissance, the painter painted what he saw. In expressionism, the painter painted what he felt. In Socialist Realism, the painter painted what he heard.”

Should we speak about what we hear—from above, whether from the left or the right—or do we have the duty and the right to express ourselves? Two events also prompted me to abandon silence: first, the Declaration of the UNEAC Secretariat published by *Granma*; second, the wise and honest interventions by Orlando Hernández and Pedro Campos. Let’s get to the first.

The opaque and concise Declaration left people in limbo. Many neighbors and friends asked me what was happening, why this Declaration had been published. None had seen those programs in Open Dialogue or Imprint. The Difference had an audience, but the interviewees who remembered were Carilda and Luisa María Jiménez, and no one mentioned Serguera. Simply, the majority of the population believes that Alfredo screwed up in one of the programs (but nobody knows which one) and will be reprimanded. That’s the rumor. In short, the vast majority don’t know the underlying causes that imposed the Declaration. As they say, there is uproar in the system.

This “uproar” is logical if we take into consideration that today, around 80 percent of the population is under 55 years of age; therefore, when Serguera administered the ICRT, the vast majority of people were either very young or simply not born. Furthermore, the interviewee lacked the slightest charisma and no one was interested in what he said, except for those of us who knew who he was.

I happened to witness that show. Years ago I saw one that seemed in such bad taste and so corny that I never sat in front of the television to watch something like that again, because I’m not here to waste my time. However, I was reading when my colleague called me to see and laugh with her at the horrible program that was happening on television, and when I turned it on, Alfredo was interviewing “Papito,” and among other things, he thanked the interviewee for having paid him his first salary, so that his family could eat. I was outraged.

But hey, let’s go to the positive part of the Declaration of the UNEAC Secretariat. The fact that the official newspaper of the Party spread it is very important because, on the one hand, it calms the concerns of the Cuban intelligentsia, and, on the other, it goes against the enemy’s propaganda abroad and frustrates those who, outside or inside the country, have as their true intent the dismantling of socialism, our socialism, which although imperfect, requires the struggle for perfection, for adaptation to the present reality in Cuba, and for the awakening of the Socialism of the twenty-first century, which is already making its way into Our America and from which we have to learn, humbly, even though we have had the glory of being the founders.

It never hurts to say that Cuba has a glorious historical responsibility to fulfill on the Continent, and we are facing it with disinterest, courage, and energy, even at the cost of many sacrifices. We were the first socialist country in America; we knew how to stay upright and uncompromising when fake socialism collapsed. And despite the aggressiveness of the U.S., despite all the hardships, difficulties, and mistakes, here we

continue, giving light and strength. Cuba is a bastion that must be maintained at all costs. A setback in Cuba would have catastrophic consequences for all of America. I believe that although the Declaration is opaque, concise, of little depth, and leaves unanswered questions that people aren't aware of, our partisan and intellectual authorities have acted with wisdom. The unity of all sectors of the country must be maintained, and in the case of intellectuals it's crucial.

For Karl Marx, the intelligentsia represented the living consciousness of society, and for us Cubans, maintaining the unity of that living consciousness is a matter of life or death, since we intellectuals are also ideology makers. It's not that we all think alike; that is impossible and holds us back. Honest debate is enriching, but we must maintain unity around essential, strategic ideas, which for me are homeland, anti-imperialism, and socialism.

Now more than ever, at a time when Fidel is convalescing and the enemy is on the prowl to create divisions; now, 40 years after the assassination of that great communist teacher, sower of ideas, struggles, unity, the eternal fighter for perfection and for the Revolution within the Revolution, which was Che, true revolutionaries have to be informed and inform: try to influence. As for the wise and honest interventions by Orlando Hernández and Pedro Campos, I also believe that deep down and on the surface the issues that have been honestly and bravely debated in the "Little War of Emails" are not a matter of brotherhood but rather of Cuban society as a whole. We are all Cubans, and the Revolution is also ours; we are and will be against any type of annexationism, and we have the right and duty to express our opinions, help in the search for solutions and, above all, save Our Revolution from the dangers that Fidel has already enunciated to us.

Debate and popular participation in decisions are essential tools for building a socialist society. If the productive forces of the nation are not liberated, if we don't make the manual and intellectual workers feel themselves owners of their destinies and the real owners of the means of production, we will be trapped in the networks of fake socialism and will be betrayed by bureaucracy. We can't sing the praise that we have less than two percent unemployment while in our country, with its centuries of sugar tradition, which once was a world exporter of this product, a worker is paid to work in a *guarapera* that has no sugar cane to make *guarapo*, and we must pay in Cuban convertible currency for a child to have a piece of candy.

We have to pay a taxi driver ten pesos to get to work, when the average daily salary of the Cuban is precisely that. Could it be that no one questions where the money comes from to pay for that taxi ride when in reality the taxi driver is paid more than we earn in a day? Where does that money come from? Doesn't the bureaucracy realize that a Cuban cannot live on his salary, that this is simply not enough for anyone? Why do we have an underground economy to which a good part of the population has no choice but to turn, even against their will?

Our new generations are being educated in this dire environment. We can't allow it. That would bring the end of the Revolution; the ideological consequences can be

irreversible, just as the Revolution can be reversible. I don't think that we should talk about who was to blame for this or that event but to present ourselves to the historic generation as soldiers who, by right and by duty, are fighting to perfect our Socialism, so that those who made the Revolution can save it, now that there is still time, together with us and the people, and we must let them know that they can have confidence in us.

Eddy E. Jiménez Pérez
Writer and journalist
Ever onward to victory.
Twenty-first Century Socialism is possible.

Note: Between 1992 and 1993, I wrote a book called *La revolución de los camaleones* [*The Chameleon Revolution*]. It's a personal essay on the fall of fake socialism in Eastern Europe. It was first published in Brazil and Portugal; last year it was published in Chile. I can send it to colleagues who are interested in reading it.

EDUARDO JIMÉNEZ GARCÍA

Translated by Regina Anavy and Gustavo Loredó

Yesterday, late at night, I commented to Pedro Campos via e-mail: "... beyond the tasteless and intellectually short declaration (?) of the UNEAC Secretariat, I go to bed tonight with great joy: today have poured in by email the reflections of dissimilar people (artists or not, intellectuals or not), all patriots, who in addition to showing their dissatisfaction with the very low profile of that note, do not want to let the real debate of these days die, the climate of frank and free exchange that we have all experienced for a week. I thank Orlando Hernández, Desiderio Navarro, Jorge Ángel, Miguel Barnet, Reynaldo González, Francis Sánchez, Zenayda Rumeo, Pedro Campos, Roberto Cobas, Arturo Arango, Jorge de Mello, and many others who kept alive this space—alternative but very effective—of debate, even when at times it seemed on the verge of being empty or diluted. I am especially indebted to Orlando for having made this exchange an event that went beyond the guild to become an inclusive forum of sensitivity and social commitment where we all fit, whether or not we're artists ..."

But I forgot to "modify" all of the above with a qualifier that, in my opinion, could not be absent: the personal, intellectual, and social courage of all of them to defend not only this reserve of reflection, but the most urgent need for a national debate about the country we want. Orlando's lucid, agile, and humble inquiry, and the entry into the arena of historians and economists like Pedro and Cobas, moved me greatly. Mariela Castro's note to Reynaldo that spread like wildfire on the Internet yesterday also made a pleasant impression on me, as she seemed, as I mentioned to Pedro, to be sympathetic.

It was obvious, although we were afraid to admit it, that the so-called "little war of e-mails" was not only "a matter for artists" but also a "matter for Cuba" and that it was not an exchange instigated, nor orchestrated, nor financed by any CIA agent. Many truly revolutionary voices—although marginalized and punished countless times by the representatives of dogma and immobility—suddenly found themselves united on the Internet, and from there they expressed themselves. They are also the Revolution, whether or not some bureaucrats like it. They are the dissatisfied, sincere, emancipatory, intelligent, and creative voice that every True Revolution needs in order not to die. They are not the "strange" or "confused" part of the Revolution, although they are apparently the minority. No. They are the very soul of the Revolution. They are its vindication. They are why it's also still alive.

Believe me that at times I had felt a certain great loneliness. Are I, and some of my friends, I have wondered, the only ones who, feeling revolutionary and anti-capitalist, don't fit into the molds of what bureaucratic thought has called "revolutionary"? Are we condemned to "maladjustment"? Or will we start to pretend, decidedly, that everything seems fine to us and "Yes, boss"? And with this last, I CANNOT. In those molds, "I don't know, I can't get in." But I have seen, with happiness, that I'm not the only dog on the outskirts, and that in this unrecognized periphery of God, there are many enchanted and dignified dogs that don't want to walk, making serious concessions, through the center of the city that they love so much.

I remember that one day, at the beginning of 2002, a television manager called to inform me that I could not continue in the analysis space that my friend Pepe Alejandro and I had founded almost two years ago in Morning Magazine, because I was “outside the information line of the revolution.” They had received “strong complaints” from the leadership of the Communist Party in Santiago de Cuba, and especially from its first secretary, Juan Carlos Robinson, about a program that I dedicated to commenting on the serious problem of children begging in the tourist area of Santiago. The anger of that chief, together with other protests from entities questioned on previous occasions, such as the Ministry of Public Health and the CIMEX commercial network, were “reasons” enough to remove me. I only managed to answer that character: “Do not speak to me in the name of the Revolution. Tell me that you are afraid, that you are under pressure, that you are taking care of the position. You have the power, but you are not the Revolution, and Robinson is not the revolution.” They suggested to my friend Pepe Alejandro, whom I loved and respected even more after those days, that he do the program alone or with someone new, but he wouldn’t do it and resigned with dignity.

I tell you this, without further details or names, because I believe that at this point the important thing is not the name of the executioner (against whom I honestly do not hold a grudge), but, as I mentioned yesterday to Pedro, the undesirable culture of exercise of power that, unfortunately, is not alien to the functioning of many areas of our present society, and in which the truth is silenced, the legitimate and sincere commitment of the professional with his society is punished, and in which the assent, chameleon character and “the unrestricted cult of authority” (as Ché said) exists. In my opinion, the email controversy held during these days has also essentially dealt with these problems. But that evil, which Pedro analyzes very well in his *Chaos on the Net* articles, is nothing more than the concentrated political expression of an excessively centralist economic scheme that almost naturally makes room for this type of “order and command” attitude and many others, no less negative, because on the basis of reflection and collective participation in decision-making at all levels, such a scheme couldn’t survive. All this, unfortunately, brings about an unavoidable lack of commitment on the part of people, as they feel more like objects than subjects—dominoes—within the process of historical construction. And all this is another gigantic danger—no less so than American aggressiveness—, and some would prefer to ignore it in order to sleep peacefully.

Fidel was already asking himself, just over a year ago at the University of Havana, “What would be the ideas or the degree of consciousness that would make the reversal of a revolutionary process impossible?” I think this is what, basically, this whole movement of electronic reflection is about, caused by the unusual appearance on television of people like Pavón, Serguera, and Quesada. And I agree with Mariela Castro that the dramatic episodes of the so-called “five-year gray period” should be deeply analyzed TO AVOID THEIR REPEAT. That is why Desiderio’s initiative—although some believed it to be demobilizing at first—seems so valid to me. Yes, we have to talk, and a lot. Report. Be assertive. Exorcise those demons that many times castrate our courage and clarity to interpret—as social entities, not as union members but as revolutionaries—the current reality and its urgent need for changes. But the reflections shouldn’t keep bouncing off the walls of a bishop’s cloister. If we still want an even more emancipated and fair country, a country where capitalism cannot be restored, then it’s necessary to involve

everyone in everyone's affairs, as Martí said. I see no alternative but commitment and creation.

For all of the above, the statement of the UNEAC Secretariat has seemed to me very bland and intellectually simplified. It simply does not measure up to what happened. Many people find it difficult to accept a problem being announced without giving the slightest explanation about it. That, it is logical, has caused a certain feeling of being scammed for several recipients of the message and seems to establish a limit to the discussions about the subject at a more socialized level. Most of the Cuban people have been left without understanding what the note was about.

As an eminently unionist and cryptic theme—"abstruse" I would add to emphasize the irony (what else is it if not "the intellectual sector"?)—this legitimate uproar has been dealt with, which, thanks to some of its participants, managed to go in its analysis beyond the painful and unforgettable anecdotes of a not-too-distant yesteryear. "To the intellectuals, what belongs to the intellectuals," and the paraphrase is worth it. The matter has been handled, in the order of politics and mass communication, as if thought were not the result of socio-economic and historical development, as if artistic ideas and intellectual exercise of any kind were separated from social reality and its dynamics. "Things of artists." Why explain to people, in detail, the conflict that arose in the cauldron of a club of sullen sorcerers, if no one is going to understand anything? In this way (some wise bureaucrat will think), people are going to get mixed up in necromancy. Better not to know.

I don't know what Mella, Villena, and Pablo, for example, would think at the moment about those who broke definitively and very early with the Ivory Tower of the alienated intellectual of the 19th century, to become what Gramsci would later call the "organic intellectual," a fearless socializer committed to thinking, constantly involved in "public affairs" and the Nation's pulse, conscious agents and enthusiasts of social change. Martí—undoubtedly—had left his fertile stamp. Ay, Martí! What a great artist, what a great intellectual, and at the same time what a great politician.

Anyway ... How good that all this has happened and is happening. And for the good, if one knows how to take advantage with intelligence and wisdom of the true Revolution and its very sense of being: the increasing emancipation of the individual and of society. Of course, as a dear friend says, after so much effort something good has to come out of all this. The REVOLUTION belongs to everyone. Sincere thanks, again, everyone.

A hug,
Eduardo Jiménez García

Message from Eduardo Jiménez García to Enrique Colina

Dear Enrique Colina:

First of all, my respect—which from now isn't only that of a viewer towards the good communication professional that you are. And many thanks for allowing your ideas to be shared.

I have read, with progressive and undiminished admiration, your brave, sincere, and insightful “download.” Right now there seems to be no other way to be consistent. It's obvious that yours is a position of rooted and indisputable commitment to the REVOLUTION that many of the participants in this discussion via email have also defended. I believe as never before that hygiene and dignity exercises like this one of yours are urgent: reflective and respectful, but at the same time open in their complaint, without ambiguity. It is, in my opinion, about helping our society do something better, about emancipating all of us in the very exercise of emancipating everyone. It is a duty and a right. It is dialectical. It is, although many do not like the word, MARXISM. To assent like obedient altar boys before the dogmatic faith of the bureaucrats and to resign oneself to transfiguration through their inaction, helping to squash genuine differences and the exercise of one's own opinion, could never be a Duty, and even less a Right.

We know that static revolutions don't exist, just as there are no revolutions by decree. Bureaucratic thought and action don't make revolutions, nor do they recreate them: they de-substantiate them by slowly and effectively annihilating them. Gorbachev and *Perestroika* drew on that (including *glasnost*). They were no more than the executioners who applied a death sentence passed long ago for the lack of a true socialist democracy, for the lack of citizen participation and supervision, for the bankruptcy of that arch-centralist and inoperative economic model, for the terrible existence of an obese bureaucracy that was depriving the working class of power in the name of socialism, and by many other twists, some extremely serious. And that is more than known. *Perestroika* was not a cause, but a consequence.

I believe that recreating the REVOLUTION, extending it alive and magnetized among generations, can only be the result of the participation of ALL of us who in good faith (but never blind) want it, because without PARTICIPATION there is no commitment, and without COMMITMENT there will be no responsibility, and without RESPONSIBILITY there will be no possible and positive exercise of FREEDOM. There will be plenty of mimicry, double standards, and convenient obeying.

It is not only material improvements that we need, even when they are of the utmost importance. Re-enchanted and feeling subject to a just and humanistic social project does not depend solely on the elevation of the material quality of existence, but on the active involvement of the subject (sentimentally and consciously) in the modeling, change, and improvement of that social project. Counting on everyone to change and growing with everyone. But to really CHANGE, without alienating verticalisms. Start doing it.

I would hate it—as I believe you and many of those who have been participating in this informal debate—if the maxim for transformation was the one that Nicholas Machiavelli recommended to his Prince 500 years ago: “Change, change a lot, so that nothing changes.” What we need are not fictions of change, but profound changes that banish fictions and the not-remote possibility of a capitalist restoration in Cuba. Changes that are neither Soviet nor Chinese (as Dimitri Negroponte wishes), nor Vietnamese, but Cuban. Changes that respond to the best of our roots and traditions, with attention placed on the most creative contemporary revolutionary thought, will make this society an unquestionably more democratic, more participatory, more natural, more functional, freer, happier, and superior space. A change where the sovereignty of the country is as sacred and unquestionable as respect for the sovereignty of its individuals and their right to participate with their own opinion in the process of building their own nation, their own REVOLUTION, without fear of being “marked” and “punished”—subtly or not—by the occasional bossy bureaucrat with too much power. CREDIBILITY and a sincere and non-exclusive debate on our problems are the basis of IRREVERSIBILITY.

But that irreversibility, to become true, cannot be understood as a process of Numantine resistance, but rather as a process of sincere and positive overcoming of so much accumulated contradiction. That is why I found your letter to Desiderio Navarro so interesting and necessary, since I consider it another valuable personal vote for open, honest, and free dialogue on old and current problems, which exceed what is actually artistic due to its lively resonances in social, economic, and political terms for our country. I hope that the conference organized by *Criteria* (now with restricted participation through the allocation of invitations) will add to your memories and opinions, which are as sincere and committed as those of you and other *compañeros*. The important thing, anyway, has already happened and is happening.

A few years ago I heard Fernando Martínez Heredia say something devastatingly free, profound, and satirical that has helped me a lot not to fall into that cynical, silent, and disenchanting conformism that abounds so much. Fernando said that time, referring to his criticized and stubborn irreverence: “I live in a free country, and I also believe it.”

Thank you very much again,
Eduardo Jiménez García

Message from Eduardo Jiménez García to Abelardo Mena

Dear Abelardo,

Yesterday I read your response to a person (I don't remember his name) who supported Desiderio Navarro with worrying elitism.

I share with you, and I thank you, for not having missed the opportunity to remind (us) that every Cuban and every opinion interested in the destiny of the country has the right to this debate, and that it should not become a gateway of intellects (which some strongly want) if we want it to remain a legitimate and respectable space for reflection—even for ourselves. All the richness that has sprouted in these crossings of e-mails,

whatever they look like and wherever they come from, seems great to me. They are the living portrait of our intellectual and ideological diversity, and above it we can see common points that are, in my opinion, the most important.

I also thank you for your feedback, and I hasten to reply to you. Although I don't share them, they give me food for thought, and they have also been the object of my own questioning at certain times. "Evolution" is closely linked to the so-called "natural order" (always respectable), and we should ask ourselves if what we are experiencing is not already for many people (with or without power) a "natural order of things," a culture of assimilated life. Would we want more of the same? Would we let so many serious problems that were "evolutionarily" created be "resolved" by the law of natural evolution? Will we rest and let the hand of God take account of our things and in our favor? Then what would be the point of participating in this valuable debate and risking our own opinion, if everything will evolve the way God wants?

Another evolutionary variant would be the return to capitalism, another "natural order," perhaps the most recognized as being old and from the devil, but that is not my option, although I respect that for others it is. I prefer to participate in the creation (engineered like all social constructions) of a new society, in the creation of a new natural order and a new common sense that far exceeds the current mode of relationship between human beings, in Cuba, and in the world. All social study is construction (laws, norms accepted or not of behavior, economic system, ideology, common sense functional to the scheme, etc.). I'm not afraid of revolutionizing, nor do I think it's a worn-out word. There is another way in Cuba to understand the revolution and another way to defend it that is not the bureaucratic doctrine that has done so much damage. That prostituted use of the word "revolution" is broken, and I think a good part of our country understands that.

I believe in the concept of revolution that Che has. I believe in the inevitable development of common sense, and I believe in Marxism as a method of interpreting reality and its great complexities. I believe in human power to transform life. I believe in socialism—that other socialism, really more humane and freer, that we could and should knead together before putting it in the oven. Another thing is whether, in reality, the majority (silent but thinking) are willing, conscious, and emotionally prepared to embark on a conquest of such magnitude, as one would wish. I think many people are.

I think that these reflections of both could be useful for the debate. If you allow me, I would like to share them with several friends, as it would help us all.

I thank you again for your sincerity and your previous interventions in this virtual forum that sincerity and courage have opened.

A hug,
Eduardo Jiménez
January 29, 2007

ELISEO ALBERTO DIEGO

Translated by M. Ouellette

My Point of View

“When I close the door, I never know whether I’m inside or outside.”
(Judith Vázquez)

I open the door. The unexpected and inexplicable (and as yet unexplained) return to television of Jorge Papito Serguera, El Gordo Quesada, and Luis Pavón Tamayo, a.k.a. (some say) Leopoldo Ávila, has awoken a logical agitation in Cuban intellectual circles, and this email turbulence has gone beyond the Island’s servers to arrive, as a choral ensemble, on the shores of the Cuban exile, where many of us follow with attention, surprise and, almost always, anguish about what happens in Cuba, for better or for worse. Those of us on this side of the border are up-to-date, if not up-to-the-day. We belong.

On January 8, the first email correspondence between Jorge Ángel Pérez, Reynaldo González, Desiderio Navarro, Sigfredo Ariel, and Arturo Arango began to appear on the Internet. Messages came, messages went, the recipient list of such stinging correspondence (at first private, and then public) grew into a very long list of addresses in just a few hours. Reason tried to impose itself on passion without complete success because ideas were running, rushing around with vibrant impatience, without time to consolidate a firm statement: so intense was the need to advise each other of the danger. Necessity and consternation.

From Havana, these unexpected “resurrections,” or the somber interpretation of the same, were not considered (as I thought from afar) more or less alarming coincidences, but rather clear indications that “some” thought that the past was better and, in the face of the current situation of the country, unpublished and critical, drastic measures should be taken. The infected areas, for “those of the Old Guard,” were the margins of relative intellectual liberty that local writers and artists had gained thanks mostly to the renewed value of their works and also to personal stances, ever more autonomous, more independent. There are enough titles left over. Also actions.

The shout provoked the echo. In this case, if the echo reverberated from wall to wall it was due to the enormous and thick retaining walls that “official history” has tried to raise throughout thirty years of distorting truth for its own benefit. The shriek bounces and rebounds; it pleases some and weighs on others. At times, the resonance is more bewildering than the shout. Just five minutes of Cubavisión prime time entirely dedicated to praising the man (Luis Pavón) who still carries on his conscience the responsibility (not exclusively) of the worst period of cultural politics of the government and the Communist Party of Cuba, was more than enough to open old wounds. Memory has a heart. Memory can also have heart attacks. One day later, Tuesday, a surge of messages overflowed the banks of the cyber-dialogue, and the first handkerchiefs emerged from the bowler hats of exile—almost all in support. From the pigeon loft where I have lived for 17 years, I sent this email to Reynaldo Gonzalez:

“Dear Reynaldo: Messenger pigeons arrive at my rooftop flat in Mexico City from Havana with references, or parts thereof, to the anger that has been unleashed on the Island by the televised resurrection of Pavón. I listen, excited, to the choir of dignified people. Count on my voice, my scars, and my words: add my anger to that of friends. May the waters return to their level and loose judgements not stir up the wasps’ nest; although, if they sting our memory, let’s call bread ‘bread’ and wine, of course, ‘wine.’ I feel I am on the Island and together with you all as always. If you can, give a hug from me to everyone—to Antón, to Desiderio, to Arturo, to Sigfredo. First to you. Lichi.”

In his response, quick and brief, Reynaldo asked me for “positive energy.” The author of *Siempre la muerte* [*Always Death*] was right to ask me for “positive energy.” I understood that the choir was gaining new voices. Most didn’t question the possible motives of such a ridiculous return to the past in depth, but rather expressed their “solidarity” with writers who had dared to raise a hand and send out the alarm, on time and in haste. At least for me, the solidarity concept continues to have deep meaning: it’s more than just a word.

However, something must have happened that Tuesday night (they say an urgent meeting in the Ministry of Culture), because on Wednesday the 10th the debate grew quiet, and a heavy silence settled on Havana. Perhaps “the misunderstanding” was cleared up. Maybe. Who knows? Perhaps the injustice wasn’t as grave as we thought. Having seen the case and tried the evidence, it wouldn’t be a bad solution worse. In silencing Havana, some took advantage of the recess to bolt.

Encuentro en la Red gave a space to various critics who are too severe, in my opinion, unjust and for many reasons inappropriate, with self-sufficient resentfulness, that intersperse. I say there are jabs of intolerable tension among undeniable truths. I respect and admire José Prats Sariol and Jorge Luis Arcos. They are my friends. I don’t know Duanel Díaz personally, but that’s not necessary to appreciate his intelligence and analytical rigor; it’s enough to read his writing. As they say in Mexico, colloquially and without offense, I have the suspicion that the three missed an excellent opportunity to be silent.

It was not, it is not, the moment to delve into a past that we, its witnesses, remember painfully, and to look for the big culprits and name them at our own risk. We would all lose this inappropriate and suicidal bet. Who doesn’t know the rules of the game by heart? There’s no need to recall them. They haven’t changed in 48 years, or they have varied only slightly. What has changed are the players on the field and the spectators in the stands, neither the managers nor the judges. They remain there, on the bench, the old executioners. But we are in this game, not out of it. “He does not want to be a hero / not even the romantic around whom / a legend could be woven / but he is chained to this life and, what terrifies him even more / fatally condemned to his era,” said Heberto Padilla in his poem *El hombre al margen* [*The Man on the Margin*].

Some accept it, others don’t. Why be embarrassed if this is (was, and will be) our life? The life that both those who stayed and those who for some reason decided to leave—or

they kicked us out—had to live. In complex situations like this, how much we miss those who are dead! How we miss Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, our irreplaceable Titón, as smiling as he was brilliant! What would he have said? And Jesús Díaz? I seem to hear him: he snorts! And Moreno Fragonal? And Lezama from Trocadero 162? Gastón Baquero warned us, with the innocence of a fish that leaves us its testament written in the sand, that “culture is a place to meet,” and that clear-sighted motto turned into the *raison d’être* for the magazine *Encuentro*.

Also from the magazines *Temas* and *Criterios*, each in their own way. I would have asked the opinion of Santiago Álvarez, Reynaldo Arenas, or Guillermo Rosales; of Mirta Aguirre or Juan Marinello; of Carlos Rafael Rodríguez, Guillermo Cabrera Infante, or Nicolás Guillén. And although I might not have shared their judgments or premonitions, I would have taken them into account, because “respect for different opinions,” as in Martí, is also something I am a fanatic about.

I will not try to respond in detail to the articles of Prats, Arcos, and Díaz. They needed to write them and express their points of view, well thought out with the advantages that an exercise in reflection provides, and not with the light logic of someone who writes an electronic SOS on the fly. I am only putting forward, through the same Internet path, a pair or trio of observations, and I’m sending them to the long list of senders involved in the matter.

For my good friend Pepe Prats Sariol, “[W]hat is not transparent or insinuated in the Aristotelian rhetoric of the reports against the media’s homage to the three Pavóns [Pavón, Serguera, and Quesada] is, simply, if they have already lost their little remnant of faith in the dome of Power. This is, it seems, what eludes them.” Who knows? Revolutionaries also can “lose their faith” and still feel committed to what has been, until today, their main reason for living. Hope is a lifeline for many.

To the author of the excellent and little-known novel, *Guanabo Gay*, my favorite among his books, it is evident “that the falcons have flown the coop,” and I predict that in a few weeks we will know if there will be changes “in the officials directing the Government’s cultural policy” or not. And one wonders, without anticipating ahead of time, *Are we seeing the renewal of the undisguised repression of artists and writers that the Power knows to be dissidents? Did limbo end?* Yes, without a doubt, for the time being (I think), purgatory is over, that field of bad weather without visible leaders, angels, or demons, in the middle of the sky between heaven and hell. So, are they really dissidents? No. Dissidents on the Island are closed in prison or in their houses, valiant, besieged by the same press that today silences the controversy unleashed by the resurrection of dangerous figures, corralled within fences of repudiation. Pepe Prats knows it well; he was one of the few that defended and aided our brother Raúl Rivero from his wooden house in the neighborhood of Santos Suárez.

Jorge Luis Arcos doesn’t stop being astonished. For him it is “simply incredible” that this means denying what to him seems “evident”: that the events do not “respond to a strategy of power as it was in the past and as it is in the present,” and it leads him to suppose “that a considerable part of Cuban intellectuals take it for granted that the

current regime is going to continue existing with them in it, in all their varied range of complicity, silence, opportunism, or even happy approval.” The gradation that Arcos proposes is no different, but rather repetitive. He forgets to mention that, in spite of the sorrows and “due to the many blows that life gives you,” as Fayad Jamis said, many Cuban intellectuals are revolutionaries. And they have the same rights as us not to be.

Duanel Díaz focuses his attacks against what is expressed in Desiderio Navarro’s letters and inverts the spyglass to exaggerate his own sentences, those of Duanel, as if the amplification of a truth was enough to sustain it, while forgetting that, misunderstood, reality seen through a magnifying glass at times only serves to distort it, not to rationalize it. Díaz strictly guarantees that the Revolution does not allow for “critical conscience”: that to “really criticize it, one has to be placed outside the game, get out of his own language: pass from the use of ‘Fidel’ to calling him ‘Castro’. As long as ‘Fidel’ exists, not only as a physical being but also as a concept that provides legitimacy, the symmetry between ‘politicians’ and ‘intellectuals’ that Navarro suggests turns out to be false. In fact, there are no ‘politicians’ in Cuba since there are neither parties nor parliament.”

What is serious is not that there are no “parties” but that there is only one—plus an Assembly of Popular Power composed almost in its whole of the militants of that single party. At these heights of the “Party,” after so much rain on a flood in Havana as in Miami, after having barely heard the proposal to choose between “Fidel” (as the “revolutionaries” do) or calling him “Castro” (as his adversaries do), considering both alternatives is a symptom of theoretical obfuscation.

Many years ago, during a visit to a work center in the port of Havana, during those exorcisms prior to the Fourth Congress of the Communist Party, Titón and I were listening to a high-ranking official, who came out with this Musketeer nonsense: “All for one and one for all, or what is the same thing: divide and you will conquer.” Which demonstrates, as if necessary, that the extremes meet.

The classic slogan that the unit is equal to its opposite: when they are matched, both strategies cancel each other out. What it’s about now is to add: the one who subtracts loses. It would be a very serious mistake to make the wrong opponent because there is the possibility of ending up being our own enemies. The ones who only see spots on the sun don’t count with me. Someone warned us: “Whoever seeks the truth deserves the punishment of finding it.”

I close the door.

Eliseo Alberto Diego
Mexico

EMILIO HERNÁNDEZ VALDÉS

Translated by Regina Anavy and Gustavo Loredó

Dear Desiderio,

Since Jorge Ángel's initial message, I have followed with increasing interest, astonishment, and indignation the escalation of exhumations of figures who were, as many have already said, nothing more than complacent and even joyous executors of a policy that left so many tears and losses not only in the sphere of culture, education, and even sports, because there it was also felt, although perhaps to a lesser extent, but also in the rest of the sectors of national life.

As it didn't seem appropriate at first for me to speak out, because I didn't want anyone to think that my wounds are still bleeding or fall into complaints and personal lamentations about what happened, I considered it better to let others, who can better guide the protest in its essence, so that the profusion of the forest that has grown so much wouldn't prevent us from seeing the trees.

Everything continues to show that it wasn't chance or ingenuity, much less lack of control or ignorance in all this. It's nothing more than a test of strength and perhaps an early and anticipated riot by those who think their time has come to leave their bastions again to impose their criteria, styles, and excesses. Unfortunately, they have chosen a bad time, but they were the ones who made the choice and given this, the eternal postponement is unacceptable. But, in my opinion, their analysis of the circumstances, of the context, has been terrible: "If they weren't able to do anything before, they let it 'happen' without doing anything because they were and are jerks"; they were wrong, because "We, those of that time, are no longer the same," nor the country or the new generations either.

It's not about settling scores, asking for heads to fall, or taking over the Bastille. It's simply that the nation belongs to everyone, including many who are no longer here because they were made to leave. "We put them on the steps of the plane," as an interviewee said in that series that was made for a television anniversary, entitled *With the Last Breath*, if I remember correctly. And if it's about planes, the sad memory of a night in Rancho Boyeros comes to mind in which by pure chance I could see the face of fear and anguish of Ivette Hernández, the pianist, despairing because her flight was leaving on which she would travel to Prague with her son and husband—by the way a former ambassador of ours in that country—because he was one of the victims with whom Quesada had been enraged. I don't want to see an expression like that again; and just to keep within the municipality of Boyeros, nor do I want to see another artist like Carucha Camejo, who almost lost her mind, sitting on her Fontanar porch, absent, gone from the world. For the record, they were not my friends, not even acquaintances.

Therefore, it's a civic duty, as Colina pointed out, to raise the need to address this and other problems, because this project is ours, and no one has the right to exclude us due to a supposed lack of orthodoxy or different ideas. Not long ago I read with astonishment on the front page of *Granma* the statement of a high-ranking official from

the Academy of Sciences who recommended, literally, that “we must return to a single thought.” As can be seen, the problem is not limited to culture, literature, television: the Academy is also threatened. It’s the national life. Therefore, today we cannot accept, as in the 1960s and 1970s, when almost all of us saw with fear or indifference, the misfortunes of others and remained silent, at the expense of what could one day happen to us. And that is all I have to say.

Emilio Hernández Valdés

ENA LUCÍA PORTELA

Translated by Regina Anavy and Gustavo Loredó

Dear Reynaldo González:

In the midst of the avalanche of e-mails that Luis Pavón's return to the stage has caused, I have read your opinions on the matter. I am writing just to let you know that I totally agree with you, with every word you say there. Only in some places where you refer to "errors" I understand that it's for elegance, not to be obvious. I would put "criminal acts," which of course continue and will continue to be so as long as they are not openly and publicly recognized as such, with absolute transparency, something that I fear is not going to happen in the current circumstances of our country.

I take this opportunity to tell you that it caught my attention—although not much, to tell the truth—that in the Cubavisión program "Today" on December 19, José Lezama Lima's date of birth was not included among the important anniversaries. Could it also be a coincidence? I don't think so. Nor do I believe that our lamentable television (the same one that showed mutilated versions of "Philadelphia," "Kiss of the Spider Woman," and that glorious spot to alert us to the danger of drugs as harmful substances that make young people become homosexuals; the same one that has never transmitted a single image of the gay pride parades that take place in other parts of the world, the same one that is always pleased with anti-gay jokes of the worst kind, among other niceties), is an entity apart from our culture. No, it's not. Come on, at this point in life we would have to be too naive to assume that. As our Desiderio rightly says in his magnificent and very timely article "Symptom of what?" let's ask ourselves about the causes of things; these troublemakers, to put it mildly, are signs of... something. And not exactly something good.

Dear RG, I first thought of sending you this little message privately, just for you, partly because I'm not accustomed to shouting in the agora and partly because you and I, if memory serves, don't know each other personally and... Well, I was afraid that you might perhaps misunderstand me. But then I thought that if one is going to show support and solidarity with someone who has shouted, one shouldn't do it in a low voice. So I'm sending copies to other people. I hope you don't mind.

A cordial greeting,
Ena Lucia Portela

ENRIQUE COLINA

Translated by Regina Anavy and Gustavo Loredó

I have decided to join the debate with these lines that I hope will stir a little the memory of the concern that now mobilizes us by referring to my experience related to cinema. By the way, I want to express my gratitude for the opportune and courageous denunciation that you have made, which has served to shake us up and remind us of our civic responsibility. Please acknowledge receipt.

A hug,
Enrique Colina

I directed the film program *24 por Segundo (24 per Second)* for Cuban television for 32 years. The program was conceived at the ICAIC, technically produced at the ICRT, and from there submitted for approval to be broadcast nationally every week. It thus existed on the border of two organizations with dissimilar approaches to culture, politics, and ideology; that is, with a different interpretation of the precept that presided over and governs revolutionary cultural policy to this day: “Everything within the Revolution, nothing outside the Revolution.”

This affirmation, analyzed with rigor and not with the idolatry that gives the value of an article of faith to decontextualized declarations and makes them lose the historical relativity of their meaning, shows the sinister permanence that supports and gives its character of dogma to the understanding, only apparently ambiguous, of who is responsible for deciding what is or is not revolutionary, what is appropriate or not to say or discuss, the information that can or cannot be received, the right or not that one has to disagree with one or more decisions, what does or doesn't correspond to a revolutionary morality, and so on *ad infinitum*. I would like to direct my participation in this debate to refresh, with my modest experience, the historical memory that underlies the causes of these muddled concepts.

In plain words, and without going into the contradictory aspects that any policy suffers from the imperfect human nature of its creators and from the historical coordinates in which it has to express itself and operate, for many years ICAIC signified in this country a more open, tolerant, and anti-dogmatic cultural policy, which allowed a varied cultural and recreational offering in its cinematographic programming. It also meant a production of national cinema that has tried to bear witness to its time, with greater or lesser rigor in the conceptual depth and artistic expression of its filmmakers, although always within the framework of the coordinates imposed by a censorship that has marked its unwritten taboos through a silent but well-known code, until now and with few exceptions, with more resignation suffered than fought.

ICAIC meant, above all—although not always—the resistance and recovery against the “errors” of that intolerance and dogmatism, marked by the other policy that, openly or covertly, depending on the situation and the tactical convenience of the moment, has exercised the control of the media following the direct guidelines of the Party's ideological apparatus, which, against the mystifying will of certain bureaucrats who hide

behind their invisibility, isn't an abstract entity but rather a human association that holds the virtues and defects of men with names and surnames that make right or wrong decisions. This trend has historically manifested itself aggressively against culture and its creators and has represented during certain periods the expression of a concrete and powerful official policy against which this other conception, branded hypercritical, lazy, soft, elitist, and *perestroikista*, has had to fight to survive and, in more closed circles, was considered anti-patriotic and counter-revolutionary. A conception that is also, and to the misfortune of the inquisitors, part of that current of ethical thought integrated into a genuinely revolutionary process that has sought not to turn into a negationist paradox the will to offer education and culture to its people and then deny them active intellectual participation in the recognition and transformation of their reality, not only obeying or following guidelines, but giving their opinions, agreeing or disagreeing as a critical conscience of their own status as citizens.

Immersed in this context, simplified by the need for synthesis of these lines and because we all know what we're talking about, *24 por Segundo* passed through the confluence of all the white, gray, and black periods, all marked by systematic mistrust of the spontaneity of an opinion, the direct language that calls things by their name, the critical reference that departs from an official *diktat* and analyzes a phenomenon in its ideological complexity. In a veiled effort to make it disappear, the program changed its time and channel countless times. Many times I had to argue heatedly to defend its conception and not a few times protest its suspension. From the sublime to the ridiculous and for the most dissimilar reasons, the program didn't go on air either because of the appearance of a nude or a sex scene dramatically justified in the fragment of a film that served to illustrate a more significant theme; by the image of a foreign actor or the mention of a director who somewhere had signed a dark declaration against the Revolution, unbeknownst to the viewing public, of course; for a bad word said in a timely manner but that "per se" contradicted the principle that the medium should promote good education; for the affirmation, heretical in the days of brotherhood with the socialist countries, that most of the films from these film makers didn't establish communication with the general public; and of course, for many other considerations that I don't remember now. However, the most conflictive area of the program was the comments on topics related to national cinema that addressed controversial aspects of reality, in contradiction to the aseptic image historically spread by the information media. Thus, the content of the program was censored many times, and its broadcast was prohibited due to my refusal to cut what bothered the small and large censors who applied the regulation of what could or could not be said publicly, always under the pretext of ensuring the educational and ideological character of the medium. That is to say, undervaluing the much preached high cultural level of our people who, according to the standards of these watchmen of revolutionary orthodoxy, should be "oriented."

This is the reason for the deformed policy of giving the population pre-digested concepts. The interpretation is entrusted to the specialist, the analysis carried out by those who know and are endorsed to tell people how they have to think, although demagogically they are invited to form their own opinion. The specialist, be he art critic, journalist, historian, sociologist, scientist, artist, politician, or whatever, is needed as an instrument of revelation and not in his deformed mediation as a damper of

contradictions, a concealer of reality, or a substitute for the necessary debate and participation of the listener.

Likewise, many Cuban films were and are prohibited on television because they don't conform to the pattern of ideological stifling advocated by a univocal vision that rejects, as judge and jury, the essential principle that keeps a Revolution alive and enduring: dialectics, recognition of contradictions, and the need for change. A brief count made without much rigor and only as an example reveals more than 20 Cuban films produced in different decades, especially those produced after the crisis of the '90s, which have never been shown on television. Considering the number of cinemas closed due to the deterioration of their facilities and others that struggle to stay open despite the poor quality of their projections, the lack of air conditioning, and the terrible state of their seats and hygienic conditions, in addition to the difficulty of transportation that has also affected frequenting them, it's worth wondering how many potential viewers our cinematography loses due to this unwritten or officially recognized prohibition that alienates its production, conceived by and for its national audience. The list may include others and perhaps some more recent ones that I unintentionally forget. I'm not mentioning the films for their artistic quality or their conceptual rigor; there are good, bad, and average ones, and I don't think that the reason why they are not exhibited is due to aesthetic considerations. There are plenty of references to poor quality foreign films shown on television.

However, there are prohibited films that deserve a separate consideration and justify my opinion that there should be an open debate with this appearance of the ghost of the *pavonato* and its other executor, whom the "parameterized" called "Torquesada." As far as I know, he has been serving as the secretary of the PCC cell and advisor in the area for television programming for several years. It's surprising that a person linked to such serious errors recognized by the Party as those committed during that period could occupy a position of such responsibility in the most important media outlet in this country, and in an area that decides and watches over the content of its programming! I repeat, therefore, with this well-assimilated parenthesis, why I consider that this debate should be opened to a deeper reflection on the ideological roots that feed this latent tendency, a constant in the historical experience of all the socialist regimes of the 20th century, which has been tarnished, over and over again, with sectarian and repressive distortions and deviations. Those of us who support the debate welcome the healthy expression of a deep humanism to which we all aspire.

An open debate that is managed and authoritarian will only generate apathy, simulation, or rejection, and I think that, like ostriches, we won't get any benefit from this situation if we don't discuss this. To begin with, I would like to single out the film that marked a schism in relations between Cuban filmmakers, ICAIC, and the political leadership of our country: *Alice in Wondertown*, directed by Daniel Díaz Torres, a director who, together with Rolando Díaz and Fernando Pérez, worked for years at the Latin American ICAIC Newscast, under the direction of Santiago Álvarez.

There, between 1977 and 1979, in those periods of critical openness against wrongdoing that regularly mark the cycles of official rectification of government policies, there were

innumerable monothematic, critical newscasts on national current affairs, with demonstrations of institutional disorganization, carelessness, irresponsibility, economic waste, corruption, etc., until the order came again to stop this type of criticism marked by an increasingly bitter irony due to the persistence and dimension of the problems, whose economic consequences, social and political, exploded in the 1980s with the Mariel exodus.

Seen now, those newscasts are striking because of their timeliness; the recurrence of many of their topics still persists despite the fact that 30 years have passed since they were reported. They were and are the product more of systemic dysfunctions than of the individual inefficiency of unconscious administrators. In the infested waters of this murky well, maintained in the 1980s before and after the policy of rectifying errors and negative trends. The absurd, irrational demonstrations that pretended to change the policy with indictments against officials—supposedly the individuals responsible for these errors—didn't eradicate the causes but contributed to accentuating and preparing the path of deficiencies that culminated in the terrible decade of the Special Period, heroic for the resistance and nobility of the people, but also tragic for the lives of many. The filmmakers drank from this fountain once again to warn, admonish, and criticize that which should be submitted to an urgent debate.

Remember that already at the time there was an Association Hermanos Saíz with a generation of young filmmakers who mostly emigrated from the country in the 1990s due to the frustration of inserting their documentaries into a public debate that questioned what they blamed as shortcomings in official cinema and that, once they tried to assimilate in the structures created, collided with censorship from the same source that had encouraged them to face the supposed passivity of the oldest directors of ICAIC, apparently already tamed and trained. Another story of manipulation of this trend that ended up distorted for its maker but didn't change the loss of that generation.

The consequence of the appearance of Alicia [*Alice in Wondertown*], its prohibition and consequent counterrevolutionary and fifth-columnist demonization for its subversive message, generated the most explosive cultural conflict that the revolutionary process would face, internally and internationally, at the moment of its highest economic and social vulnerability. The low profile, the determined and consistent attitude of the Cuban filmmakers who opposed us took precedence over our passion and ethical convictions. We had no leaders to guide us, and a measure of the Council of State led to the decision to dismantle the ICAIC and turn it into a dependency of the ICRT and, by transitive nature, into an appendix of the Party's ideological apparatus, then led by the infamous Carlos Aldana, today anathema but yesterday an arrogant and ambitious commissioner who treated us as enemies of the Revolution. In a measured way that prevented outside manipulation, the filmmakers avoided the consummation of this wrong behind closed doors. Then came the political vindication of the film and its director; it was exhibited at a film festival and the chapter was closed. Before the ban, the film had been shown publicly for only four days in a few cinemas in the capital, with a mobilization in the municipalities of the PCC's militants so that they would go to the cinema and react to those spectators who liked the film.

Inspired by real events, documented over and over again in the weekly ICAIC newscasts of the seventies and in its second round of the eighties, and without its satirical hyperbole surpassing the absurdity of everyday social life lived by Cubans on the street, the experience of *Alice* questioned the infallibility of a single judgment that decides what is or is not revolutionary. “Within the Revolution everything, against the Revolution nothing” emerged as a Solomonic commitment proclaimed in different historical circumstances, when the Revolution had not been consolidated and was the object of invasions and sabotage that threatened to frustrate the attempt to create a state of social justice, when it became necessary to maintain the union and creative participation of intellectuals within a framework of trust in the political vanguard that had created a multiform cultural space, when the revolutionary project was still a dream and the transformation had not been consummated at the level of reality.

Well, what now? Now almost half a century has passed and there you can see the unsealed scars of the mistakes made by those who have interpreted this article of faith by exercising intolerance and repression against those who also hide behind this fluctuating motto to have the right to express their interpretation of their Revolution, what they have in their hearts, in their thoughts, and what remains valuable and recoverable in what has been built, not what needs to move and change to enter this time of change, in this socialism of the XXI century so heralded and necessary that it means shaking off the narrow, dusty, and sectarian criteria that claim to have the truth by the horns.

Then came *Strawberry and Chocolate*, protected by the umbrella of the political error that had been committed with *Alice*, with the endorsement of Titón’s artistic personality and with the intelligent support of Alfredo Guevara to maneuver in a sea agitated by the spasms of the Special Period. *Strawberry*, co-directed by the also renowned filmmaker Juan Carlos Tabío, had a successful international career, favorably endorsing the political prestige of the Revolution for its ability to keep the channels of critical questioning open despite the difficult circumstances in which the country lived. In Cuba, the reception of the national public that was able to see it showed that it shared its message of tolerance and human solidarity, alien to the revenge of those who retreated and had to put up with it. However, *Strawberry* was only shown in theaters and has never been shown on television. It would be surprising if it weren’t because it directly denounces the problem of the period of homophobic “parameterization,” and some of its executors still today have decision-making power in the programming of this medium, which belongs to the people and not to any reactionary trend that debases the humanist values that have been and are inspiring this Revolution, at least, as I understand it.

Here I could also dwell on what happened with *Guantanamera*, the last work by Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, co-directed with Juan Carlos Tabío, which was branded as counterrevolutionary due to the rancor and mistrust of schemers specialized in sowing discord within the artistic sector at the highest level, and only vindicated by the position of intellectuals who came out in defense of the memory of Titón, the best and highest exponent of Cuban revolutionary cinema.

I have made this account, without a doubt riddled with insufficiencies and perhaps poorly expressed concerns, and at the risk of appearing incendiary for some and temporizing for others, because I feel that the ultimate goal of this debate is to turn the analysis of the past into the retort of the present where the future of our country is cooking. There will be a meeting that needs to break the public isolation of this debate. It is unacceptable that the communique published in *Granma* by the UNEAC Secretariat turns out to be so parsimonious and bureaucratic, using the same political jargon that speaks to us of annexationists who seek to appropriate this debate and excluding reference to its causes, making, as always, the concealment of the essence of the problem, the same thing that someone jokingly mentioned as "...and I shit on you!" I believe that these signed emails are already a clear political signal that an opening is imposed that goes beyond verifying and ratifying what we all know has been an insult and an attack on our culture. Citizens need to know, and there are many things that prevent citizens from finding out what is going on behind their backs and that nevertheless affects their lives. The "mystery syndrome" that was questioned in a Congress of Journalists 20 years ago: will it continue to be activated?

Without public repercussion, the rectification would also be inconsequential and hypocritical. It's the Party that controls the information policy and programming of national television, which controls its official organ, the *Granma* newspaper, and also controls, through its ideological apparatus, all the rest of the publications and radio stations in this country. Blunders have been committed by some high officials, and a succinct note that always finds a scapegoat is not enough.

The many rectifications that have occurred throughout our history have had the inveterate and unhealthy habit of sweeping the dirt under the rug. It's not a question, I insist, of demanding, humiliating, or justifying accounts from anyone, but an institution that exercises political power in the name of what has been an ideal for us and has shaped the meaning and political choice of our short lives must assume with transparency the permanence in its ranks of this trend that allows itself, at a time like the present, to ignite a provocative spark, whose only virtue has been to fuel an awareness that it must be fought in its very essence. The future of trust depends on transparency towards this and other issues. The assimilable legacy of what we incorporate as an enriching experience for the future of our people, who have that inalienable right above all, depends on the opening horizon of that historical and present information.

For this reason, I propose that this debate be broadcast on television and, if not live, that it be edited under the supervision of three members, without official representation or public office, and that they be elected by vote at that meeting.

I think that these emails should also be published and whoever wants to question them should also respond in writing. It would be a sign not of weakness but of confidence in a true rectification, and it would give an unusual vigor to a battle of ideas within and about the problems that are omitted on television. It would be truly controversial, with round, square, or rectangular tables that look inward with the same critical rigor with which the problems of the imperfect and crooked world outside Cuba are analyzed.

There would be dissenting points of view and discussions animated by the desire to call things by their name, against leaders who respond publicly to journalists who ask them uncomfortable questions. The solution for these pressing issues depends not only on the imperialist blockade or on good faith, but also on correct decisions that demonstrate their efficiency not only on an ideological level but also in practical solutions for the problems, in an improved quality of life, and the recognition of the inalienable right of citizens to demand accounts from their representatives. I'm not naïve, and I understand that if there is a desire for change, this will result from a progressive, delicate, and complicated readjustment in the correlation of internal forces, inside and outside the Party, which will necessarily require an honest and courageous contribution from its intellectuals. And I'm not just talking about artists, but the thaw has to start somewhere and I consider this situation appropriate, although some may consider it dangerous and explosive because the valves are blocked, as is obvious, and under pressure accumulated over the years.

I also propose that our films be put on National Television, and if those who prohibit them consider them politically inappropriate, they should say so publicly. This can't be postponed. The light that we radiate shouldn't continue to be fueled eternally only by the humanism of our doctors or because of the brilliance of our education, of which I am proud and know very well that it counts for a lot. However, there are contradictions that undermine the democratic sense of the system and its economic efficiency, which cry out for reforms and internal changes. Hope for the future is not a bottomless barrel, and resources are needed to sustain and preserve the entire scaffolding of social justice. For people to produce and create wealth, they have to be stimulated materially, and the doors to their creativity and initiative must be open. If we continue assuming that the State controls and takes care of everything when it's not able to do so, if we don't face the distortions we all recognize and go to the core of the problems, the essential issue of these concerns, I sincerely believe that the light will eventually go out, and we will remain only as a historical reference of chivalry, resistance, and dignity, but we will lose the battle.

Enrique Colina
January 25, 2007

Below is a list of films not shown on National Television.

ALICIA EN EL PUEBLO DE MARAVILLAS [*Alice in Wondertown*]
ADORABLES MENTIRAS [*Adorable Lies*]
FRESA Y CHOCOLATE [*Strawberry and Chocolate*]
EL ELEFANTE Y LA BICICLETA [*The Elephant and the Bicycle*]
MADAGASCAR [*Madagascar*]
LA VIDA ES SILBAR [*Life is for Whistling*]
SUITE HABANA [*Havana Suite*]
PON TU PENSAMIENTO EN MI [*Think of Me*]
AMOR VERTICAL [*Vertical Love*]
LA OLA [*The Wave*]
NADA [*Nothing*]

TRES VECES DOS [*Three Times Two*]
VIDEO DE FAMILIA [*Family Video*]
HACERSE EL SUECO [*Acting Stupid*]
PERFECTO AMOR EQUIVOCADO [*Perfectly Wrong Love*]
GUANTANAMERA [*Guantanamo*]
LISTA DE ESPERA [*Waiting List*]
DIARIO DE MAURICIO [*Mauricio's Diary*]
AUNQUE ESTES LEJOS [*Although You're Far*]
ENTRE CICLONES [*Between Cyclones*]
MARIA ANTONIA [*Maria Antonia*]
PAPELES SECUNDARIOS [*Secondary Papers*]
LEJANÍA [*Distance*]
TECHO DE VIDRIO [*Glass Ceiling*]
UN DIA DE NOVIEMBRE [*One Day in November*]
HASTA CIERTO PUNTO [*Up to a Certain Point*]
LA VIDA EN ROSA [*Life in Rose*]
BARRIO CUBA [*A Cuban Neighborhood*]
MIEL PARA OCHÚN [*Honey for Ochún*]
LAS NOCHES DE CONSTANTINOPLA [*The Nights of Constantinople*]

It would be worth making a list of documentaries made by young filmmakers who also suffer from this unwritten censorship. It would be sad if their efforts and concerns, and I am talking about some truly significant films, were relegated to the consolation of presenting them only once in an annual *Muestra* competition that would omit any type of censorship, to later circulate on records or cassettes from hand to hand, or by this compensatory virtual space, which is restricted and insufficient.

ENRIQUE PINEDA BARNET

Translated by Regina Anavy

The attached text by Anton Arrufat, added to the previous ones of Arturo Arango, Reynaldo González, and a significant list of valuable Cuban intellectuals, express my thoughts in such a way that they save my words. I thank history that, on days like these, we can declare our dignity with memory in this way.

This doesn't mean that I'm not able to say the same things with the same energy, it's that I'm filming.

Enrique Pineda Barnet
January 8, 2007

Message from Enrique Pineda Barnet to Reynaldo González

Dear Rey:

You know I'm filming and that locks me up and misinforms me. I have received with fear, everything that is resurrected from Pavón. I have insomnia again. I am between nightmares of beaten friends, of the Guignol assassinated, of those persecuted, those who fled, those who are terrified, of phones with broken sentences, innocent documents burned or hidden, lost poems, and mutilated dreams. Words and signs reappear, like burns marked on the skin: parametrization, UMAP, censorship, condemnation, advice, witches, Pavón, Quesada, and their inheritances in repudiation rallies or their consequences, congresses....and etcetera.

Please keep me informed with this documentation, as it's a reliable and secure source.

With my love always,
Enrique

Another Message from Enrique Pineda Barnet

I have received with terror everything that is resurrected from Pavón. I have insomnia again. I am between nightmares of beaten friends, of Guignol assassinated, of those persecuted, those who fled, those who are terrified, of phones with broken sentences, innocent documents burned or hidden, lost poems and mutilated dreams. Words, signs reappear, like marked burns on the skin: parameterization, UMAP, censorship, condemnation, council, witches, Pavón, Quesada, and their legacies in repudiation rallies or their consequences, congresses.... and etcetera.

Enrique Penida Barnet

ERNESTO YEVGENY

Translated by Regina Anavy

The time has not yet come to criticize our comrades on the island, says Eliseo Alberto Diego in an article that is surprisingly naive. Momentum is not momentum, he says. At certain times, and I think this is the case, so much naivety can be more harmful than praiseworthy. It conditions the exercise of truth, submerges controversy in cheap sentimentality, dilutes the critical capacity that defines the intellectual profession in the name of the culture of “encounter,” good feelings and the *ubi sunt* of cowardly old glories, because Titón, Lezama, Jesús Díaz and Moreno Friginals were, among other much more memorable things, examples of intellectual cowardice. (Some, like Jesús and Moreno, had time to acknowledge it publicly. Others passed by in the name of the circumstances, which doesn’t mean that we have to do the same).

In short, Lichi’s article is anthological because of how unfortunate it is. I extract this paragraph: “It was not, it is not, the time to delve deeply into a past that its witnesses remember in pain, and look for major culprits, name them at risk. We would all lose that suicidal and inappropriate bet. Who doesn’t know “by heart” the rules of the game? Do I remember them? Needless. For 48 years they have not changed. Or they have changed very little. Those who have changed are the players on the field and the spectators in the stands, not the managers or the judges. They remain, on the bench, the old executioners. But we are inside that game, not outside. ‘He does not want to be a hero, / not even the romantic around whom / a legend could be woven; / but he is condemned to this life and, what terrifies him most, / fatally condemned to his time,’” said Heberto Padilla in his poem *The man on the sidelines*. Damn, Lichi, that poem by Padilla, in case you haven’t noticed, is a criticism. And even a self-criticism. (Duanel Díaz has already replied, and it doesn’t seem that he is going to stop).

Ernest Yevgeny

ESTEBAN MORALES

Translated by M.J. Porter

Dear Rogelio,

I think your observations are very wise. As you well know, I was the Director of the School of Political Sciences and the Dean of the Faculty of Humanities two years later, with the ashes still hot from the “last battle” and the ropes brandished to hang the “children of the Revolution.” The Saturns were walking around our Colina at that time. A dark period, which luckily is now over today and to which we’re not going to allow anyone to make us return.

We, the revolutionary intellectuals of this country, cannot go back to the cavernous dark period that took place in those years in ideology, culture, and mass media. The attempts to resurrect the dead on television, when it could confuse so many and even change history, are typical of opportunists.

The Revolution has matured a lot. But we must be alert, because it’s precisely the moments that we are experiencing these months that lend themselves to revenge, the dusting off of corpses, and the opening of graves. I don’t think we’re facing naivety. And if they’re naive, they can’t have the power to appear on television media.

Greetings,
Dr. Esteban Morales

ESTHER SUAREZ DURAN

Translated by Regina Anavy

During the late 1980s, I conducted a study—almost completely unpublished—on the authors of drama and their production processes, based on a sample that included several of our most prestigious playwrights. The analysis of the first results, referring to the frequency and rhythm of the completion of the texts and their release, drew my attention to a phenomenon that was unexpected for me: between 1965 and 1976 appeared what I then called the “zone of silence”: a period during which a number of my interviewees didn’t write any new text or play.

Such was the reading that could be made of the data provided by artists such as Abelardo Estorino (from 1968 to 1974 without writing any text except for the scripts for recitals in 1972 and 1974. Nothing released from 1964 to 1974); Tomás González (from 1968 to 1978 without writing and nothing released from 1965 to 1985); David Camps (nothing written from 1970 to 1975 and nothing released from 1968 to 1986); Gerardo Fullea (nothing written from 1965 to 1975); while José Milián, whose production between 1961 and 1988 added up to the enviable figure of 35 titles (13 of which corresponded to the period prior to 1970, during which he had recorded more than one work per year on three occasions), had remained without writing between 1970 and 1974 and without appearing on stage from 1970 to 1979, when another director staged one of his pieces for children with a provincial group.

Examining the matter put me in front of that chapter of ignominy that was the process of “parameterization.” As a consequence, the recent trajectory of a significant part of those whom I considered and still consider my teachers became clear to me. Paths were suddenly interrupted at their highest point. After a civil death of several years, those who had been able to return with the creation of the Ministry of Culture in 1976 would no longer be the same. We won’t know what the scene of the seventies, heir to the burst of audacity, innovation, and originality of the sixties, would have been if its organic development had not been curtailed at its dawn, in the same way that we lost the future work that was announced in the creations by Estorino, Tomás González, René Santana, or José Milián until the beginning of the seventies, among many others where I can add not only theater writers but also theater designers and musicians, directors, and actors.

When in 1986 Tomás shook the theatrical arena and, in particular, the students of the specialty with the staging of *Los juegos de la trastienda* [*Backstage Games*], written in 1977, it wasn’t difficult for me to see signs of a resumption of the path. It could be something tragic, since the journey had been stopped at that same point twenty years before.

In a similar way I receive Milián’s shows, especially those that the Director, Milián, has staged since 1991 with his group: *El Pequeño Teatro de La Habana* [*Havana’s Little Theater*]. The aesthetic of most of them refer us to that of *Otra vez Jehová* [*Jehovah Again*] with the story of Sodom (1968), and *La Toma de Havana por los ingleses* [*The taking of Havana by the English*] (1970), which I was lucky enough to see when I was barely fourteen years old.

Something similar, I feel, could be said about Roberto (Blanco), while the devastated landscape of the National Puppet Theater and the irremediable loss of Carucha and Pepe Camejo, together with Pepe Carril, doesn't allow us to lose sight of the crime's dimension.

I return to the playwrights. Towards 1974, Estorino culminates *La dolorosa historia del amor secreto de José Jacinto Milanés* [*The Sorrowful Story of José Jacinto Milanés' Secret Love*]. He had managed to stay connected to the theater even though his works appeared in the cursed Index together with those of Piñera, Triana, Beckett, Ionesco, and Pinter [i]. He remained in the Teatro Estudio writing scripts for the performances of *Mientras Santiago ardía* [*While Santiago burned*], *Que hable el camarada Máuser* [*Let Comrade Máuser Speak*], and others of that style that, while claiming the political slant of the theatrical programming offered there, allowed a flexible platform for the commitment of acting talent in moments of absolute instability.

After *Ni un sí ni un no* [*Neither a Yes nor a No*] from 1981, Estorino's dramaturgy made a definitive leap in 1983 with *Morir del cuento* [*Dying from the Story*]. The experience would allow him to come back later on *La dolorosa historia ...* to tell it another way. Vague rumors arise.

Since 1967 the playwright combined writing and art direction. It isn't possible to ignore the inter-influence of both occupations, but the truth is that Estorino managed to make the leap in time; he performed a kind of ellipsis with which he managed to harmonize the personal exercise with the poetics of the new theatrical eras. With the arbitrariness terminated by a legal action—the ruling of the Supreme Court—its consequences were felt.

For decades some of these authors didn't exist for our publishers. In 1990 Milián was not published by Letras Cubanas—not even in its Minimum collection—despite having a vast and varied body of work. Something similar happened with Tomás González. *El robo del cochino* [*The Pig Robbery*], by Estorino, released in 1961, had to wait until 1980 for its publication. *Santa Camila de La Habana Vieja* [*Saint Camila of Old Havana*], by José Ramón Brene, a success on stage in 1962, was published twenty years later, in 1982.

Subsequently, I have had to refer in various articles [ii] to the parameterization process, to some of its causes (or, at least, concomitant situations), and its consequences. I share the perspective that places it in the context of a conflict of interests, with the struggle of a sector to obtain hegemony in the artistic field, which returns me to—and reaffirms—the field of ideological struggle.

I continue to think that such a practice was possible because certain ideological values were present, among them a negative vision of the intellectual, which was the opposite not only to the man of action but also excluded him from the socio-class structure (remember that at that time we were not talking about Gramsci or the presence of the petty bourgeoisie and the intelligentsia in the vanguard of the Revolution), while

denying him the possibility of being part, with the rest of the sectors ideologically aligned with the revolutionary process, of its critical consciousness.

We were then far from fully understanding that unity had to be built from diversity, the only way to achieve true unity. Of course, our country's history had too many bitter lessons in this regard, with libertarian epics steeped in regionalism, *caudillismo*, class and racial differences of which Spanish colonialism and Yankee neocolonialism had known how to take advantage. Insular *machismo*, of extensive ancestry in our national being, was updated in a precise image of determined virility. Homosexuality was considered a scourge and referred to a previous stage, to a capitalist social order or, at least, to a pathology.

As for the somewhat more intangible issue of religious faith, the position assumed by the Catholic Church in the face of the complex initial conditions of internal counterrevolution and external aggression had led to an adverse climate, which associated religiosity with a position alien to the interests of the Revolution and to the very notion of progress. A kind of doctrine known among us as scientific atheism, which in essence meant the absoluteness of a unique way and, in addition, the schematic way of understanding the world became one of the pillars of revolutionary ideology. Being an atheist was among the essential features of the human paradigm of the time.

Consequently, as the culmination of the First Congress of Education and Culture that took place in April 1971, the aforementioned process of artistic parameterization began, in which the parameters were related to sexuality, religiosity, relations with foreigners, and a group of other phenomena of subjective assessment, by virtue of which José Milián, for example, was separated from his position as artistic director and prohibited from developing his creative work on the grounds that his works—specifically those mentioned above—were obscene and pornographic.

When justice was restored, the victims of the ignominy were returned to the ranks of the artists. They were compensated for the salary difference of all these years; they were timidly given, individually, apologies, and a modest cloak of silence was thrown over the event. I still remember the stupefied faces of some and the astonishment and consternation of others when I alluded to the matter in one of the critical colloquium sessions that included the program of the Camagüey Theater Festival in 1986.

Subjects such as those referring to cultural politics, the relations between art and ideology, between art and politics, art and society, the generations in history and in art, the place and role of the intellectual in society, among other things, demand a space in the circulation of ideas and social debate. At the macro level, we need a permanent context of honest, rigorous, and, moreover, updated reflection on our social practice by talking about absolutely everything. Meanwhile, the exchange of opinions, knowledge, and intelligent and responsible debate must animate the geography of the cultural system.

On the occasion of the last edition of the Havana Theater Festival, dedicated to the seventy years of theatrical renewal in Cuba, I elaborated some ideas about the saga of

Teatro Estudio. I say no more, the beginning of that article speaks for itself. Take these words by way of introduction.

Esther Suarez Duran

[i] Samuel Beckett and Harold Pinter won the Nobel Prize for Literature. Estorino is among our National Awards for Literature. Together with Roberto Blanco and René Santana, he is on the list of the National Theater Awards.

[ii] See *Otro largo viaje hacia la noche* [Another Long Journey into Night], in *Boletín Indagación* [Inquiry Bulletin], No. 6, 2002, *Centro Nacional de Investigaciones de las Artes Escénicas, La Habana* [National Center for Performing Arts Research, Havana]; *Teatro cubano* [Cuban Theater] 1936-1958: *El maderamen de la herejía* [The Framework of Heresy], in the magazine *La gaceta de Cuba* [Cuba Gazette], No. 4, 2004; *Cuarenta años del Teatro Nacional de Guiñol* [Forty Years of the National Puppet Theater], in *La gaceta de Cuba* [Cuba Gazette], No. 4, 2003; *Teatro Estudio: la espiral infinita* [Studio Theater: The Infinite Spiral], in *Tables*, No. 1, 2006.

EVA

Translated by Regina Anavy

It's good that different generations are speaking.

You know very well my position and commitment to the construction of more tolerant and free formulas of coexistence, wherever they may be, and in this case with our society.

I congratulate any process of self-recognition, memory, and historical justice as healthy, as conflictive and painful as it may be, and this unusual beginning of debate makes me hopeful, even though I still don't know exactly why. The truth is that I haven't experienced many Cuban historical events either, but those I have experienced have made me feel that the consequences are heavy for all of us who inhabit this island, from any sector, origin, and generation, although in different ways.

Even more so when they are facts and processes that don't have due recognition and are not given balance or justice. And there I see the worst of the problems.

To what extent are we not permeated by intolerant and even repressive attitudes, as artists, communicators, educators, or citizens, if we have taken and take as "normal" or at least not publicly and openly reprehensible, the repressive, undemocratic, and perverted policies and institutional methods?

Unfortunately, apart from any five-year gray period and the minimum understanding of its consequences, I have suffered like many from the culture of intolerance, censorship, harassment, and other aberrations from institutions and from people with different institutional positions.

That is why I point out that on many occasions I've seen people with institutional responsibilities or careerist airs exercise abuses of power, repressive intrigues, and other clearly fascist attitudes, who paradoxically tried or believed in (it's possible to justify anything) "alternatives," with aesthetic projections that are apparently progressive and liberating. I've also seen self-proclaimed revolutionaries with whom there is no possible agreement, who immediately, and after demolishing people in the name of their particular vision of revolutionary duty, have taken advantage of the "faster" way and, in other latitudes, have thought to publicly put themselves on the other side (when evidently they were never on our side, all without discrimination or exclusion).

In my particular case, every time I've tried to debate these ideas I've encountered blind and revengeful attitudes, which take refuge in atrocious chauvinism and in even more intolerance of the type "You don't have the right to express an opinion because you were born in another country; you can speak out whenever you want, so if you don't like it, go away and don't criticize; doesn't your country of origin have problems?" I have tried to understand, but "it's not easy."

Few people know, but among them I tell you, that my personal positions with this country have reached quotas of great involvement and, unfortunately, also on many occasions, serious problems. And that I feel like a Cuban citizen, with or without nationality, and not because I dance *casino*, am obsessed with jet skis, or drink soup while waiting for September 28 [anniversary of the Committees for the Defense of the Revolution]. And of course I'm a citizen of the world.

How many times have we argued that there is no single Cuban identity, pre-drawn and exclusive, just as there is no single way to be a revolutionary, no matter how many famous phrases can inspire us in our own ethical construction. Ultimately and broadly speaking, "Cuban" is what is done in Cuba now, and "revolutionary" is what revolutionizes human progress and not what stagnates or goes backwards, etc. But this enlightened despotism that today speaks to us about the massification of education and culture doesn't treat us as grownups, and thinks, criticizes, and decides for us and for our good, just as it decides what we should consume and what pot to cook in.

Yes, I am, despite the damage to my pocketbook and family finances, one of those who has refused to constrain myself in dubious judgments and institutional schemes, among others that of "evaluating" myself artistically. I haven't missed your call.

I simply responded out of righteous rebellion in the face of so many schemes and exclusions, in the face of a measure that I currently consider obsolete in the way it exists. My curriculum, prestige, and merits were highly recognized in the past at the convenience of the institutions, and yet now that I'm trying to achieve some difficult quotas of artistic and pedagogical independence, I'm forced to pass elitist tests that don't respond to the real result and effectiveness of my work.

Amazing. I also respond to another true rebellion against the bourgeois and prejudiced structures of the artistic collective (in this case the stage), in which we demand freedoms but at the same time are repressors. And this is my greater concern. I have been disassociating myself as much as possible, with high doses of loneliness, from as much institutionalism as I can, and it's true that the possibilities are narrowed, sometimes to devastating points, but I breathe easier. How not to?

I also decided to be more aware of my irreverence in my private, pedagogical, and artistic life, and uphold a sense of humor as a tool for analysis, self-criticism, tolerance, debate, and consolation. It's difficult.

We laugh when someone slips on a banana peel, but we can't stand a hint of laughter at our own falls, even when it's healthy laughter, which helps mitigate the pain when you fall on your ass. So I decided to keep laughing at myself, since I stumble so much, and of course smile at almost everything that falls (irreverence is highly censored too).

Especially now that I have a son of school age and experience through him the practice of indoctrination versus education, of instruction and dogmatism versus tolerance and critical thinking, verticalism, and passivity versus participation, I think, isn't this the easiest and most traveled path of the parameterization that we now denounce?

To what extent have we not been and are we educated, and in the best of cases almost callously, to be repressed and repressors? Why don't we feed the word "culture" in all its dimensions, beyond professional executors and elites, and talk about the culture of coexistence, family culture, neighborhood culture, community culture, the culture of participation; and how many last names seem significant in our lives? Will we be able to begin the difficult process of recognizing ourselves as active or passive subjects of an intolerant education, and for the intolerance, will we have the will and the capacity to recognize each personal and group process in which we have been and perhaps still are executioners and victims on any scale?

You are right that parameterization has been and still is in our lives, as citizens and not only as intellectuals and artists. And I'm very afraid that the cleaning process will be long. I believe that we should monitor our passive and intolerant tendencies daily, each one himself, like washing your face when you wake up.

We consider the unanimous, sometimes the majority, but we still have a long way to go to accept the possibility of respect and consideration for minorities and diversity.

There have been and there are thousands of excuses not to face it, to justify and justify ourselves, to delay the democratic process of healing. We have been heard and we are many, some not so well-known or public, perhaps all; and there is no shortage among them of those who want to live committed to progress, freedom, and the revolutionary struggle, to take the form and path that the moment, our moment, takes and demands. Even more paradoxes.

We are all involved; we only have to assume it.

Nor am I sure that involvement is the only form of the healthy irreverence and the call to disobedience that you propose: the renunciation of privileges and ties of membership. We cannot be absolute, although I don't reject the idea. However, the personal questioning of the extent to which we collaborate with the discriminatory and exclusivist character, with the possession of a license and the almost blind acceptance of disciplines that we only privately and sometimes criticize, seems very positive to me.

In the best cases, there are people who take advantage of some of the mentioned privileges and others who share and extend their benefits to the less fortunate as much as possible. I also know that it's not enough. It's true that we urgently need, now that the necessary historical memory is more or less publicly defended together with its even more necessary justice, clear formulas of awareness and insubordination. The debate must be aimed not only at destroying, but also at constructing options, answers, and even solutions.

So I congratulate you, your proposal, in the hope that it stimulates the search for a way.

Because the road or roads, wherever they go, will be long, so it's better, this time, that we be accompanied by respect, endearing tolerance, and a broad sense of humor.

Hopefully we will go from “changing the world” to having meetings with friends and sharing drinks, to strengthening friendships and finding common ground. Let’s reposition our passivity and leave bitterness for the hangovers, exchange proposals, and implement agreements.

“What’s up, dude, how are you?”

“Here, in the fight.”

A common fight this time.

Muleteers we are and on the road we meet.

Kisses,

Eve

P.S. Well look, I enjoy sharing this with friends and associates, those who have shared your words through Roxana and a few more, but so you can see the level of my paranoia (not unfounded). Precisely I don’t dare much to share with such a great figure who, fortunately, today we see taking part in the debate. I have no national awards or great public recognition. And it’s not the first time (or the tenth) that people with all those merits have clipped my wings (or have tried more than is possible, although I have finally flown and fly), like so many others, some of them apparently and contradictorily defenders of free creativity and opinion, with the “accusation” of not being a prestigious figure. And it seems to be a basic requirement and an essential condition to having prestige to be able to comment, debate, and raise a theory although with coffee in hand and, still more, to expose attempts or creative works. Either you have bachelor degrees, doctorates, and awards, or you don’t criticize. I’m telling you: we’re all contaminated.

Me too: I recognize that what I have left is a lot of paranoia, but I’m not very upset. I am or try to be many things, but what I most believe in, which deserves all my attention, is being a common citizen.

FÉLIX SÁNCHEZ

Translated by Regina Anavy

Jacomino:

I have received, as part of the list of people who receive your letter to Francis, your message, which clearly confirms that what is happening to us is a terrible paradox, a “low culture” deciding on the very high culture of this country. I believe in Abel, but he must also be sorry for being in such bad company. I don’t think it would ever have occurred to a writer to do the math for the pesos that he has been paid, to present him as ungrateful rather than as someone wrong in his concepts. It’s not the first time you’ve done it, it seems that for you earning more is an obligation to speak less. The unethical always believe that money is a pact, that the truth is bought with gratitude. I consider Abel. At times like these, as always, when patience, understanding, debate, respect, and unity are required, he will regret a message like yours, a veritable pachyderm cast in the warehouse of a glass factory.

To a writer who comments about things in the country, who believes that happiness for him, his countrymen and the future of his homeland, it isn’t only a question of a more-or-less personal book that is cornered and attacked personally. It’s typical of those who are incapable, of those who believe that one should look at the world only from how things are going personally, a clear defense of that vain villager who believes that “the whole world is his village” and that Martí unmasks in his paradigmatic essay *Nuestra America* [*Our America*].

We will continue without the required spaces, away from the social reflection that everyone demagogically mentions but no one makes a reality. Without fulfilling the duty to stimulate participation there will be no meditation on what we may still have left of that five-year period, but after the peak of the matter we return to the routine of scolding and punishment. It was to be expected. An astonishment similar to yours, an argument similar to yours, must have been handled by those who didn’t understand that Fidel, the son of a bourgeois landowner, instead of stroking his full stomach put his heart at the service of the poor of the earth. That’s the story; what do we do with it?

Francis has turned those money figures into books. Tomorrow they will read him in the libraries. A pity that I also don’t have access to the income and expenses of others who endanger our cultural health with their clumsiness and who many will not remember tomorrow, luckily.

I’ll write to you at length later, and with the same publicity as this message of yours to Francis. For now, and since you refer to the ethical problem of Francis and Ileana for their letter to UNEAC, and you don’t count me in that group of moral deviants, I send you the message that I sent to the UNEAC Secretariat long before Francis. It seems that none of them bothered to send it to you. I’m still waiting for a response from someone from the Secretariat, but I thought they would at least let it circulate.

That you stand in condemnation of a message to the UNEAC Secretariat, you believe in the right to give an opinion as an official (you have that mass of data you handle about Francis thanks to your position) of a letter to an address of the UNEAC which you are not part of, illustrates our chaos, the existence of a UNEAC that, it seems, everyone represents. No, you don't explain anything in your message, you don't clarify anything, but you exemplify our problems, and deep down that will always be appreciated.

Until later. I also have important things to do right now.

Félix

February 4, 2007

About the “Declaration of the UNEAC Secretariat”

Dear Members of the UNEAC Secretariat:

This seems to have lost the point. And I no longer know if it's a dirty ula-ula that is self-propelled sovereignly, and whose detention depends on your fatigue in the game more than on the existence of a terminal station in which you can get off. In the meeting they had with us here in Ciego de Ávila on the 17th, the draft of this declaration was read to us by Fernando Rojas. It wasn't a reading to comment on it, nor to correct it. After almost three hours of exchange that seemed to be a victorious closing, the UNEAC had taken action and would make its position public.

Now that I have received this text, that I read carefully, that I observe with the exigency with which one must assume an official text of your organization in the face of such a delicate matter, I have only renewed and enriched my conviction that “the Pavón effect” continues alive and kicking. That from the debate “among revolutionaries,” the “cultural policy that has guaranteed and guarantees our unity” has a gray color. What have we advanced? Who said that the debate has to be among revolutionaries? Are those who aren't and who don't necessarily have to be “imprisonable counterrevolutionaries” excluded? What legal document authorizes this “ideological” discrimination, this deprivation of a citizen's right to discuss what's happening in his country?

That of relating to culture with unity, skipping over other things that a cultural policy must first ensure creative freedom, freedom of thought, cultural democracy, the right to diversity, is like an almost Pavonian signal. Wasn't it for the sake of unity that jazz and the Beatles were banned? As if this were not enough, there are two blunders at the end, which only occur when you want to, rather than inform, make up a slogan. An irreversibility is reaffirmed based on the words of Fidel to the intellectuals. And the gray period didn't exist a decade later, despite the existence of those “Words to the intellectuals”?

It would be good to ask Pavón how he zealously (and somewhat excessively) fulfilled the paradigmatic “nothing against the revolution.” The other is that the UNEAC makes a statement that exceeds its scope, its authority, which is not in its hands: the cultural policy (...) is irreversible. Does the UNEAC build and approve of the cultural policy? If

so, how was the *pavonato* possible? What did it do at that time? Isn't it out of date to call "irreversible" the cultural policy of a Revolution that two years ago made public its own "reversibility"?

That a UNEAC document doesn't have the courage of the UNEAC, looks like any other State document, doesn't differ from the one that could be issued by the CDR or the FMC, is enough to continue worrying. A friend of mine called me today so that I could explain to him, "translate" that text that he had read in *Granma* that didn't tell him anything; it only aroused conjecture. I had to do what the UNEAC Secretariat didn't do. Why this circumlocution, this not speaking clearly? Now no names, nor the reason for the rejection of those programs; it was too much to ask. Not even the date of those programs was given, so that a reader with a good detective's nose and the time could piece together the story.

That policy of informing and not informing, of believing that if the truth is told, the problem spreads, that the "masses" have no right to clear information, smells to me like brush strokes of white and black running up to the 21st century, put into the current landscape. That people receive a gray cloud instead of information, that in the end the people say "Hey, something big happened; I don't know what it will be but it seems that it was something with the artists," is an act of informative irresponsibility.

The UNEAC, due to its prestige, for what it means, is a model. Its steps are signs of intellectual health; its actions have an educational burden. Cuban journalists will have in this document an example of what should not be done, of what it means to sacrifice depth for the sake of "the energetic," of how to juggle so as not to offend either God or the Devil. And of course, since it's an unhappy document, the enemy will use it. The UNEAC speaks of a problem, but the messages that had been issued up to that moment contained more problems than the ICRT error.

What is the position of the UNEAC in this regard? At least it was able to say that attention would be paid to the concerns raised by the intellectuals, that certain things would be recognized, such as the lack of spaces for the debate. One of those initial messages, from Paquita Armas, one of those ignored, addressed the UNEAC directly: "That this exchange of ideas progresses so quickly makes evident the need for a space for dialogue among Cuban artists. The UNEAC is no longer what it was, and now there is no place to say what you think."

The UNEAC should have said this, yes, because it's also responsible. Let's see some of its own documents with which it hasn't complied and for which it should respond to its membership and the country at a time like this.

From the UNEAC Statutes:

Chapter 4: The UNEAC proclaims its adherence to the principles of socialist democracy and, consequently, defends the right to speak, research, experimentation, criticism, self-criticism, and frank and constructive debate on the most disperse aspects of political and cultural life that contribute to the development of our society.

From the Guidelines for the next five years (1999-2003) (Approved at the VI Congress)
Point 6:

“Consolidate spaces and institutions for debate where the diversity of opinions of the revolutionary intelligentsia regarding the most diverse cultural and social problems is expressed in a systematic manner. Properly disseminate the results of these debates in which respect for diversity constitutes the basis of our unity.”

From the agreements and recommendations of the VI Congress:

“Changes in social reality must be accompanied by reflection, without which we would not be able to fully understand the nature of these processes and deal with their implications” (Commission on Culture and Society).

“Handle information saturation through the media and debate critical reflections on current issues (Commission on Cultural Policy and its consolidation in the mass media).

That this appears like this, in the governing documents of the UNEAC, since 1998, without the UNEAC having found the way to make it a reality and nothing has happened, is enough for a new debate. It would be good if UNEAC at least showed solidarity with those who in their messages, in their reflections, have done nothing more than act in that critical and reflective spirit.

The socialist experience has shown that unresolved problems do more harm than disclosed problems. It is in the first ones where we play for life. If Revolution means to change everything that must be changed, then we must make a daily practice of asking ourselves what we must change. That is the function of the debate; not to debate is not to change.

Yes, this is a criticism of my Secretariat, an act that is also covered by Article 4 of my statutes. And it's my personal vote against that document that incorrectly closes the curtains on a much more complex issue.

Greetings,
Felix Sanchez
Ciego de Ávila, January 20, 2007

Another Message from Félix Sánchez

DEBATING IDEAS, an approach from absence

In the middle of 2006 I began to write this text, which I later set aside to round it off in the future. These days of January have put your issue in a leading role and for this reason I have decided to update you with that experience and circulate it. Not to claim a great theory, only a provocation, and also an outline for debate.

Debate, as a political category, doesn't descend to the level of human singularity; it doesn't contemplate a sea of people exchanging, contradicting; it's not an all against all. Confusing this type of debate with the whispering among all collective subjects (inmates in the same cell, comrades in the barracks) is an error that—no matter how big—fails to appear in certain respectable thinkers. The debate we are talking about cannot be equated to an exchange of impotence, ruminated opinions to the supportive or complicit ear. That triumphant slogan: "Our society is very prone to debate. There is no other country where people debate so freely; you only have to stand on a corner to hear people debating everything," is a statement that is also misguided, conformist, and dangerous.

As a political category, we must see that the debate takes place between two great bodies of ideas: the body of power (a coherent system of ideas that strengthen and support each other through the use of institutions, regulations, politicians, etc.), what in *El socialismo y el hombre en Cuba* [Socialism and Man in Cuba] Che calls "official thought," and a heterogeneous body that represents civil society, let's then call it "unofficial thought," which is characterized by being offensive. In other words, it receives these other institutionalized ideas with suspicion, with an evaluative attitude, as a counterpart, as a powerful bloc that tries to defeat it, because it needs to legitimize itself at all costs. The body of ideas of power is defensive, to the extent that it is presented as a conclusion, as a stable system, as a justifying discourse, which ideologically supports the State.

The other body, then, has no other remedy but to be different, to be neither image nor parody of the first, but to be provocative, questioning. The first works to sow and increase faith and trust, the other through doubt and questioning, which is its way of compelling the official body to renew its actions, to maintain a critical attitude that allows it to self-renew and sustain authority. The authority of the State not only rests on legal, repressive instruments; it also rests on its graceful exit in the debate. Sure, when there is one. When there isn't, it also wins, but by not showing up (like in boxing, a very lackluster win).

How it fares in the debate depends on the ascendancy of the body of ideas of the State over society, its influence on public opinion, and its acceptance. In this way the debate becomes a regulator, a designer of public opinion, and its driver. That's an opinion the State always wants to accede to. The debate, when it exists, multi-thematic, active, the audacious spiritual product of civil society, forces the State to a constant critical attitude towards itself.

Now, only to the extent that there are effective possibilities for debate between these two bodies of political ideas will there be debate. What is the effective possibility of a debate? A certain balance in forces and means, a certain space for confluences, a certain civilized communication, a certain respect for the "other." And if I monopolize the media and the spaces, the debate becomes a caricature, because instead of boxing what you have is sparring. And if I throw all my forces, overdo it, as specialists in humanitarian law would say, pitting hawks against sparrows, there is no real debate either. A confrontation between the Haitian army and Germany is not a war; it's a massacre.

This massacre occurs in the debate when, against a solitary voice, barely an embryo, is launched, intolerant, the barrage of speeches, press, media, etc. The massacres, not by chance, are always carried out by the body of ideas that is in power, which are ideas that are quartered and armed. New ideas are always born in the minority, defenseless, and the ideas in power prefer a quick victory, taking advantage of this growth crisis. A prolonged debate is a spur of defeat. That's why it's difficult to keep excess out of the ideas of the power.

The ideas of the other side, the unofficial, for a fair debate, need to counteract the weakness of not being a body of ideas in power. As in a good war, this material disadvantage is not decisive; it's replaced by the use of certain tactics: surprise, night, the trap. In other words, there's a debate strategy and a debate tactic. The tactic of the debate offers the means, the resources, and the actions, and in this way contributes to the success of the strategy, which has to do with objectives to be achieved: impose a new criterion, dismantle an idea that is considered obsolete or negative. In the field of debate, the tactic includes many resources and has an arsenal of them, which includes the use of irony, the twist, the help of art, etc. This tactic is also modernized. It's almost no longer forced by wall posters; emails are sent.

No idea passively accepts that challenge, the debate, if it's not threatened by disarticulation and discredit. There is no debate by obligation, task, mission, or sensitivity. There is debate by reaction, by an offensive or defensive need, by the urgency that my opinion triumph or prevail. It's combat. And in a fight there are only two positions: either you defend or you attack. The other is a coincidence in space and place of ideas that pass by the side and say goodbye to each other, like soldiers on parade or in joint training. Unfortunately, this is the type of debate that can be seen today in our magazines, in *Temas*, in *La Gaceta de Cuba*, for example.

In this political debate, from the State to the defense and from the body of ideas to the attack (public opinion, freethinkers, non-governmental organizations), whoever attacks, as in any struggle, has to use force. Force if the combat is serious, if it's not an act justifying my status and my dashing military uniform. As in war, the debate is also measured in the long run by results. It's not about reporting the ammunition spent, or the marches and counter-marches, but by the levels of captured, the enemy's casualties. It's not about shooting (as some of our snipers in the press do, in fifteen lines) and saying, Now I've done my duty, here are the shell casings and smoke, I'm going to rest happy.

It's about advancing, breaking the defense. That then includes a certain violence, and the use of a tactic typical of the "Battle of Ideas." In the case of such a type of combat, the tactic includes insisting, provoking, exemplifying, despairing, sowing doubts, insisting again, and employing various means (radio, press, bulletin, banner, letter, manifesto). If all this doesn't exist, there is no mobilization for the front, and there will be no real debate. Barely a verbal skirmish, ambiguous and artificial.

A body of ideas in power never really stimulates debate. You have to impose it. Any divergent opinion is not only a different opinion in the eyes of power, but it's also

disobedience. And the State is very careful not to encourage disobedience. It was and is an error that immobilizes us to believe that in socialism the State will promote debate. The socialist State, for its many new attributes, continues being a State. And the State discourse always seeks supremacy, a supremacy that is clear, luminous, and without shadows. Deep down, its attitude has a greater logic: no one consciously organizes his aggression, only those who are suicidal.

The same socialist State, which formally says yes to debate, takes care to make it impossible with many resources, ranging from the control of spaces to creating in social psychology the feeling that “debate can weaken because it threatens unity,” “the debate gives elements and pretexts to the enemy.” Within those subtle resources is the use of a verb that contains and frightens: “to question.” You can give your opinion but not question. Giving an opinion is a citizen’s right; questioning is a legal and political crime.

When do you finish giving your opinion and start questioning? Borders are already in our subconscious, regulatory, protective. When you get out of the anecdotal to get into politics, when you don’t point to a butcher but to the Minister of Economy, when you stop complaining about the misapplication of a measure to comment on the State decision to deploy those measures.

Debate, even in our society without class struggle, is not the product of any harmony. It’s not a table conversation; it’s the way in which ideas compete. Thus, it must be clearly spoken of as contending and not exchanging. Eight people talking about a movie don’t constitute a debate no matter how much and deeply they talk, because their speeches can be parallel, not touching. In the debate there are at least two discourses that, due to their positions, exclude each other, that attack each other. And there may be others acting as strategic allies, as tactical, occasional allies, undecided, but at least two must ensure the contradiction, the exclusion, which makes energies and passions be invested in the act.

The essence of debate isn’t an exercise of the neurons; it’s subtracting credibility, influence, from an idea, going against something. So just as the revolution is not made from power, the debate is never organized by those who are already in power. The effective absence of debate in our society lies, in part, in that we have been led to believe that debate is of interest to power, and it’s not. An honest act would be to say, “We are not interested in debate,” but an affirmation of such a fascist cut-off is unforgivable in the modern world and is then replaced by declarations without effective acts, debates with restrictions that nullify them, debates in appearance and not in content.

Debate and reflection are intertwined in thousands of documents in an exemplary rhetoric. But what remains true is that power goes to the debate only forcibly, when it sees its idea in danger. Meanwhile, no. We are talking, of course, about the real debate, because there is also the apparent debate, the theatrical, the repetition of subject matter to seem wise and profound.

Debate and criticism, the two most revolutionary categories in socialism once the class struggle is excluded, the confrontations of different sectors of economic power, have

been very badly handled by theory. What has been said of both has been rather immobilizing. On criticism: timely, constructive, in form, place and time (almost an impossible perfection for something that we aspire to be massive). It's almost necessary to pass a criticism course to meet these requirements. In the debate, no less has happened: between revolutionaries, fraternal, useful, in tune with our ideology, that doesn't serve the enemy. I would like someone to explain to me what a fraternal debate is, how it is possible to turn a confrontation between two worthy representatives, determined to defend their point of view to the end, into a caress.

Already recognized as a confrontation, we must also accept that the debate includes a certain violence and an arsenal of offensive and defensive resources that will be used by the different parties. Just as a shot is not an attack, saying something provocative is no longer ensuring debate. (It's the dubious merit, we said, of some snipers in our press who think they are contributing to the debate with two or three lines sneaking onto a page.) The debate arises from this confrontation in which the parties maintain a firm will to achieve their purpose. That firm will is what ensures that the attacker doesn't retreat at the first refusal, at the first loss in the ranks. Posting an opinion can be a good start to the attack. But it's not enough, you have to see the "evolution of the proceedings." The offensive action is conditioned on the defense. It's not about an act and its reply; it's about an obstinacy, a "combative" persistence.

If the interest in provoking the debate is firm, if it's from conviction and not appearance or fad, then the attacker looks for the gap, strikes again and again, until the opponent gives in, surrenders, or flees. When the attack is just a salvo, just a prop threat, a verbal feint, the defending side knows it. It's very difficult to pass off the debate as serious if it's not. Faced with the attack, the opposing side doesn't even bother, like that general who, while playing cards in his bunker, hears the routine whistle of enemy projectiles and limits himself to saying to the guards, "Keep me informed of the situation."

Thus, like those trusting generals in their bunker, most of our structures, represented in the official discourse, react many times. They feel safe, protected, and they know that most of the stirrings of debate will not go beyond that, whether by the provocateur's, the inciter's, lack of resources, will, or real decision to face the danger.

Danger I said, yes. Danger is not an intrusive word in matters of debate. All debate, as a confrontation, entails dangers. Debate without danger is not debate. You have to see that a new, conflicting idea is destabilizing. And the system, stabilized, with its body of well-dovetailed ideas, won't allow any provocation that puts it in danger to pass with its arms crossed. The system always reacts, threatens, and attacks.

Let's remember how much praise the Spanish Captain General makes of Martí in his words after hearing him on that memorable evening. "I'm going to think that Martí is crazy, but dangerous." The crown saw him as so dangerous that he was sent into exile. The reaction of the attacked is a good measure of the quality of the attack. Today that extreme reaction from Spain says a lot about the quality of Martí's provocation; it's an anecdote that no biographer of Martí leaves out. We don't really know what Martí said, but there is no doubt that the apostle spoke loud and clear.

As for these ideas, apparently very new, very “high,” nobody pays attention; let’s not claim the duty to hear the debate, to participate. It happens like this, simply, because they aren’t very daring ideas, not very “crazy,” not very “dangerous.” With benign, innocent, obtuse ideas, a debate is never triggered. It’s totally impossible, because sanity, caution, correctness, and etiquette in matters of debate is a very bad adviser.

Debate, in short, is not received as a passport or a prize; it is forced. Now, we would have to ask ourselves what possibilities we have so that this weak idea manages to exert pressure, manages to be truly offensive. By confession, because it’s the people in power, socialism must create those spaces and those channels for its subjects. The experience to date is that this hasn’t been the case.

What happened? That the illusion was created that in socialism there would be no need for proclamations, protests like that of the 13, manifestos, small gains. That illusion was created and along with it the model of the good thinker, the “new type” thinker, who may disagree with the act but never with the policy that supports it, who is clear about his limits of action and respects them, who must be a good citizen, a citizen who trusts his country, who should not make a scandalous use of resources because that serves the enemy. In short, a “low intensity debater.”

The result has been, not surprisingly, the cancellation of the real debate. When an idea, a discrepancy, is conceived, and the father of the enthusiastic creature himself evaluates it from the other side, accommodates it so that it’s publishable, doesn’t bring misunderstandings, doesn’t cause bad moments to its recipients, doesn’t provoke the anger of such and such an official, then the birth of a dead creature is already being certified.

A newspaper like *El Invasor*, from my province, has a section that’s very curious. It’s called *Sin rodeos* [*Straight Talk*]. It’s an ambitious name, ideal for a site of criticism, of controversy. But when one reads it, one realizes that it’s the antithesis of the name. There is no talk of anything other than services, bakeries, potholes, complaints. Pure tactics, pure anecdote, pure daily calamity. That is the whole space of bravery, the dimension of that announced “Straight Talk.”

So, let’s not be naïve. For every society it’s good to give the impression that it encourages debate. The possibility of debating is one of the most important certificates of democracy that a society can have. It’s important for every power to declare that it doesn’t suffocate or deprive those it directs of a voice. Even the caciques and the feudal lords did it, in their own way.

The body of ideas in power takes care of its image, never openly affirms, embarrassingly, its privileges in relation to the debate. It even tries to give the illusion that it wants a debate, respects it, and finds it useful, and it creates fictitious spaces and tries to have its own “fictitious debaters.” One example is the now traditional and famous “speech debate.” Debates and more debates, an apparent exercise of opinions. But when one goes to the practice of these so-called “speech debates of such...” he sees that what is

intended is that the ideas of that speech be reaffirmed, planted, and understood. An idea contrary to the speech in “debate” has no possibility of arising there. The organizers are not interested; moreover, deep down they know that a good debate of the speech should contemplate the immediate defeat of any idea outside the speech. Can that really be called a debate?

If the State is the great subject of one of the bodies of the debate, there are diverse subjects on the other side, homogenized by their condition of being “non-governmental.” An essential role in the debate, acting on the other side of the State, is played by what we call non-governmental organizations. But what happened in the “immobilized” European socialisms, which still happens today, is that in socialism they are assumed as pulleys of transmission, pulleys that carry the Party’s idea to the masses, not conceived with transfer in the opposite direction; and, therefore, they don’t serve as a vehicle for debate. The name that they assume here, to be in tune with the international denomination, doesn’t solve the problem. They are non-governmental, yes, but they are officially subordinate to the party in power, and as part of the system they act in the harmony that the Party demands of them.

The Party, like any high command, isn’t going to allow two of its subordinates, who have welcomed it as the leading force, to fight in a fratricidal battle. In this way, non-governmentality says nothing about the fact that NGOs can assume a critical attitude towards the State. Everything is very simple: if the Party is A and the State is B and the NGOs are C, to the extent that B and C fulfill A’s assignment, a unity is born between them, a prohibition of differences. This is pure logic, which one day we’ll have to figure out, to understand why an NGO, to round off its square center, approved by the Party, isn’t going to contribute anything original to the debate, but will always unconditionally support the block of ideas that gave it life.

The apparent debate was one of the great “conquests” of socialism. After a crude, unwise attitude towards different opinions (which brought it a bad reputation and illustrious dissidents), it began to use the “effective” weapon of tolerance, of indifference. It’s an easily verifiable attitude. It can be seen in many spaces, in magazines, how the bearer of a provocative idea of truth, which could spark debate, doesn’t go beyond that to enunciate it. This is the pact: if you say it in a certain tone, I accept it. You can’t turn your opinion into something shocking because you force me to act. This is a dangerous pact, dangerous for the future, dangerous because it bribes and corrupts the intelligentsia, the call to participate in a stable, professional way in the debate and be an example.

In this enunciation of supposedly debatable ideas, hints of debate, I have discovered regularities: not connecting the event with the “line drawn,” with policy; not mentioning concrete facts, not giving examples, not comparing, not using strong metaphors, not saying taboo names: PP, PCC, people with positions. Thus, the supposedly “inciting” text is as bland as cabbage soup. Do we not know how to do it differently, how to achieve a truly debatable discourse? Yes, we do. It’s enough to have that journalist, that cautious intellectual, face an idea of the enemy so that all his resources are deployed. What

records! What rhetorical arsenals! What handling of irony! What a mix of skills to throw more and more fuel on the fire!

It's sad, very sad. Capitalism has spent 70 years saying that we're a society closed to debate, and we deny it. European socialism fell, and we remain bogged down, saying yes, challenging the fable with impunity like carnal Pinocchios.

It was symptomatic, very demonstrative for me, what happened in the last ANEC Congress (National Association of Economists and Accountants of Cuba). The year had ended, the congress was beginning, and I expected a certain view from ANEC last year, one that was not a copy of the Ministry of Economy and Planning, nor that of Finance and Prices. No, it didn't happen, as I, still a bit naive or optimistic, hoped. The Congress, first of all to make its subordinate position clear, to give notice of its fidelity, to contribute to "unity," made an initial agreement, very well publicized, not only to support the measures taken, but also those that would be taken.

That position of approving what is to come, supporting what is to come, seems to me to be one of the most caricaturized things that can occur within an institution that should feel the responsibility of always searching for gaps and defects, of contributing its original view about society. Such an agreement is applauded by those in power because it gives peace of mind. It's like an advance: don't worry, in me you won't find a reason for debates.

Another problem in the debate, of its many, has to do with the lack of progression. No one in their right mind attacks a defensive force ten times with the same resources, the same volume of fire. Whoever does it this way doesn't really care about victory; he performs a routine act either because he's an ally of the enemy or because he's only interested in "making a mark" in the evaluation of his superiors.

He has a very clear mission: to divulge his own successes and the enemy's defeats. That was *Patria* [the Cuban Revolutionary Party's newspaper founded in 1892 by José Martí and others, to inform Cubans about the War of Independence.] *Patria* was justified by its role, by its very specific aspiration. What is not justified is that *Patria* be taken as the guiding tradition today, that a provincial Party newspaper is asked to say something strategically against its mentor. That is pure fantasy. It has been tried and proven in life. If instead of repeating that complaint on the same scale, those who want to change the role of the press had gone on to other planes, other questions, other actions, whether the problem was bigger (also a way of changing, better than inertia, because it brings the crisis closer to the solution), it would have been resolved.

We have talked a lot about the ideas of one side to the debate. Let's see those of the State, those of power, those of the entrenched side. That side, in addition to its advantages, can show all the arrogance in the world. How is its arrogance expressed? Very easily. They don't attend the debates, they don't take a seat, consider lowering themselves, catching up with others, going there. They don't write for the press. They do it not by acceptance but by tolerance, by an act of grace.

One resource that is used often is to consider that an idea a provocation, a wise choice because the term “provocation” is the only one that ethically justifies inaction. “It’s a provocation, and we mustn’t allow ourselves to be provoked.” Silence, before your provocation. I let you do it, I let you say it. That’s a way of getting out, of avoiding what might offend the intellectual. And it’s the intellectual’s duty, if he is organically able, to feel offended. A misunderstanding, a punishment, a scolding is always preferable to indifference.

In a certain article from the 1960s, Carlos Fuentes recounted the envy of a North American intellectual when he saw the picture of Latin American writers, artists, thinkers, exiles, persecuted, expelled. He said that he envied them, that there is nothing happier than being persecuted for your ideas. That shows that your ideas are worth it, that they are strong, that they are taken into account.

Things are being said in Cuba today that couldn’t be said twenty years ago. Is this maturity or the understanding that an idea only exposed, devoid of the possibility of an echo, of passage to big media, is really a censored idea? Is this tolerance or letting go of the arrogant stature of a body of ideas designed, closed, that that won’t regard others equally? Fernando Pérez’ gaze on our essential Havana wouldn’t have been allowed during the *pavonato*, but I, instead of celebrating, am sorry. Seeing in *Suite Habana* a compelling opponent to the official discourse would have been a good prize for this; worse still is that in the same year of knowing all the Cubans who saw it as a more realistic reading of our daily life, in the annual balance of our economy, of our domestic life, not a single old lady selling peanuts appeared, not a single doctor-clown, not a single young man with a lost look of despair. For the official speech, in short, even if they don’t tell him, Fernando Pérez told a story about a Havana that doesn’t exist.

The recent Round Table on the debate in the magazine *Temas* (I am referring to the one published in number 41-42, January-June 2005), exemplarily illustrated these evils. The worst thing was that she [Dr. Mayra Espina] failed to establish herself in debate. Everyone was on the side of the dissatisfied, but no one went there on behalf of the other side. It was truly an academic exchange between intellectuals. What Dr. Mayra Espina said was the best of the session: “What I am taking for debate under the call of this panel is an eminently political question.

There is not enough space for that debate, that confrontation, that contrast of perspectives, because the political design of our society is excessively authoritarian, top-down, centralist, and the strategic ideas are pre-elaborated, so that debate is left for minor issues.” After her, there was no one to oppose or join her. And the debate didn’t catch on. And it had to catch on. A judgment like this, of that roundness, deserved at least a good response from the “other side.”

I return to an idea already noted but which I consider essential. Those bodies of ideas that are institutionalized, hierarchized, established by power, only enter the debate when they feel really “threatened.” Creating that “threat” from the sharpness, the insistence, the multiplication of instruments, the disorder, the disobedience, the challenge, the audacity (“I never thought that something like that would be said in front

of me,” expressed the high-ranking Spanish officer, evaluating Martí’s audacity very well), is the only resource left to spark the debate, the real, irrepressible debate. It’s the only one that exists; the rest, the appeal, is pure naivety. What has happened these days with the Pavón case is an uncontrollable avalanche of emails and opinions, a debate organized without asking permission, growing, which confirms this thesis. Its strength, its dimension of four-force prompted negotiations, declarations, and the organization of cycles of conferences. In the face of unleashed ideas like this, the terms “understanding” and “recognition” always appear. They are terms used to hide the alarm; they are truly containment terms. In political rhetoric (and this is not a pejorative term) this is called “taking the problem into one dimension.” The problem is not in the content of the idea itself so much as in the forecast of its expansion, of its getting out of hand.

If we’re going to talk about content, that ICRT blunder is nothing compared to a trial like this, which can be found not in a publication of the enemy but of our country, and that has happened, like that of Dr. Espina, without pain or glory under our noses, converted into an opinion of “low intensity,” although it questions that Popular Power that has already turned 30 years old, and calls into question the veracity of our reiterated “full democracy.” In his article in *Participation, Dialogue and Debate in the Cuban Context* (Center for Research and Development of Cuban Culture Juan Marinello, Havana, 2004, Dr. Ovidio D’Ángelo, psychologist and sociologist states:

“In current Cuban society, one of the possible spaces for democratic exercise closest to the daily life of its participants is the constituent assemblies of popular power. On many occasions they have been framed as places where neighbors go to raise and address immediate issues and demands in their environment. Some of the approaches obtain a collective or institutional solution and many others, at most, a formal response by the competitive institutions, and citizen concerns about economic, social, and other policies are relegated or excluded from all that are generated at the highest levels of the State.”

Revolutions begin with weapons and continue and consolidate with debate. And if debate is so important to us, it must be a category on which we have to reflect with all the freedom that the act of knowing in depth demands, an act where trial and error are legitimate, where the worst thing is superficiality, the limitation to the “skin” of the issues.

I have tried to go beyond the “skin” of the debate. Debate—and I repeat, debate as a political category, not like that ballpark where one half says the best first baseman was Marquetti and the other half says Pedro Chavez—and its place in our society today deserves a visceral probing. A raw, brave, audacious, urgent survey. Above all, it cannot be postponed, because to postpone the debate will be to irresponsibly risk the health of the Revolution itself.

Félix Sánchez Rodríguez
January 22, 2006

FÉLIX SAUTIÉ MEDEROS

Translated by Regina Anavy

Desiderio,

The debate that is taking place began when I was in Spain, and when I arrived in Havana, I found in my mail that a friend had sent me the exchange of messages about it. I will tell you that at first I felt that accounts were being passed to the weakest link in a great chain. It seemed to me that some presented themselves free of all guilt and capable of judging others without looking for the gleam that they themselves have had and have in their eyes. I have been an exceptional participant in many things that have been talked about, and I have also been a victimizer and victim like many others who have believed in the possibility of taking Paradise by storm, based on the often-repeated concept that violence is the midwife of history. The prejudices that have already aggravated me from old age about the elites, the vanguards and the masses in which they classified us and have entrenched us for more than 50 years, have also existed within me.

I have been part of elites and vanguards, and I have acted in accordance with their postulates and, at the same time, been a victim of those same elites made up of the most diverse signs and sectors. I have also remembered the Gospel passage from Matthew that says that “with the same measure you use, it will be measured back to you,” as well as the passage from John about the Adulterous Woman in which Jesus said, “Cast the first stone whoever is without sin; then those who judged her all left.” That fragment states that while saying that, Jesus began to write on the ground, and some specialists have suggested that he most likely wrote the names of those who had been with the adulteress, especially those present who planned to stone her. All these things and many more that would take too long to explain have come to my mind at the beginning of the debate.

Notwithstanding these initial feelings about the beginning of the dialogue, the reflections that Belkis Vega sent you and that came to my email hit my conscience hard, and I decided to write some reflections about it and send them to you. I think after all these years and after having lived a long time, that this whole issue is a set of the same thing today, globally strung together, because I very much agree with an article by a journalist from Ciego de Ávila entitled, “The Low Culture Crisis” (Francis Sánchez) and with Amir Valle’s opinions. I think that the problem raised regarding the initial topic was not something isolated but part of the policies of the Revolution at that time, and if you want to go deeper, you have to question the policies of the System in its own errors and deviations and look up, not just down, because it’s always easier and less risky to do so, especially for those who have fallen.

I’m not evading responsibility, although I have something to do with the rectification process that culminated in the liquidation of the famous Resolution No.3. I have been a friend of Pavón and still consider myself to be, and I have agreed and disagreed with him as well. In reality he was an executor of something that guided him from the same

centers of power which many of those who criticize him today have shared, without daring to go deeper, as is really required by a true analysis of the problems.

For 50 years I have been above, in the middle and below. My first setbacks were in *Juventud Rebelde*; in *Cultura* I also ended up with discrepancies and serious problems, and in 1994 I received the last blows before leaving the official world. And I must tell you that the times that I've been down and beaten could be counted on the fingers of my hands, perhaps by just one, for those who have approached to support me or simply encourage me, other than my wife, my children, my family and a few old friends. Praising who is above and trampling who is below, making firewood from the fallen tree, is one of the greatest perversions of this era, which also lends itself a lot to opportunism and the double standards that surround us everywhere.

Another widespread problem from the top to the bottom is the disqualification and insult to those who think differently, which clouds the essential understanding for the calm debate that allows delving into the true causes of the problems in order to uproot them and solve the succession of crises in which we have been developing for many years. Triumphalism, paternalism and the universalist grandiloquence of an official language and action that has surrounded us and that surrounds us everywhere are other serious problems that generate a succession of evils that are now becoming more acute, and whose solution must necessarily be by recognizing them all without exception, with a true self-critical spirit, assuming our true dimension and our own mistakes, because I don't deny that there are those out there who would dare to throw the first stone, but I say responsibly that I don't know who, logically including myself, wouldn't throw it either, and I think that very few would do it.

For some years now I have been writing in my journalistic articles that, unfortunately, are only published abroad in my capacity as a foreign press correspondent (the times that I decided to send some to the national press I received silence as a response so I haven't even tried for many years, with the exception of the permanent section that I maintain in the *Vitral Magazine* of Pinar del Río) on the urgent need to carry out an inclusive dialogue among everyone and promote an effective reconciliation of Cubans from within and outside in favor of the common good of the country, because passing around threats, repudiations, insults and disqualifications of some against others, from all political and ideological sides without exception, can generate a chain of hatred capable of ruining the nation itself.

I believe that everything must be analyzed, starting with the most important that affects the population, reduced always only to compliance with what is established. Likewise, I consider that the generalized fear of losing status silences the realization of this necessary analysis. That is why, in my opinion, we should begin by debating the basic problems of freedom of expression and conscience, the essential need for true economic openings that allow the solution of many hardships that are becoming more and more generalized, as well as the population's ability to sustain itself with its work from salaries with real purchasing power, linking salary to the compliance standard on the basis that everyone receives according to their contribution, according to the quantity and quality of their work. Equally, I consider it necessary to facilitate a maximum

deployment of individual and collective creativity, eliminating all the obstacles that stand in its way.

All this together with a true defense of the good that the Revolution has brought, such as education, public health, social security and the attempts to achieve real distributive equity that shouldn't be confused with egalitarianism, leaving aside the triumphalism that harms us so much and recognizing above all the current problems of these achievements, which are many.

I'm against destroying the Revolution and much less replacing it with a ferocious capitalism, but I do think that many reforms, rectifications and changes must be made to save the process of social justice and distributive equity on which it has been inspired. For this, I believe that it's essential to put fear aside, give an opinion freely, be willing to work on whatever is necessary to achieve rectifications and changes and look at the global problems that affect us from top to bottom, excluding grudges, resentments, hatred and scapegoating among the few disgraced who can no longer defend themselves. That is how to open the way definitively and not only virtually for the new generations to assume the main and highest helms of command in our society.

In this scheme of things, I fully agree with the development of a dialogue that is increasingly open to the fundamental problems that generate the other problems, with a high degree of civilized conduct that is manifested mainly by the respect of all, without any exception, and for the opinions of all (worth the necessary redundancy), even for the opinions of those whom we could consider enemies. I know that after so many years of polarization this is very difficult, but we have to try to get ahead as a nation. I have written and published a lot on these matters and don't want to expand further. I believe that bridges must be built before they are destroyed. I wrote an article about that a few years ago, because I think that we have less and less time to solve our problems without producing chaos and desolation.

This is why I welcome a dialogue without insults, without rancor, without hatred and with everyone's respect for everyone, which seeks the ideal of Martí, expressed in his phrase: "With everyone and for the good of all."

Félix Sautié Mederos.

Cuba: Looking Inside

On the occasion of the current debate among Cuban intellectuals

The reality that surrounds us very rarely coincides with what we want it to be, and although it's considered a platitude, I must say that it's always presented to us as it really is, although those who are stopped in time and those who want to impose their criteria above all circumstances see a virtual reality that coincides with what they want it to be and with what some want to impose on others. This dilemma in relation to the analysis of the reality in which we find ourselves immersed and the conception from which we start is a very important feature manifested in the analyzes that are made

about Cuba, which are decisively affected by the high level of polarization both inside and outside the country on the issue.

Along these lines, I identify two great virtual positions, one that starts from a hoped-for reality, which presents the Cuban social system as an ideal paradigm without defects or antagonistic contradictions; or, the alternative, where everything concerning Cuba and its social system is totally demonized. In my opinion, both versions differ essentially from the true reality.

In this sense, the triumphalism with which the internal reality is officially presented leaves very few opportunities for the necessary criticism, for the analysis, to which we all can contribute our way of looking at things and our opinion on the real impacts of the policies that are applied. The practice of persistent disqualification from one side and the other, for those who dare to state their opinions regardless of the coined formulas, clouds everything.

The opportunities for participation are made more difficult and complex given the fact that the debates that take place on these realities happen outside Cuba in foreign countries, where, logically, the main role is played by people who don't live within the national territory. Those of us who are inside have very few possibilities of access to these media, and when we do, we enter a space where suspicion makes the atmosphere rarefied.

On the other hand, the opinions of foreign personalities are officially privileged, highlighted and publicized through all the local media, mainly of those who have fully accepted the official version that is proposed. The critical opinions of certain Marxist intellectuals from abroad are also admitted or ignored without further confrontation, while those of us who remain inside without becoming champions of official thought, as Che says, lack the adequate spaces, the security and the opportunities to express our opinions.

The interference and aggressiveness of the Government of the United States in all these years of Revolution have seriously complicated the internal situation and affect this need for dialogue, because in a country under siege, the opportunities for dialogue are few, but this shouldn't be made absolute to the point of drowning honest and responsible thought on either side, because these aggressions already materialized at the end of the 19th century, when the so-called Spanish-American War had the objective of forcing Cubans to annihilate each other, as was openly stated. These interferences and aggressions are real facts to be taken into account, which have been and are manifested through multiple specific aggressions, as well as arbitrary laws and measures, including some of an extraterritorial nature, among which the Blockade or Embargo stands out. But it's the same thing: a task aimed at trying to compel the people of Cuba so that through hunger, poverty and induced desperation they rebel against the established system. All of which has led to an environment of blackmail that includes controversial results, because in addition to the profound illegitimate essence and real effects of these measures, they also become contradictory factors that are used to stop thought and constructive criticism.

For such purposes, looking inward from the inside and expressing it, even with a positive and leftist conception, becomes a complicated exercise and one not exempt from certain risks, which constitutes a very important problem, in my opinion, for the implementation of a positive objectivity that contributes to the true knowledge of reality, which, as is logical at any time and latitude, develops in constant movement and unfolds within opposing forces, positive or negative, given the binary character of life in its daily alternation between good and evil, right and wrong.

Here I would like to reiterate something that I've already raised on other occasions, and that is that I believe that all Cubans, without exception, should exercise respect for the opinions of others and even learn to value the true and positive aspects that are expressed in the opinions of those we consider our adversaries. This, in my opinion, is an attitude of great intelligence and a high level of civilization.

In my opinion, it's these circumstances and conjunctures that determine a special importance for the unusual debate through internal emails, which has begun to develop as a result of the presentation by Cuban Television of three former officials of the cultural and mass media. Never in many years has something like this happened. It is totally new, even by the means used, since in Cuba e-mail is very restricted, and the internal network of Culture is an extraordinary exception in this regard. This exchange of emails is also especially novel because it has aroused critical voices from Cuban intellectuals, mainly from within, together with some who are based abroad, who together have begun to debate with those who don't have the same critical vision.

The initial theme was limited and also began with a certain bias without many of its participants looking at the gleam that each of us carries in our eyes and also throwing a first stone from glass roofs. This is how I made it known in my first personal participation in which I presented myself in my capacity as victimizer and victim. In short, it had to start somewhere, and I welcome debate and dialogue, which is always the best option for dealing with problems no matter how complicated they may be. The question now is to redirect it towards fundamental issues that refer to the problems that generate other problems, to the fundamental and determining problems. In this way, I consider it necessary not to let the debate be mediated by venal interests or manipulated by other interests foreign to the positive solution of the problems that arise.

It's in this direction that I've tried to steer what I'm now writing, which simply constitutes the summary of what I see inside Cuban society from the inside at the present time, and which I consider only an approach that isn't exempt from errors and considerations that require corrections and rethinking for its most appropriate definition, in a collective search for the truth as it really is, and on which we must act together with a view to peace, harmony, justice and the development of our local society. That is why I have begun my analysis by outlining the obstacles and actions that stand in the way of the possibility of debating, of honestly presenting our criteria and opinions without being restricted, disqualified, much less insulted, in the fullest respect of all for all. These possibilities are directly related to the freedom of conscience and free will inherent to the human condition.

Consequently, my analysis is not comprehensive, but rather covers the main point of where I think we should start in order to adequately unravel the essential need to continue with a dialogue among Cubans from all walks of life and conditions, inside and outside, where the very acute and complicated problems that afflict us can be reviewed. For some years in my articles and chronicles, I've been advocating the need for dialogue and reconciliation. and now that a dialogue is beginning, which may not be the ideal but is what has become possible, I must be consistent and actively participate and support it in any way I can.

I believe that if these problems are not properly understood within the country by those who hold power and no real breathing space is given to facilitate the development of criticism and self-criticism the debate and consequent disagreements, proposals, and the most diverse approaches can be expressed within a spirit of harmony, peace, fraternity and mutual respect, far from strengthening and securing the Revolution in its positive aspects that in all circumstances should be preserved, consolidated and developed, the very foundations of the entire process will be undermined from within, and their self-destruction would be a matter of time, which, unfortunately, I perceive is happening. I would like to be wrong.

In my opinion, these reflections should be the object of an in-depth analysis with all possible honesty and seriousness, mainly by those who, from their responsibilities, act in order to limit the thought, conscience and the free will of the people. It seems to me that we are at a turning point, although some are obstinate in denying it, in which reconsideration, course corrections and positive changes can be made every moment that passes. This is essential in order to really achieve practical validity within the contemporary Cuban society, following Martí's approach of acting with everyone for the good of all.

Instead of using the energies and forces still available (because really the forces and energies have been slowly running out), as some do, to limit thought, conscience and free will with moral and ethical responsibility, they should be used instead to extend, liberate and develop production and service processes, facilitating participation, as well as individual, family and collective initiatives that could definitively change many of the negative tendencies that favor the self-destruction of the social process.

They could point out the weariness that is systematically generalized and the disinterest in work in its quality and quantity, with which the basic needs of subsistence are not resolved, around which phenomena of appropriation of state-owned resources and merchandise are raised, which are then circulated within an alternative market network, as well as the illegal payments for the services that certain officials provide as part of their work for the State, and other ways that would be too much to mention, which develop within the framework of a profound crisis of values that requires a true moral rearmament of society.

The alarming problems of disorder and corruption that have even been recognized and raised by high government and political leaders, in my opinion, will not be resolved with a repressive policy, which, controversially, could strengthen and aggravate them. In this

sense, I think that it's necessary to assume and recognize their existence as such, to analyze them deeply in their essential causes in order to confront them first and foremost with economic and administrative measures, beginning with the area of work, standards, wages and prices, in order to consider specific reforms and the necessary openings that facilitate consistent development that effectively reaches labor groups and citizens in general.

In this scheme of things, profound reforms would be necessary in the economic area: returns linked to standards, wages in a currency with real purchasing power, promoting the development of cooperatives, self-employment, small family businesses and local authorities, the solution of the problems caused by the dual currency and the adjustment of prices according to realities and wage levels so that citizens can solve their subsistence and development based on their own efforts.

For such purposes, it would be essential to put aside voluntarism, paternalism, idyllic conceptions that cannot be applied in the field of economics and the logic of people, normative restrictions that conspire against the individual and collective development of citizenship and against valid satisfactions, many of which remain restricted by schematic criteria, canonization and the implantation of a single unquestionable thought.

In my opinion, the solution of these problems would contribute to an effective strengthening of the base of society, the Social Being, with positive repercussions on the superstructure or Social Conscience, which, together with the development of the fullest freedom of conscience and belief, propitiators of a necessary recovery of spirituality so damaged by the policy of scientific atheism and its consequences, would facilitate a favorable climate for the personal and collective fulfillment of people, in addition to reunions, reconciliations and the necessary forgiveness that contribute to achieving a future of peace, social justice, real distributive equity and development for our children and grandchildren.

This, in turn, would be an important factor capable of slowing down and stopping the flow of definitive departures from the country that bleed contemporary Cuban society progressively as a result of boredom and despair. In addition, I also think that it would be the most effective formula for confronting the annexationist tendencies that some from the United States favor, taking advantage of the closedness and dogmatism in which many are trapped internally.

In these circumstances, the structural and suprastructural bases would be created, which would make it easier to seriously consider making an effort by the whole of society, in favor of achieving a moral, ethical and civic rearmament aimed at recovering a great multiplicity of values that, as a consequence of all the objective and subjective wear and tear that contemporary Cuban society has suffered, have gradually been lost in a constant deterioration that urgently needs to be stopped. This is a very complex issue that requires a specific analysis, and I have only pointed it out for the purposes of the necessary unity of the combined situations that are observed when looking inward with full objectivity, responsibility and honesty of thought.

To stifle one's own thought as a whole, both to those who accept and those who differ, to silence those who express themselves with sincerity and honesty, to act against the status of those who propose it, would be to leave a scorched earth within the field of true intelligence and the will of positive development towards the future. This situation could continue for a certain time, but ultimately, as long as the internal crisis continues, it will increase, and I really consider that harmful and very risky.

These are, in my opinion, some of the main problems and generators of other problems that currently affect the Cuban Social System and that are obvious when I look inside: the entrenchment in a single and rigid conception of socialism, without adapting it to the dialectic and the effective development of life, and without taking into account that people need to fulfill themselves during their only earthly known life, to have a free state of consciousness and action. The formula should not be to silence them and turn them into a taboo subject, but rather to face them openly, beginning first by recognizing them, identifying them, debating them and getting down to work to solve the problems. Otherwise, we resign ourselves to being mere spectators of a subtle process of self-destruction of the Social System by way of a slow and silent implosion.

I am against destroying the Revolution. I don't hide or blush to say it, proclaim it and defend it, although the current tendencies of many others are aimed at burying Socialism and leaving it behind. I believe in socialism, but a truly human and democratic socialism, with a deep Christian essence, where, as Rosa de Luxembourg proposed, freedom is either for everyone or it is not. What I express here I do from my heart, with a self-critical spirit, without avoiding responsibilities and committed to a process in which I have participated for almost 50 years, in which I have been a perpetrator and a victim.

In summary, I propose these reflections and opinions with the aim of helping to purge errors, correct wrong directions, repudiate what was wrongly done and defend all human rights without exception, to preserve the original ideas and achievements of the Revolution, and I present this as a call for dialogue and responsible and respectful debate, from which I hope and trust the necessary corrections and essential solutions will emerge. It is sad that there is no space inside to publish ideas and critical and constructive thought, and that it can only be done from outside, also running the risk of disavowal, misrepresentation and silencing, but I think it's time to clearly express our thoughts, because in reality there is less and less time to do it with peace, honesty, harmony and good will.

(Published in the newspaper *Suplemento Dominical Unicornio*, Mérida, Yucatán, Sunday, March 11, 2007)

Felix Sautié Mederos

FERNANDO JACOMINO

Translated by Regina Anavy

Message from Fernando Jacomino,

Vice President of the Cuban Book Institute, to Francis Sánchez

Francis,

Since I saw your and Ileana's message in disagreement with the UNEAC statement, I felt that, ethically, something strange was happening with you. I tried to keep going, in the midst of the pressures of this final stage of organization of the fair, but a great concern prevented me. It took me a little longer to respond because I wanted to search for data, explore various documents that I vaguely remembered and that something told me would be related to these new issues. Finally today, even in the midst of a thousand concerns and pending issues, I came to the office on Sunday in order to spend some time writing to you a little about the subject.

Despite the brevity of the note I referred to above, it's easy to understand that, once again, you are departing from the problem itself to evaluate the functioning of the Union. I also see that you have sent the text to an extensive list of recipients, including Ponte, a confessed enemy not only of the cultural policy of the Revolution, but of the Revolution itself, a member of the Editorial Board of the magazine *Encuentro*, an organ that, as you well know, is financed by the Yankees. We already talked in *Ciego* about how this publication has tried, once again, to fish in a troubled river.

I have a hard time believing, honestly, in that image of a victim that you present in that initial email. There you wrote, for example, that we young Cuban writers fundamentally live outside of history, they were putting us (you say)—and we accommodated ourselves—on the sidelines, in a position of every-day amnesia, harmlessly on the sidelines. I confess that this was one of the parts of the text that I understood the least, especially because it's very easy to verify that your levels of real participation in Ávila and Cuban cultural life, at least in the last six years, have nothing to do with those of someone who has been harmlessly placed on the sidelines. I perceive, yes, a lot of amnesia in all this, but more in you than in those who supposedly confined you to that non-existent corner.

After those very hard '90s (not only for you, by the way), in which jobs such as publishing and others related to books were a real rarity even in the capital, another stage came in which you were not only able to work as an editor of *Ediciones Ávila*, but you published, in that same publishing house between 2000 and 2005, three of your books and another three anthologies of Ávila authors prepared and annotated by you, beginning with those *Arribos de luz* that you always mention and which was the first letter of introduction for many Ávila authors who became increasingly better known throughout Cuba.

But you also published three other titles in publishers from Pinar del Río, Vila Clara and Guantánamo, and more importantly, you have been able to express and publish the

harshest opinions about this system that, although still imperfect, has made that possible, and I quote here your own words in *La Jiribilla*: “For the first time the communities of authors from the different provinces have the possibility of really existing, that is, of seeing their work printed, palpable.”

But there’s more. As a result of the prominence that the publication of these books has given to your work, *Editorial Letras Cubanas* has just published your volume of poems, *El extraño caso del niño que dormía sobre un lobo* [*The Strange Case of the Boy who Slept on a Wolf*], which fulfills the natural trajectory of an author based in the provinces who, from *Ediciones Territoriales*, has become visible for one of the highest-ranking Cuban publishers.

Meanwhile, and at the same time that your books have been published, you have had a great participation, for example, in the organization of the literary program of the Ciego Book Fair, an event for which you propose guests, speakers, books to present, etc. In addition to that, you assume, also during the Fair, a group of book presentations that doesn’t prevent you from getting paid in your condition as an employee of the publishing house. You work as editor of the magazine *Videncia* and support, together with Ileana, the digital poetry magazine *Árbol Invertido*. Doesn’t it seem a little strange to you, this way of remaining harmlessly on the sidelines?

And since we are talking about getting paid, I take the opportunity to remind you that you have earned, from 2000 to date, for copyright, the figure of 53,786 pesos, counting what you will retain for the publication of *Letras Cubanas* and not counting your salary as an editor or what you have received at events and fairs in other provinces, without selling liters of milk door to door, or exchanging old clothes for pounds of rice in the rice cookers at the end of the world, as you say happened to you in the ’90s. In that same period Ileana, your partner, who works as an editor for *Ediciones Ávila*, published five titles: four in the publishing house where she works and one in *Sed de belleza*, and she has earned from 2000 to date, for copyright, the figure of 38,394 pesos. Nor do I count here what was charged for it in other provinces.

Now, with respect to the attention you have received from provincial and national institutions, you forget that your claims and those of the main Ávila authors have been addressed directly by the ICL, and that there has been no lack of public criticism of colleagues that made mistakes. In all cases we have discussed the issues directly with you. We did so when we considered the number of books by you and other colleagues, including Ileana, in the Ávila catalog to be excessive, and when the wrong decision was made to suspend the monthly payments for *Árbol invertido*. In the first case, the discussion was chaired by Iroel, and in the second, Rubén del Valle, Alex Pausides (for UNEAC) and I went to Ciego, and we corrected the error. We gave very clear indications at that time that the magazine should be resumed, and despite the fact that payment was restored retroactively, it took us several months to see it again.

Regarding your disagreement with the UNEAC document, I must also comment on a couple of things. Regarding the circulation of the first texts that make up the controversy, including yours, several colleagues were in Ciego de Ávila, and we

explained, first to you alone and then to the main Ávila writers, the entire chain of events related to Pavón's appearance on the *Impronta* program. We also talked there about the need for you to contribute whatever was necessary to resolve the issue among revolutionaries. I am struck by the fact that you were aware of the Declaration before it was published in *Granma*. That night, at the end of the meeting and the debate on various issues, which later extended to UNEAC headquarters, we read the Declaration, which came out the next day in *Granma*, and you didn't express any disagreement. At that moment it didn't seem dishonest to keep quiet; then it did.

I could tell you a few more things, but my time is running out and I have to go out and do other things that can't wait another minute.

Regards,
Ferdinand Jacomino
February 4, 2007

FRANK PADRÓN

Translated by Yenny Fernández

I am as outraged as any honest Cuban intellectual who knows a little about history and, in one way or another, has suffered from it. Now: if we don't take urgent measures there is a risk that all this will not go beyond the already usual controversies on the network, in the style of *La Diferencia*. I also think that the “airing,” almost followed by two such dark figures, isn't a simple coincidence or a mere clumsiness (“for variety”) of our beloved Television Institute.

Frank Padrón

January 2007

GUSTAVO ARCOS FERNÁNDEZ-BRITTO

Translated by Alicia Barraqué Ellison

Magaly, Desiderio, Arturo:

Although I did not live through that period (I was between five and ten years old), I fully share your positions and ideas. I have always thought that although history has passed over many of those sad individuals, not a few of the ideas, conceptions and attitudes that bolstered them are still present in our society today. I also believe that without taking one iota of responsibility from them, there is a lot of fabric to cut through [i.e., much to discuss about this matter] because that fabric extends throughout the most diverse spaces and levels. Precisely the matter's resurrection on television along with certain ideas that horribly seem to be revitalized in our media, or approaches to the direction that our culture should take, are a sign of how much remains to be done.

When the river flows....the peacocks* come.

It's an urgent debate in which we must all participate in one way or another, whether or not we have experienced those unfortunate events.

From my perspective and with the license that my position allows me, I have involved everyone I deem necessary in this exchange of messages. Here I send you the answer of the filmmaker Belkis Vega. Other ISA students and professors have also expressed their adherence to the positions that you defend.

Regards, Gustavo Arcos

Translator's Note:* Peacocks are known for their strutting behavior when showing off their colors. "Pavón" is a Spanish word for peacock used here. Pavón is also the name of Luis Pavón Tamayo, one of the prime movers behind the 1970 period of censorship that is at issue in the email-driven Intellectual Debate, which includes this text.

Another Message from Gustavo Arcos

Looks like the right spot for a debate.

Well, well, well! Finally, Cuban intellectuals have the "appropriate place" to debate their problems: their wailing wall or, if you like, their psychoanalyst's chair. Armando Hart has just announced it; the press has published it using these very words, and we are very proud of it. In other words, after almost five decades, we can go to a legitimate site, as such, and say what we think in the appropriate way and before the appropriate people. We still don't know if it will go the right way, but we must be optimistic.

One might well wonder if appropriate locations will also open in the provinces or other regions of the country. And will the people also have their appropriate spaces, or will it be the other way around? What have they had until now? Are we recognizing that none

of the sites, parliaments, discussion centers, congresses, panels, tables, or seminars organized by tens of thousands throughout all these years was the appropriate one? Why should there be an appropriate place? Perhaps it's because the country will move towards establishing *parameters* for—oh, sorry!, total compartmentalization of—the spaces where some individuals will be oriented towards reflections or opinions and others will not.

If we have the true will to fruitfully channel the extraordinary intellectual and cultural debate that has taken place by email in recent weeks, why not use (among others) the space of the Round Table, for example. Of course, there is no better place than this. It is a national television space, which has full institutional support, which reaches all homes through various channels and is even broadcast more than once for those who couldn't see it in its original broadcast. It would also be an excellent opportunity for this program to acquire its true meaning, since after almost seven years of permanent existence, the broadcasts that its directors have dedicated to the deep debate of the essential issues of the nation have been embarrassingly few. "Debate," did I say?

Doctor Armando Hart: As you know, the discussion of the problems that affect our island doesn't belong exclusively to the intellectual field, nor to an elite, the party, or a social caste. It belongs to everyone and can only be resolved with the responsible participation of ALL CUBANS. Let's see if once and for all we leave behind that exclusive and sectarian feeling where some have all the powers and others none, where someone does the thinking and others the doing!

From an appropriate place in Vedado,
Gustavo Arcos Fernández-Britto
January 27, 2007

GERARDO FULLEDA LEÓN

Translated by Alicia Barraqué Ellison

Message to Reynaldo González

Dear Rey,

I didn't watch Alfredo's program where "Papito" appeared because I don't have time to watch that kind of program; at that hour, I prefer to watch a good movie, read a good book, or the press. But, the next day, I was outraged when they told me what he had said: one has to be brazen to lie like that in public and to make the confessions he did. I did see the other one, because I was having dinner at a friend's house and the television was on; a program that I watch when I can, even if it's nothing to write home about. But we went ballistic, my friend and I, we who suffered through that time, when we were all *parametrized* *— that is, morally, psychically, and let's be frank, financially curtailed, even though our names had not appeared on the official sanctions list.

For all this I add myself, as one more voice, to anything that might prevent the resurgence of those days, and of those mentalities that caused such damage, strutting before our viewers like meek lambs or proud adherents of "what has been arranged." They did quite a lot of harm to us here and to the Revolution itself, which they claimed before international public opinion to defend with their abominable deeds for the abuses of power committed during that time.

Now is not a time for fear or for silence, but for unity, to prevent any attempt to go back in time and for history to repeat itself. The Pandora's box was opened by them, and they are the ones who should fear our pain, apologize for our scars, and shut up. A hug, keep me up to date on everything, and count on me.

Gerardo

* "Parametrized" refers to sanctions imposed on writers and artists who breached the "rigid cultural parameters" that were imposed on creative work in Cuba in the 1970s.

HAROLDO DILLA

Translated by Alicia Barraqué Ellison

The Stable of Fine Horses

As is known, a group of Cuban artists and writers launched into an unusual, semi-public debate, unenviably motivated by the reappearance on the (fully public) scene of a cadre of inquisitors, protagonists of what they call the “five-year grey period.” This has prompted the investigative magnifying glass of those of us who—as emigrants, exiles or whatever—reside outside the Island. I have read by the latter as many decent arguments as arrogant libels that distill all the grandiose misfortune of exiles when they start to see themselves as virtuous and unyielding warriors.

I dwell on this briefly only to fix a position. With their different levels of importance, the people involved in this debate are all deserving of the utmost respect, and in some cases also admiration, for their intellectual gifts and works. The fact of living in Cuba doesn’t count against anyone, and can even be a great plus without the person having to be a member of some opposition group—just as being in the opposition (although an ineffable indicator of personal courage) doesn’t in itself confer merit. Cuban writers and artists can be (and in many cases are) generators of innovative ideas, values and ethical proposals. And they can do this under very unfavorable conditions, ever treading the edge of what the system considers the border between virtue and sin.

Frankly, I envy the possibility of influencing Cuban society in this way, and I admire how it can be done from a theater, a painting exhibition, a conference, or a rap concert. Since I live in the Dominican Republic, I can no longer do it. Subjecting these people to the opposition test case is immoral, for various reasons.

One of them lies in the fact that most of the people I have seen expressing their opinion with such disdain and arrogance never, in truth, challenged the system in Cuba beyond a few private conversations that were a bit risky. Another, because some of the commentators seem to live in a different place from the “rude real world,” where we intellectuals are always figuring out what should be said and what should not be said (whether for political, ethical, or economic reasons) and with respect to the world we inhabit. Let’s be frank, all this business about “being careful” is an occupational disease.

And the thing is that the intellectual world is always like a stable of fine horses—although I will admit that the Cuban stable is very intricate and houses horses of a distinctive sensitivity.

The image of the stable does not imply any pejorative judgment, but rather a sociopolitical condition. A few years ago I visited a stable of fine horses owned by a Canadian friend. I was struck by how slowly the barn doors opened, which according to my friend was because if they opened suddenly, the gusts of cold air that could cause the animals to rear up. The doors had to be opened little by little. They are strange

creatures, he told me, because when a real danger occurs—for example a carnivorous animal entering the stable—they become paralyzed with fear.

The precariousness of negotiated subordination. In Cuba, as it happened, they opened the stable doors suddenly. The stable is a pact that for decades has implied the negotiated subordination of writers and artists.

The agreement was very clear. The Cuban leadership promised to allow them certain freedoms and spaces for personal fulfillment, which ranged (to be graphic) from presenting “Marketing” at the Teatro Mella, or filming *Guantanamera*, to being able to travel almost freely and live outside the country. That is to say, from the most altruistic to the most prosaic, the writers and artists had a range of ready reasons to stay within the Revolution (as Fidel demanded in his “Words to the Intellectuals” *) and of course, to become worried when they saw Pavón on boring Cuban television.

As for the artists and writers, they had to submit to humiliating terms.

The first requirement was to delay any criticism of at least three issues—Fidel's leadership, the legitimacy of the single party, and the repudiation of U.S. policies—and to execute it always in an elliptical and cryptic manner. All of which was not too burdensome, if we take into account that, after all, artistic language is always cryptic and that ultimately art does not demonstrate but only indicates.

The second requirement was to enjoy their privileges without ambitions to universalize them—which, in fact, left a group of sectors such as social scientists outside the “intellectual” field. And incidentally, this castrated the UNEAC, turning it into a guild protected by the umbrella of liberal regulation (in the worst sense of the term) and backed by an international opinion much more sensitive to what could happen to a poet than to a historian.

In this sense, it's fair to point out that if writers and artists suffered a five-year gray period, social scientists have known nothing else. And the gang of its anodyne and mediocre inquisitors—Darío Machado, Isabel Monal, Fernández Bulté, Miguel Limia, Talía Fung, Valdés Vivó—led by the Ideological Department—are showing off*** on all the television channels, at all events, and even at the congresses of the Latin American Studies Association.

The meaning of the “Revolution” of which one had to be inside was severely rarefied by the policies in progress, such that if for a writer the Revolution was defined as a program of social changes, for a sociologist it was relegated to the causeways,** the plantain microjet,*** and the Battle of Ideas. If the Cuban leaders knew anything, it is what Carpentier reminded us of on one occasion: the works that motivated revolutions were not *Don Quixote* or the *Mona Lisa*, but *The Social Contract* and *Capital*.

On the part of the UNEAC, its leaders, and the loquacious Minister of Culture (who in turn is a member of the political bureau), there has always been total silence when social

scientists have been repressed, and writers and artists have been rendered mute with dread by the predatory action of the carnivores.

Redefining the system. Although the writers and artists debate had little impact on public opinion, it is very important because it has sent a signal to the political class. Although a television producer has affirmed that everything was an unimportant coincidence, as the young Baudolino said, the only chance thing is the love of innocents. And nobody here is one of those. The stupidity of this fact doesn't imply irrelevance. The Cuban political class knows that times of adjustment are coming and that it must face at least three challenges.

The first is the disappearance of Fidel Castro or at least his reduction to the stringy specter that appears on television, which means the loss of the system's center.

The second is the end of the blockade [embargo]—gradually, by exsanguination—but its end nonetheless, following the stupid attempt (so as not to do something different) by George W. Bush to intensify it.

Third, it must open the economy to increased levels, a process that Chávez delayed with his subsidies, but only delayed. And it must do so by preserving its unity in the midst of the mess that the commander in chief has been leaving since the times when, like a spoiled grandfather, he began teaching housewives how to make black beans and filled the gas stations with social workers.

The regurgitation of the bile of the grey five-year period was a trial balloon orchestrated by the infamous ideological department, whose head—a prototypical case for Lombroso—knows very little about culture but a lot about active intelligence measures. And it did this by exposing to the public pillory three old men who served them faithfully for years. The carnivorous animals did not enter the stable, they only opened the doors to see how the fine horses reacted. The UNEAC's declaration closed the doors again, and it was like this, with the doors closed, that the conferences on the five-year grey period have begun. This is the systemic limit of our writers and artists.

Haroldo Dilla, Santo Domingo
February 12, 2007

Translator's Notes:

* Refers to Fidel Castro's "Words to the Intellectuals" speech of June 30, 1961, in which he set limits to the free expression of artists and writers: "Within the Revolution, everything; outside the Revolution, nothing."

** Likely refers to the *Pedraplén a Cayo Santa María*, a causeway—said to be the world's longest—constructed between 1989 and 1999.

*** "Pavón" is a Spanish word for peacock. Peacocks are known for their strutting behavior when showing off their colors. In the original text, the writer uses a verb,

pavonearse, to describe the strutting behavior of the persons he mentions in this paragraph. “Pavón” is also the name of Luis Pavón Tamayo, one of the prime movers behind the 1970s censorship period that is the subject of the email debate that includes this text.

****A 1990 speech by Fidel Castro refers to plantain plantations that will feature an “aerial microjet system.”

ISBEL DIAZ TORRES

Translated by GH and Regina Anavy

New Templa Conference for over 40s at Casa de Las Américas

Yes, apparently the issues that were debated yesterday at the Casa de las Américas were not of interest for the future of Cuban culture and thought. Apparently it was about vindicating (rightly) some of the victims of a period that was more than gray, invisible.

For many like me, knowledge of this region of our cultural history is limited to comments from one or another parameterized and readings between the lines in essays and spaces such as those of the magazines *Temas* or *Criterios*. However, the youngest artists, researchers and intellectuals in general who wanted to attend had to be content with the iron barriers that our beloved Casa gave us. “There’s no room,” they said, and it was a great truth: for us there was no room in that group.

The sad thing about all this is that perhaps it would not have been so. It’s very possible that if our Desiderio had been asked if that was the audience he had thought of for his cycle of conferences, the answer would be negative. And it’s not because those who were there didn’t deserve that place, but because those of us who stayed outside were assisted by the law as future makers of Cuban culture.

There are those who think that everything was just an organizational problem; there are those who are more suspicious; the reality is that we did not enter. How many invitations were given to members of the Hermanos Saíz Association who were not members of the National Council? Why did the UNEAC manage the entire organizational process, taking away an immense number of places? And where was the University of Havana? It’s very possible that half of those who attended, if they had not been expressly invited, would have stayed at home, and this is not as light a speculation as one might think. Go to the substantive and contentious conferences that are given at the Criteria Theoretical-Cultural Center and confront the faces of the usual attendees with the faces of those who yesterday were among the chosen ones. Are they so concerned about Cuban history and culture?

Fortunately, deep-thinking people were up there also, people who, regardless of their artistic merits, have always professed the practice of opinion, debate, confrontation, heresy. But it’s not enough: we should have been there too, and it doesn’t seem necessary to argue that further. Someone among the excluded said that maybe it was better to be down there than up there, maybe we were making the part of history that corresponded to us; perhaps, I say now, we were demonstrating that this was not exclusively about the past, but also about our conflictive present.

I welcome the entry of this debate on the agenda of Cuban intellectuals, those who suffered the *pavonato*, and those of us who today reap the fruits of those wounds and face others perhaps of a similar nature. I trust that the seats for the next conferences in this cycle will be within reach of those of us who are interested in hearing how to create our culture’s future.

Lic. Isbel Diaz Torres
Writer member of the Hermanos Saíz Association
Wednesday, January 31, 2007

Conference for Under 40 Years Old

Well, as you may already know, the conference for young people took place... or the conferences... or the workshop “The Cultural Policy of the Revolution,” as the invitations distributed by the Theoretical-Cultural Criteria Center and the Association Hermanos Saíz said. It took place was last Friday (February 23) at 2:00 p.m., at the ISA. Who were invited? Well, although I don’t have the statistics, there were quite a few people there, the vast majority of them young. Intellectuals from all branches of art, researchers, writers from the AHS (with and without positions), university students and creators from many provinces of the country. Perhaps this time the ideal audience was not achieved either, as Alain Ortiz said. “The meaning of the meeting had to do with multigenerational representation,” to achieve a true debate, and we agree that it was a really arduous task.

However, I want to be optimistic; “Wonders will come a little slowly,” as Silvio says, but the sails can be seen on the horizon. This process that has been unleashed is irreversible, in my opinion, and I feel that the Revolution burns with rich contradictions, which will make it stronger and more resistant if we manage to take advantage of them. It’s not about opportunism, but about not leaving in the drawer the issues that concern us today, which urgently need to be addressed and resolved. I feel that much of what we suffer today is due precisely to the fact that the wounds were not healed at the time they were perpetrated. It’s like trying to hide a piece of meat under the mattress: the rot and the bad smell will come out over time. The moment is now. Tools like the web and email are in our favor; silence is impossible.

So far I have not found any repercussions from this Workshop; neither in the national press nor in emails. That worries me a lot, because I think it has been a gain for the debate, a conquered terrain. Are we only interested in catharsis by denouncing our misfortune, or do we really want to systematize this debate? We must be fully aware of what we do. This is not an action plan or anything like that; we all have our own ideas and important differences; but the spirit of renewal, truly revolutionary, cannot be lost after a short period of effervescence, but must be part of our daily lives.

For now, I publish my words here in the “meeting with young people.” The text was short, adhering to the moderator’s demand not to exceed three minutes, but “I have said my thing on time and smiling,” and above all, with great honesty, which is what is important.

Higher Institute of Art, Friday, February 23, 2007

Hello to everyone.

A thought insists again and again in my brain, since this avalanche of emails and statements has invaded the Cuban intellectual sphere. That question is: Will all this make any practical sense?

What is Cultural Policy? Does a “cultural policy” decide which works are aesthetically valid and which are not? Will it help me to know if rock is better than timba, if performance is preferable to landscaping, if inside writers are superior to outsiders, if reggaeton is erotic or pornographic? Is a “cultural policy” one that “helps” blacks, gays, artists from the provinces...? Is it that? Is it something that is written in the Constitution of the Republic, or in Decrees, or that come down as “guidelines from higher organizations” in the meetings of the Party or the UJC? Does a “cultural policy” say what is revolutionary and what is counterrevolutionary?

In my opinion, the Cuban Cultural Policy, so linked to the spheres of power, and many times more than linked, subordinated to the State apparatus, fortunately has not been set in stone, but has been shaped along with the future of this nation. Many times it has been at the mercy of wills outside the Culture itself: international situations, “defining moments,” crazy ideas that in the head of some manager became laws, etc. Moments of greater or lesser permissiveness existed, sometimes of tolerance and, why not, also of real understanding. But is that really what we need today: to give thanks for the arrival of a moment of greater permissiveness? Sing a requiem to Socialist Realism and a Hallelujah to postmodernism? I think it would be a frivolous attitude of ours.

Since I was little I was taught that the true transformations, or at least the most necessary ones, are those that go to the roots of evils. Then I learned for myself how difficult such a feat was because it involved, first of all, identifying those evils, work that requires a strong dose of wisdom, detachment and love. But who wants easy tasks? We need real transformations and for that we have to “think about the Revolution.” It’s not exclusively about the artistic or intellectual sphere, but about the whole society, the whole country, the Revolution.

Cuban society is a society of fear, in addition to other more comforting qualifiers that it could have. It is possible that other societies have a similar name at this time, where superior and invisible forces determine the destinies of their inhabitants. Perhaps it’s a sign of these times, but it turns out that we are responsible for this society of ours, for this Revolution of ours. I don’t have the theoretical tools to demonstrate that fear has been established in this country, but denominations such as *pavonato*, “Five Gray Years,” “Secretism” and “Mystery Syndrome” could illustrate what I mean.

A process so painful for the soul of this nation cannot be easily banished. The hives caused by my message, “Conference for over 40 Years,” showed me how far we still are from leaving the nefarious influences of fear. The censors are there; they exist; they hold positions from where they can harm us. When will they be recognized as counterrevolutionaries? When will we have a television that reflects our society and its contradictions, instead of investing time and resources in empty self-promotion spaces? When will we have a risky and inquisitive journalism? Why does no one out there know that we are here saying these things?

The cultural policy that we need is one that encourages the exercise of criticism wherever it comes from; it’s one that embraces creative activity from an ecumenical position and without paternalism; it’s one that does not have “The Institution” as its matrix, even when

The Institution protects the creator, but rather its matrix is in the cultural activity itself. It's the one that teaches us to have a dialogue.

New and old airs (but different) are necessary. We cannot afford that names like Gramsci, Trotsky, Varela (to name a few) are known only in intellectual spheres and totally alien to Cuban knowledge and practice. On the other hand, young people cannot continue waiting for spaces to be designed for free expression, for criticism: the power to generate these spaces and multiply them lies in our own condition.

Ones (The Just Human Time, 1962, Heberto Padilla)

(...) And yet, you had things to say: dreams, longings, trips, anguished resolutions; a voice that did not twist your too-much love or certain anger.

Isbel Díaz Torres

ISKÁNDER

Translated by Alicia Barraqué Ellison

Message from Iskánder in reply to Ana Assenza

Anna, dear;

You wanted me to comment on the fucking debate and you have succeeded... if you see sense in what I write in the mail I just sent you—by sense I mean that the ideas are understood and so on—THEN SEND IT TO EVERYBODY, AS IT IS SIGNED BY ME!! and if not..., then tell me whatever.

IS. [“Iskánder” is the *nom de plume* of Alejandro Moya.]

Dear Humans:

The affairs of “culture” are affairs of the people, and we all belong to the people and not only that but to “our people,” continually referenced in the mass media by the spokesmen of the many half-truths that are daily proclaimed to the daze and confusion of so many people in our country, about the “achievements and social conquests that only in Cuba do we Cubans have the privilege of enjoying, while the rest of the world is sinking into the deepest of shit;” and, simultaneously, all the social “crap” that we Cubans live daily that affects us so much is left out of the media, all the bureaucratic hurdles that fuck the lives of millions of people here in the “key to the Gulf” when carrying out the most basic tasks—even their jobs—, and of course the possibility of facing our “own problems” to solve them—to at least recognize them (first step to the solution of any difficulty: recognizing it), while history shows us that the realities we don’t face at the moment they present themselves will suddenly hit us in the face on any given day as we turn any given corner.

Every day I hear many times on Cuban radio and television—not without blushing—how things that have to do with the world of artistic manifestations are called “culture;” and in the best of cases with the arts, when it’s known that culture is the way in which people clearly lives in a specific space and time, and such culture ranges from the way people walk, what they eat, how they make gestures, and even the way they wipe their asses when they shit—the arts and artistic manifestations being two grains of sand perhaps lost and sometimes shining in the infinite beach of the historical intricacies of any people’s culture.

Every day I hear and see countless absurdities and stupidities and spelling mistakes in our mass media, while I hear and see people in those same media inordinately apologizing for what is simply a duty for the Cuban Revolutionary State—a duty for which many human beings in our country’s history have offered their lives; and we are “sold” or “given” an image of ourselves that doesn’t exist, full of demagoguery and fallacy and hypocrisy and fame and repudiation and applause.

I have always wondered why many things are not called by their names in the country where I was born and in which I live by my own free will.

I was born in 1969, and I certainly heard about that Pavón¹ at one time, and later as time went on here and there someone said his name, not without contempt, but I'm not aware of anything that is being talked about so much. I am an artist of my people—Cuba—and of humanity. I have directed and produced the film *Mañana* that is currently being shown in the cinemas of this country. I am a member of the UNEAC² and from the streets of Cuba, and I say: if this Pavón was such a bastard as they say, then they should fuck him, his image and his footprint on the earth, but I also tell myself: let all this talk about the Pavón and his shitty five-year period⁴ come out in the emails, because most of Cuba's inhabitants don't have this tool, and they deserve to know about and have an opinion on what happens behind the curtains of their "culture."

I wonder as a Cuban and a man of this planet what purpose the proposed actions have on the Pavón case while this country today is full of pavones³ and petty bourgeois occupying offices where the immediate fate of millions of things that try to be brought forth cleanly is "decided." We have enormous problems to solve and name, problems that birth a thousand Pavóns per second and thousands of other nameless and immoral beings who will execute the directives of Pavóns in the name of the revolution and its leaders when a million times these current Pavóns gouge the mere mention of the word "revolution" and openly live in capitalism while proclaiming a socialist Cuba.

I wonder why we are "hiding" and keeping this issue in Cuba, as if our problems weren't part of the filthy and brutal and unjust and cruel global village in which we live and that we humans have built, allowing millions and millions of Pavóns to exist in the world. I am one of those who think that recognizing our mistakes and taking ownership of them is a sign of strength and courage and doesn't weaken us in any way. I wonder why we should not clearly say—and I say it here—that our television is crap and that those who rule it act in the name of the same human being who issued the "words to the intellectuals⁵, and here there is a huge contradiction between the infinite image of Che Guevara, symbol of the social revolution of the world and of us, and those who today with their business suits—and almost all of them overweight—break their necks and disdain advocating a revolution that has nothing to do with that gentrified and narrow image, and that makes such a dent in the altruism and purpose of those who really exercise power with respect for the people who placed them there.

I wonder why we Cubans allowed Pavón to carry out so much shit at that time, and if there was not an uncritical and indolent and permissive mass of people in our country, like there is right now, carrying out so much shit that has nothing to do with the open and free spirit, which is detached from those who founded our homeland with their blood. I ask myself if it's not time now to rip off the band-aid and not turn a blind eye to the true evil that is first of all economic—as we all know—and the distribution of national "wealth," and if we're going to demand accounts for the appearance on television of this Pavón and he who was head of the ICR⁶ when they threw my father and Silvio Rodríguez out of that institute, and for the appearance of the other, Quesada.⁷

Why then is it not better to take the bull by the horns and demand that so much shit be put aside and place in “positions” in the world of “culture” only those who think not only of their belly or their underpants or their bloomers and that only decent and capable people, which are also “at bat and in the fight,” occupy the positions of leadership at all levels and are not automatons that tell us all the time that they are fulfilling a task given from above while they shit on those of us who are the working people and put us off indefinitely, until one day many of them get their families and “riches” into the territory which they were so much against: the USA, the United States of America.

I wonder who will return to those who lost them the friends lost to the so-called five gray years, who will give back their youth to those who already lost it eating shit and shutting their mouths before people like Pavón, as if the Pavóns of this world were really important. I didn't even remember that Pavón when in reality we validate cretins like Pavón and those who are “shown” on television, and we validate them through our silence, turning a blind eye, with our thoughts, only for our crusts of bread without realizing that others are wasting banquets that also belong to us, with our typical “now is not the right time” and so much hypocrisy and so much shit that I have painfully lived through in my country, not without there being others who with their lives and their arts and their jobs have been over here fighting fearlessly to bring an end to the Pavóns and the servile ones who, without a common name, produce so much shit and then turn to complain to their neighbor in hushed tones about so much crap that they themselves provoke!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! Let's get off the couch!!!!!!

Let's not restrict our social ills—because without a doubt the Pavón event is very much a social ill of ours—to two or three centimeters of national space!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Let's go to the causes that breed so much shit and confront them so that they don't continue to afflict us in other forms and other disguises fucking up our lives so much!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! and long live the real revolution, fuck!

!!

Iskänder.

And don't put me down now as one who wants to light the fire with everything or anything like that, and don't put words in my mouth. I haven't said here that all bosses are corrupt or any fucking such thing, or that all people are cowards, ok????????????????!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Open letter to Abel Prieto⁸ on Enrique Colina⁹ and the abuse of power, demanding justice

Dear Abel;

Thanks to you, the film, *MAÑANA*, of which you know I'm the author, is the first Cuban cinematographic work that is made independently and that the Cuban state through the ICAIC¹⁰ welcomes in its catalog to "distribute," "market," "exhibit" it and other similar "categories" whose meanings contain the will to achieve an openly public destiny for the work so that it can pull out words like the ones in quotation marks: I "quotation-mark" them—if Spanish allows one to say "quotation-mark" as a verb—because although *MAÑANA* has been shown throughout the Island of Cuba "commercially" without many people knowing it while it was exhibited, even the ICAIC and Yours Truly here writing to you (you also know that I'm a producer of the film) haven't signed any contract where the issues in quotes are legally concretized and all the synonyms of this type that accompany a film distributed by a "great production house" (the ICAIC in this case is the great house because of its national scope in the broadest sense of the word's territoriality)..... thanks to you, I tell you, regardless of how things may be right now, after the president of the ICRT (Ernesto López) transmitted to us that it was NOT APPROPRIATE FOR TELEVISION TO "GET INVOLVED WITH" *MAÑANA* BECAUSE HIS ADVISORS TOLD HIM THAT THIS FILM HAD NO MORAL [to its story, i.e. a lesson], after this opinion was rendered we went to you and you provided an immediate route for our script to the ICAIC, and the ICAIC almost immediately authorized us legally to shoot the film and, in turn, to have the nationality that I wanted for it: the Cuban one.

Thanks to you then and to those who decided on the part of the ICAIC that my film can exist legally in Cuba. setting the precedent of the legal legitimization—let's have these two words together—of a production with this characteristic: independence. Thanks to you, I say, I have publicly applauded a decision like this because I consider it evolutionary, brave, necessary, human, respectful, inclusive, intelligent, mature and above all things REVOLUTIONARY in all senses of this word beyond what its letters can contain...

Because you behaved that way then regarding my movie, because my brother Rancaño and I have known you since we were kids in those meetings at my parents' house and have had affection for you since that time when you were not a minister; because you're an artist and a Cuban intellectual; because you are now the Minister of Culture; because you're a member of the Political Bureau of the PCC;¹² because so far you have proven to not be a coward, and especially because you are a *pinareño* [from Pinar del Río], and Pinar del Río is one of the most beautiful provinces of Cuba for me; and that an injustice in quotation marks has historically been committed against the people for being the subject of a thousand absurd tales and all the *pinareños* and *pinareñas* that I know are good people: for all these things I am writing to you to communicate my request that the article that I attach here be immediately removed from your site and that in that same place there be apologies to me and to the thousands of Cubans who are insulted there without the slightest sense of respect for the people from in this case a cultural institution of the state, directed by Fidel and Raúl, leaders about which neither friends nor enemies of Cuba and/or its revolution deny their certain leaderships; and to the date on which I write to you and since I was born I hear in my land that the state (we) exists because of the people and it is for the people that it works.

I will explain myself better: you don't have to go to the university to see clearly that the article I attach is not a criticism of the film that with so much effort I have made together with all the (hundreds) of colleagues who worked energetically on it, and I would say heroically, because INDEPENDENT means for this work, above all, that it was done without barely having money to produce it, and, therefore, there had to be a lot of hard work put into it—and this type of work is very hard even when it's done with money, as you know—because where money has been unavailable to solve problems of technology, food, transportation and a million other many things, there has had to be work, work, work, and work a hundred times over, and it's been more work than the work it usually takes to be able to work in Cuba. You don't have to go to university, as I was telling you, to see that the article in question is not a criticism but is an aggression against me and my film, and my friends, and my family, and my wife's family, and the neighbors of the Querejeta¹³ neighborhood in Playa, and those of Vedado¹⁴, and the workers of the Joaquín Albarrán clinical surgical hospital, and the leaders of the ICAIC and its President Omar González, and the national Secretariat of the FEU¹⁵ and its president, Carlitos Lage,¹⁶ and to the thousands of Cubans who before my eyes applauded in the cinemas the film *MAÑANA* and the beloved artists of the Cuban people who appear in my film, such as Silvio Rodríguez, Juan Formell and Pedro Luis Ferrer,¹⁶ among others, and in the article in question the thousands of Cubans I have just mentioned—and there are many, many more—are called, I tell you, “troublemakers” and “ill-mannered people” and, I quote, “lovers of mischief and rudeness.”

Sincerely, as a Cuban I wonder:

What merit does it have for an institution of the Cuban state—in this case RADIO HAVANA—and for those who direct and work in it, to make available to millions of people in the world a writing where clearly, with a destructive and denigrating eagerness and with poison in the place where there should be common sense, I am “sentenced” as an artist and insulted, because I am one of the thousands of spectators who watched the film with pleasure?

What merit does that institution have to attack me publicly when I'm only an artist from my country, “young,” who doesn't have material goods, money, any power, while hundreds of people in Cuba—hundreds—have expressed their joy and their taste because they have seen in my film a work that MOVES THEM TO THINK and with artistic values, aesthetic, human, ethical, and is REVOLUTIONARY (also in the broadest sense of the word), people who have nothing to do with the “world of culture” but also people of “our culture,” such as Fernando Pérez, Luis Alberto García, Jorge Perogurría, Silvio Rodríguez, Eduardo Moya, Humberto García Espinosa, Camilo Vives, Ernesto Rancaño, Alexis Leyva (Kcho), María Eugenia García, Frank Delgado, Tensy Krysmant, Mariela López, Angel Alderete, Abelardo Estorino, Luciano Castillo, the actors and actresses of *MAÑANA*, its technical team and a lot of other people?

Why does that institution attack me by publishing that article when all I have on EARTH is my ability to carry out my work and my talent that I have always put at the service of my homeland, and I'm insulted before the world and thousands of Cubans who have enjoyed and applauded my film and who don't have direct and even indirect access to

the world of the Internet and of course are insulted? Do you not know these insults while millions of people on our planet can read on the site whose address is this <http://www.habanaradio.cu/modules/mysections/singlefile.php?lid=2240>, the concentration of destructive and disrespectful words that have been published there against me and against my work?

I wonder what it means, how to interpret the fact that together with everything said against my name and the film that I've directed, and together with the insults thrown at me, how should I interpret—I repeat—that together with those words on the right are the images of the Cuban flag, our five heroes unjustly imprisoned by the empire, Eusebio Leal, José Martí, Alejo Carpentier: is there some suggested message in this containing the repudiation of my country towards me, of the state towards me???

Is this manifest fact part of the policy of the Cuban revolutionary state, part of its cultural policy, to blaspheme underhandedly and openly (these two words are not contradictory considering where the article is published, on the NET) against its artists before the world, when we all here know that I in this case, as an artist, cannot summon the “press” to respond publicly to whoever publishes something about me? In fact, I have asked journalists who have approached me, I have requested them to publish my opinions about the lies and nonsense that have been said in the media referring to MAÑANA and my work as a director, and nobody has given the “green light” to my request.

I'm not a man who fears what is whispered about him; those who know me know the case I make to those who speak ill of me behind my back: none. I'm not afraid of criticism; my opinions don't change in the public presence of opinions that are opposed to mine. Those of us who belong to the world of “culture” know that a “critic” gives his “opinion,” and that this opinion can be honest, dishonest, educated, uneducated, savage, brilliant and a thousand other things, but it never goes beyond being THE OPINION EXPRESSED BY ANOTHER PERSON. We are all critics of everything, and it goes without saying that THE CRITIQUE doesn't exist as a unanimous or homogeneous entity, and if you don't read the articles published about my film where there are a ton of people, so to say, “opining” on things that are totally contrary and opposite in all the disciplines that are analyzed, I don't understand why the critics are allowed to publish their criteria speaking in first person plural, thus implicating the reader (with the intention of implicating him, I say), without clarifying that what they say is what they mean and never, of course, THE TRUTH about the work. Those of us who belong to the “culture” know this—among other things because we know each other—and on the other hand, of course, many of the articles that are published by these critics often CONFUSE the reading public, above all because their analyzes almost always start from one point (the director, let's say).

And it's never analyzed how audiovisuals are officially produced in Cuba, under what conditions, and how the system, through its officials, compels so much crap to be carried out and finances and squanders state money. What is produced and shown to the people is because officials without a name or a face approve what is carried out. They support and then exhibit to people all the abomination that later the “critic” “criticizes,”

without ever reaching the roots of the true cause of so much material waste in so much work without value: which is neither more nor less than what the state produces because it wants to. You can if you want to do it in another way; nobody forces you. This is never talked about in the “reviews,” and I put quotation marks in the words in which I put them because not all critics are critics nor are all reviews reviews.

Where do I want to go? Because the article for which I’m writing this email to you, Abel, of course “sets standards” and dictates sentence and condemns me and is the executioner of my film and my person without saying for one moment: the person who writes here has this opinion of that jerk Alejandro Moya, when you see the movie maybe you’ll think like me..., maybe not... AND I REPEAT THAT I’M INSULTED AND THE THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE WHO HAVE ENJOYED *MAÑANA* UP TO NOW ARE INSULTED.

Everyone is free to think as they want and write what they think. That is sacred for me, but it’s the duty of an institution of the Cuban state to respect the people of Cuba and its artists, and never put themselves above them because they are the *raison d’être* for the institutions, and even less disrespect them by insulting them. This doesn’t make them more powerful, and nobody here is going to be intimidated by reprisals of this type (not me, in this case, and less so by retracting a work of which I am humbly proud, joyful and even happy to have realized!!!!!!!!!!!!!!). Nor do I believe that people are afraid and retreat. THOSE ARE NOT METHODS.

I say that I’m addressing you, Abel, because many “efforts” and claims that I undertake never prosper and are lost in ten thousand offices and people who don’t assume any responsibility, and I no longer know who to talk to about what, and right now I am only one and without resources before an enormous machinery of bureaucrats who talk a lot and solve nothing. (I’M NOT SAYING THAT THERE ARE NO PEOPLE PERFORMING THEIR DUTIES...AND SORRY FOR USING THE IMAGE OF THE ENORMOUS MACHINERY AND SUCH, IT’S AN IMAGE, OK?, BUT IT WEARS YOU OUT.)

I’m not asking that they shoot anyone, nor that they condemn, nor that they sanction, nor that they expel, nor that they admonish, nor that they look askance, nor that they criticize, nor that they “lead” them to make a self-criticism, nor that they “pay” me for personal damages or do anything to the person who wrote the article (he has the right to write whatever he wants). I only ask that this article be removed from that site HABANA RADIO, and that, instead, they publish an EXPLICIT apology to me and to the insulted people to which I belong, and that those who have allowed such an insult to be published sign the apology, BECAUSE WE KNOW THAT WHEN SOMETHING COMES TO PUBLIC LIGHT IN CUBA IN A MASSIVE DISSEMINATION MEDIA, A LOT OF EYES REVIEWED AND APPROVED IT, and that the names of the authors of such an affront who appeared on THE NETWORK be published, so it will be known on that same site who is in charge of that entity that is capable of attacking people and reviling them.

For my film to see the light of day in theaters in Cuba, a lot of people supposedly capable of deciding what has quality and what doesn’t saw it and spoke wonders about it. Is that

article trying to say that those people are useless? that the ICAIC is useless for having approved the screening of my film? Is that article trying to say that the selection committee of the film festival is a bunch of idiots because it accepted the “quality” of my film as optimal to participate in an international competition in which a lot of works are discarded or rejected because they’re not “professional” and don’t have artistic value? And if this is true, where then is the criterion about the other films that, under equal conditions, have been accepted by the same people who have accepted mine?

Should the Cuban state withdraw from including the film MAÑANA in the catalog of Cuban films, is that what this article is about?

I’m sorry for occupying your precious time, dear Abel, but these things are happening, and as a member of the people to which I belong I feel that I have my duties, and as an artist of my people and a natural person from Cuba it’s my duty at this moment to address you.

I CAN’T UNDERSTAND WHY THESE INSULTS HAVE BEEN PUBLISHED. I sincerely hope for a prompt response.

Revolutionarily, and with affection, and with respect, and with a certain sorrow for witnessing how these things happen in the country that I love so much.

Iskänder (Alejandro Moya)

P.S. When I wrote a brief note on, I think, December 26, 2006, to communicate through this same channel that MAÑANA would be released on December 28 and that no mass media had said anything, a high-ranking ICAIC official against whom I have nothing and with whom I have a good personal relationship (I won’t say his name here because it’s not necessary; he told me not to write these notes because it would be suicide for me), the day before yesterday when I read the article that I’m attaching here, I couldn’t avoid wondering, DID I REALLY COMMIT SUICIDE AND AM I NOW IN THE HELL THAT AWAITS THE REVOLUTIONARIES?!!!!!!

Oh, and in the article in question it says that the novel “released at night” is mine to continue attacking me: THAT NOVEL IS NOT MINE.

And it also says three times, I think, that Enrique Colina is working on my film: I HAVE NEVER WORKED WITH ENRIQUE COLINA IN MY LIFE. ASK HIM.

Over and out.

No. One last note: I don’t use the names of the personalities that I mention here as a shield or anything similar; I don’t want them to do anything...

I ADD UP WHATEVER IT IS AND ALONE WHATEVER IT IS: BUT WHAT I SAY HERE IS NOT A SECRET TO ANYBODY.

January 31, 2007

Translator's Notes:

1. PAVÓN: Luis Pavón Tamayo, Armando Quesada, and Jorge Serguera were closely involved in designing and enforcing rigid cultural parameters that negatively affected many writers and artists in Cuba in the 1970s, a period that came to be called “The Five Gray Years,” although it lasted longer than five years.
2. UNEAC: *Unión Nacional de Escritores y Artistas de Cuba* (National Union of Writers and Artists of Cuba).
3. PAVONES: Likely a play on words combining Luis Pavón Tamayo's name (see note #1 above) with the meaning of the noun *pavón*, which means a peacock. So, these “pavones” are strutting peacocks like Pavón.
4. FIVE-YEAR PERIOD: The Five Gray Years; see note #1 above.
5. WORDS TO THE INTELLECTUALS: A speech by Fidel Castro, delivered on June 30, 1961, to artists and writers, in which he set limits to free expression, i.e. “Within the Revolution, everything; outside the Revolution, nothing.”
6. ICR: Formerly *Instituto Cubano de Radiodifusión* (Cuban Institute of Radio Broadcasting); now ICRT - *Instituto Cubano de Radio y Televisión* (Cuban Institute of Radio and Television).
7. QUESADA: Armando Quesada; see note #1 above.
8. Abel Prieto: At the time of this correspondence, Prieto was Cuba's Minister of Culture.
9. Enrique Colina was a Cuban filmmaker.
10. ICAIC: *Instituto Cubano del Arte e Industria Cinematográficos* (Cuban Institute of Cinematographic Art and Industry).
11. Ernesto Rancaño was a Cuban plastic artist.
12. PCC: *Partido Comunista de Cuba* (Cuban Communist Party).
13. Querejeta is a neighborhood in Havana, situated northeast of the Romerillo neighborhood and the Havana municipality of Playa.
14. Vedado is a central business district and urban neighborhood in Havana.
15. FEU: *Federación Estudiantil Universitaria* (Federation of University Students).

16. Carlitos Lage, the son of Carlos Aurelio Lage Dávila who, at the time of this correspondence, was Vice President of the Council of State.

17. Silvio Rodríguez is a musician and leader of Cuba's *Nueva Trova* movement; Juan Formell was a bassist, composer, and arranger, best known as the director of the musical group Los Van; Pedro Luis Ferrer is a guitarist, composer and singer.

ISMAEL DE DIEGO

Translated by Alicia Barraqué Ellison

Recently I have read several letters about the presence on television of individuals hitherto unknown to me, such as Pavón, Serguera, and Quesada.¹ I was born in 1977 and in the version of history that I received there was never a single reference to these people. I learned fairly late about that dark period of parametration,² and the word “UMAP”³ sounded to me like just another acronym in the endless repertoire. No one took it upon themselves to send us even a warning about institutional intolerance. My generation met a fate not unlike that of the Seventies, my generation and all those that followed. No more Pavón, no more Quesada, perhaps they had other names and worked more in the shadows, or it was simply no longer necessary to continue putting the lurid intentions in the mouths of any mediocre person, and intolerance became the policy of the Party, of Fidel.

I was always puzzled by the fact that many of those young men in their twenties who shot their way down from the Sierra Maestra, with their long hair, covered in necklaces, wearing dark glasses and prominent beards, shouting things about equality, freedom, and tolerance, would become career repressors. I wonder how the change came to be. Didn't anyone notice? Wasn't that an unforgivable betrayal of the trust given to them, of all the support they were given? Weren't they traitors, and therefore enemies, of the Revolution? Or was the Revolution no longer the same? No, it was not.

When I saw in the documentary *Seres Extravagantes* [*Extravagant Beings*], by Manuel Zayas, Fidel's speech where he openly declares the persecution of anyone who didn't conform to his parameters of "normal person," of revolutionary, I wondered how that was possible. The position was never corrected; all those lives made dust by stupidity were never vindicated. Nothing happened, not even forgiveness was asked. And the parametration continued here among us, with another name, with other faces, with other excuses; the culture of exclusion was perpetuated and accepted. How many things does a UNEAC⁴ or MINCULT⁵, ICAIC⁶ or UPEC⁷ card allow us, how many privileges, which are denied to all other Cubans? The institutional system certifies or discredits at will, without the possibility of complaint, whatever suits and perpetuates the stance of “You, yes” and “You, no.”

So, seeing the indignation that has led you to demonstrate in writing against that injustice, I urge you to speak out against this other injustice, more present and current, but this time with action. I invite you to renounce your status as evaluated artists and associated intellectuals, writers, and researchers. I invite you to surrender your memberships and renounce all those exclusionary and selective institutions that still ravage our culture, denying spontaneity and choosing the most politically correct as the standard of our cultural identity, in order to make it clear, once and for all, that these are not the exclusive rights of revolutionaries but of human beings.

Ismael de Diego

Havana, 26 January 2007

Translator's Notes:

1. **Pavón, Serguera, and Quesada:** Luis Pavón Tamayo, Armando Quesada, and Jorge Serguera were closely involved in designing and enforcing rigid cultural parameters that negatively affected many writers and artists in Cuba in the 1970s, a period that came to be called “The Five Grey Years” although it lasted longer than five years.
2. **Parametration:** From the word “parameters.” Parametration is a process of establishing parameters and declaring anyone who falls outside them (the *parametrados*) to be what is commonly translated as “misfits” or “marginalized.” This is a process much harsher than implied by these terms in English. The process is akin to the McCarthy witch hunts and black lists and is used, for example, to purge the ranks of teachers, or even to imprison people.
3. **UMAP:** Military Units to Aid Production (*Unidades Militares para la Ayuda de Producción*) were forced labor camps established in 1965 to remove allegedly “bourgeois” and “counter-revolutionary” values from Cuban society. Three years later, in July, 1968, the name “UMAP” was discarded, and records associated with that name were destroyed.
4. **UNEAC:** National Union of Writers and Artists of Cuba (*Unión Nacional de Escritores y Artistas de Cuba*).
5. **MINCULT:** Ministry of Culture of Cuba (*Ministerio de Cultura de Cuba*).
6. **ICAIC:** Cuban Institute of Cinematographic Art and Industry (*Instituto Cubano del Arte e Industria Cinematográficos*).
7. **UPEC:** Union of Journalists of Cuba (*Unión de Periodistas de Cuba*).

IVETTE VIAN

Translated by Alicia Barraqué Ellison

I was 23 years old. And I was parametrized,* frozen, for 12. They took away my UNEAC and UPEC**cards. I worked four years as an assistant at Kásper kindergarten and eight years in construction. In both places I met wonderful people, learned a lot, and found happiness, despite everything. I never thought I would be able to publish anything else, but I was uneasy at the thought. I didn't really understand what had happened to me or what was going on in my country's government. But I didn't hold grudges (although I was never able to greet Ricardo García Pampín again, nor was I able to be friends with David García Gonce again, both top traitors), and I was and am always willing to forgive. But I am horrified that those times are coming back, and now that we're in the midst of changes, the appearance before a mass receptor (and who possibly does not know "the story" or as they say, forgot it, in a Caribbean way) of the newly resurrected executioners Serguera, Pavón and Quesada (adding other signals such as the prohibition of the play, *Marx in Soho*, or the departure of the program on that Council of Culture ...) suddenly it was like a shock of suspicion and fear: does another greater test await us, after 40 years?...is spiritual torture returning?... So I agree with the voice that rises in protest and to conjure up any "coincidence." Just in case. In case they intend to return. In case any change comes accompanied by something worse.

I stayed in Cuba out of pure love. My whole family is gone. I've lost almost all of them. Especially for this reason, I join with those who want to prevent a return to the shadows. "May the sun always shine" on this Island. We don't want executioners (they just deserve to be forgotten). With love for all Cubans, we expect compassion and piety.

Ivette Vian

Translator's notes:

***Parametration**/*parametración*: From the word "parameters." Parametration is a process of establishing parameters and declaring anyone who falls outside them (the *parametrados*) to be what is commonly translated as "misfits" or "marginalized." This is a process much harsher than implied by these terms in English. The process is akin to the McCarthy witch hunts and black lists and is used, for example, to purge the ranks of teachers, or even to imprison people.

** **UNEAC**: National Union of Writers and Artists of Cuba/**UPEC**: Union of Journalists of Cuba.

JAIME SARUSKY

Translated by Regina Anavy

I ask that my signature be affixed to the protest of Cuban writers and artists against the clumsy claim that the television program *Impronta* has tried to revive and vindicate an undesirable official from a period of unfortunate intolerance in our culture.

Jaime Sarusky

JOEL FRANZ ROSELL

Translated by Regina Anavy

Opening the box of Luis “Pandora” Tamayo

Who would have thought? After so many five-year periods of mold and oblivion, Luis Pavón Tamayo is—finally—beneficial for Cuban culture. His exhumation, with out-of-tune fanfare and tin medals, has made the Island’s intelligentsia dare to disagree for the first time. The usual soloist was left waiting for the usual choirmaster, with an insecure countertenor voice, to express his unwavering adherence to the familiar score of slogans that deny the very essence of the intellectual: the freedom to think and format his speech.

Although in many cases the protest is timid, cautious and even sprinkled with “revolutionary” rhetoric, the fact is new and promising. Its political context shows that the factual motivation is transcended: the tributes on state television to three figures from the most rigid and retrograde years of Stalinist-Maoist cultural regulations.

What the chain of e-mails and the call to protest before the Minister of Culture, the UNEAC and the leadership of the ICRT reflects is the entry of the Island’s creators into civil society (in recent decades in Cuba there was only a military or Party society), a civil society that expresses its opinion and wants to act on its own.

The intellectuals based on the Island and those who enjoy the Damoclian temporary permits to stay abroad have been joined by creators and thinkers permanently based abroad. From those who revile Fidelismo, Castroism, Ruzismo or whatever they prefer to call it, to those who have kept quiet, “not looking for problems” (more problems), not seeing themselves reflected in the various tendencies of the opposition, or because they’re fed up with the forced politicization that they suffered on the patio and want to enjoy that form of freedom that consists in disregarding or not expressing an opinion.

Of what is happening, nothing seems to me as interesting and healthy as the juxtaposition of positions and opinions.

Those who take advantage of the debate opened by the exhumation of Pavón, Serguera and Quesada to highlight that the oppression of culture included and includes the marginalization of young creators, contempt for provincial intellectuals and the denial of writers, artists and thinkers who have emigrated, are in their full right and look away.

No one believes anymore that the gray clouds that completely closed the sky over Cuban culture during a five-year plan (or two) have disappeared. They only moved depending on the situation, knowing how to compact themselves and discharge their divine rays every time someone—individual or group—moved away from the flock, ignored the shepherd’s piccolo, wanted to eat the forbidden herb or smell a flower.

I don't agree with the colleagues who—from within or from without, from one extreme or another, and as if seeking a center, a consensus—call for unity. The practice of recent decades has amply demonstrated that dividing is not Caesar's only tactic. The formula "Unite and you will conquer" is also diabolically effective.

Reducing all opinions to one, erasing the inevitable and healthy diversity for the sake of a supposed common cause is the first trick that every magician who wants to make a career must learn.

Those who denounce the ostracism and humiliation they suffered at the hands of Pavón, those who denounce the velvet muzzles imposed on them by Pavón's successors, those who denounce the silence to which other more distant and subtle heirs of Pavón advised them, and those who denounce neo-pavonist apartheid invented for those of us who live abroad; whether or not we have publicly broken with the System, the Regime and/or its representatives, we are all right (and have our reasons) to join the dissatisfied entourage that tries to prevent the rise of what is not a pantheon of figures from the past, but a new wall off which to continue bouncing ideas.

All roads lead to Rome or, as Cabrera Infante wrote, "All roads lead to Love." Whatever the political creed and project for Cuba of each one—populist-liberal, Christian Democrat, social-democrat, socialist—we all have the right and even the duty to participate in this skirmish for the full liberation of Cuban culture. We only have to exclude, obviously, the fascists (right or left), since those are precisely the ones that muzzle culture, with right-handed or left-handed arguments and strategies.

It's welcome, in short, the attempted resurrection of Pavonismo. It's not we who will say: God forgive them, they don't know what they do. On the contrary, we thank them for the clumsiness, the madness, the imprudence of opening Pandora's box, thereby freeing the winds, hopefully hurricanes, that the stranded ship of the insular culture requires to get moving.

Paris, January 24, 2007

JORGE ANGEL HERNÁNDEZ

Translated by Mary Jo Porter

Regarding the text “A little bit of shame for ourselves,” by Luis Manuel Pérez Boitel, in response to “The crisis of low culture” by Francis Sánchez.

My friend, Riverón,

Although I keep friendship as one of the gifts that must be defended at all costs, I also consider that the criteria around the things that happen in life, art and literature, must be placed, if not on a par, at least close. Hence, not infrequently our personal discussions have raised the tone to the point that only friendship has stopped the damaging avalanche of blindness on both sides.

I also highly value the grateful acknowledgment of the good deeds that come from others, who aren't exactly part of that small group of friends, even more so those that honestly spring from those who have accompanied us as opponents on the same march.

This rant, which you know well, perhaps in more playful tones and turns, as I like to speak person to person, allows me to introduce, in this communication that I already allow you to use publicly if you consider it necessary, an idea that, although foreseeable given the many anecdotes that witness I can relate as a witness, never ceases to amaze me negatively: I am referring to the treacherous message that Luis Manuel Pérez Boitel circulated and in which he tries to revile your person, considering that an editor, at the head of a publishing house where he himself began to earn his first “birdseed” of prestige is obliged to assume, without the slightest benefit of doubt, the fair and deserved price of his remuneration.

I remember that on that occasion our poet and anti-fascist fighter didn't “litigate,” as he says, (knowing as a lawyer what that word means, you would have placed him in a cumbersome legal process that didn't take place) but haggled, in my opinion with a just reason—his fees—which were set at the amount that he himself demanded, in my opinion unfair, much less than what he would have deserved. I know the details because I also found myself in a dispute by declaring that I didn't agree with the price and, out of respect for the scandal and my solidarity with Boitel, I set the same low sum, and I hope that the copies of contracts can serve as proof and also challenge any evidence of “litigation.”

What he did do was lobby higher authorities to press his demand for payment and tell many, too many, people about the incident. I also remember how you accepted as your problem the fact that he could attend the award ceremony for the Poetry Prize, which he obtained in a closed vote in the Casa de las Américas contest, news he received a few hours before, and how you put in that effort both your institutional influence and your personal value as an intellectual and publisher at a time when the person was the talk of intellectual satire in a good part of the country.

I thought he was grateful for those efforts, happily achieved, even more so when hearing him complain—during the meeting, or encounter, that we had at the UNEAC in Villa Clara with Iroel Sánchez and Omar Valiño, that is, the “duos of the Party,” who bothered to talk with us about what was happening around the phenomenon that I immediately named Pavonazo in my work—that the attendance at the award ceremony was true and that the Casa de las Américas, calling Jorge Fornet irresponsible and taking care to save the “diplomatic decency” of Roberto Fernández Retamar, had refrained from informing him the following year, once his book was in circulation, of “what would be his leading role in the award activities,” and that they didn’t give him any support either.

This was said about your comment “to eat from the turkey born,” which now seems so suspicious to him and on which he didn’t express any opinion despite the fact that we were provoked to do so during those conversations. This attitude confirms that the title of the writing by Francis Sánchez is still accurate, since confusing the low desire for protagonism with low passions and culture is something petty, in the most Martian concept of the term. And while perhaps the overwhelming majority justly believe that he doesn’t deserve even the honor of the insult, the basic instinct of my lower passions calls for payback.

So, my friend, on behalf of those dishonest intellectuals with opportunistic double standards, whom, like Neruda's awful Englishmen, we still hate, and in virtue of the fact that it seems unthinkable to “take them out of circulation and credit,” I ask you for an apology. I feel ashamed that so much strife surfaces in the middle of a moment that I believe is crucial for the cultural destiny of those of us who continue to decide to build inside.

A hug, and no antidepressants,
Jorge Angel Hernández
February 3, 2007

JORGE A. POMAR

Translated by Mary Jo Porter

Alarm over the media return of Luis Pavón

Are the intellectuals awake?

Everything stinks in Cuba like in Hamlet's Denmark. Because it stinks, even the Horatios of the UNEAC stink. Yet another proof of this is the electronic wake-up call that Desiderio Navarro has just made in Havana regarding the unusual resurrection of Luis Pavón, the once powerful—albeit not almighty—president of the National Council of Culture, thanks to the work and grace of the program *Impronta* of Cubavisión. Arturo Arango and Reynaldo González have already crossed swords for him in what is already a promising campaign. Whatever the objections of those of us who are outside the stew—and, as will be seen, mine are many and strong—, we must not only celebrate the initiative of, as usual, the controversial Desiderio, but support it wholeheartedly by throwing firewood into the fire in good faith; that is, in order to force them to draw conclusions and look at themselves in their own mirror.

But this doesn't make it any less true that the arguments put forward leave much to be desired. Which is explained in part, of course, by the risk they are undoubtedly running by circulating such a protest on the Internet. What is not explained is what is inferred from his deceptive argumentation, the rights and allegations derived from his words.

According to the three—who have endorsed the alibi of the so-called “czar of criticism in Cuba,” Ambrosio Fonet—, Pavón and a couple of subordinate officials (among them Lisandro Otero, which they are careful to mention because he's in vogue in the infamous Castroist literary digital magazine, *La Jiribilla*, but was Pavón's second for all purposes) would have been guilty of an unjust cultural policy (1967-1971), happily overcome. In his eyes, with Pavón's glorious arrival, the Leviathan of *pavonado* once again pokes out his furry ears, threatening the freedom (?) of the “authentic” creators.

It's a version of the story of the noble king, applied to his majesty Fidel Castro, who in almost half a century has never been aware of the excesses committed by his evil ministers. In reality, the “silence and passivity of almost all of them,” “the complicity and opportunism of not a few,” which Desiderio places in parentheses, continue to characterize the attitude of the Island's intellectuals to this day. The troubles of writers and artists didn't end in 1971, as Fonet claims to believe or would have us believe.

Pavón, who certainly was no angel, has been since 1971 the favorite scapegoat of those who, rightly or wrongly, delight in considering themselves his victims. You'd have to study casuistically, research that doesn't interest me at all, what role he played then and/or each one plays today. Now, Pavón's crime consists, neither more nor less, in having been the visible face, the instrument of the Revolutionary Government that put into practice, to its ultimate consequences, the cultural policy of a Revolution that the members of the UNEAC applauded—and still applaud even when they are

protesting—enthusiastically in a time of full prisons and firing squads with which they couldn't cope. Those “exceptionally fertile '60s” of which Desiderio speaks were, then, the cruelest years of Castroism.

After swallowing without question so many toads and snakes, publicly condemning disgraced colleagues every time they have been asked and, above all, living above the vile mass thanks to subsidies in dollars (now CUCS) from the UNEAC, the prizes in the same currency and trips abroad, etc., I'm afraid that it will be enough for the kind (nearly always literati) *compañeros* of State Security to give them a good tug on their ears, if they haven't already done so, under the pretext of the seriousness of the situation, so that they can pick up their crab step again. It would be a pleasant surprise for me to find that I had been wrong. Obviously, they feel free of guilt, Little Red Riding Hoods, literate in the fable of the eternally uninformed good king. However, his greatest merit since the end of the Five Gray Years (it's already a “Dark Half Century”) has been living with his back turned to the national drama, locked in his ivory tower during the three decades of ashes of the wolf cub Pavón.

On the other hand, they know very well what it costs to protest. Hence, by instinct of conservation they have never dared to do so. When, to cite an example, in 1989 I protested the imminent execution of General Ochoa and his colleagues in a plenary session of the UNEAC, everyone gave me silence for an answer. “You're nuts!” And immediately, by order of Abel Prieto, who was presiding over the conclave, they moved on to the topic they had brought up in secret: how to tie yourself with a few dollars by making your artistic-literary contribution to the then-renascent tourism industry?

Willing or by force, far from supporting it, in 1991 they signed the official UNEAC protest against the Charter of the Ten, a list of moderate reforms in order to alleviate the misery of Cubans. In contrast, they did not oppose the execution in 2003 of those three young men, black and solemnly poor, who, however, were only trying to flee from the paradise sung in so many poems and stories. And not to mention raising your voice in defense of Raúl Rivero and those convicted in the Black Spring. The list of their public silences (in private they sometimes dare to express their condolences), accomplices and collaborations can be extended at will.

Why then not also give Luis Pavón, who in 30 years could have reconsidered and been another man, the benefit of the doubt? Any court would consider his “crime” expired, and, apart from that, no one lost his life. Not so a pristine Reynaldo González, who has no qualms about bringing up nothing less than “the holocaust of the Hebrews by Nazism.” By the way, anticipating a possible return of Carlos Aldana, who supported *perestroika* (let's not forget it, please), stirs up the fear that the “hard-liners” will return. Reynaldo, find out once and for all: the “hard-liners,” with their large cohort of opportunists and climbers of all stripes, hold power more than ever at these precise moments. And “among the indolent cradled in their positions,” the more the intellectuals increase, the more they will bow down. Not all, of course. Quality also counts.

The “Cuban intellectual field,” Arturo, has not “become more complex;” rather it has been corrupted to the core. The “luck of the vindicating blacks,” and of those who claim nothing, continues to be as black as their skin. On television they are reserved exclusively for the role of slaves, mambises and the needy; in real life, they are denied access to management positions in the dollarized economy. If not, ask “Ambia” about it; I recently heard him repeat it in a video filmed in his beloved Parque Trillo. Homosexuals have made some progress but outside the cultural field, they continue to be stigmatized. Tolerance does not equal acceptance. What are the “belligerent right” and “pragmatic passive” that you speak of, if not the eloquent result of “success” along the lines of current cultural policy? Give them names and surnames, please. For the rest, there is no thought or disagreement “from the left and the revolution.” It’s enough to do it from the brain, which not for nothing is divided into two hemispheres.

To affirm that, with his sadly famous “Words to the Intellectuals,” Fidel tried to allay the alarm of “those non-revolutionary creators, but not counter-revolutionaries either” (Desiderio refers to Heberto Padilla, whose name he doesn’t mention either, because it’s taboo) seems to me, if not an act of political pimping, at least a bizarre willful absurdity. He makes me laugh. The leitmotif of that speech, plagiarized from Mussolini, by the way, left no room for doubt: “Within the Revolution, everything; against the Revolution, nothing.” *Tutto nello Stato, niente al di fuori dello Stato, nulla contro lo Stato*, said Il Duce on October 28, 1925. Translate it. [*Everything in the State, nothing outside the State, nothing against the State.*] You will remember, memorizing Desiderio, that after listening to Fidel in the Assembly Hall of the National Library in June 1961, Virgilio Piñera asked to speak and stammered: “I want to say that I am very afraid. I don’t know why I have this fear, but that’s all I have to say.”

Therefore, if our ineffable “creators” protest now, because of that television bagatelle pregnant with bad omens, it’s rather out of pure professional selfishness. They’re in danger of losing the perks and cash benefits that, in order to tame them, have been granted by their cultural patron, Abel Prieto, with the blessing of the Maximum Leader. The sufferings, the shortcomings, of the vast majority of the population, seem to give them neither cold nor heat outside the field of literary fiction. Although we know that deep inside they also suffer. From a bad conscience...

For the rest, the television space dedicated to Pavón at least breaks the routine in a programming that usually produces yawns, in which he occupies a not-insignificant place with the self-aggrandizement of the victims of that black beast of Cuban culture. Finally, something worth seeing on Cubavisión, among so many rituals of loyalty, triumphalism, Creole folklore and nineteenth-century art! Even if it’s just to be alarmed, like Desiderio and company. I share this alarm, since it’s quite evident that behind Pavón's grandiose vindication is the hand of the Raulista generals. Bad omens for art during the forthcoming succession. However, as far as I’m concerned, I would take it for good as long as it puts an end to the hardships of the population and, above all, doesn’t last longer than the biological clock of the Castro old guard. The art may well wait. So I’m obsequious and right-wing.

Regardless of the reservations expressed, I won't hesitate for a second to support a protest that, as timid, prudish and paradoxical as it may seem to me, could well be the trigger for a broader political-ideological debate. My respects to Desiderio. Congratulations! Our intellectuals had to start with something. After all, perhaps minimalism yields better results in politics, which supports it better, than in literature, where it requires loads of excellence. Hopefully this unpleasant media event will help the intellectuals of the patio to wake up from their long sleep of Sleeping Beauty, muster up their courage, include ordinary Cubans in their just claims and, working hard for more generous causes, end up beginning to play once and for all the role that corresponds to them on an Island that is at the most transcendental crossroads in its history, but clearly doesn't know where it's going. It was time. Now we can only hope that they don't disappoint us again.

Jorge A. Pomar
Germany

JORGE ANGEL PÉREZ

Translated by Regina Anavy

A new mistake on Cuban television has just occurred: Luis Pavón, one of the most frightening and fearsome characters in the history of Cuban culture, has just received flattery on the Cubavisión program *Impronta* [*Imprint*].

In these days when so many took up against *La Diferencia* [*The Difference*], I suppose, I hope, that now they also point out this absurd nonsense, and, please, allow me the tautology.

Jorge Angel Pérez
January 6, 2007

Message from Jorge Angel Pérez to Sifredo Ariel

Of course, dear, I saw, with these little eyes that the earth will swallow, the *Impronta* program where that old man appeared who, no one would think if you looked at his little figure, had left some imprint. And we do know he left a mark, but an ill-fated one. I agree with you that it's those who received the national awards or those who suffered from the *pavonato* who must lay the cornerstone, testify, demand; but I don't think, Sigfre, that we should be just spectators, but in all cases critical observers and, to continue with television, viewers. It's true, as you say, that we didn't live through those years, but you, I and many others of our generation, know, as well you say, how terrible it was for them but also what another Pavón would be for everyone.

A kiss,
Jorge Angel

Message from Jorge Angel to Reynaldo González

Rey, I'm still connected to this story and I think we shouldn't let it slip away. Time continues to pass, and in a few days we'll have Ana Lasalle receiving a National Television Award and then Aldana as ICRT president.

A hug,
Jorge Angel
January 6, 2007

JORGE CAMACHO

Translated by Regina Anavy

The victim, the messenger and the executioner: the intellectuals in debate

Among the messages that were published regarding Pavón's appearance on Cuban television, in *Encuentro en la Red*, is that of Mariela Castro Espín, apparently sent confidentially to Reynaldo González, in which the daughter of the (interim) President of the Republic said that she was concerned that these problems hadn't been aired before. To make matters worse, this message appeared together with that of Víctor Fowler, in which he clarified that the *pavanato* was simply another cog in the gears of totalitarianism and couldn't be read as an isolated case.

I agree with Fowler that an in-depth analysis of the issue would require an examination of the entire Cuban society, of its mechanisms of power, control, education and communication. An effort like that could only be carried out jointly and could hardly be done today in Cuba. The discomfort before the appearance of Pavón is nothing more than another reflex action before the humiliations of power and the recycling of a figure, whose model is repeated, as we speak, at all levels of society.

But to think that the government would be willing to critically review its history of looting and retaliation is truly walking on clouds. What then is Castro Espín saying in that self-confident note, jumping into the discussion like a thunderclap and summoning all the intellectuals of the Island to a debate? Will the President's daughter perhaps take on the role of messenger of the Gods, as García Márquez did until a few years ago? Will she, from now on, carry and bring the messages of the black sheep, "deactivated," to the majesty of him, the King? What can be said to this lady who wears, like two medals, the surnames of her parents, the disgusting emblem of Cuban nepotism?

Allowing intellectuals to resolve their differences with the government and not allowing dissident groups, and others who suffered as much or more than them, is simply immoral. That they find those who speak for them, those who represent them and "facilitate" that dialogue, is no less revealing of that duplicity. I find it even more humiliating that the leaders, and Papa's children direct these debates than putting Pavón and Serguera on television again. Because what needs to be clear is that the only ones who can "speak" here, who carry the "messages," are the proven ones, those who comply and have complied with the government before. Not for pleasure, these "facilitators" of the dialogue, carry with them the name of some hero of the Homeland ("Abel," for Abel Santamaría; "Castro" for Castro and "Espín" for Espín), while the victims carry the common and vulgar names of any neighbor's son under any monarchy.

I wonder, then, if by accepting this dialogue—as if it were just a matter of a moment, or as if they were the most important thing in what happened during that "five-year gray period"—the victims would not become victimizers, in another turn of that immense mechanism of Power that they supposedly reject. The government's logic behind this debate is surely to "clean the slate" of the past. But obviously, we all know that's not going to happen.

As long as everyone is not convoked, with complete freedom, a debate of this nature is pure rhetoric, another masquerade by the government without any consequence. And if they are, don't they legitimize that process and the executioners themselves with their participation? Until when are Cuban intellectuals going to play the role of the innocent, the naive, the one who doesn't know, who talks to himself and watches over those above and below, but ignores the rest? Will the monarch's daughter then "facilitate" another "meeting" between him and his victims? And given that the executioner doesn't participate in dialogue but gives orders and his secretaries take down the names, will they listen to him as they did before Aldana, Abel Prieto and so many others? I don't doubt it.

There will be your debate, your conference cycle and your joint statement. But as long as some don't understand that this doesn't concern them only, as long as they dedicate themselves to accepting awards, publishing magazines and worrying about their little trips abroad, their role as victim will be very unbelievable, and the executioner will continue to humiliate them as many times as he wants.

South Carolina, January 24, 2007

JORGE DE MELLO

Translated by Alicia Barraqué and Dolores

The fruitful exchange of ideas so necessary to form a true state of opinion that finds reasonable, satisfactory and intelligent solutions is over. I received today, after the meetings, this mysterious e-mail where one of the intellectuals participating in the debate is now called XXX, and everything seems to be in a war between the ICRT and the Minister of Culture, according to what this guy says is the tactic. Will we return to the anonymous message, to the corridor rumor, to the “politically correct?” Incredible!!!! That’s tactical?

Response from XXX to my Response:

I think you’re right in some of the things you say, but it seems to me that the matter is a little more complicated. And at this moment, I think the tactical thing to do is not to touch the Ministry of Culture at all, which, after all, has also been attacked by television and those who are behind the appearance of Pavón and company.

From Jorge de Mello in response to Orlando Hernández

Landi:

I have received, literally with exclamations of joy, your letter to Arturo Arango. You've got your finger on the trigger with your sights on the true target. That's how you talk brother, that's the thing. Today I have been writing a similar reflection, in content and points of view, responding to a letter from Abelardo Mena, but of course never with the conceptual clarity and formal quality with which you know how to do it, so I'm not sending him my letter To Mena, I will send yours adding to your opinion.

I congratulate you from the bottom of my heart; that is the true Orlando that I have known for almost 30 years, the brave and illustrious brother with whom I have shared so many ideas, sufferings and joys. I also congratulate you because you have awakened from a certain state of apathy that has affected you in recent times.

Ideas as clear as yours are needed by all of us right now and will be needed in the times ahead.

A grateful hug,
Jorge de Mello

PS: After I wrote you the previous note I decided to also send you the response to Mena that I was talking about.

From Jorge de Mello in response to Abelardo Mena

Abelardo, I agree with you, I had a feeling that something like this would happen. I told you about it a couple of days ago; everything seems to be more of the same. In so many

opinions and reflections, from here and there, not one single time has this essential word been mentioned: FREEDOM. What kind of society are we that we're afraid to pronounce that word? What has happened to us?

The short and heartfelt reflection of Cesar López, in which he recommends that we be alert, ends with these words: "I am honest and I am afraid." I admire the sincerity of the poet. In the opinions of the other prestigious and brave intellectuals there is also fear, but we have to discover it among the rhetorical twists and turns, in the way they avoid sticking their fingers in the wound. One would have to ask: why so afraid?

We're all afraid because we know that the immense bureaucratic apparatus that allowed the *pavonato* and that tries to redeem it now is getting healthier every day. It holds now, after the so-called Centralization, more power than ever: the unproductive, obtuse and harmful political-economic power that paralyzes the soul of the nation. I think that this should be the topic to be analyzed, but in an open and truly revolutionary discussion, one that isn't led by the same powerful people who run the bureaucratic apparatus and its indescribable repressive mechanisms, so that it's without obstacles, without censorship and includes all the "thinking heads" of the country. There are many revolutionaries and patriots who think with their own heads, also among educators, scientists, workers and students. What's happening is not just a problem to be discussed in the small artistic world.

I sincerely believe that this hesitant path (of tacit concessions and timely tactics), which we have seen so far in this little war of e-mails, is not enough to find the necessary light for our immediate future, which to this day, I feel, is very dark, because the bureaucrats continue "freewheeling." Everything indicates that the protest will end, as you say, in an administrative laxative to some television official, in a new "explanation" and a call for sanity to the intellectuals who wrote the letters. It seems that once again we will be left without sight of a possible solution to our old problems. In addition to fear, I feel ashamed, I admit it.

Changing the subject. Where do you live now? Are you still in the shadow of the Virgen del Camino or are you my neighbor again? We have not seen each other for a long time.

Hugs,
Jorge de Mello

From Jorge de Mello to Orlando Hernandez

Landi,

The fact that the director of the program that caused this fair protest was praised in another television program, at a time when everyone was waiting for an apology, a rectification, is a strong and forceful blow. Padura considers that act a coincidence; Desiderio, a provocation. For me it's nothing more than a show of strength, of power, made with the aim of demonstrating that those who are powerful aren't going to give in even a millimeter, as has always happened. When has any of the country's "leaders"

publicly apologized? Nothing like this has ever happened, and mistakes have been made, small and large, many of them with serious and painful consequences for the nation.

Hopefully this latest show of strength and arrogance won't achieve its goals, causing the fear and disappointment necessary to paralyze the discussion and the state of opinions that are so interesting and necessary for our society, which was being created.

How I would like to be wrong...

Last night I received this response from Mena to a comment of mine. Don't circulate it, but it's interesting; I think things are going as he says. How sad, how disappointing!

Hugs,
J.

JORGE LUIS ARCOS

Translated by Mary Jo Porter

The latest events unleashed in Cuba after the resurrection of Pavón-Quesada-Serguera, for now a multitude of shouts of various kinds by email, articulation of a common domestic front to protest the Raulist attempt to clean up his old repressive instruments, wash away historical memory, and, incidentally, once again humiliate the victims, and, in general, all intellectuals, if not also, incidentally, warn that the nightmare can return again, etc., is just one more episode within a devastated reality.

Many of the reactions against it show this in spite of themselves. Some advocate that the problem be resolved at home, as if a considerable part of the victims were not outside of Cuba; others try to deny the obvious: that all this responds to a strategy of power, as it was in the past and is even in the present. Many criticize what happened, advocate public reparation, but, of course, without naming—either before or now—the real culprits.

It's simply amazing. It seems that a considerable part of Cuban intellectuals take for granted that the current regime will continue to exist, and they within it, with their varied range of complicity, silence, opportunism or even cheerful approval. Because even when what happened recently is publicly rectified, this would only constitute a slight rearrangement within a cultural policy essentially subordinated to a totalitarian power.

Well, it's all very well to protest the resurrection of the image of that ominous past, but how to live in the present with a regime that daily restricts all elementary freedoms? Worse than forgetting the past is having amnesia for the present. Even the most honest critics of what happened show that in the present they themselves continue to be subjected to a certain censorship, to a fear shaped by decades of repression. As if the terrible only happened in the past, as if the present couldn't be questioned.

In any case, a good dose of conformism prevails: that those dark times (for them) not return, because the present, also terrible, at least is not so dark (for them). In the long run, power has won: it has ensured that a good part of the intelligentsia, especially those that have a public voice within the country, live in a metaphysical limbo with respect to the rest of the population, not raising their voices—as they do now—against those who organize repudiation rallies against peaceful dissidents, against those who summarily shoot three common criminals in a disgraceful early morning, imprison journalists, and, to make matters worse, sign letters approving such acts of vandalism.

They therefore have a relative, selective, pragmatic, opportunistic, or conservative civility. They are scared, after all. And it's not bad that they have it, because we all have it, but they wield it only when they see the possibility of being affected again, more than they have always been.

One of them rules on who is from the right inside and outside of Cuba, taking for granted that he is from the left. But what left is that that doesn't want to recognize that

the right has always been in power? Well, I was also afraid; I also suffered censorship and above all self-censorship. I had to leave my country to enjoy the sad privilege of being able to write this very article without expecting reprisals, to be able to put what I really think in black and white without the fear of losing my job, being expelled from civilian life, or even going to jail. But let us at least respect those within Cuba who suffer direct repression for the simple sin of saying what they think, and let us also respect those of us who have had to renounce our physical homeland in order to be able to sleep at least with a little calmer conscience, if that is now possible.

You, those of you who live in Cuba, also deserve to be respected, but you will have to earn—like everyone else—that respect, either with acts or even significant silences and sacrifices, because how can you even try to be respected by the same regime that humiliates every day with its varied collaboration or selective or opportune amnesia? At this point in the game, can you honestly play at being a reformer? Reforms for what, to maintain the current state of affairs? This is the crossroads. If current events don't make them see the obvious: that the regime has always been essentially the same, then very little can be expected from a future "with everyone and for the good of all." It's very comfortable to advocate that the Cuban culture be one and suddenly forget the victims both inside and outside the country. Cuban intellectual friends, that's not how you play it.

Jorge Luis Arcos
Madrid, Spain

Another Comment from Jorge Luis Arcos

I write the comments that follow (and I now quote Eliseo Diego) “with the melancholy of someone writing a document.”

Surprised by a language “from the '70s,” typical of Pavón himself, I have read the recent Declaration of the Secretariat of the UNEAC. As I attended many meetings of this secretariat for ten years—because in everyday life it “expands,” so that different people can attend depending on the issues to be discussed or their responsibilities in the UNEAC—, I know more or less, after almost three years of absence, its members and regular attendees. But the Cuban population, no. I have to admit that many of the discussions that take place there have nothing to do with the rhetorical language of the aforementioned declaration.

Also—and this is perhaps the most important thing of all that has happened—in innumerable e-mails and in some publications outside Cuba, all this recent phenomenon has been experienced with understandable passion, before which Cuban intellectuals inside and outside the Island have expressed their necessary and healthy different points of view, of course in a very different way, both in form and content—as they say—about the document in question.

But, in addition, apart from these passionate disputes, various claims, or moving testimonies, something very deep must have happened there—invisibly, I mean—in the minds of so many people who have been affected not only by the *pavonato* (five years, decade, period, dark?), but by many other circumstances and at other times, some very recent. However, according to that UNEAC statement, it seems that the matter has already been settled. To forget, as a bolero says, again and quickly, that—as a Piñera-style Greek choir seems to say in the background—the Party is... immortal?

I have to admit that the mere publication of that text in the *Granma* newspaper is something uncommon. But it seems that the magnitude of the discontent was such that it was almost inevitable to speak out and publish it, if the error committed had to be repaired to some extent; and on top of that, in a circumstance, by the way, as unique as the one that our country is experiencing right now. But, as you know, the image is always the most important thing—the image for the exterior and for the interior, as they also say. And in the name of that image, truth, passion, memory, and the infinite contradictions inherent in life... are buried. Although, it would be worth asking, until when?

As for the publication of this pronouncement without a signature, it's a very widespread custom in Cuba to prepare documents “in the name of the population” (in reality, in politics, everything is always done “in the name of;” I mean, in the name of that abstract entity that can be called “our people” or “our intelligentsia,” etc.), or summon the signature of others in order to show support for certain declarations or measures.

Why weren't those mechanisms used, for example, when Antonio José Ponte of UNEAC was “deactivated”—a delicious euphemism, in which we are experts? Well, because the UNEAC leadership itself knew that it wasn't going to have majority support, not even among its members. That is, those methods are used as appropriate. What Wendy Guerra raises is still an interesting challenge. But, even if what she asks were to be done, moved by an elementary democratic principle and respect for the person's opinion, which is always individual and not collective, who can guarantee that, once it's done, they would really know all the opinions?

But that's not even the problem: the problem is the lack of real democracy. There has been no democracy in Cuba for so many years (more than half a century) that very often it can be said, quite naturally, that there is... Because a good part of the population was already born in a country without democracy. In any democratic society, the varied opinions of Cuban intellectuals—I insist, of all Cuban intellectuals—would have been published or made known in different media—and even by individual initiative—without a hint of censorship.

In Cuba, unfortunately, that's unthinkable. But, in addition, the understandable reluctance to express true opinions on any subject out loud is already known. On the one hand, there are fears of so-called subtle retaliation, if not direct ones. On the other hand, as was the already legendary case of the call to the Fourth Party Congress, its uselessness is known. As a former colleague from my workplace warned on that

occasion, he didn't want to vent in public, only to later find that such venting would be of no use. And, as you may recall, that is exactly what happened. How strange, right?

The well-known argument to justify this lack of democracy is not to give arguments to the enemy, but the price of not giving arguments or not playing the enemy's game has been, curiously, to suffer an absolute lack of freedom, and the true one: always project a false impression of unity or ridiculous unanimity. And a darker one: exercising absolute control over a captive public, which, by the way, is typical of all dictatorships, whether they are left-handed, right-wing or ambidextrous.

But has anyone really been surprised by that innocuous statement from the UNEAC? I think it was essentially predictable. What was not so predictable is the hackneyed tone, full of commonplaces, not really typical of the intelligence that is left over in the UNEAC. As Fefé says, and I would add, what is this "annexationist" story about, if not the purest rhetoric of the round tables and the so-called battle of ideas? Always disqualifying the opponent or anyone who has a different opinion has been, as is known, a permanent practice.

But all these arguments I express, I confess, are from an infinite weariness or tedium. It always leaves a bitter taste, as if one lived an infinite postponement—ay, when there is only one life, so short. After almost half a century of authoritarian and anti-democratic practice, that is, of theatrical representation, what can you really expect? The bitterest taste is had—at least in my case and, I understand, not in others'—when at the end of the statement the two main people responsible are jubilantly mentioned, not only of the *pavonato* but also of the sad and complex history—with luminous areas too, what doubt can there be?—of the so-called cultural policy of the revolution. But that was perhaps the most predictable. Or not.

As always, the Cuban people Cuba are the real absentee from all these representations, a people that no longer deserves, because of its rulers, not to know the critical opinions or testimonies of the intellectuals, called "counterrevolutionaries," "enemies" or ghostly "annexationists," etc. "Let the scum go, let the homosexuals go!" Don't you remember the *Granma* newspaper of the 1980s—by the way, now without Pavón?—but not even the critical judgments and testimonies—ah, the memory, what danger—of those considered revolutionaries?

I would like to be wrong, but, finally, sadly, on this occasion, visibly or according to the image (as Lezama would say), as in so many others, "there is nothing new under the sun." So don't worry, Cuban intellectual friends and colleagues, inside and outside of Cuba, you can sleep peacefully, because, at least for now, absolutely nothing will happen—visibly, I mean.

Jorge Luis Arcos
Spain, January 23, 2007

JORGE LUIS ARZOLA

Translated by Regina Anavy

Dread (Pavón?) in Cuba

Dear Reynaldo, Antón, Senel and Rebeca, Jorge Ángel, Arturo, Angelito Santiesteban, Eduardo, Waldo, Amir, dear all:

I have just read a good compilation of emails exchanged by you in Cuba. Uhhh, I'm getting goosebumps from all of this.

This email will surprise you a bit, because I haven't seen most of you for many years and I hardly even write to the others..., but the truth is that my blood has run hot. Now, since I'm not a revolutionary, and since I never was, and since I didn't suffer from the Terror because of my age, and on top of that since I've been living in the purest and harshest exile for five years now, it seems that I don't have much to contribute to this debate; but, apart from reiterating my unconditional love and support (if you accept it from this grumpy countryman thrown by Fate (like Barry Lyndon) into a strange Germany), in spite of everything, I would like to add a few words to what has already been said.

It's clear that the Pavóns and the Sergueras, like the zombies, are easy beasts to resurrect because they were never buried, and because this time, like the vampires, they belong to an older vampire or to the Lord of Darkness himself, who is ultimately the one who commands or who causes the blood of the innocents to flow. But this has already been said by someone else, and on top of that we all know them very well.

As many of you may not forget, there were countless occasions when the jaws of State Security and their Party cronies (or vice versa) opened to swallow me, perhaps taking advantage of the fact that all of you, in Havana, were too far away to hear my kicking, back in that pigsty in Ciego de Avila. I was kicked around in the dungeons, threatened and harassed, and was belittled and dismissed by many in the "cultural realm" for years. No one ever wanted to give me a job in Ciego de Avila, not even as a grocer in a House of Culture.

And when did all this happen? Of course it wasn't during the famous *pavonato*, when I was no more than four years old, but in a period of time that goes from the mid-1980s, through all of the 1990s and almost until 2002 itself, when almost by pure miracle Abel and, I believe, Barnet, let me leave the country for Berlin, after harassing me until the last minute at the level of the recently revived CDRs, as part of the Battle of Ideas and with the consent of Culture, the Party and all. By the way, I'll tell you: my Avilanian bloodhounds were emboldened, because, as one of them told me, their sharp teeth and tongue drooling with rage, after Abel intervened in my defense the last time, Sacha (who also had to run so many times to save my skin, thanks old man) and other officials declared to whoever wanted to hear them, that "next time" no one was going to defend me. I was served up on a silver platter!

Apart from that, I was served up by the Asociación Hermanos Saíz (AHS) and by Alpidio Alonso, simply because in one of the preparatory meetings of the latter's Congress (to which they had elected me direct delegate or something like that, I no longer remember well, and which ultimately I never attended), and in the face of the general servility, I had dared to say that we should not hold a Congress to please the One (Fidel Castro) who had decreed for years the suspension of such an event, since the times of the AHS of Eloisa Carreras, when young artists still dared to say a few things to that same power that now threatens you, and that can no longer touch me, thanks to the mediation of God and the Atlantic Ocean.

I know, I know, don't think that I forget that thanks to many of you and a few others and to the fact that I never committed another crime than to call things by their name and have a big mouth, I never spent more than two weeks in the dungeons. Thanks to that and to the fact that the maximum authority of the culture was not then PaVoR, but Abel Prieto. In a certain sense I was privileged, because he was a young writer (not so much anymore, what a horror!), known, and because on top of that he had the support of some of you, with influences there, in Havana. But what happened to those who didn't have such privileges? Well, they rotted in jail, and then in exile, always in exile. And I'm talking about writers: the others, whether innocent or not, screw them, even if they're "non-revolutionaries, non-counterrevolutionaries," that weird category of ideological zombie that seems to exist in Cuba. What I want to say is that the Monster was and is always there, ready to strike, because there are no counterweights to stabilize the country's policies. Reason doesn't exist, but rather the capricious and sometimes antagonistic will of a few and the submission of the herd.

My dear ones, I will be praying for you in the three languages in which I can do it in case God understands any of them. I fear for all of you. I think you need a lot of luck and God's help.

A big hug from Cologne, Germany,
Jorge Louis Arzola
January 11, 2007

JORGE LUIS SÁNCHEZ

Translated by Regina Anavy and Alicia Barraqué Ellison

Jorge Luis Sánchez

This debate seems much more serious and interesting to me than the candles feeding the shadows of a study, in that I agree with Arturo Arango. I, who don't have time to sit down and watch television, saw the little program. And I doubted, because when the *pavonato* happened, I was a child and didn't suffer it directly. Others touched me, more recently, in the eighties. But this gentleman of the seventies, I had never seen his face. It caught my attention that whoever did the report completely hid the fact that Pavón was the president of the National Council of Culture. Not even the voice of the narrator dared to name the position! Perhaps so that before the new generations, a word as undesirable as "parameterized" wouldn't disturb our memory anymore. I wrote this, and I circulated it on the night of the 6th after reading Desiderio and Arturo, and now I add that I'm joining this whole fruitful debate. This should not concern only those affected. Nor only those who lived through the nonsense. My grandmother used to say this: If you saw me I was playing; if you didn't see me, you were screwed. When ignorance and malice come together...!

You can count on me for everything.

Jorge Luis Sánchez

Another Message from Jorge Luis Sánchez

So?

A group meets inside, discusses and analyzes.

A larger group, from outside, follows—with more or less cybernetic information—the result of what those inside discussed.

As in those bad American movies of the *Tanda del Domingo* [Sunday Show] television series, it would seem that with the statement by the UNEAC (Cuban Writers and Artists Union), all is resolved. It's covertly conclusive. It doesn't satisfy me. I don't feel represented by it, even though I'm not a member of that organization. Meanwhile, the television, full of incoherencies, censures *Strawberry and Chocolate*, among other films produced by the current Cultural Policy, a film that contributed, not just to the culture, but to all of society, making us less medieval. Our television continues its particular Cultural Policy, which in general is no more than the historic application of the no-Culture Policy. Remember that what doesn't appear on television in this country simply doesn't exist. It doesn't.

Meanwhile, they continue putting a band-aid (the Declaration) on the wound (the conflict), which lacks the demand for an efficient solution; thus, it becomes a palliative, or something like a methodologically old response, inefficient and unsatisfactory. I think

that the UNEAC should have demanded, and television should have responded. In this case, television responded via the voice of the UNEAC, so that one should be left positively frustrated, and more confused.

Once again, the screwed-up practice is repeated of publishing a Declaration which, for the people, is incomplete and destined to be interpreted by clairvoyants, being that it omits any amount of data and dissolves in its generality.

In Central Havana I've been asked what happened, and it tires me to summarize what has been happening all these days, all these years, all these decades. A paradox, this, because the majority of Cubans—for whom their existence is designed to be lived attached to the television set—don't know what happened in the three television programs mentioned in the Declaration.

Serenity shouldn't be related to the application of old solutions to old and new problems. I quickly tuned in, in case anyone said, publicly, more or less, that the Revolution is already tired of justifications.

Never will a clumsy move be solved by another clumsy move. At least unless it wants to make a show of tranquility toward the exterior, undermining the focus on the interior, another old practice.

Since I was born, all the great and essential debates about the culture of my country continue to be postponed, with the conservative, monotonous and worn-out argument: "This is not the right time."

So, when will it be?

The Declaration could have been a better sign. It's not enough to write that the Policy of the Revolution is Irreversible. To which provisions can one appeal when that guarantee is threatened? To which historical figure? Where? To a Declaration? To a Self-Criticism? Well? Okay, it will be because the sorrows crowd one another, and as Sindo* said, this is why they aren't lethal.

Shall we be eternally the children of historical context? Naively, someone told me that, between the 80s and the start of the 90s, it caused plenty of headaches for artists. Remember the film, *Alice in Wondertown*.**

Jorge Luis Sánchez
January 18, 2007

Translators' Notes:

*Sindo Garay (1867-1968) was a Cuban trova singer, and the author is quoting the lyrics of his song, *La tarde* [Afternoon].

**This film, which satirized Cuba's bureaucracy, caused the early retirement of the then-director of the ICAIC, [Julio García Espinosa](#).

JOSÉ M. FERNÁNDEZ PEQUEÑO

Translated by Regina Anavy

Gray, gray, is the five-year period gray?

(Example of what happened because of the suspicion caused by a tape recorder)

Now that, convened by Criterios, a group of brilliant Cuban intellectuals will lead the much-needed reflection on the Five-Year Gray Period, and that the national intelligentsia from inside and outside (definitely and despite whoever may be upset, those adverbs have become less distant in recent times) is given combatively to theorize about it, I want to say what the unclear and temporarily vague five-year period has been for me. I'm doing it because I won't be able to be present at the debates organized by Criterios, and because years ago I, myself, wanted to tell this story, like someone who drives away an uncomfortable and persistent insect or exorcises a memory that, by dint of becoming stronger in its contact with a reality that doesn't yield, refuses to pale with the passing of the years and the advent of senile forgetfulness.

In September 1975 I was still 21 years old and studying Literature at the Universidad de Oriente. Those who know the scenario know that the extreme east of Cuba is the part of the country that has received with greater force not only the few seismic events that sometimes shake us, but also the periods of rectification of errors, the stages of revolutionary reaffirmation, the ideological deepening of various kinds and any other adjustment or tightening of the screw of the many that have occurred during the last almost half-century in Cuba. The Universidad de Oriente was severely punished by tremors of this kind between 1968 and the early 1970s, a story in which intellectual friends took part (and suffered) that I learned about on my arrival at the high house of studies and with some of whom I would later found the Casa del Caribe.

But that's another story. It turns out that in September 1975, a group of writers based in Havana (that is, nationals) and members of the UNEAC visited the literary workshop of the Faculty of Humanities. I didn't belong to the workshop (I never belonged to any) but I went to the meeting, curious to see and listen to the established writers. The director of the workshop had printed (mimeographed, as befitted the not-yet-global village) a little brochure with the works of the workshop owners, and thus the long-awaited night arrived. I can still see the room in the Dean's Office for Humanities: not too big, with an oval table—the same one that this humble servant would later transfer to one of the stories in *Un tigre perfumado sobre mi huella* [*A Perfumed Tiger on my Trail*]—, around which we sat: the apprentices at the head, and the national writers deployed as a wise and magnanimous court, following the already mentioned oval disposition.

In principle, everything went normally (the introductions, the first exchanges, the typical jokes of those meetings, the indications of how the activity would develop), until chance made two apparently unconnected events concur. The first and decisive one ran on the side of the lack of malice. When the reading of the collected materials was opened among the members of the workshop, someone from the executive committee placed a tape recorder in the center of the table. To record the opinions of the experienced

writers, he clarified, since they could be studied later by the neophytes present and absent. It was a tape recorder, and now that I look at it from the passing of time and the modern microchips, I realize that it has grown cruder, more imposing, more antediluvian.

The second fact also brought its touch of ingenuity, although in another dimension. In the brochure prepared for the workshop, rather towards the end, there appeared a poem that had been favored with some circulation among the students of Letters. Not so much because of its quality, but rather because of the person to whom it was dedicated: Professor Ricardo Repilado. Many of us who studied at the School of Letters of the University of Oriente in those times have recognized the debt of discipleship we owe to Repi, but we also remember his strict discipline, his sharp irony and the cultured demand that prevailed in his classes. Well, as Repilado was, as a rule, the last one to enter his classroom and, apparently, he had left out several times a certain student with poetic aspirations, the latter dedicated a short poem to him under the title "Poets arrive late to class." Who could have guessed that this slight student revenge would become an explosive ideological trigger to the casual encounter with a tape recorder? We didn't.

Even when the rule had been established in the activity that only the texts of those workshop participants who were present would be debated (and the author of the aforementioned poem was not there), halfway through the session one of the visitors, a writer with enormous power at that time in the UNEAC, raised his hand and said that he had read a text in the pamphlet that he couldn't help commenting on. And right there a fiery diatribe was launched against the elitist attitude of that author, who for writing poetry, considered himself different from the rest of his classmates and demanded different treatment. Thus began the deviations of the intellectuals who, as in the case of Heberto Padilla, ended in betrayal, petty-bourgeois hyper-criticism, etc., etc.

There was a moment of deep astonishment, but only among the beginners. With extreme speed and for almost an hour, each of the seasoned visiting writers took the floor according to the order they occupied around the table and emphatically declared before the monotonous spinning of the reels of the tape recorder their rejection of that terrible elitist attitude of the intellectuals who were leaving town and were ending up playing the enemy's game. One by one and without pause, those adults (some would have children our age or a little less), writing professionals (supposedly, supposedly), full of published books and awards, repeated the same arguments, almost with the same words, not to record them for us by insistence, but to record on tape the testimony of their combative spirit.

It was very difficult for the 21-year-old young man who I was then to understand what was happening, and if I didn't go straight out of there to ask for an appointment with the psychiatrist, it was because when it came time to pick up the bats, Grillo Longoria (who was or had been until very recently Public Prosecutor of the Republic) used his best sympathetic grandfather tone to ask his colleagues if they weren't being too suspicious and turning into a terrible act of ideological betrayal the poem written by a university student who had trouble getting up early. The full understanding of what happened and the protagonism that the tape machine had recorded that night came to me the next day,

in a conversation with the Guantanamo poet, Marino Wilson Jay, who had not been able to attend the activity. Not a few of the guest writers that night and the vast majority of the then-young hosts are still alive.

When I hear the term “Five Gray Years,” that night inevitably revives in my memory: the tension that curdled the atmosphere, the meticulous fear that ran beneath the words, the irrational self-censorship that clouded the intelligence of those men and didn’t allow them to recognize the limits of the absurd. Only, honestly, for me it’s not a distant memory after thirty years of being alive. That night it happens again every time I run into the most belligerent and harmful virus that the Cuban intelligentsia suffers: caution; every time someone wonders (or asks me) if acting in a certain way would be appropriate; every time I observe how politically correct intellectuals until yesterday, and very careful of their opinions in Cuba, become recalcitrant accusers of their colleagues once they’re situated on the other shore and aware of where the winds of convenience are blowing; every time (even here, in Santo Domingo) a colleague offers me silence as a less compromising option or reminds me that I’m no longer obliged to give an opinion. That is why I wrote in the message sent to Desiderio Navarro a week ago that the rejection of the reappearance of Luis Pavón (and what he represents) didn’t concern only those who had been directly affected by the cultural gendarmes of the time, but all Cuban intellectuals with dignity.

I think I was present at a defining moment for the crystallization of the Five Gray Year label, during the Cuban Narrative Meeting that I helped organize (together with Jorge Luis Hernández and Aida Bahr) in Santiago de Cuba in 1980. Ambrosio Fornet was a key intellectual in those meetings and also for the recovery of our generation, someone who reached the age of twenty in the heat of the disastrous period. I think that the essayist was trying to mark with his name a time of closure, dogmatism, persecution and unanimity manufactured from exclusion and submission; a time very close then, which was necessary to conjure up to move forward and grow as people and as writers.

A dividing line had to be drawn, and in that sense I think the name served. Those debates held in the middle of the Santiago heat of 1980 (in part of which Armando Hart, then Minister of Culture, participated) accelerated the publication of some of the most interesting novels of the 1980s in Cuba, including titles that had remained trapped by the censorship, such as *Las iniciales de la tierra* [*The Initials of the Earth*], by Jesús Díaz.

In the last of those Santiago conferences, held in 1988, the already famous five-year period and its projection in subsequent years were debated again, then with a better perspective and the participation of young narrators who had emerged in the eighties. In an unplanned manner, the discussions ended with the drafting and signing of a document protesting the blow that two or three days earlier members of the MININT had inflicted on a group of poets gathered in Matanzas, which made it very clear (if for some it remained obscure) that we had not been doing the methodical dissection of a fossil trapped beneath the geological layers of oblivion.

For this reason, because the debate surrounding that period can once again serve as a starting point to recognize the present and look towards the future, the current invitation seems totally timely to me to reexamine the five-year period, its true extension or the real intensity of its greyness; how many times its imprint (to use a suddenly fashionable word) has resurfaced later or the ways in which many of its procedures have been camouflaged in order to continue acting with total virulence. But always, the analysis must not stop at a sharp dichotomy of victims and perpetrators, and it shouldn't exclude the examination of the responsibility that the intellectual sector has had in all this, or the way in which the seed of caution, double morality, submission and opportunism that the so-called Five Gray Years sowed remains fertile, as if the ominous reels of that tape recorder threatened to continue turning for ever and ever.

José M. Fernández Pequeño

JOSÉ MILIÁN

Translated by Mary Jo Porter and Regina Anavy

The Period of Silent Scandal

For Antón de Milián

Many friends and others who are not have approached me, interested in knowing my opinion about this debate on the parameters or simply, because the non-participation in it could be interpreted as disinterest, apathy or in the worst case scenario... cowardice. Those who really know me know that I don't suffer from any of these three evils. The reason is very simple: I don't have email. But I have kept abreast of what is happening because there are always kind souls who have sent information to me and because I have participated in various meetings. I'll get to the point: I have never thought that Pavón, despite his ideas, acted alone.

The phenomenon is more complex. At this point it's very easy to think that we should look up, but I'm also talking about looking to the side and, at times, down. The documents I have, signed by him, show that he relied not only on the agreements of the Congress of Education and Culture, but also on a Legal Adviser whose name I don't want to remember and on other representatives of institutions, in this case the Union and the Ministry of Labor. But we know that he also relied on criteria emanating from the Theater Groups themselves, that is, from their Work Councils. Councils that in some cases reconsidered and joined the victims and others that supported them from the beginning.

Those who left the famous hearings carried out by the so-called Evaluation Commission, left with a ticket in their hands, with ten days to appeal the sentence in case they disagreed, or otherwise they would have to appear under penalty of having the Vagrancy Law applied. Could Pavón alone create this legal machinery? I'm not going to recount, of course, the ordeal we had to go through.

The story is more or less known, and this isn't the right framework. But when this man signs with his own hand on my expulsion resolution that: "...His works AGAIN JEHOVAH WITH THE TALE OF SODOM and THE TAKING OF HAVANA BY THE ENGLISH allow us to qualify his literature as pornographic and obscene" ... he's not alone. There, on the document are other signatures. And in the process, other names. He had prepared the conditions before acting. And he had support from people who thought like him. And in the field of ideas, I don't know if it would contribute anything to us in this debate by questioning who thought the same and who no longer does. Because time has passed.

There is only one idea in which I fully agree with Pavón. A better world is possible. Only that for him, or for them, that world is better without me, or without us; that is, the parameterized. The superficiality and naivety, so to speak, with which he judged us cost us a lot. And I refer to certain words that Blas Roca said to Fernando Sáenz and Lázaro Peña: "The parameterized are living proof of faith in the Revolution, that what was

wrong will be rectified, because if not, they would have already given up... and despite their not having a place in the different analyses, they continue to insist, and for that you have to have a lot of faith.” And of course we had it and still have it. And because of that faith we return, and here we are here.

But for this matter to have been forgotten as it deserved, it had to be analyzed and rectified at that time. It should have been talked about and judged. It’s not about revenge; nor is it about justice. It was and still is about saving a project of social justice that was above us and even Pavón himself, and he was the one who was doing the real damage. He and his allies were affecting the credibility of that project, and with this massacre they were the ones who served up the gossip to the enemies on a silver platter.

For me, this was never the Five Gray Years; for me it has always been the Period of Silent Scandal. Generations that have come later were formed in that silence. Playwrights, directors, actors and designers, etc., have existed, or not, in artistic education according to whether or not the professor dares to talk about these things, due to ignorance or fear of not knowing if they were still among us. And it’s these young people who are already professionals that I’m now thinking about. What will happen to them? Will they be willing not to make the same mistakes?

Excuse me for the delay and perhaps the length of my words.

José Milián
February 9, 2007

JOSÉ PRATS SARIOL

Translated by Mary Jo Porter and Regina Anavy

The masochistic left is strutting

“Sexual perversion of someone who enjoys being humiliated or mistreated by another person,” says the dictionary. Will the writers who now, rightly, denounce the revival of Luis Pavón, Serguera and Quesada on official television really enjoy themselves?

“Mess with the chain, never with the lion,” the director of the Cuban Academy of Language advised me one afternoon in Mexico City in 1997. Do most of the protests against the resurrection of the *subcomandantes* follow in a disciplined way the morals of the picaresque warning?

Please, pears to the elm?—to end with Sancho Panza. Except in one of the fair protests, by a talented narrator, there doesn’t seem to be the slightest intention of judging the lion, or the brother, those who have never publicly repented of committing that National Congress of Education and Culture in April of 1971, after the disaster of the 10 million harvest and the consequent submission to the Moscow of scientific communism and socialist realism.

Critical thinking in 2007 by the same people who closed down *Critical Thought* magazine and the Philosophy Department of the University of Havana? Naivety or fear of some of those who today accuse television—as totalitarian as in the “black decade”—of fulfilling an order handed down from the Party, similar to the one then?

Could it be that they do it as a tactic, understood, implicit? Let’s hope so... What is not transparent or insinuated, in the Aristotelian rhetoric of the denunciations against the media tribute to the Pavones, is, simply, if they have already lost what little faith they had left in the dome of Power. That is, it seems, circumvented.

What position did Luis Pavón hold before being appointed president of the National Council of Culture? Wasn’t he the director of *Verde Olivo* magazine, that is to say, a very close cadre, of the absolute confidence of Raúl Castro? Who could appoint former prosecutor Papito Serguera at the Cuban Institute of Radio and Television? And by the way, what was Armando Hart—among other leaders with liberal poses—busy with in those years?

Ah, memory. I propose a campaign to collect “odor pads.” As I haven’t lost it—nor do I want to lose it—I vividly remember Fidel Castro’s speech at the closing of the Stalinist Congress on Education and Culture. The same contempt for intellectuals was shown by the deputies at the beginning of 2007: the proof was on the television screen.

I generally agree with Duanel Díaz’s article. Perhaps what is worrying is not the attitude of critics of the chain that some masochists now assume, but the message that such resurrections bring with them. Is there another turn of the screw that has been

sweetened? Will there be changes in the officials who direct the government's cultural policy? Are we witnessing the resumption of open repression against artists and writers that the Power knows are dissidents? Is limbo over?

In any case it's a bad; polarization is always a terrible symptom, which heralds violence. The next few weeks will tell us, because it's obvious that the falcons have come out of their cages. Let's hope that old age and ailments on the right side—they are the true right—prevent them from flying.

José Prats Sariol
México

JOSÉ ROJAS BEZ

Translated by Regina Anavy

Dear Desiderio:

Receive once again the cordial hugs of this friend from “beyond the capital.”

I celebrate your just challenge of the qualification of “GROUP” applied to the wide and diverse number of participants in the current debate, and I am even more motivated by the last paragraphs about our “entertainment culture” and its “controls.”

But I wanted to make an observation. Knowing you for years (you and your work), I know that it’s an editorial slip when you talk about the “important ones.” It’s worth clarifying that we are all equally important as human beings and potential “contributors,” although not equally “known” or “influential.” Let’s avoid falling into the trap that we criticize: thanks to the mass media and other “promotions,” the best are not always duly known, and very often—this is more serious!—the worst “figure” too much.

You confirm my reasons, already stated, that the problem is not a “Pavón” or a “five-year gray period,” singularities that, well observed, can be valued as symptoms (“indices,” “icons” and “symbols”) to know and reject so many innumerable “Pavones” and “Pavonas” and “problems” of yesterday, today and tomorrow (because I don’t think they can be solved from one moment to the next; I wish!); but that, badly used, can serve to excessively focus the problems on two or three singularities and circumstances. Let’s prevent such a mistake!

In my previous letter I pointed out three or four among the infinity possible, including those of education and, of course, the media, with their manipulations, doors open to mediocrity, opportunism and misgivings against depth, sincerity and culture other than the “aesthetics” of superficiality. Although it’s a universal problem—and apart from the fact that other’s evils don’t justify our own—the “Pavones,” structures, circumstances and uses—especially the “uses”—have aggravated it among us. I’m glad you insist on it. What a great topic for a broad “shirtless” debate! (Would it solve anything? I wonder.) I am sending you an article here where not long ago I suggested reflections from the universal to ours about it (<http://www.aldia.cu/imagologicas.htm>).

Since it’s so short, I’m enclosing it, so you can skim it when your “current reading urges” are over.

Cordially,
Rojas Bez

Another Message from José Rojas Bez to Juan Antonio García Borrero

Your letter worries me doubly.

I am struck, first, by the double or repeated slip of seeing Colina as the only critic who was “sensitized.” I am glad that Gustavo has already made it clear to you that there were others who were “sensitized” even long before Colina, from the very beginning, such as Luciano and Frank. I say “before” for simple chronological order and not to mark differences of sensitivity or any other order, but to point out that, having followed the debate, you should have already “noticed” others.

But you fall back into the slip. Well, it’s not “in addition” to Luciano, Frank and Gustavo, but also to Rojas, from the very beginning of the controversy, along with others (Marrón, Manuel García,...), which I suppose you know less about, although I think so, because they are not members of the Association (They are not all those who are, nor are they all who are). I hope you haven’t forgotten that I’m also a critic (and an old acquaintance of yours, founder of our Association and even before), or that our youngest friend Gustavo has inadvertently misinformed you. Well, I’m kidding.

What happens is that many “film critics” are not only interested in cinema, but, even more so, in Culture and Society. Especially this one: Culture, Spirituality and Society, and we don’t focus our “sensitivity” on our participation in the cinema (in parentheses, neither does Colina), or on our being essentially a “film critic.” Maybe that’s why you didn’t really notice it. The second concern: Are you imbued with an excessive relativism? Don’t you have a few more definitions? The end of your letter leaves me with that worry.

Don’t you know that critical thinking DOES exist within the Island, that it doesn't need to “be brought to light,” be borne by you (and others) because it DOES exist, even though it isn’t the most widely spread officially, and even though it always can, and SHOULD, be enriched by you, and many, many more, even outside the Island. Is it contempt, nonsense or another slip on top of the previous ones? Remember that you criticized the critics who believe they are the “world’s navel.” You amaze me when you say, for example: “Since I’m still interested in supporting the idea of critical thinking from within (which, for some, is a symptom of the most decadent naivety), well...” There are many tones of voice that have called my attention to your letter.

I know that you have written all of this in the haste of “hot debate” and that you are sharper than you show yourself in this specific letter. Therefore, I invite you to reflect more calmly and, of course, to continue being critical, inside and outside, up and down, in the capital or province, whenever it is with honesty and love for Cuba and its Culture.

Finally, I’m not opposed to any assembly of critics, as someone has suggested. Why not, except for practical expenses and scheduling issues? No debate or reflection is bad. Now, as long as it doesn’t become an “elite” or special group, but always integrated into the COLLECTIVE DEBATE, of all and for the good of ALL; although, as the Cinematographic Press Association, we could accentuate, underline the problems of cinema.

Cordially, your old friend, the equally old friend, old film critic and researcher and old exerciser of opinions, not only about cinema.

Message from José Rojas Bez to Desiderio Navarro

I have just received your message of fair disapproval, along with that of other friends and colleagues who, logically, seem to be multiplying.

First of all, I left you thinking that I'm joining such a just protest.

However (and here come my "buts"), I regret that such energy is displayed only now and that we haven't shown it before (I include myself, of course, in the criticism) on countless occasions.

Is the "Pavón" case a symptom or, even better, a syndrome?

Yes, a syndrome that has never been absent, although sometimes more hidden than at others.

I'm speaking to you from a province (characteristically conservative and exclusionary) and want to remind you that, if Havana has always been, out of obligation and not out of mere desire, more permissive and pseudo-liberal than the rest of the country, then imagine how it is so far away from the best possible ministers and intentions, in the hands of the local "godfathers."

Many "Pavóns" (and "Pavonas," of course, not to be macho and also to recognize in some women the ability to take advantage of tribunes and other proximities to power to "make themselves felt," impose themselves and "strut") have always existed. Just as their associations with opportunism, figurative speech and laudatory phraseology have been placed above serious work and achievements.

In one way or another, I want to insist in my criticism (and self-criticism) that we have never made such energetic and collective protests or proposals on countless problems that concern the nation and the culture, including the causes (first and second), and not simply the tertiary ones with the most visible visceral effects.

How many times do we use that "anti-Pavón" energy to suggest lower expenditure and exhaustion in eternal tyrannical manipulations of information, and demand greater criticism and analysis or, equally, less triumphalism? Or when Customs seizes political books sent from abroad for our information by colleagues, denying us the right to read them and judge them on our own?

And what about the opportunistic, distorted visions of our history and our heroes, such as that deplorable image of Martí (actually anti-Martian), increasingly official and enthroned, of a democratic Martí as a popular "pre-Marxist?" Poor little, immature Martí, who had not yet reached the light of Marxism, remaining in the "pre!" What reader of Martí was unaware that he not only knew about Marxism and socialism but also didn't approve of it, in the deepest tradition of Cuban thought, that of Father Félix Varela, that of Agramonte, et al., and wasn't he just a high school student!?

Brave is the editor (not the writer) who published essays on Martí's idealism or on the fruitful influence of idealism on Martí!

Nor do we complain so much when the aforementioned Father Varela was offensively left without the "Father" because, they said, he was patriotic and great "despite" being religious.

Brave is the editor (not the writer) who published an essay affirming that a patriot and a man of faith were inseparable, and the more faith, the greater he was!

And how difficult it was to publish essays related to biblical books (of course, when it was to praise or give them merit) even if it was from a strictly literary perspective!

Let's not forget, in passing, how a single atheist education was sustained for decades (not secular, which would have been good, but aggressively atheist).

When, among thousands of other possible examples, did we demand so angrily, for years, that Dulce María Loynaz be published, and that such an illustrious creator, like many others—let's say Lezama Lima himself—not be "non-existent" in our programs and study material of Cuban literature?

Okay, dear (and also admired Desiderio, because we owe a lot to your informative work as a disseminator of high culture), let's cry out against Pavón and the Pavóns and Pavonas, but the two or three examples mentioned among a possible infinity remind us that it's not only a matter of one Pavón or of some other individual and circumstance before then and since, up to the current year.

Receive, as always, my warmest hugs,
Rojas Bez

JOSEFINA DE DIEGO

Translated by Regina Anavy

Some reflections on “Words to the Intellectuals” and other texts

I confess that I didn't remember the complete text known as “Words to the intellectuals,” pronounced by Fidel Castro on June 30, 1961, in the National Library before a group of intellectuals. I think that, like many people, the only thing I remembered from this text was his famous declaration of principles, “everything within the Revolution, nothing against the Revolution” which, without a doubt, summarizes the essence of the document.

In the debate that is currently taking place by a group of people—not just intellectuals—via email (which, of course, limits greater participation), a series of problems, past and present, began to be questioned. Presently, of the national culture, from the surprising presence of three officials—simple executors of a cultural policy drawn up and guided by the highest leadership of the country—who, in the seventies, were in charge of important cultural institutions: the former lieutenant, Luis Pavón (president of the National Council of Culture, 1971-1976), former commander Papito Serguera (director of Cuban Television, 1966-1973) and Armando Quesada, who, among other things, was responsible for destroying the Cuban theater movement during those years. These officials were former soldiers who had been part of Raúl Castro's work team. Taking into account the current situation in the country, in which the Minister of the Armed Forces has taken over the leadership of the government, many thought that the “resurrection” of Pavón, Serguera and Quesada was a sign that there would be a return to the past.

During the “reign” of these gentlemen, a true witch hunt against homosexual writers and artists was unleashed in the country. Books were censored (“Padilla case,” 1971); what was called “ideological deviations” was severely punished (having long hair, wearing blue jeans, listening to the Beatles and other groups and singers not well seen by the government, having “wrong sexual preferences,” professing some type of religion, etc.); the poet and novelist José Lezama Lima, who died in 1976, was condemned to intellectual silence, etc.

Although the persecution was accentuated in this five-year period, it had begun in the early sixties (censorship of the documentary P.M.; the UMAP; accusations against Padilla and Arrufat in 1968; destruction of Delfín Prats' collection of poems, *Lenguaje de mudos* [*Language of the Mutes*] (1968); the transmission of artists who had gone abroad was prohibited on radio and television; purges began in the country's universities, etc.) and would continue, with different nuances, sometimes more, sometimes less, until today.

There are plenty of examples: censorship of the plastic arts movement at the end of the 1980s; ruthless criticism of the movie *Alice in Wondertown* (1991); prison of María Elena Cruz Varela (1993); criticism of the film *Guantanamo* (1997, at a meeting at the

Palace of Conventions, after Eliseo Alberto, co-writer of the film and author of the book *Report Against Myself*, won the Alfaguara Prize for the novel); impossibility of mentioning writers and artists residing abroad who don't maintain a "comfortable" position for the system; "deactivation" (he stopped belonging to the UNEAC) of the writer Antonio José Ponte when it became known that he would be part of the Editorial Board of the magazine *Encuentro* (2002); imprisonment of the poet Raúl Rivero and others for the crime of expressing their opinions openly, even though they were accused of being "agents of the enemy" in hasty trials (2003); censorship of critical fiction documentaries and short films, as was the recent case of *Monte Rouge* (2005), etc.

Pavón, Serguera and Quesada disappeared from the cultural "landscape" in 1976 when the Ministry of Culture was founded, and a new stage began that, without a doubt, wanted to correct the mistakes made and tried to promote an environment of trust and respect, which was achieved in many respects. When they reappeared in the last months of 2006, thirty years later, in three different programs on Cuban television, those who suffered in their own flesh the injustices committed during those years reacted angrily, with good reason, and decided to demonstrate through limited email space.

The controversy has transcended the national border, and many Cubans residing abroad have expressed their opinions; others—insiders and outsiders—want the debate to cover other fundamental issues (a justified demand, since, as the economists of the 19th century, including Karl Marx, said, "the economic base defines the superstructure," so it naturally follows that we must look for answers about culture in the economy).

Unfortunately, some use offensive language, bring up "dirty laundry" and cloud a discussion that could and should be deep, serious and inclusive of all opinions. The tone of the debate has varied, from complex and measured analysis to full blown, furious and nasty attacks. I believe that, for the good of all and of the country, it would be advisable for all of us to try to listen, with tolerance and respect, to each other's opinion. In a country where for years only the official criterion has prevailed—with very small spaces for debate—it's not easy to develop a balanced dialogue, without offense or passion.

In the "Declaration of the UNEAC Secretariat," insufficient and misguided for many—nobody understands that something like this was written if they had plenty of time to write a more elaborate and consistent text with everything that had been proposed—it's stated: "Martí's cultural policy, anti-dogmatic, creative and participatory, of Fidel and Raúl, founded with 'Words to the intellectuals,' is irreversible." Alfredo Guevara also endorses this statement. And this is the point that I would like to analyze.

In the first place, cultural policy was defined by Fidel in his words; Raúl Castro had nothing to do with the matter—among other things, because it's not his specialty. The fact that his name is added to the UNEAC Declaration responds to the current situation, not to his real participation in its elaboration. The meeting with the intellectuals took place two months after the Bay of Pigs invasion, at an extremely difficult time for the Revolution, with strong and real threats from the United States and great political tension that would reach its peak in October of next year. The main topic of discussion, according to Fidel himself, was freedom of expression:

“The problem that has been discussed here and that we are going to address is the problem of the freedom of writers and artists to express themselves. The fear that has worried us here is whether the Revolution is going to stifle that freedom, whether the Revolution is going to suffocate the creative spirit of writers and artists. There was talk here of formal freedom. Everyone agreed that formal freedom be respected. I think there is no doubt about this problem.

“The issue becomes more subtle and truly becomes the crux of the discussion when it comes to freedom of content. This is the most subtle point because it’s the one that is exposed to the most diverse interpretations. The most controversial point of this question is whether or not there should be absolute freedom of content in artistic expression. It seems to us that some colleagues defend that point of view. Perhaps out of fear of what they considered prohibitions, regulations, limitations, rules or authorities in order to decide the question.

“What can be the reason for this concern? Only one who is not sure of his revolutionary convictions can truly worry about this problem. Anyone who mistrusts his own art may worry about this problem, who has mistrust about his true ability to create. And it’s worth asking if a true revolutionary, an artist or intellectual who experiences the Revolution and is sure that he is capable of serving the Revolution, can consider this problem; that is, if the doubt fits for the truly revolutionary writers and artists. I consider that it doesn’t; that the field of doubt remains for the writers and artists who, without being counterrevolutionaries, don’t feel themselves to be revolutionaries either.”

The form is not questioned but rather the content, and a worrying accusation is clearly enunciated: anyone who has doubts is not a true revolutionary. I think, with all due respect, that this approach is not correct, not true, and that it’s based on this criterion that a series of injustices have arisen in terms of artistic creation. A rigid, narrow official thought was generated, reminiscent of the excesses and errors committed in the Soviet Union from the time of Stalin. Why couldn’t a Revolution that had the support and love of the majority of the population allow opposing opinions? It would have been healthier for the system to allow the free confrontation of ideas, because, without a doubt, the Revolution, with all its social and economic achievements, would emerge victorious in that battle. But the path of rigidity was chosen, and that path led to an abyss of frustrations and injustices.

It strikes me how, at the beginning of his speech, Fidel states that:

“We are not making a Revolution for future generations; we are making a Revolution with this generation and for this generation, regardless of whether the benefits of this work benefit future generations and it becomes an historic event. We are not making a Revolution for posterity; this Revolution will go down in history because it is a Revolution for now and for the men and women of today.”

In other words, the benefits, both material and cultural, were conceived to be enjoyed by the protagonists and contemporaries of the Revolution. The writers and artists would be

living their moment of realization; they were granted the right to be free, a right won with arms in a fair fight. But whoever distrusted, whoever had different opinions, was automatically “out of the game.” In the cultural supplement *Lunes de Revolución*, founded in 1959, the writers who were members of the Grupo Orígenes had been harshly criticized as Catholics, bourgeois and apathetic.

Wouldn't these writers have felt marginalized from the revolutionary process? Didn't they make them feel guilty for doubting and having philosophical criteria different from those of the triumphant revolution? Wasn't the moment “now and for the men of now” destined for them then? But already at the end, Fidel affirms the opposite and asks for the supreme sacrifice: postponing personal fulfillment, illusions, for the sake of a greater and long-term objective. Why did the manifestation of a different and even opposite criterion imply, practically, betrayal of the people?

“Gentlemen, wouldn't it be better to think about the future? Are we going to think about our flowers wilting when we are planting flowers everywhere? When we're forging those creative spirits of the future? And who wouldn't trade the present, who wouldn't trade even their own present for that future? Who wouldn't change what is theirs, who wouldn't sacrifice what is theirs for that future? And who would have artistic sensibility without having the disposition of a combatant who might die in battle, knowing that he dies, that he ceases to exist physically, in order to fertilize with his blood the triumphal path of his fellow men, of his people? Think of the combatant who dies fighting, sacrifices everything he has, sacrifices his life, his family, his wife, his children, for what? So that we can do all these things.

“And whoever has human sensibility, artistic sensibility, doesn't think that doing this is worth making the necessary sacrifices? But the Revolution doesn't ask for sacrifices of creative geniuses; on the contrary, the Revolution says: put that creative spirit at the service of this work, without fear that your work will be cut short. But if one day you think that your work may be cut short, say to yourself, it is well worth my personal work being cut short to make a work like the one we have before us.”

One of the topics discussed was the censorship of the documentary made by Sabá Cabrera, *P.M.* It was considered harmful to the people because it presented scenes of nightlife in Cuba, at the end of 1960, which were not, according to the criteria of the high officials of the ICAIC, up to the moment the country was living. Fidel talks about the documentary, although he confesses that he has not seen it.

“Although we haven't seen that film, we have submitted it to the opinion of comrades who have seen it, and to the opinions of the comrade President and different comrades from the National Council of Culture. It goes without saying that these are opinions that deserve all our respect, but there is something that I think cannot be discussed and that is the right established by Law to exercise the function that in this case was carried out by the Film Institute or the Review Commission. Is that right of the Government even discussed?

“Does the Government have or not the right to exercise that function? For us, in this case, the fundamental thing is, first of all, to specify whether or not that right existed on the part of the Government. Then we can discuss the question of the procedure, as it was done, to determine if it wasn’t amicable, if a friendly procedure could have been better. We can even discuss whether the decision was fair or not. But there is something that I don’t think anyone is discussing and that is the right of the Government to exercise that function, because if we challenge that right then it would mean that the Government doesn’t have the right to review the films that are going to be shown before the people (...). And, in reality, could the right of the Government to regulate, review and inspect the films that are shown to the people be discussed in the midst of the Revolution? Is that what is being discussed?”

“And can the right of the Revolutionary Government to control those media outlets that have so much influence on the people be considered a limitation or a prohibitive formula? If we were to contest this right of the Revolutionary Government, we would be incurring a problem of principle because to deny the Revolutionary Government that power would be to deny the Government its function and responsibility, especially in the midst of a revolutionary struggle, of leading the people and directing the Revolution; and sometimes it has seemed that this right of the Government was challenged, and in reality if that right of the Government is challenged, we believe that the Government has that right (...).”

But who is it that has so many reservations about the Government, who is it that has so many doubts, who is it that has so many suspicions about the Revolutionary Government, and who is it that distrusts the Revolutionary Government so much that even when it considers that its decision is wrong, finds a real source of terror in thinking that the Government can always be wrong?

I think that in the context of the time, as I have already said, in the midst of difficult situations in which the Revolution needed to consolidate, an inflexible and cautious policy was justified, and that the approach of “nothing against the Revolution” had its reason for being. On innumerable occasions the development of the country has demanded changes, adjustments, modifications—it’s a logical process of life itself. Fidel himself hasn’t hesitated to make these changes. He denounced the “errors and negative tendencies” (1984); important shifts were made in economic policy (“Now we are going to build socialism,” he said in 1986, denouncing a series of situations that threatened the economic development of the country); and, very recently, in his speech in the Aula Magna of the University of Havana (November 17, 2005), he made these reflections:

“Are revolutions destined to collapse, or can men make revolutions collapse? Can or can’t men prevent, can or can’t society prevent revolutions from collapsing? I could add a question immediately. Do they think that this revolutionary, socialist process can or cannot collapse? Have they ever thought about it? Did they think about it in depth? Did they know all these inequalities I’m talking about? Did they know about certain generalized patterns?”

I don't think we should accept that "Marti's cultural policy, anti-dogmatic, creative and participatory, of Fidel and Raúl, founded with 'Words to the Intellectuals' is irreversible," among other things because that affirmation, in itself, is dogmatic (according to the definition of "dogmatic": inflexible, that maintains its opinions as firm truths, without doubts or contradictions"). Everything can be reversible (only death is not); everything can be improved, adapted and perfected. We all have the right to participate, for and against.

Education and culture have been developed in Cuba, perhaps as in no other country: art schools have been created; a literacy campaign has been successfully carried out; libraries have multiplied; education has been brought to remote corners of the Island and a solid and cultured intellectual and artistic movement has been created. So, I think, it's time to consider a true national dialogue, where everything is questioned and analyzed, without fear or schematics, and where a true exercise of freedom of expression is allowed.

Josefina de Diego
Havana, January 25, 2007

Another text by Josefina de Diego

"We followed orders" or "Who puts the bell on the cat?"

In relation to the presence on Cuban television of three key officials of what has been called the "five-year gray period"—Serguera, Pavón and Quesada—an important debate was triggered, as everyone knows, although only through email (which a few in Cuba have). Nothing has been published in the national press, except for the insipid "Declaration of the UNEAC Secretariat," nor has anything been said on television. People not linked to the cultural sector don't have the slightest idea of what is happening, but, without a doubt, the controversy has been important, and many have decided to speak and tell their stories. Others have asked for more and demand that urgent and current issues be addressed, such as the deplorable economic conditions in the country and the worsening of this situation in the provinces, among many other issues.

The "five-year gray period," framed between the years 1971-1976, was only a stage—not gray but black—within the entire cultural context of the Island. The problems attributed to this period had begun as early as 1959, and had "their best definition" in June 1961, with the famous "Words to the intellectuals" pronounced by Fidel in the National Library.

At the end of 1960, the documentary *P.M.*, directed by Sabá Cabrera Infante and Orlando Jiménez Leal, was censored; *Lunes de Revolución* attacked the Grupo Orígenes (1959-1961); in 1961, the private school was nationalized and priests and nuns were expelled from the country. Also in that year, the Integrated Revolutionary Organizations (ORI) were created, where all the political groups that fought against the Batista

dictatorship were merged, which eliminated any possible source of discrepancy, however slight it might be.

Its director was named Aníbal Escalante, a prominent member of the PSP; in 1962 Aníbal Escalante and his main collaborators were expelled from the leadership of the ORI, accused of sectarianism; in 1963 the ORI were replaced by the United Party of the Socialist Revolution (PURS), the antecedent of the future (only) Communist Party of Cuba (1965). The sadly remembered UMAP, an embarrassing chapter in our history, occurred between 1964 and 1969; the censorship of the books *Fuera del Juego* [*Outside the Game*], by Heberto Padilla, *Los Siete Contra Tebas* [*The Seven Against Thebes*], by Antón Arrufat, and *Lenguaje de mudos* [*The Language of Mutes*], by Delfín Prats—to name only well-known examples—happened, in 1968. On March 13, 1968, in a speech commemorating the attack on the Presidential Palace, Fidel confirmed the arrest and imprisonment of the “micro-fractionaries,” led by Aníbal Escalante, and announced the beginning of the Revolutionary Offensive that ended, among other things, with the little private property that still remained. It was also at the end of the sixties that the purges began in the universities, the accusations of “ideological deviations,” etc.

In the following decades the problems continued, although not with such intensity and harshness. I won't recount this because many have already taken it upon themselves to do so in the current debate, but what I'm interested in highlighting is that control over freedom of expression, the media, free association, etc., has been maintained up to our days, and not only in the cultural sector but in all sectors of society. The ICAIC, an organization with a liberal reputation, continues to decide which scripts are filmed and which are not, which films are shown and which are not, just as they did with *P.M.* in 1960. The imprisonment of Raúl Rivero and the independent journalists, in 2003, and other cases of censorship and restrictions that occurred “yesterday,” are proof of this.

Equally, it would be unfair not to recognize all the undeniable achievements accomplished in this almost half century of Revolution: no government proposed to do so much for “the poor of this land.” Education and public health were taken to the most remote corners of the country (although the quality has declined considerably in the last fifteen years. I consider the internationalist aid that is being provided to many countries to be disproportionate, since it has left the Island without the doctors and teachers that it requires, which has seriously affected the quality and quantity of these services. For the record, it seems to me a humanitarian and generous effort, worthy of respect and admiration, that all governments should make); important plans for cultural, social and economic development were drawn up; the Literacy Campaign was carried out successfully; schools and art institutes, libraries, museums, houses of culture, the National Ballet, the ICAIC, the Casa de las Américas, etc. were founded. Those seeds gave the very valuable fruits that we collect today.

Now, going back to the title of this text—which I don't want to extend too much—I wanted to point out that the statements of two officials who stood out during the “five-year gray period” have caught my attention: Serguera and Félix Sautié (second from Pavón). Both have stated (Serguera in an interview and Sautié in a letter) that they received and carried out orders, just like soldiers. According to them, they were not

responsible for what they did, only executors of the policy outlined by the “highest leadership of the country”; that is, the policy defined in 1961. We all know that this was and continues to be so. I think that the centralized power during all these years has been the cause of many of the difficulties that we suffer today. I don’t doubt the good intentions, but the fact that there is no real discussion and debate in the bodies responsible for defining government policy has not been beneficial for the comprehensive development of the nation.

There is something that has always been held as an unquestionable principle, but I think it may be the cause of many of the evils that afflict us (double standards, apathy, laziness and disbelief among young people, among others): the existence of a single Party (I do not want my words to be misunderstood or be accused of having an “annexationist agenda” or of “providing services to the enemy.” I simply express my opinion). I remember a person who told me: “It’s true that Martí created a single Party, but who founds a party and, at the same time, another that opposes it?”

The existence of a single opinion (because, for example, all the members of the National Assembly are members of the same Party) prevents a necessary flow of different ideas, important for the “oxygenation” of the country and for its organic development. The affirmation that this gives “arms to the enemy” and that “this isn’t the time” has been reversed like a boomerang and it has been the people who have been left without the essential weapons to build, think and organize their homeland. In other words, the silence has prevented the real expression of the ideas and concerns of the population, the true exercise of free expression, of debate, the confrontation of opposing opinions, the effective and enriching exchange of different opinions.

If the officials of the time under discussion carried out orders, who gave them? Why did they do it if, as Serguera says, he didn’t even agree with many of them? Why was this type of behavior generated, of accepting everything, of not questioning anything? Wouldn’t it be good and healthy to start changing this mentality? Why not hold a debate—not only about culture but also about the economy, education, public health—where these issues are thoroughly analyzed and what needs to be changed begins to change?

The international situation has evolved; the left has been reborn with new vigor in many parts of the world, and Cuba is once again accompanied by many Latin American countries. I honestly believe that if many of the things considered immovable in our country were reconsidered, it would be an important step to rescue, protect and maintain everything that has been achieved—which is a lot—in these years.

Josefina de Diego
Havana, February 9, 2007

Another text by Josefina de Diego

Case closed

The debate about “the five-year gray period,” which has taken place in our country since the “resurrection” of three former officials of the National Council of Culture—Pavón, Quesada and Serguera—is already coming to an end, it’s dying out; we could say that it’s in its death throes. For a moment, many of us thought that what had begun as a simple exchange of letters by e-mail could give rise to a real debate on fundamental issues of our culture and, also, of the economy and society. But it hasn’t been that way. In the highly criticized Declaration of the UNEAC Secretariat, it was recognized that the appearances of these former officials “did not respond to a policy of the organization and that serious errors had been made in their gestation and execution.”

It was said that many of those who had intervened in the controversy did so because they worked, “obviously at the service of the enemy,” and referred to “those who claim to see ambiguous positions, fissures or opportunities for their annexationist agenda in the debate between revolutionaries.” In the last sentence, it was ratified that: “Marti’s cultural policy, anti-dogmatic, creative and participatory, of Fidel and Raúl, founded with ‘Words to the intellectuals,’ is irreversible.” As if to seal the debate, Alfredo Guevara expressed his solidarity with the UNEAC text and accused television officials (who are appointed by “the Party”) of being responsible for the “belligerent insurgency of ignorance and mediocrity” that prevails in the media. Guevara never did allude to the *pavonato*, nor to the “five-year gray period,” nor to any of the proposals that were being made.

The “five-year gray period” was a term used by Ambrosio Fornet to refer to the “grayness” of the literature written between the years 1971-1976, as a result of a policy of schematism, suspicion and intolerance against the culture sector, and of the calls that were made, by the highest political and cultural leadership of the country, for the development of a truly “revolutionary” art, something impossible to achieve from such narrow limits. Previously, there had been a moment of splendor according to Fornet, a “golden five-year period,” with *Los años duros* [*The Hard Years*] by Jesús Díaz; *Condenados de Condaado* [*The Condemned of Condaado*] by Norberto Fuentes and *Los pasos en la hierba* [*The steps in the Grass*] by Eduardo Heras León (all published at the end of 1960), etc.

And also—although I think Ambrosio was not referring to these books—with *Celestino antes del Alba* [*Celestino before the Dawn*], by Reinaldo Arenas (1967), *Fuera del juego* [*Out of the Game*] (1968), by Heberto Padilla, *Lenguaje de mudos* [*The Language of Mutes*] (1968), by Delfín Prats and others. But when one speaks of the “five-year gray period,” one is also speaking of the persecution unleashed by Pavón and his followers against homosexuals, “intellectualoids” and “extravagants,” to the “parameterization” of theater artists and artists in general, and the “ideological deviations,” etc., a period that, as we all know, lasted much longer than five years.

Many people say that “that already happened,” that it was a “bad cold” (according to statements by Reinaldo González published by the newspaper *El Clarín*, February 13, 2007), that the “five-year gray period” and the controversy that occurred in the months of January and February of this year are already “a closed case,” to use a terminology that has made the famous CSI series fashionable: the crime scene.

I think that, indeed, many things have changed for the better; the persecution of homosexuals decreased, and at present, although there are many prejudices, no one can be expelled for this reason from jobs and universities. There are even programs broadcast on television that deal with this topic with great breadth and depth, such as the telenovela *The Dark Side of the Moon*, recently shown. It's also true that there is a real openness, and issues are raised and questioned that, in those years, would have been impossible to deal with (proof of this is this controversy).

But I do believe that there are still serious limitations to the true exercise of freedom of expression, association and movement (not to mention other very serious problems in the productive sphere). The right that officials arrogate to themselves to decide what is ideologically correct or not is maintained; the granting or not of a permit to leave or enter the country where one was born is still in force, which is nothing more than a brake on freedom of movement and, indirectly, on freedom of expression (many people have been denied the right to travel because of political views); the cases of censorship of books, authors (who live in Cuba or abroad), documentaries and films, etc., exist and have occurred in this 21st century, not in the "five-year gray period."

But this reality is not accepted; nor do they want to recognize the errors and injustices that were committed. And if they aren't recognized, if the true causes are not pointed out, it's not possible to state that it's a "closed case" because, continuing with the detective terminology, "the evidence" that there is still much to rectify proves it. As Dr. Arnoldo Kraus says in his book *Who Will Speak for You?: An Account of the Holocaust in Poland*:

"Human silence"—that complicit, buried and cowardly silence—is a modern invention that protects the community, depersonalizes the individual and exempts the executioners. It's a state that removes guilt and avoids reflection. When many people don't know, no one knows. When there are no guilty, nobody is responsible, and when nobody is responsible, knowing is meaningless.

In summary, I think that there are things that are repeated in our days, just as in those years, and I will give some examples:

1. The current debate hasn't been reflected in the press (only the UNEAC statement, without any explanation, so people who don't have e-mail and who aren't related to the world of culture, didn't understand anything). There was also no information about the meeting held at the Casa de las Américas, on January 30 of this year, in which Abel Prieto, Minister of Culture and member of the Political Bureau, participated. This situation resembles that of the year 1971, when the famous "Padilla case" (which also remained "behind closed doors" for the population) and its explanation can be found in the closing speech of the First Congress of Education and Culture: "Some issues related to intellectual gossip have not appeared in our newspapers. Then: 'What a problem, what a crisis, what a mystery, that they don't appear in the newspapers!' It is that, liberal bourgeois gentlemen, these issues are too inconsequential, too full of rubbish to occupy the attention of our workers and the pages of our newspapers.

2. It has not been officially recognized that there was a persecution of homosexuals, that it was government policy and that it didn't end in the 1970s (remember the Mariel Exodus in 1980: "Let the homosexuals go!"; expulsions of militants of the Communist Youth that occurred in the universities in that decade under the accusation of being "mannered" etc.). This is reflected in *One Hundred Hours with Fidel*, pages 253-255, second edition, September 2006.

3. A high official of the Ministry of Culture stated at the meeting held at the Casa de las Américas, on January 30, that Padilla had been "a coward, an actor and a cynic." In the conference that day, "The Five-Year Gray Period: Revisiting the Term," Ambrosio Fornet writes about what happened to Padilla: "Every so often we heard that he was very active as a spontaneous consultant to foreign diplomats and journalists in transit through Havana, whom he instructed on the most dissimilar topics: the fate of socialism, of the world revolution, of young Cuban literature..." I think it should be recognized, frankly, that what happened to Padilla was an injustice and a violation of his human rights.

The enumeration of examples could continue, but already in these days a lot has been written about what happened in recent years.

I think that many people wanted the debate to spread out, not to remain in the narrow framework of the 1970s. This was not the case, although it's good to recognize that, until now, the opinions expressed through the limited space of the email and that, according to what is said, those who were able to participate in the conference on January 30, expressed themselves freely. "A leopard can't change its spots," we could say, without much enthusiasm and little conviction.

Josefina de Diego
Havana, February 20, 2007

1. *One Hundred Hours with Fidel: Conversations with Ignacio* (Second Edition. Revised and enriched with new data) / Publications Office of the Council of State / Havana, September 2006).

One hundred hours with Fidel is the second part of *History will Absolve Me: Alfredo Guevara*.

Chapter 10: *Revolution: first steps, first problems* (fragments: pages 253, 254, 255).

Ramonet: One of the reproaches made against the Revolution, in the early years, is that there was aggressive behavior, repressive behavior against homosexuals, that there were internment camps where homosexuals were locked up or repressed. What can you tell me about that?

Fidel Castro: In two words, you are talking about a supposed persecution of homosexuals. I must explain to you where that comes from, why that criticism was born. I can guarantee you that there was never any persecution against homosexuals, or internment camps for homosexuals.

R: But there are quite a few testimonials about that.

FC: What kind of problems occurred? During those early years, we were involved in an almost total mobilization of the country, given the risks of imminent aggression by the United States (...). Compulsory military service was created. We found ourselves with three problems: the need for a scholastic level to serve in the Armed Forces (...). In turn, there were some religious groups that, by principle or doctrine, didn't accept the flag or didn't accept weapons (...). Lastly, there was the situation of the homosexuals, who weren't called up for military service. You are facing problems of strong resistance against homosexuals, and against the triumph of the Revolution. At that stage we are talking about, the macho element was very present in our society, and ideas contrary to the presence of homosexuals in the military units still prevailed.

These three factors determined that military units were not called up; but additionally that became a kind of irritation factor, since they were excluded from such a hard sacrifice, and some used the argument to further criticize homosexuals.

With those three categories of those who for one reason or another were excluded, the so-called Military Units to Aid Production (UMAP) were created, where people from the aforementioned categories participated. That was what happened.

R. Weren't they internment camps?

FC: These units were created throughout the country and carried out work activities, mainly to help agriculture.

In other words, it didn't only affect the category of homosexuals, although it certainly affected part of them, those who were called up for compulsory military service, an obligation in which everyone was participating.

Hence the problem arises, and it's true that they were not internment units, nor were they punishment units; on the contrary, it was about raising the morale of those who entered these units, presenting them with a chance to work, to help the country in those difficult circumstances.

JUAN ANTONIO GARCÍA BARRERO

Translated by Alicia Barraqué Ellison

Dear Enrique,

Your message to Desiderio has encouraged me to add some ideas to this debate which, to my liking, has left us with an excess of words in the middle of a desert of actions. Compared to the richness of the reflections that have been heard that final declaration of the UNEAC verges on the scandalous due to its grayness and superficiality. On the other hand, I think you are the only one in the critics' guild who seems to have felt publicly sensitized to the controversy in question, so I appreciate that in your writing it's clear that what you call "civic responsibility" also concerns those of us who try to think about Cuban cinema.

I'm interested in retaining a couple of things from your reflection. Those that have to do not with the anecdote, but with that way of assuming the life that has become something natural to us. I believe that if a hundred years go by, it will cost God and effort for the Cuban (the one from Havana and the one from Miami, the one from Camagüey and the one from Madrid) to put aside that Hollywood vision of existence, in which those who don't think exactly like me are the villains, and only those who have millimetrically exact thoughts to mine are trustworthy. We know that this is nonsense, but we have wholeheartedly embraced this foolishness. It's almost an addiction.

I would like to talk, like you, about Cuban cinema. I think it's still virgin ground for discussion. In general, we have discussed more vehemently the relevance of "Forrest Gump" having so many Oscars than the effectiveness of our own cinema. Which doesn't mean it's not important to talk about the Oscar, as long as it's critically examined as a cultural phenomenon. Gratuitous Oscarophobia is just as harmful and petulant as Oscaromania.

I continue to insist that Cuban cinema is much better studied outside Cuba (example: France and the United States) than in our country. This is because speaking critically about the history of Cuban cinema means subjecting the relationship that this artistic expression has maintained over almost five decades with the political vanguard to scrutiny. And from Cuba, that is quite complex to do, because it can annoy that vanguard. You mention the case of "Alicia in Wondertown," but you'd have to go back to "PM," and the reception at the time of "Memories of Underdevelopment." The reaction of certain political commissars would also have to be taken into account when, in the middle of the *pavonato*, "One Day in November" was made, only released six years later. Or one would have to speak equally of "Glass Ceiling." Or "The Charm of Return," never exhibited despite winning a Caracol award or something like that.

What happened to Cuban cinema during the so-called "five gray years" is still paradoxical. It's true that a film like "One Day in November" was withheld for six or seven years without being released, because it was finished at that time when the cultural policy represented by Pavón (not invented by him) became natural law, and the order from the "First Congress of Education and Culture" assigned to ICAIC was still in

force, which is the increase of historical films to help legitimize those hundred years of struggle for national independence.

A story like that of Solás, with everything and its rather edifying ending, seemed doomed not to fall within the permissible parameters of the censors, who were more attentive to the protests of the intellectuals about the Padilla case, than to the possible criticism that could come from within. Only that Titón was shrewd enough to turn the story of “A Cuban Fight Against the Demons” into an always contemporary analysis of what ideological intolerance can be, and the same with “The Last Supper,” where it’s possible to perceive the portrait of something that has never abandoned us: double standards. Titón himself would comment in one of his last interviews that the Church and the Party have so many things in common that the story of “The Last Supper” can be extrapolated without much effort.

I believe that the responsibility surrounding this absence of debate on Cuban cinema in the country is shared. And here I can seem incendiary. But it’s not just about those who censor television, even when their responsibility is decisive. There is also a lot of responsibility on the critics and filmmakers, who perhaps have preferred to ensure our next book or filming before discussing *ad nauseam* what, obviously, is an outrage: the censorship of national films on national television itself. I remember that once I participated as a delegate in one of the UNEAC Congresses, and the point I wanted to raise was precisely that: the non-presence of Cuban cinema on television.

The official who was coordinating the event at the time told me that there were more important things to discuss, and suggested “other problems” to raise. I also remember that in that same event Rolando Pérez Betancourt said the same thing, arguing in great detail and in a very intelligent way each of those questions that you now outline. And nothing happened. “Strawberry and Chocolate” still doesn’t appear on local television, although it’s systematically projected on Cubavisión Internacional. Someone has decided that the Cuban viewer (the insider) is too young, intellectually, and that despite so much education and level of schooling, he’s not competent to see a film like this. That way of thinking reminds me of a brilliant phrase by Julio García Espinosa, when he talks about “the double standards of cinema.”

However, my question goes further: in the midst of all this, where are the Cuban filmmakers? We already know that critics will not be able to program “Strawberry and Chocolate” on television because the rules are the rules, and they have to comply with them. They don’t make the rules, although of course they have a voice, and that privilege of public enunciation that they have been granted should be used in order to reflect on what society really needs, and not on what those who rule the media expect to talk about. All things considered, the existence of Cuban cinema within the television framework seems nonsense, since it’s as if one were speaking in two languages: on the one hand, television with its inveterate tradition of celebration, and on the other, Cuban cinema, with its tendency to show a more complex vision of reality and a more humane image of a country that, like everyone I know, has a lot of pain and laughter.

That the filmmakers have no real influence in the Cuban media is clear. What is not clear to me is to what extent the filmmakers seem determined to denounce this situation. To oppose this and not become accomplices of the nonsense. I have defended a thesis that has lavished me with countless detractors. Some time ago I published a little essay titled *La utopía confiscada (De la gravedad del sueño a la ligereza del realismo)* [*The Confiscated Utopia. From the gravity of the dream to the lightness of realism*], which clearly sought to promote an “enlightened” discussion between filmmakers and critics. The essay was barely replicated (thought about) by a couple of filmmakers (Arturo Sotto, Jorge Luis Sánchez), although rumors or oral responses from the hallway abounded, written as I always say, on cigarette paper. In my opinion, this was proof that intellectual organicity had been confiscated within Cuban cinema. And I’m not speaking about the usual organic intellectual, but about the artist who, being a heretic by nature, opts for silence, which is not a natural condition, but an imposed one.

The thesis of *The Confiscated Utopia* also spoke of the need to put aside those false divisions in which creators and critics see each other as irreconcilable antagonists. As far as I know, thinking is not exclusive to critics, and criticism can be creative. But that creative thought begins at home, and perhaps it’s still a hasty impression, but filmmakers in Cuba at some point gave up that collective goal in which a Titón, a García Espinosa or a Solás were recognized, to face the harder survival.

The desire to survive makes us selfish, because what is imposed is “every man for himself,” and measured thinking falls by the wayside. I continue to insist on the thesis, well, until the contrary is proven, that there was no Cuban cinema of the 1990s, but rather filmmakers trying to make their films. Filmmakers who thought for themselves because circumstances forced them to. Hence, a decision as absurd as that of banishing Cuban cinema from national television is counting on the almost unanimous and involuntary support of all. Of bureaucrats and filmmakers. Of critics and public. He who is silent concedes, the saying would go. I admit that what I say is still a personal impression. What’s serious is that almost nobody cares to discuss this in Cuba. In our collective imagination, the ICAIC continues to be an island within the Island, which even influences the way filmmakers conceive of their films.

Not a few of these films continue to use the same model of representation that was in vogue at the beginning of the sixties. As if time had not passed. As if it were Robinson Crusoe who was filming himself. Or as if 1959 were just around the corner. Nor is it about trying to make another “Memories of Underdevelopment” or “Lucía,” but rather to feed on that same heretical spirit that mobilized the production of that decade, the one that surpassed the ideological order, to become a paradigm of a cultural phenomenon (the new Latin American cinema) that still survives in memory.

Outside the country, many attack the ICAIC as a mere propaganda machine of the system, but the demand for a national cinema was already present in the fifties, and it was this combination of desires (aesthetic and ideological) that allowed its rapid leadership on the Continent. Today that leadership doesn’t exist. All you need is to compare the bulk of the most recent Cuban films with the Latin American films that are

currently leading certain renewal movements, and you can see to what extent we have remained isolated in that field as well.

There is neither good political cinema (like the documentaries of Santiago Álvarez) nor innovative cinema on an aesthetic level. The only way to recover that creative spirit of yesteryear is by discussing *ad nauseam*, updating the narrative arsenal, turning the corridors of the ICAIC into a traveling cinematheque where people live cinema, and not from the cinema. And above all learning to discuss, because among us (filmmakers and critics), that primitive feeling still prevails that makes us think that any discrepancy is a personal problem, if not a political one.

Although I'm interested in the culture of debate, I don't like the gratuitous response. I think there are many people living off that ancient tool that insults those who don't think like them. Not in our case. Your writing has made me think, and that's what matters. Unfortunately, the controversies around Cuban cinema have revolved around other interests outside the cinema itself. And they have almost always ended up silenced by circumstances that won't exist tomorrow, although they have too much influence on the lives of particular filmmakers.

No one returns to Daniel Díaz Torres (not the filmmaker, but the human being) the calm stolen in those bad times of "Alicia," nor does anyone restore Titón and Tabío's tranquility after Fidel's public criticism of "Guantanamera." Or to Solás for his misunderstandings as a result of "One Day in November" or "Cecilia." That is perhaps the saddest thing that happens with those "cultural policies" designed with apparent good will, policies that speak a lot about collective principles and very little about flesh and blood beings. They are policies that, like all policies, end up dehumanizing art and its reception.

Since I am still interested in supporting the idea of critical thinking from within (which, for some, is a symptom of the most decadent naivety), I want to applaud your text as one of the most lucid that, linked to Cuban cinema, I have read in long time. And I'm glad that it comes from someone who works within the ICAIC, that is, from an artist who thinks. Hopefully this is the prelude to that date when the debate in Cuba (understood as a nation and not just as a physical island) is what it really should be: the path for our common improvement.

A hug,
Juan Antonio García Borrero

Another Message from Juan Antonio García Borrero to Gustavo Arcos Fernández-Brito

My dear Gustavo:

Like everything in this life, the Internet has its undeniable advantages, but also its dark side. If, on the one hand, thanks to the Internet, the public sphere seems to recover some of its autonomy (as this debate that keeps us busy right now demonstrates, and,

luckily, no one can control or lead it for an express purpose), on the other, it runs the risk of total dispersion. I admit, then, that it has been a mistake to say that Colina is the only Cuban critic to be sensitive to the matter. I should have said that he was the only one I knew, and in this way avoid that simplified vision that I myself have tried to combat with my previous writing. I would be grateful, then, if you would send me the considerations of Luciano, Frank and yours, which will surely be very useful to me. As the best philosopher who has ever looked at a screen has said: “No one is perfect.”

Another aspect that I must clarify is that reference to critical thinking “from within.” It’s a statement that seems to say that those of us who live on the Island have a monopoly on the truth, when there is everything in the Lord’s Vineyard. There are those who live in Miami and have never left the pre-revolutionary Vedado. There are those who live in Mayarí Arriba and from there perceive with much more clarity what the current world is, especially when they go to a ration store that doesn’t look like the ones in Vedado. But there are those who live in some uncertain place in the Cuban nation, not the physical one but the imagined one, and they know that this is not a movie of good guys and bad guys, but something more complex. Critical thought (if it’s real and tries to adjust to the rigor of contrasts) surely benefits the adversaries, and makes them discover unpublished areas of the discussion, the same in Havana as in Madrid. In the end, nobody argues to impose a vision for life, but so that those who come after can obtain a higher point of view.

But let’s talk about cinema, which is what interests me right now (even when I know that cinema is not the problem that this country must solve with the most urgency). I see that from his blog, Duanel Díaz argues with my vision of revolutionary cinema. His is an opinion I respect but don’t share. I don’t want to be naïve or ungrateful. I admit that no film is innocent, and from *Juan Quin Quin* [*Adventures of Juan Quin Quin*] to date, passing through *Fresa y chocolate* [*Strawberry and Chocolate*] and reaching *Suite Habana* [*Havana Suite*], Cubans of my generation have been shaped by the visions of the world that are articulated in those films.

And I’m grateful for that, because it has allowed me to attend a cinema that isn’t just a simple escape, that isn’t a substitute for that trash they tend to uncritically sell us in “Saturday’s Movie,” and that far from encouraging a critical spirit in the audience contributes to their alienation. I’m not opposed to entertainment, because without it we surely would go straight to suicide, but that attitude of national television leaves me unsatisfied, which on the one hand speaks about the horrors of imperialism in the Round Table, and two hours later shows on the same channels the worst of the “enemy” cinema. Or that censors the ICAIC films and turns most of its film spaces into a free zone for Hollywood’s most debatable ideas (there are always exceptions, and we know of colleagues who insist on promoting another type of cinema, be it Latin American, Iranian, European or North American).

I’ve defended and will continue to defend the ICAIC cinema because films have been made in its shadow that will last beyond our specific conflicts. Because in many of its stories the uncertainties of an era can be discovered between the lines, and not just the strict anecdotes of a revolution that, like all others, leaves winners and losers, joys and

sorrows. Those who insist on attacking the ICAIC cinema for its ideological assumptions are losing sight of the fact that we're talking about a production that was (is) conceived by human beings, and not by machines that say yes or no to everything. Simple apology of the system? Then where would we leave Guillén Landrián's irreverence? Sara Gómez's disturbing questions in those documentaries about Miguel's island? Fausto Canel's rootlessness? Alberto Roldán's absence? The nonchalance of *Memorias del subdesarrollo* [*Memories of Underdevelopment*]?" The existential doubts of the protagonist of *Un día de noviembre* [*A Day in November*]?"

If this had only been a reaffirming production, then the cinema made by Cubans in the diaspora would have obtained better results, taking into account that it has had greater freedom of expression, but it happened that the ICAIC cinema was made with another type of intentionality: the ideological became aesthetic from the moment it coincided with an era that demanded those changes and more. The ICAIC cinema was one more within the set of cinemas (such as the Polish, the free cinema, the new cinema or the third cinema of Solanas and Getino) that tried to blow up the most usual model of representation. It's true that it coincided with a violent rupture in politics (the Revolution), but even before, the dissatisfaction with the Cuban cinema of yesteryear was notorious. Even *P.M.* participated in that desire to experiment with film language.

Attacking the ICAIC only from an ideological point of view reduces the analysis to the support it received from the State. But this support hasn't been so transparent, if we review the relationship that this institution has maintained with the political vanguard: at least three or four films have caused major disagreements (think of *Cecilia*, *Alicia en el pueblo de Maravillas* [*Alice in Wondertown*] or *Guantanamera*), while others such as *Lejanía* [*Distance*], *Papeles secundarios* [*Secondary Roles*], *Techo de vidrio* [*Glass Ceiling*] or *Pon tu pensamiento en mí* [*Put Your Thoughts on Me*] have mobilized more than one official resentment.

On the other hand, judging the cinema of Titón, to mention one, only from political militancy, makes him lose what is human about that creation. Whoever reads his correspondence knows that Titón had the same questions in the fifties, because since that time he was interested in the finitude of being; for example, hence the almost constant presence of Death in his films. But by ignoring this issue, the interpretation may lead to the political observations that we already know about *Guantanamera*.

I think that in this ICAIC cinema many times, over and above ideology, it's possible to detect the behavior of the most common mentalities, although other times I have commented that it's necessary to talk about Cuban cinema in general, and not only about the ICAIC, because in that submerged cinema that Colina doesn't mention in the television omissions (and to which Belkis Vega refers in her reflection), one can also perceive many of the illusions of the Cuban.

I don't doubt that the ICAIC has questionable areas, and that some of its films militate in the most Manichean scheme, but I don't think it has been the rule. Precisely what should arouse the most interest right now in the Cuban film historian is the exploration of those submerged tensions between the individual and society, which have made

possible so many films with more than one message. That desire to explore is still not in sight, perhaps because prudence counts more than the challenge. Or because that misleading message continues to predominate, which is often internal, alerting us that “it’s not the moment.”

However, the urgency of this necessary debate about our cinema has been postponed due to the evidence of a mystery that I confess is truly absurd: what is the exact reason that prevents a good part of Cuban cinema from being shown on national television? For those who have systematically attacked the Revolution for what it represses, it’s clear that it’s a problem of freedom of expression. I refuse to believe that it’s something so crude, because it’s evident that these films are not counterrevolutionary. I mean, they’re not *Azúcar amarga* [*Bitter Sugar*] or *La ciudad Perdida* [*The Lost City*].

As primitive as the mentality of a bureaucrat with power may be, he knows that this is not the best way to protect the Revolution, or at least he will have advisors sensitive to the cultural issue, who will bring him up to date on those international awards that *Strawberry and Chocolate* and *Havana Suite* have won, so it’s really nonsense to turn something that is so notable internationally into hostages of the shadow.

Of course, these officials have the power of decision, but I also like to remember that the time the dissolution of ICAIC was announced almost by decree as a result of *Alice*, it was the filmmakers themselves (from within) who pushed back that decision that came from above. A proof that the power of reason cannot always be silenced by the reason of power.

My suspicion is that right now, filmmakers and critics are divided among themselves over questions of survival rather than thought, and the bureaucracy knows how to take advantage of that. Everyone goes their own way, because it’s more important to obtain financing for the film itself than to maintain the existence of a national cinema project at all costs (because only the showing of our films on television would end up confirming that this film project exists). And of course, it’s not among the priorities of the filmmaker eager to film to demand that our films be shown to the public for which these works were originally conceived: the Cuban people. Neither does it foster spaces where thought and systematic debate make life intellectually impossible for that bureaucracy. It’s a matter of the period, they’ll tell me, and it’s true: an ICAIC-style production center is no longer essential to promote a work. But although production has been democratized, exhibition has not.

Non-Hollywood filmmakers continue to depend first on the festivals, then on the support of their respective states (which outside Cuba don’t have much support, or if not, see the case of Cuban filmmakers in the diaspora), and last, on the television channels interested in showing this type of product. Therefore, it’s a really important problem that has to do with our audiovisual memory (wherever Cubans are), and that deserves to transcend the discussions of those who discuss “cultural policies” in general, or of political antagonists who try to cancel each other out due to irreconcilable criteria.

It shouldn't even cross our minds to believe that Cuban television isn't proud to show on its screens what is assumed in other latitudes as part of the revolutionary culture. In fact, it will be difficult to explain to our grandchildren why a film like *Strawberry and Chocolate* took more than a decade to go on television, despite showing that fervor for the national project that the Revolution announced. If it seems absurd now, five decades from now it will seem pathetic.

Surely I have a thousand things left to say, and I have no doubt that opinions will arise that seek to disqualify everything that I present here, but as I think I told you in another message, I'm not interested in announcing ultimate truths, only in sowing a little concern around what we barely know: the history of Cuban cinema. This is just my view of the problem, one of many that, according to Rashomon's cautionary tale, could admit the matter. New opinions will surely improve it, and hopefully more than one colleague will feel encouraged to participate.

Another hug,
Juan Antonio Garcia Borrero

JUAN CARLOS TABÍO

Translated by Regina Anavy

I'm absolutely in agreement with everything you say.

Juan Carlos Tabío

JUAN PIN

Translated by Mary Jo Porter

As you know, the most used argument for any public or private Cuban cultural debate divides the pulses of the different criteria into two fundamental currents, left and right, in the long run terms that in reality, and in my opinion, circumscribe the discussion to specifically intellectual opinions, about a matter that has a lot to do with the very nature of the formation of the revolutionary elite in power, which hasn't been the same during fifty years.

We know very little about the ideological debates that the different members of the elite faced and less about their internal political alliances. The just fear of the fragmentation of that elite, on the one hand, caused us to remain “compartmentalized” all these years of a debate that today is expressed with abundant curiosity among the youngest, confused by history books, pamphlets, appointments, photographs and authorized biographies, revised and written as blandly as any of the books approved during the *pavonato*.

Within that skein of political interests, insurreccional and non-insurreccional, some prior to the fall of the Batista, are the embryos of Pavón, or of those who, like him, served as victimizers. Nothing excuses them. They don't have any reason for such arbitrary and immoral behavior, but they did have—and have—the authorization and delegation of powers. They were not isolated policies and they are easily identifiable in those initial debates of the revolutionary victory.

What has been happening on television for a long time, and with worse to come, I'm sure that expresses more than a trend, the enormous ignorance that today reigns due to its respect in the ICRT, although I think that in times of crisis, paying homage to the perpetrators is also a way to remove them from the debate and prevent them from revealing those major fissures. I'm not going to write a string of arguments about this last idea, which would make most of the debaters pale and a good part of them withdraw due to fear, misinformation or ignorance.

I've spent the last three years of my life collecting testimonies, not only from the victims but also from the perpetrators, to articulate a verbal work to give to my daughter, who is only five years old, when she's old enough to judge the events that happened. I hope you are interested in the problems that hinder life and the future of the time that you have, but very few tools are bequeathed to you by the institutions, much less by you, the survivors. Whenever you want, in the circumstances you want, in the way you choose that is for the benefit of love, my country, the best of the revolution and sanity, count on me for the debate. But Rey, you know very well that they will never invite me.

Juan Pin

LEONARDO ACOSTA

Translated by Mary Jo Porter

From 1959 to date, the ICRT has been characterized as the media and cultural organization (????) that has enjoyed, or rather that has suffered, the punishment of having the most mediocre and/or most blatantly abusive and irresponsible leaders of the country, almost always oblivious to journalism and culture, or indifferent to both professions. The “Papito” Serguera case had the rare privilege of combining each and every one of these “qualities,” added to his anti-historical performance as a diplomat that unfortunately has been forgotten and that was on the verge of alienating our friendship with one of the countries of the Third World most intimately united to Cuba through the revolutionary processes of both countries and the first large-scale Cuban internationalist mission in the face of the cunning imperialist invasion against those brothers.

In the case of Luis Pavón, there are so many open or covert accomplices that it's not worth mentioning them here, but it's indisputable that his permanence at the head of the CNC for much more than a “five-year period” only served to engender or at least prolong a state of “Blood, Sweat and Tears” in the national culture. But the praise of both characters, now added to that of the frustrated, resentful and vindictive Torquesada and to the disastrous Congress of Education and Culture of 1971, is simply an infamy and an insult to the memory of José Martí, Félix Varela and all our heroes and intellectuals. This makes me think that there are sinister characters behind this true campaign for the rehabilitation of hired assassins who have done so much damage to our country and to the unquestionable world prestige of the Revolution. Who should be summoned for these excesses? I believe first of all, the ICRT. I believe that all journalists, writers, artists, scientists and, of course, the clear political minds that abound in our country, have a duty to unite so that it can be explained to us how it's possible that this lack of tact, respect and sensitivity is allowed, which places us on the level of certain countries of the Southern Cone, under characters such as the disastrous Menem, the champion of neoliberalism, with his laws calling for forgiveness and forgetfulness towards torturers.

Act quickly and with tact and intelligence.

Leonardo Acosta

LEONARDO PADURA

Translated by Regina Anavy

Colleagues, who says that coincidences don't exist? Now just a few minutes ago, coincidentally, on the "Noon on Television" program, they interviewed the director of the *Impronta* program, nominated for several awards at the television festival, and they spoke—I do not quote verbatim, but truthfully—of the depth and quality of his work, which teaches viewers so much. What a coincidence, right?

The response of Cuban Television to the unleashed controversy and the indignation of so many people seems clear to me.

My solidarity, as you know, and my affections,
Padura

Memory and Forgetfulness - (Cult. and Soc.01/07)

By Leonardo Padura Fuentes

Cuban art and society at the center of a debate

The month of January 2007 will be remembered, in Cuba, for the almost summer temperatures that passed through its days. But, more than for these thermal effects of the threatening climate change, I think that it will have to be remembered, necessarily and I would say obligatorily, for the explosion of a burning controversy into which, through alternative email channels, Cuban intellectuals threw themselves with an indignation, fury and responsiveness worthy of the events that generated the debate and, above all, with the lacerating pain caused by the manipulation of a poorly stitched-up physical and spiritual wound which, therefore, never completely closed.

Although I think that all those truly interested in Cuban political and cultural life have a more or less approximate notion of what happened, the deficient management of information on the subject (as other times) still forces a brief but necessary account of the origins and emanations of a debate that, in my opinion, doesn't concern only creators, but also Cuban society as a whole.

When in the first days of the month the television program *Impronta*, dedicated to highlighting personalities whose work has precisely left an imprint on Cuban public and cultural life, brought the poet Luis Pavón Tamayo to its space, an earthquake of indignation and pain ran through the conscience and memory of Cuban creators who, directly and indirectly, for many years, had to pay in their spirits and in their works the most dissimilar and humiliating aggressions of intolerance, repression, censorship (and her natural daughter, the castrating self-censorship), suspicion and fear.

In reality, the aseptic rescue of Pavón Tamayo, about whose performance as a fierce instrument of a repressive policy from the offices of the National Council of Culture, in the first half of the seventies of the last century, nothing was said in the program, was the final straw for a strange and suspicious (we have suspicion in our marrow) tendency

to resurrect in various television programs and always from friendly perspectives, leading characters from the darkest side of Cuban cultural policy of the last decades, as was the case of Armando Quesada (scourge of the Cuban theatrical world in the early seventies, invited to the television space *Open Dialogue*), and Jorge Serguera (ruthless president of national television, interviewed on the program *The Difference*).

The explosive and immediate reaction of several writers and artists, who vehemently and spontaneously expressed their indignation and asked the country's cultural leadership for an explanation for such unexpected and repeated resurrections of those censors-repressors, became the classic snowball that began to roll, adding adhesions, adding stories of victims, asking for clarification of such "casual" rescues and, what is more important, bringing to the fore the effects that, at the time and for many years, the policy applied by those characters from their places of power had and would have for the Cuban artistic work.

The passionate discussion of the intellectuals continued for several days on Internet channels, but without any reflection in the country's official media, until last January 18, when the Secretariat of the National Union of Writers and Artists of Cuba [UNEAC] published a statement, reported by the newspaper *Granma*, the official organ of the Communist Party of Cuba. From the beginning, it affirmed that the UNEAC shares "the just indignation of a group of our most important writers and artists as a consequence of recent broadcasts of three Cuban Television programs: *Open Dialogue*, *The Difference* and, in particular, *Imprint*." It added that "The fundamental concern of the *compañeros* [...] was that the aforementioned programs might respond to an intention and express a trend alien to the cultural policy that has guaranteed and guarantees our unity. It was of the greatest importance to have from the first moment the absolute backing of the Party leadership."

Although for those who weren't aware of the details of the debate (most of the inhabitants of the Island, that is), the solitary statement barely told them that something had happened of which they had no news or background. For those in the know, even when we weren't entirely satisfied with the tone and scope of the UNEAC document, it became clear that an essential issue was included in it: silence and indolence are no longer possible, because a wounded memory doesn't admit new manipulations.

What has been expressed by Cuban creators in recent weeks has served to highlight errors in the country's cultural policy that were never debated or overcome through critical examination, but only through the silent, forgetful rectification that made it possible for many of those who suffered the rigor of the so-called "parametrations" and other repressive methods that marginalized them for long years, a slow rehabilitation in the country's public and cultural life that would allow many of them to even hold important and more-than-deserved honorary awards for their valuable life's work.

However, the imprint that those policies left on the final years of the lives of intellectuals such as José Lezama Lima and Virgilio Piñera, who died in the second half of the 1970s without seeing their books published again, without being interviewed again and hardly even mentioned ("civil deaths" as Antón Arrufat called it), is more difficult to repair,

even though for several years writers like them have become an object of worship and their real “imprint” on Cuban culture recognized time and time again.

While the most heated and indignant part of the electronic debate took place, I was tempted several times to give my point of view, but I was stopped by the certainty that I could add little to what other colleagues had already said and, above all, the fact that my opinions about the infamy of those years are sufficiently expressed, I think clearly, in almost all my novels, especially *Mascaras* [Masks] and *La novela de mi vida* [*The Story of My Life*], and in several critical works and many interviews.

However, throughout all these days and while the opinions of even personalities not directly linked to the world of art accumulate in my inbox, a concern that has accompanied me for many years has not ceased to haunt me: the loss of memory and the manipulation of oblivion to which we are compelled by those who only aspire to remember figures, data and moments favorable to their positions.

The untimely and unexpected resurgence of apparently buried figures, executors of policies that cannot be pigeonholed in the margins of a still unresolved past, and now presented to the general public without the adjectives that their performance deserved and deserves, is at the very least a biased way (I cannot speak of intentionality, because my knowledge of the intricacies of those rescues doesn't allow me to do so) to go over the past and to rewrite a story by proposing an inadmissible oblivion.

On occasion, we Cubans have been accused of having very little memory, and, with cases like that of these characters, everything seems to indicate that there are those who think so. The immediate and furious reaction of the intellectuals, on the other hand, indicates the opposite. The “imprint” of the coercion of artistic and individual freedoms carried out during those years that Ambrosio Fornet benevolently called the “five-year gray period” (in reality it was more than a five-year period and its color was much darker), the censorship of what today would seem ridiculous to us, the marginalization of artists and students due to their religious beliefs or their sexual preferences are processes and traumas that accompany us to this day.

Moreover, the suspicion that covered every action or opinion not supported by the strictest orthodoxy like a cloak, the exacerbated dogmatism with which the most diverse attitudes were prosecuted, the ease with which we were accused of having “ideological problems” and the consequent fear of being repressed and expelled from work or study centers for reasons that life has overcome, happily, cannot be forgotten, since they are wounds that many of us received. The trivialization of various manifestations of cultural creation, the marginalization of Cuban artists from international “capitalist” activities, the insistence on Sovietizing and indoctrinating creation were processes that weighed down works, lives and the very essence of Cuban culture.

The memory of the Cuban intelligentsia and, even more, the collective memory of the country in which we live, needs a review (now it doesn't matter if it's late, as long as it's profound) of the burdens and excesses of that past, as the only alternative to preserve in

the future the spaces for reflection, criticism, opinion, communication and creation gained in the present by Cuban creators and intellectuals.

The creation of the Ministry of Culture, in 1976, certainly marked a turning point in the application of cultural policies in the country. From that moment began a slow recovery of an artistic life still lacerated by dogmatism and opportunism. The 1980s witnessed a fierce struggle to gain space, to validate the possibility of critical art, to recover names and works buried in the previous decade. During the harsh years of the 1990s, among the most oppressive material miseries, Cuban art grew, became stronger, once again occupied spaces in the complex universe of the international market and established, I think definitively, the possibility of making a critical, questioning and incisive work from within the borders of the Island.

This gain has been of such importance and transcendence that today these are the signs that best characterize Cuban artistic creation and explain the very attitude of the intellectuals who live in Cuba of not admitting in silence what many consider a true provocation to the memory and current reality of Cuban art. The consensus around a position of principles is the mark of the times and constitutes the sign of a space for reflection, criticism and even indignation.

Fortunately, the snowball that has broken off from four, five e-mails, between astonishment and indignation, is beginning to put memory in its place and will save from oblivion the infamies of a past in urgent need of a definitive solution. The Declaration of the UNEAC Secretariat doesn't seem to be the end of the debate, as perhaps some thought, but rather an incitement to sustain it. For now, the messages continue to cross the paths of the network, and in public spaces the processes of those years and their consequences in artistic creation, in education, in the Cuban conscience are being discussed.

The controversy over the freedom of creation on the island and the artist's right to work according to his needs and preferences has been unleashed; the critical assessment of the errors made in the application of socialist cultural policy is on the table and the health of our memory and our society itself is being analyzed and, rightly, rescued. More than the end, I trust that we are at the beginning of a necessary examination process for Cuban art and society, so in need of open, truly open, inclusive and incisive dialogues, with everyone and for the good of all.

Leonardo Padura
Mantilla, January 22, 2007

LEONEL BRITO

Translated by Regina Anavy

I am addressing you perhaps at the wrong time, but better late than never, as the well-known popular saying recommends. The monastic life that I lead in one of the Battle of Ideas programs has made me drastically separate myself from my usual contacts with the cultural world, which is why I have arrived late to the controversy that was unleashed around the shameful appearance of several people in charge of the cultural policy of the “black decade” and not the “grey five-year period” as Desiderio Navarro has lucidly stated in his *In medias res publica*.

I am young (barely in my twenties), and in part I am responding to Arturo Arango’s fair complaint about how alarming it would be if those of my generation did not take part in this outrage, beyond the fact that we have not lived through this atrocious and horrifying process. As Oscar Llanes says very well, the exclusion of our presence now would be precisely to reproduce, consciously or unconsciously (we no longer know), those repressive methods such as silencing and marginalization, not known in all their dimensions and edges. It’s time to talk, comment, discuss this topic as closed as other aspects could have been in those years.

Take into account, for example, that these names (Luis Pavón, Jorge Serguera and others) are now heard by us for the first time. I and many young people do not want under any circumstances to suffer a second part of the *pavonato* (remember that the second parts were never good), or the appearance of those sinister little characters, directly or indirectly responsible for embittering the life and work of many intellectuals who advocated a plural thought, as should happen in a true democratic society that is receptive towards the opinion of its citizens, especially considering the epic and apologetic projection with which they were presented.

And it is not only a lack of the most elementary ethics, since I am not talking about that humanistic ethics which we brag about before the world and before ourselves, but also an insensitive aggression to the majority of those who lived through that time, whether they are intellectuals or not, (relatives, friends and people in general) who had to suffer in the most unknown ways the dogmatism, opportunism and misrepresentation of a certain ideology manipulated to the point of paroxysm, forms that are still unknown to many of us.

Publicly praising people implied in this barbarism doesn’t fit in a political and social context such as today’s. It’s not only a symptom or a syndrome as another of the polemicists said, but also without ghosts or pathological elaborations, a very clear announcement of what could happen in an increasingly uncertain future that could repeat new and worse events. Therefore, the protest that you have initiated seems to me to be just and irrevocably necessary. You can count on the support of the youngest, of those who begin their walk along a path that can be abruptly cut off, and we are not willing to submit, not because of our parents, but because of ourselves.

Leonel Brito Coro Discordant

LETICIA CÓRDOVA

Translated by Mary Jo Porter

After so many years of being gagged, we couldn't expect anything more than this discordant choir in which the voices scramble, one on top of the other; we must respond to the opinion that was issued yesterday, also to the one that was silenced. They barely stop long enough to be read, and they overlap with others that we already collected on our computers or under the covers of some vulgar-looking file. There is everything: some reasonable, others excessive. A necessary set for understanding the damage and pain that we Cubans carry on our consciences.

Just like Galileo Galilei, they showed us the instruments of torture. This time on television. Culture and/or Party officials must have been amazed that the same silence as always did not ensue. You have to be very naive—I know it's a very polite adjective—on the one hand, to swallow the story that it's a matter of an adverse sequence of clumsiness and, on the other, to believe for a second that Cuban television is the place where “belligerent ignorance” is based. Alfredo Guevara must have known this well, because since 1960 he has been calling Cuban intellectuals to please have the lucidity to create following the objectives and the inspiring example of the Revolution: “the only limit to freedom is freedom”—an ingenious phrase in which it's not clear what freedom is, but what its limits are. With the passage of time and the vicissitudes of practice, this call became less obsequious.

Can anyone defend the idea that the *Round Table* is a television program? Is it an initiative of the “ignorants,” who, according to Guevara, conspire against the Revolution?

There's no doubt that the Cuban government has known very well how to keep the people at bay during these 48 years. One of the reasons why many compatriots left was to be able to express their opinion, something that they couldn't do here without regretting the consequences. Power long ago showed how a man's poetry-book and his spirit can be reduced to a pulp. There's the poet Delfín Prats to prove it. With others, it turned them into fairground characters.

Literally.

Those of us who live here must not forget that, wherever we are, we are Cubans, and the country is not only ours because of the circumstance of inhabiting it. Every Cuban has the right to express an opinion on Cuban affairs. José María Heredia does it daily from his transparent verses:

Cuba, Cuba, what a life you gave me, sweet land of light and beauty, how many dreams of glory and fortune I have attached to your happy soil!

We must not forget our past. We urgently need it to be able to decipher our present and face our future.

In the Intervention at the meeting between Fidel Castro and the intellectuals, in the José Martí National Library, in which the issue of artistic creation was discussed, after the ban on *P.M.* in June 1961, Alfredo Guevara expressed: I want to clarify, of course, that I'm not one of those who has fears; from the Revolution I expect only positive things in all fields, including the field of art, including the field of creation, and I believe that with the Revolution we have found all that we need to express ourselves, all of us who have something to say. All of us who want to say something have found the possibility of saying it with absolute freedom and of saying it not in a small group of bourgeois or fans, but of saying it before all our people, the broader public, the public corresponding to the entire nation. Because the revolutionary triumph is the total of the entire nation with its own ends, or at least that is how I understand it, specifically for artists (*Revolución es lucidez* [*Revolution is Lucidity*], Ediciones ICAIC, 1998, page 181).

This appears to be in response to a very brave opinion that was issued at one of these meetings. One man expressed, out loud, that he was afraid. His name was Virgilio Piñera. We would be diminishing the scope of Virgil's statement if we don't stop at an overwhelming fact. In 1952 he had published a strange novel, *La carne de René* [*René's Flesh*], an account of the terrors that beset the flesh. René, the protagonist, has received the inheritance from his father and his grandfather of the cause of flesh. For this reason, his life has been a succession of escapes and an imperious resistance to its call. With his refusal to accept the Cause, René shakes the precepts of an established world. In turn, that order will use all its weapons to persuade him. It's a sinister game in which each man has been a victim, but also a victimizer. It's worth the length of this quote:

"But father," René exclaimed sharply, "I don't see why you have to die."

"Everything can be fixed. He writes to that boss informing him that he is withdrawing from the persecution. Withdrawing from the persecution...The persecution is endless; not even death could stop it; stay there to continue it. Haven't you noticed the relay races? When a runner drops the torch, the next one picks it up instantly. Your grandfather gave me the torch; I will pass it to you. You will put it in the hands of your son or, in his default, to the most prominent member of the match. The Cause can't stop running for a single moment."

"Why do they fight?" René asked with great agitation.

"For a piece of chocolate," his father answered solemnly. "The boss who now persecutes me, many years ago managed, after a bloody fight, to bring down the powerful and ferocious boss, who had prohibited in his country, under penalty of death, the use of chocolate. This rigorously maintained a prohibition that went back in time for centuries. His ancestors, the founders of the monarchy, had banned the use of chocolate in their kingdoms. They claimed that chocolate could undermine the security of the throne. Imagine the efforts, the struggles that took place for centuries to prevent the use of such nourishment. Millions of people died; others were deported. At last the boss, who now persecutes me, won a crushing victory over the last sovereign, and we had the happiness, very brief, of having our territories flooded with chocolate."

“Tell me, father, in what way did chocolate undermine the security of the throne?”

“Very simple: the founder of the dynasty claimed that chocolate is a powerful food, that the people should be kept in perpetual semi-starvation. It was the best measure for the durability of the throne. Imagine then our joy when, after centuries of horrendous strife, we were able to flood the country with chocolate. The masses, who had inherited this pathetic predisposition to eat it, began to consume it madly. At first everything went smoothly. One bad day the boss began to restrict its use. Your grandfather, who had seen his father and his grandfather perish from the implantation of chocolate, was categorically opposed to such a restriction. And the first brush with the boss took place. As in all fights that are going to be to the death, there were essential attempts, apparent arrangements. One day we woke up and hope filled us. The boss gave *carte blanche* to the use of chocolate: another day he limited its use to three times a week. Meanwhile the discussions increased.

“Your grandfather, the most influential person close to the boss, reproached him for such a disastrous policy, going so far as to call him a “reactionary.” My father openly opposed the government, and the group of chocolatophiles was formed. I was very young then, but I clearly remember a parade under the balconies of the Government House eating chocolate bars. In retaliation, the boss confiscated whatever was left in the country. We didn’t give up and dressed in the color chocolate. The boss, considering that this could incite the people against him, declared us criminals for offending the fatherland, and he ordered a great trial. With great difficulty my father was able to cross the border and seek asylum in a neighboring country. The result of the trials was the death of thousands of our people.”

“If they weren’t guilty, why were they executed?” Rene yelled, beside himself.

“Why? Ask the Boss.” Ramón let out a laugh. “It’s the will of the Party that you be my successor both as persecuted and persecutor. They are two diametrically opposed functions. Each requires a different tactic. You will learn both. As in recent times luck has been adverse to us, you must prepare yourself to be the great persecuted of our Cause. My advice is that, without expressly renouncing the job of persecutor, put the emphasis on the very complicated technique of the persecuted. Don’t forget that for the time being, the Cause’s durability depends on flight. A good escaper can cause a lot of damage to the enemy. He who flees does so from two things: from another man like him and from confession.” (*La carne de René*, Ediciones UNIÓN, 1995).

The rest is known history. Virgilio died in 1979. They say that very few people attended his funeral. In 1968 he had written *Dos viejos pánicos* [*Two Old Fears*]. He had had the bad taste to insist on the theme of fear at a time when the ostentation of *macho* bravado was required.

Now that in a declaration by the UNEAC Secretariat, in a predictable text written in a well-known language, we are summoned not to abandon the flock, to continue to be silent like lambs of the purest lineage; now, when we are threatened with any word we

say meaning an argument in favor of annexation, I cannot forget the scrawny figure of Virgilio, walking towards a microphone to confess his fear: the fear that accuses such guilty unanimity of keeping silent.

Leticia Córdoba
Havana, February 16, 2007

LOLY ESTÉVEZ

Translated by Mary Jo Porter

Respected colleagues:

Through e-mail I have been able to learn in part about the exchange of opinions caused by the appearance on Cuban television of the program, *Imprint*, dedicated to Luis Pavón, and that of Jorge Serguera as an interviewee on *The Difference*. I don't know the content since I am currently in Spain, invited by the Jovellanos Athenaeum of Gijón. I confess my astonishment when, in some of the messages I received, I saw Quesada's appearance in *Diálogo Abierto* [*Open Dialogue*] several months ago being compared to the aforementioned "events." To two friends who asked me about the matter, I clarified that it was a program dedicated to evaluating the space's five years of work and that it included a previously recorded opinion of Quesada in his capacity as advisor to the Programming Department of Cuban Television, in charge of *Open Dialogue* and other programs.

The fact that the appearance of Quesada was linked several months ago to refer to a specific and technical matter, with the inclusion of Luis Pavón in a space dedicated to people with an intellectual work accepted as capable of making an imprint, and with the presence and statements of Jorge Serguera on *The Difference* didn't surprise me too much: let the first stone be thrown by whoever hasn't allowed himself to be led, like Vicente, where people say.

What does surprise me and motivates me to write these lines is that the UNEAC Secretariat signs a Declaration where it admits to sharing "the just indignation of a group" about three television programs and mentions in the first place *Open Dialogue*, which, automatically, is implicated in "expressing a tendency alien to the cultural policy that has guaranteed and guarantees our unity"; in the ICRT President's assessment that "serious errors had been made in its gestation and execution" and in "the blunders" that can be exploited to harm the Revolution. I wonder if they took the trouble to review the *Open Dialogue* that they so "generously" describe. Before giving an opinion—and publishing the opinion—you have to investigate.

As director and founder of *Open Dialogue*, I affirm that for six years we have respected Cuban culture and its protagonists. We work on a daily basis not for the award the program received for its category at the First National Festival of Cuban television with the theme "Where is the newest trova?" nor the Special Prize awarded by critics at the Second Festival (2006) for the space dedicated to "Cultural criticism in the media." Our difficult struggle for the complex task of making television in Cuba breathes thanks to the viewers who respect us and the personalities who attend through their media and want to collaborate with our studio to give us the prestige of their presence and their language. There have been National Awards of different specialties, experts of ample category, officials of culture and the media, consecrated figures and intellectuals and artists who will be protagonists of the future.

I declare that I'm happy to have been during 27 minutes of my life with people who, with their existence and their work, guarantee culture and unity. I haven't mentioned names so as not to invite forgetfulness, but I suggest that those officially in charge of "assessing" and "declaring" and those who exercise their right to give their opinion, request criteria regarding *Open Dialogue* from people like Reynaldo González and Miguel Barnet (yes, they have been invited to the program), who managed to turn into a work of valid imprint the time of sorrow that caused them a period that is now symbolized in Luis Pavón.

I suggest that we don't mix that which—like oil and vinegar—will end up where it belongs according to natural and social laws. I suggest not stating that the outrage is from "a group" but instead remember Hemingway and his tip of the iceberg. I suggest that the cycle of conferences programmed by the singular and wise Desiderio Navarro be joined by the voice of Dr. Isabel Monal, who, together with Fernando Martínez Heredia (and other mediocre, opportunistic and superficial Marxists) could remind us how much the so-called "real socialism" cost to ignore the concepts of Antonio Gramsci; or the time that Lenin dedicated to the cultural debate with the poet Mayakovsky; or the artistic realization in the Paris of the Vanguards and not in the Moscow of the October Revolution of the talents removed by ignorance and irresponsibility in terms of cultural policy of those who succeeded Lenin in the then-besieged and admired Soviet Union.

I suggest, above all, that there be no attempt to put an end to a necessary debate. Light is born from discussion: that is what my mother taught me, a lady educated in an Asturian home amid the prejudices of the first half of the 20th century, who was a volunteer teacher, founder of the CDR and the FMC, and who decided to marry an emigrant Galician, known in Morón for his trade union and communist militancy already at the time that Machado assassinated the labor leader Enrique Varona. Thanks to those who have read me to the end. And to those who continue to think.

See you soon,
Loly Estévez
January 22, 2007

LUCIANO CASTILLO

Translated by Regina Anavy

Faced with this ignominious “resurrection policy,” we should remember that phrase so recurrent in Cocteau that Carpentier liked to quote: ‘Men of true talent never bother others; those who poison the air that surrounds them are the mediocre and the unsuccessful.’ The poison that those guardians of culture distilled through their pores splashed not a few intellectuals and artists.

Luciano Castillo

MAGALY MUGUERCIA

Translated by Regina Anavy

Outside Cuba there are revolutionary intellectuals who chose to emigrate when it wasn't possible to make their thoughts public. Subtly, access to publishing houses and university classrooms was closed.

There is also a generation of young professionals who are now in their 30s and 40s and were educated on revolutionary principles. They left for economic reasons but also out of disappointment and fed up with being forced into obsequiousness. I know many, because it's the generation of my children. They are thoughtful and cultured people. But we are scattered around the world. If we were summoned, if someone summoned us to return to Cuba, many of us would return to assert the right of every revolutionary Cuban, at this time, to think about the future of the country. [It is] time to summon those of us who are outside so that we return to think about the country we want and to say so, because it's evident that Fidel's convalescence is opening undesirable doors.

These doors usually open towards the internal repression of thought and towards the external reception of pseudo-socialist models: capitalism with a repressive state.

Magaly Muguercia

MAGALY SÁNCHEZ

Translated by Regina Anavy

I think that creating a climate of concern and disgust among the Cuban intelligentsia at this time is the best service that has been rendered to the ideological enemy. I believe with you that we must get out of the way of that tendency to make amends and distinguish people who, guided by I don't know whom and with evident great pleasure, left such a painful mark and not only within the sphere of culture.

Magaly Sánchez

MANUEL VÁZQUEZ PORTAL

Translated by Regina Anavy

Nothing of Pavon(nearse)

These days I have learned of a debate between Cuban intellectuals and artists about the appearance on official television—the only one—of some old officials of culture. I obtained the first information through emails sent to me by some friends scattered throughout those worlds of God, the second through a dispatch signed by Wilfredo Cancio Isla in *El Nuevo Herald*, and the other versions through messages that other friends have forwarded to me, with the opinions of those enrolled in the discussion. I found it very funny on the one hand, and very painful on the other. I know how much love some put, how much pain others, how much hope many and how much hypocrisy the least, that there is everything in the vineyards of the Lord.

In my view, the current problem of Cuban culture is not whether they appear on television, like old heroes come to less, certain obscure characters who collaborated with the overshadowing of some moment of these 48 years of Cuban cultural darkness, but in the artist-intellectual-government relationship that maintains the same characteristics of previous periods, and that is the problem to be debated, the problem to be solved. Otherwise, all discussion will have the character, modest and plain, of the Byzantine.

Of course, I'm not asking anyone to immolate themselves by discussing the downside of their contract with power. That would be as extremist as that old communist, Rubén Martínez Villena, who, in his time, said that his verses interested him as much as the freedom of Cuba mattered to the intellectuals, but I do remember that without social freedom there is no possible freedom of thought.

Cuban cultural history, from the arrival of the Castros to power, has more twists than a creeping vine. Few Cuban artists and intellectuals have been saved from being victims and, many times, victimizers of the political voluntarism that has plagued national life for almost half a century. The bohemians and Cuban celebrities have passed between dismissals, recantations, pardons and the “rescues” of Cuban academia.

The list of disemboweled, neglected, annulled, imprisoned, exiled for non-artistic reasons ranging from religious, sexual or philosophical to political would be too extensive. The list of those chosen, exalted, awarded, polished, honored for the same reasons is very long, and not least that of those who, once on the stage, were “dethroned,” and, after a mournful *mea culpa*, climbed back up .

Heberto Padilla and Manuel Díaz Martínez are not alone in the mural of the judged. Hugo China and Armando Cristóbal Pérez aren't alone on the canvas of those driven out. Nor are Norberto Fuentes and Eduardo Heras León alone on the poster of the “dethroned” returned to board the “engineers of souls” train as requested by the great Uncle Stalin. Luis Pavón and Jorge Serguera are not alone in the frieze that shows the keepers of the cauldrons of the Cuban cultural hell. Names and two surnames are left. But I don't write to irrigate the hatred sown by the government. But to get closer to the

essence of why such an aberration has occurred. Ever since Caesar came up with the idea of propitiating a divine origin for the empire in distant Rome and appointed General Maecenas to feed, care for and put Virgil to write *The Aeneid*, artistic patronage has had its inevitable political consequences. Power protects you, but charges you.

The formula couldn't be simpler. Virgilio, a social slave, was at the same time an intellectual slave, but he enjoyed a more comfortable life than the other slaves. I don't think I need to explain the parable.

When a national culture has the sole purpose of extolling, polishing, and disseminating the values of a government, above all aesthetic or cultural values, and the artist depends economically, socially, and politically on that government and agrees to such a contract, he bears the risks of poor Faust. By giving up his soul, out of ingenuity, vanity or opportunism, to dedicate himself to building the souls that power claims, it is always at the expense of the devil. And, of course, the devil hierarchizes. Whoever best serves his interests is better treated, although with this he doesn't win the social freedom or freedom of thought that deep down he longs for. A compromised art suffers twists.

No one knows this better than the artist. But once he has fallen into the trap, he pays with his commitment or pays with his life, and he cannot ask anyone to offer his life, unless he decides of his own free will. From that infernal game springs the artist overseer, although he's not the most skillful artist, but the most loyal. This artist overseer becomes a transmission belt of the designs of power for the rest of the artists. He fetches and carries. He can't do anything else. He turns, as imposed by the pulley of power.

These have been the successive Pavóns, although with other surnames, of the Cuban culture, and they have been creating their own successors. With their meager power they have handed out prizes and awards, and from Luis Pavón they have moved on to Edeles Morales, without anything changing at the root, nor could it change in the future if such a situation continues. The artist-government relationship must first change for any debate in this regard to truly bear fruit.

The thinker must first win his freedom of thought so that he can name things and defend his opinion without fear of reprisals, reprisals that, as almost half a century has shown, can have many variants. A dependent artist is a measured artist. A committed artist is a half artist. An artist is a cynic.

Manuel Vázquez Portal
United States

MARCOS GARCÍA

Translated by Yenny Fernández

The thing is hot... Really, I think that no one should be allowed to remain silent in the face of these things.

I heartily applaud Desiderio Navarro and all those who honestly put their name when giving their words.

I didn't watch on television nor do I remember "The Five-Year Gray Period," but what I have been told is enough: so many intelligent voices cannot be wrong at the same time and on the same subject.

A hug.

MARÍA DE LAS MERCEDES SANTIESTEBAN

Translated by G.H.

On the words of Alfredo Guevara

The first thing that draws attention to the document presented by Alfredo Guevara is its terrible writing. A man who has always been characterized by his lucidity and intelligence has written a text that is difficult to read, repetitive and unoriginal. The very long first paragraph is proof of this:

The Union of Writers and Artists of Cuba interprets and assumes that ethical, Martí and *fidelista* lesson of preventing, with the exercise of its authority and prestige, the impunity of that abuse of power that led a level of our Television to trample on its ethical obligations developing or trying to promote a design that contradicts that of the cultural policy of the Revolution, a policy of respect and exaltation of freedom of creation and intellectual work, and of the intellectuals that make it possible.”

It's not clear what is meant by “the design that contradicts that of the cultural policy of the Revolution.” Until now, what was criticized and questioned was, in the first place, the appearance of the “gray triad” formed by Pavón-Serguera-Quesada and what all this could mean as a setback for the national culture. Guevara goes down paths and accuses Television of “trampling on its ethical obligations”; he practically accuses them of being traitors, although he is quick to clarify that all the programming devised and conceived by the “great communicator” is the correct one: he does not want, in any way, that his words be misunderstood.

Later, another convoluted paragraph:

“... [I]t is the people who deserve to be and are and have to be the real protagonists of the Battle of Ideas, if, in parallel, it were not developed from an instrument that has ended up being usurped at certain levels, another campaign of exaltation of vulgarity, the mimicry of the worst of the programming promoted by the Empire, and that favors the destruction of the language, a reflection of the clarity, structure and exercise and expression of thought. Why, from what premises? We do not know.”

Guevara never mentions the names of Pavón-Serguera-Quesada, nor is he aware that the main focus of the debate is the general cultural policy of the country. Many even want to take it further and demand that the problems that exist in the productive sphere be analyzed. Guevara directs his attack on television, which is fine with me, because much of the programming is lousy and vulgar. But where has Guevara been all this time? Why does he decide to criticize it now if this problem has existed for years? Why does he divert, or try to divert, the center of the debate? Is it not because he fears that the snowball will grow too large and that, at a moment of such tension, totally unprecedented in the history of these forty-nine years, people will decide to question the very essence of the system, as happened in 1991 during the deceitful and manipulative “Call to the Fourth Party Congress”?

Cuban television is a ruthless propaganda medium, unbearably politicized, with a rigid news structure and the aggravating circumstance that, every time it wants—which has been many times—simple entertainment programs are interrupted to insert the transmission of long and boring political acts. Many people leave their television on, without the audio, to patiently wait for the act to end and the soap opera to begin. But those who direct television—who are not the directors of television but the ideologues, or The Ideologue, of the Party—don't care much about that: propaganda must be distributed "by the hour," and Cuban society must be presented as absolutely idyllic, happy, prosperous, facing a depraved, violent, impoverished world. The world, it is true, is very bad, but Cuba is not so good. Television projects a virtual image: people don't recognize themselves in it, nor do they see their problems reflected.

To breathe a little, multiple ways have been invented to evade the tedious official refrain. I remember that in 1993 Havana was filled with homemade satellite dishes that, oriented towards the Habana Libre Hotel, captured the Miami channels. That was abruptly stopped because the government was not going to tolerate people having a different source of information. Something similar is happening right now, and thousands of people, for the "low" price of ten convertible pesos, enjoy "alternative broadcasts," watch different newscasts and forget about the daily hustle and bustle.

These programs, it's true, the vast majority, are terrible, in very bad taste: as Guevara rightly says, they are "the exaltation of vulgarity, the mimicry of the worst of the programming promoted by the Empire." The curious thing about all this is not that they are "outside channels," as they are called; the worst and most worrying thing is that people are willing to pay the equivalent of one month's salary to see these productions. Why does no one wonder what happened in all these years of "wholesale" culture? Why, after so many real efforts that the country has made to raise the cultural level of the people, what they want to see is the worst of television in the United States? (and, by the way, the best programs that are broadcast on our television also come from that country, such as the documentaries on the Discovery Channel and National Geographic, to name just two examples).

Guevara continues:

"The highest authorities of our leadership, as well as the Ministry of Culture and the Party, are aware from the first moment of the indignant rejection that I have expressed directly, that is, as it corresponds to me, in the face of the repeated humiliation to which the Cuban intellectuals have been subjected and, in practice, that intelligence that the Revolution has awakened, forming it from education, so that it would be, as it is beginning to be, the most important asset of our society at the time, the first century in which knowledge became the greatest spiritual, social and economic wealth."

What is "the repeated vexation to which the Cuban intellectuals have been subjected" that Guevara mentions? The presence of the "ashen triumvirate" or the "belligerent and usurping ignorance" of the television officials? It's not clear to me. Guevara affirms that he has rejected it with indignation; I don't doubt it, although we don't know where or when he did it.

He finally ends with a very serious accusation:

“What has happened in these days is not only an affront to the Cuban intellectuals, to our culture in its artistic expression; it has been, is, a trap set from that belligerent mediocrity and ignorance, for Fidel and Raúl; a game of interests determined to confuse and divide.”

A trap for Fidel and Raúl? A game of interests determined to confuse and divide? Cheating is treason and treason in our country is paid for with death, with the aggravating circumstance that, at this time, the *Comandante* cannot even defend himself. Those who direct television have been appointed by “the highest leadership” because the mass media are a very powerful weapon for the transmission of ideology, among many other things. So those who run these media want to confuse and divide? Is Guevara talking about some conspiracy? Is there some kind of “micro faction” that has infiltrated our television channels?

Although confusing, Guevara’s accusations are still very serious, and he strongly supports the “Declaration of the UNEAC Secretariat,” a document that most have described as insufficient, clumsy and mediocre. Fortunately, the debate continues. We hope that everything unjust, the abuse of power and the dogmas are reversible, for the good of the culture and for the good of all.

María de las Mercedes Santiesteban
Havana, January 22, 2007

MARIELA CASTRO ESPÍN

Translated by Regina Anavy

Camilo passed the debate on to me because he knows I'm interested and, of course, I want to participate. I am not an artist or a writer, but as a Cuban identified with a revolutionary social project that seeks to conquer all justice, I feel moved by these comments and the fear that moments in history will be diluted, which, although they hurt and embarrass us, should be deeply analyzed to prevent recurrence. Obviously the experiences of the past were not sufficiently clarified, nor properly regulated, and that is what worries me.

In my opinion, these television programs show only the tip of the iceberg, and the reaction provoked responds to deeper malaises that still don't have the necessary support of our society, expressed in its policies. This is precisely what interests me the most, that as a result of the concerns caused by the carelessness—or clumsiness?—of television programming, we can analyze and discuss styles of thinking, ambivalence, absence of coherent definitions in the institutional policy of the ICRT that must know how to express our cultural, educational, women's policy, etc.

As a member of the PCC, I aspire to an intelligent response from the organization, as a facilitator and coordinator of the debate, so that all the concerns and suggestions that are responsibly made are considered, and we can collaborate with this permanent and necessary dialectical process, of addressing and elaborating the inevitable contradictions of all processes.

Receive my affectionate greetings,
Mariela Castro Espín

MARINA OCHOA

Translated by G.H.

First of all, I apologize for entering the debate so late. I have quite a complicated life precisely because of the climate of indifference, incapacity and/or corruption that I am seeing in all instances of the Housing “apparatus.” I’m horrified! And I mention this because my opinion is that what ended socialism in the countries of the East was the unpunished mix of interests of those who became millionaires during socialism, from opportunism, corruption and repression. Criminal impunity thanks to the absence of spaces for criticism, debate and critical culture, of course. Gorbachev and Eltsin only gave it the *coup de grâce*... we must all reflect on this and those who are entitled to act accordingly.

I am not a theoretician and I speak to you from my principles and experiences.

I think it’s time to go to the essences or rather to other essences. And I’m going to mention first the demoralizing impact of the repression, the confusion and paralysis that it produces. This would partly explain why the response from the culture, on many occasions, has not had the necessary consistency. I know this well. The purification assemblies of the School of Architecture (second five-year period of the 60s) produced in me, in the midst of adolescence, a true terror and confusion. The lack of correspondence between the political discourse full of lofty concepts and the lowliness of practice overwhelmed me. I didn’t understand anything, I couldn’t articulate anything. I knew the taste of impotence. Many of the members of the “purification” courts are in exile. “Purification” for God’s sake, seems imported from fascism!

Later, in the 70s, I went to the School of Journalism. I was a student of Eduardo Heras, and the same thing happened again. At both times, devaluing the human essence of the position was part of the strategy. Then came a period in which it seemed that we had suffered a kind of collective amnesia, from which we didn’t want to wake up so as not to be passed the bill for our weakness. And then, a new low blow with *Alicia*... frustrated because it was answered by the filmmakers and the members of the culture who supported us with principles, unity, coherence and firmness. We managed to bridge the differences between us, which exist, as they do everywhere, and we declared a truce to fight to safeguard our cultural project, in which we still exist.

Now I ask those who challenge our intellectuals for not giving “strong” responses at the time, is it more meritorious to go into exile, a choice that is a right that I don’t question, than to collect the fragments of our essences, sensitivities, illusions, and even of our being revolutionary and staying here, fighting in our own way, as we can, and as we cannot, also to rescue a cultural project in which we believe? We must respect each one’s way of struggling, because in all cases they have been the product of traumatic processes that have surpassed us. I believe that we must clearly and coherently express what country we aspire to, what culture. For this reason, I propose to return to the presuppositions that were present in the founding period of the culture of the Revolution, distorted later by the circumstantial, obtuse, opportunistic and convenient

interpretations of the “Words to the Intellectuals,” which unfortunately lend themselves to this because they suffer from the evil of the lack of definition of concepts.

Not transculturation or transnational culture, but rather a culture of its own, traversed by all the currents of the time... an aesthetic and politically committed culture but with cultural breadth, without infertile dogmatism or sectarian presence that closes the roads is my proposal. Conciliation between the political vanguard and the artistic vanguard is only possible in a cultural environment where cohesion is achieved from the confrontation between different criteria and on the basis of “loyalty to its own time, to its intellectual and artistic potential, to its revolutionary and human commitments.

The battle of ideas should be that: battle, and I think this debate illustrates like no other what it should be.

I hope I have contributed something to this debate.

A big hug,
Marina Ochoa

Marina Ochoa to Gustavo Arcos Fernández-Brito

Dear Gustavo [Arcos Fernández-Britto]:

I’ve been filming and I’m getting ready to start editing, so although I haven’t lacked the will to communicate, I’ve lacked time and strength, because I end up with scattered neurons.

The creation of a wailing wall for artists is bad news. They do not understand anything. We say tweet tweet, and they reply quack quack.

The 47 years in which the “vanguard of the proletariat” has been translated into the right to think for us, decide for us what suits us or doesn’t suit us as individuals, family and nation have corroded their ability to grapple with criteria and placed it in the rear guard, while the thinking of the people has become more complex, growing and overflowing the society “designed” from above, which functions less every day. They perversely deny every minute that the other, underground, parallel or floating economy works, but it appears as ideal on our television screens, and on many occasions seems directed by Walt Disney.

The son of one of my nieces, nine years old, sighed while watching the national news on television, “I would like to live there!” Childish wisdom... and I swear it’s not fiction.

I’ve received with great pleasure the intervention of the lucid Colina and that of Belkis Vega. Indispensable. I think that *Cristerios* should collect everything that has been expressed and publish an issue of the magazine and include what will be produced on the 30th. By the way, knowing professionals of the stature of Belkis, in all senses, professional, moral, human, revolutionary, I can’t understand how it’s possible that her

name is not used to occupy positions such as the presidency of UNEAC, the presidency of ICAIC, since now what's happening or not is that the names of possible substitutes manage to be all *macho*, men, masculine.

Colina refers to Torquesada's positions in the ICRT, and another one is missing: adviser to the telecasters, including the one in Matanzas, which would explain the campaign against *Stay with Me*, one of the programming exceptions that confirms the rule.

I also learned that Torquesada was made an advisor to the program *Open Dialogue*, based on a negative report on the program that this *señor* had broadcast, accompanied by the recommendation to take it off the air, which shows an extremely interesting practice: I make you an advisor to whoever wants to destroy you, and that would explain the decrease in the quality of the debate on said program.

I won't steal any more of your time, and I congratulate you for your honesty and integrity.

A hug,
Marina Ochoa

MARIO COYULA

Translated by Regina Anavy

Your call seems to me to be very appropriate at a time when some unfortunate characters, or their ghosts, seem to be repositioning themselves. But more than people, it's a recurring way of seeing the world, which over time has received many different names, always ominous. It's better to pass for paranoid than stupid and anticipate the stick.

I hope it's all just a coincidence.

I admire Mandela, who relinquished the power he had gained and united what was possibly the most divided country in the world, with tremendous grudges that went back a long way. Like him, I am not for delving into the past, however ugly it may have been. But if others do it, seeking to return to what we already suffered, it's good that they know that they will not let them pass. After all, involution is the opposite of revolution.

Mario Coyula

MARIO CRESPO

Translated by Regina Anavy

I have received letters from many friends and strangers, protesting or giving their opinion on the events *pavo-cergue-sada*. Today I received an email in which comes almost a summary of everything, and I see that you were, as I expected, in the first row among those who made their voices heard.

I agree with Orlando Hernández that a dismissal of the president of the ICRT is not enough, much less an apology from the television channel.

The dismissal wouldn't attract anyone's attention, in a country in which the announcement of the change of tasks of some "comrade" is constantly seen in *Granma*, without further explanation. The apology, on the other hand, would be years too late, since it should have been done when the officials, who today "someone" has shamelessly tried to honor, were dismissed. When are we going to see the apology for the aggrieved, for those who went mad or died in Cuba or in exile?

In one of my first comments, I proposed that a right to reply on television be demanded, and that it be announced beforehand so the whole country could see it, allowing once and for all that the truth of the facts be told to the public. Let it be clear to the young people and to all those not aware until today that these three men—visible proponents at that time of a wrong policy—made criminals of people, who, for some reason, weren't to their liking and didn't comply with the "parameters" of their particular moral code.

Nothing is accomplished with one or two dismissals. We don't need to know now who authorized the programs and who made them and continue looking for the guilty among us. It would be feeding hatred. What it inevitably does is wash away the stain of those who today still haven't been able to respond to the infamy, which is repeated again when their executioners are publicly flattered. What it does is let them express themselves, and not so they can have a catharsis so many years later; that doesn't have much value anymore. What is truly valuable and uplifting is that they have the honor of giving the necessary lesson to those who come after them. It is the aggrieved, the humiliated of that moment, who must set a clear precedent for future generations of artists and, above all, for future and present generations of public policy makers. This will be a particularly useful lesson for the latter.

I agree with Fullea that everyone, including my generation that was in our teens when that happened, are all responsible for having kept silent about that infamy for so long. Not enough poems have been written or published about it, not enough plays, novels, and films about that infamous piece of our country's history. It is not the particular story of a small group of men and women. It is part of the history—ten years, not five—of a generation of artists and thinkers, plus all the years of aftermath, which together summarize the lives of a generation.

At this time, what matters is that the aggrieved—and we must give them the honor—can express themselves in a public letter to the country and demand that this right be granted to them. One of the comments I received said that “in the meeting of the main group with the Minister it was left in the hands of Esteban Lazo in relation to the ICRT,” and I think that here we return to the usual mistake, which is to put the solution of problems in the hands of a leader and not let the voices of others be heard. Why does Abel meet alone with a small group of artists? Why does the UNEAC not make a statement of protest and thus clear its name for the many of those who, in other times, it removed from its ranks for no reason or turned its back on them? Why can’t a large gathering of artists bring information out to the public eye?

If everything is left to the word and the sacrosanct hands of a chosen one, they will be falling into the same mistake that allowed the nefarious trio to do what they and no one else believed was right. I think with Fullea that at this moment we must declare ourselves united and demand that the voice of those who have been silenced for so many years be heard.

If you think my suggestions are worth something, you can make them public or send them to other friends. Keep me updated on everything please. Little arrives here.

Mario Crespo

MARÍO VIZCAÍNO

Translated by Regina Anavy

And what a *pavonazo*!

Eduardo:

It's a pity that we have to remember in such an unpleasant way that report on homosexuality in Cuba that you rigorously did and that we both defended with tremendous pleasure, published in *Alma Mater* in August 2003. I am still surprised by the crude mutilation that the magazine *Encuentro* (of Cuban culture) did by censoring—it seems to me the appropriate word in this case—a report that was previously published by another media outlet as it was conceived and organized. The most serious thing is that now, in print, it multiplies, I don't know for how many readers, and forever, a distorted report with the botched purpose, I imagine, of adapting it to an editorial interest that wants to ignore an institutional policy—that of the National Center for Sex Education—for support and defense of larger and recognized spaces for Cuban homosexuals, raised in the interview you did with the director of that center, Mariela Castro Espín, and which is part of the report “The price of the difference.”

I want to tell you that after seeing this journalistic nonsense, I am even more satisfied with the way we approached that material, because we did it in a more objective way, with space to criticize homophobes and defend the rights of gays and lesbians as human beings (as well as heterosexuals), but also to show the other side of the coin, as journalism has advised since ancient times.

In the almost four years that I was director of that *Alma Mater*, that is one of the materials that I remember best, and although it wasn't the only bold one of the period, it was undoubtedly very daring. Do you remember that then some accredited press agencies in Havana reproduced it almost completely, and even *El Nuevo Herald* published a version? However, they respected it, including the aforementioned interview.

Of course, surely not many outside of Cuba will learn about this ridiculous manipulation of *Encuentro* (and not *Cubaencuentro*, I think that's the name of the digital version, and I don't know if your report is also included there).

Yes, you're right, brother: it has been, ironically, a *pavonazo* of *Encuentro*.

A hug,
Mario Vizcaíno
January 30, 2007

MARITZA CORRALES

Translated by Regina Anavy

It's not possible to accept this type of "mistake and naivete," to use a euphemism, in times like the ones we are living through. I know that, as always, you will be deep, accurate, devastating and, like Martí, without hatred. Count on me as one more crusader. The patient and very painful reconstruction of the cultural but above all, human damage that we were forced to live and tried to heal cannot have been in vain. Go back, brother, as one of our revolutionary slogans says, not to gain momentum. If we accept it, we would be, according to Mayito, regressing, and this, for which we have given our best, each one of us, is a Revolution based and conceived on two simple and rooted words: dignity and justice, and we must continue fighting for it to be so.

If it's possible to synthesize what I wanted to say to Magaly in that very personal message, I repeat: I believe that at the time of transition that will inevitably come to Cuba, Raúl must at least be given the benefit of the doubt. Wait. Just as Cuban intellectuals have rebelled against the indications of the resurgence of an infamous passage of the exercise of the culture in Cuba, so they will have the maturity not to let their active participation be covered up in a process that will undoubtedly have to be directed towards overcoming the social deterioration that we have seen develop in recent years in our country; to the achievement of individual freedoms that are limited today; to the restoration of dialogue between society and its rulers; but also and in a very specific way, to the defense of national sovereignty against the attacks of the most aggressive right and with it, of fascism.

That's my opinion. The incident which I hope will be cleared up has compelled me to state it. I'm not happy about what happened, but I am happy to finally participate in some way in the debate.

I hope this message gets published. Now I give my authorization for it. And I take this opportunity to greet the editors of *Consenso* in this task of disseminating opinion that they have undertaken.

MINERVA SALADO

Translated by Regina Anavy

Maga, I am aware of the matter and have the main materials here. I think this is a conspiracy against Raúl by some of the groups that are going to fight for power, obviously from the ICRT. The intention is to discredit him and take away the support of the intellectuals, which has a lot of repercussions at the international level. I believe this because I have heard Raúl's recent statements in speeches, and they seem very intelligent to me, fully aware of the context that is being forged in the Latin American left, which although it's not monolithic (and it's good that it's not) does constitute a united front against the fascism of the United States, which is what is needed.

I believe that this is perhaps the first outbreak of many that there will be in the power struggle that will come to Cuba in the near future. But times have changed, and I don't think Raúl is the protagonist of a return from the past that at this juncture is not convenient for anyone, and for him especially. I repeat, this goes directly against him and intimidates those who suffered these attacks in the past. We have to wait. I refuse to believe this will happen again. The protests seem good to me because they prove how times have changed in this sense.

Minerva Salado

Minerva Salado to the Digital Magazine *Consenso*

To the editors of *Consenso*:

Alerted by a friend here, I have just seen with surprise that the message I sent in a very personal way to my friend Magaly Sánchez, with whom I hold a fairly frequent dialogue by email, appears on the *Consenso* page. If I had known that this was going to be made public, in the first place I would have used a less synoptic, more explicit language, something that I can't do now because "the evil has been done," as the saying goes, and above all because I am under the effect of reading a message that I never thought would be published, much less without consulting me.

Magdaly invited me to participate in the debate, and I politely refused, especially because I think that you have to be in the water on this subject and not speculate happily when you've been living outside of Cuba for so many years. Those who know me know that I am far from pursuing any desire for notoriety that doesn't come from my own work, which I haven't been very good at promoting. I don't like to give my opinion from afar, although with friends I often elaborate, like anyone else.

MIRTA YAÑEZ

Translated by Regina Anavy

Dear Marilyn,

Thank you for sending me all three emails. I completely agree with Desiderio and Arturo.

Actually, I had already begun to worry a few months ago when I read Guillermo Rodríguez Rivera's incoherent letter on the subject of *El Puente* which, due to the pathetic nature of some of its fragments, could be disdained, and in fact I disdained it.

That letter tried to justify some disastrous actions of those years under, effectively, the aforementioned "owed obedience." And Guillermo affirmed, gloomy and somewhat shamelessly, that one had to navigate in "those waters." Many did not surrender their ethical principles nor did they accept "navigation," and it cost them dearly. Some of them can't be with us (not even to feel nauseated as I did) like Ezequiel Vieta, for example. Yes, I believe that this nefarious opportunistic and repressive thought is still latent, and looks for any opportunity to appear.

There were so many shovelfuls of lime, and so much was lost under them, that the grains of sand still feel isolated, although they make the heart happy. Let's keep the hope that the sands cover all the wounds of the lime. And let's live to celebrate it.

Mirta Yáñez
January 10, 2007

NÉSTOR DÍAZ DE VILLEGAS

Translated by Regina Anavy and Los Iguanitos

Che, the Parameters and the New Man

The unique opportunity to see and be seen offered to the vain world of writers by a media scandal, aptly baptized with the name *pavonea*, seemed to me, from the beginning, too irresistible to ever produce any memorable reparation.

The way in which the correspondents rushed to take advantage of the fiasco for their own benefit, using the shameless and disadvantaged e-mail—whose only function, to date, has been to show the skin of onanist fantasies—was not without something of a striptease, even pornographic.

That many of the protagonists had been committed, at some point and to some extent, to the same system that they refuted—either because they ran to celebrate the thanks, or because they accepted a slice of cake, or because they jockeyed for a decoration or stole a handshake—and now deplore the exhumation of Luis Pavón, when we all believed that the shame had been eradicated for a long time, is a fact that deserves to appear in the surgical annals of the dictatorship, along with Castro's diverticulitis.

The same language in which the proclamations and declamations of principle were written, the clumsy use of the “tú” and the tap on the chest, the lukewarm and untimely support, the cowardly demarcations: were they not even more sinister, taken as a whole, than an hour of *Imprint* with the Grand Inquisitor? And the declarations of Papito Serguera, that raised hives on so many, aren't they more honest, more candid, than what our sacred pigs emit, whenever they can, at festivals and world congresses?

The very crudeness of such realities would be enough to produce in us, at this point, a disgust—if not a fear—much more intense than that produced by an old, retired censor. And that two figureheads inspire more confidence than our intellectuals, doesn't it give the measure of the emptiness in which we have fallen collectively? Doesn't the fact that two criminals come out better off for the sole fact of having known how to keep quiet, even if it was by force, confirm the suspicion that for Antón Arrufat, for Miguelito Barnet and for Pablo Armando Fernández, it would have been much more honorable to have remained “imPavóned” in a proud and self-inflicted ostracism, than to voluntarily participate in their unfortunate reappearances?

Knowing how to disappear—who said it said it: giving oneself up for dead, fading away, erasing oneself from the map, would have been less hateful than being run over by the rehabilitated troupe. Said clearly and promptly, the parametrations never ceased. If the readers of *Unión* and *La Gaceta de Cuba* can delight today in the funny remarks of Uva Clavijo; if José Kozer and Achy Obejas have been stamped on their buttocks with the official seal of kosher products; if Lorenzo García Vega cooks organic artichokes for housewives of the Casa, don't we owe it to the courtly indulgence of Abel Prieto? The

parametration mutated, absorbed and adapted right and left, and its Russian-style Stalinism endowed the little Chinese butterfly of calculated risk with beautiful wings.

Reina María, in her harebrained confession, seems not to have heard that the Estonian purges are a matter of the Hermitage, nor that we are mourning the death of Valdés Tamayo. As if she had just left the crystalline capsule of a Nabokovian entomology museum, the Monarch of Creole letters begins her melancholy missive with a quote from Marina Tsvietaeva! to immediately move on, stumbling, to the following exhortation: “Let us now remember Mandelstam, Pasternak, Ajmatova...”. To what else, but a Soviet revival or Stalinist chic, could be attributed, at the present juncture, the invocation of dissent so charmingly arcane, so scandalously alien? Isn’t the tone—and even the essence—of that royal letter equivalent to the request “Let them eat caviar!”? Well, although it’s true that in those moth-eaten purges the shape of our destiny could already be read, it’s no less true that, in its disdainful escapism, reading it seems to cover up a veiled note of strangeness and lack of solidarity.

The criticism of Soviet cultural policy was completed by Che Guevara in his famous article, *El Hombre Nuevo* [*The New Man*], published in *Marcha de Montevideo* magazine, in March 1965. There the Argentine, putting the Royal Palm before the leak in the roof, had practically nothing to say. The rectification of errors was a concluded matter—at least theoretically—for the Stalinists of the courtyard, who, not seeing clearly into the soul of man under Stalinism, renounced brandishing the weapon of ideological coercion. By the way, after a long survey, the Rio Plata doctor advanced an accurate diagnosis about the soul of the Cuban intellectual, expressed in a theological key: the “guilt” of our intellectuals and artists lies in a sin, in a kind of stain or original illness: “He defends his individuality oppressed by the environment and reacts to aesthetic ideas as a unique being whose aspiration is to remain immaculate.”

Although it’s hard to remember, after Marina hanged herself in Yerálbuga, Ricardo Vega had his jaw fractured with a whip in front of the Cuban embassy in Paris, and María Elena Cruz Varela was forced to swallow her own poems. To date, no one knows where Eddy Campa and Pedro Campos are buried, or if they are buried. Like Marina, they are poets without a tomb, without a country and without a bouquet.

It’s for such reasons that I wouldn’t be at all surprised if, as a result of the *pavoneo*, the news suddenly reached us that some hack had converted to orthodox Guevarism. The legal opposition is so sad, leaves so much to be desired, that the innocence and prescience of the Rio Plata native in artistic and intellectual matters acquires a more desirable validity than the award-winning ineptitude of so many other rehabilitated writers. Why not award the National Prize for Literature to those who with so much effort and so much honesty—honesty, indeed, dear careerists—aspired to a single feather of the Phoenix? Why not snatch the gold medal of the Bellas Letras from some impostor and posthumously hang it on the neck of that *porteño* [native of Buenos Aires], who penetrated so deeply into the soul of our intelligentsia?

Translated from Russian, the epistle of Reina María Rodríguez would say the same thing as this quote from Che: “In countries that went through a similar process, attempts were

made to combat these tendencies with exaggerated dogmatism. General culture became almost taboo, and the height of cultural aspiration was proclaimed a formally exact representation of nature, later becoming a mechanical representation of the social reality that wanted to appear.”

Isn't this form of expression more sensible and direct than the vague sentimentality of the protestors? Isn't the healthy fanaticism displayed by Guevara in his famous essay more commendable than the diplomacy of black tortoises? Even Mariela Castro Espín can write today, with correctness and style, an indignant letter. Why not at the least be like the Ladies in White and go through Havana in procession, from the ICRT studios to the Central Committee, carrying the sarcophagus of the Five Gray Years, that dotty grandfather of our careerist painters? Why not bury it in a revolutionary way on the lawn of Cubanacán, on the same lawn where the Zayda del Río in Flavio's oil painting has been wallowing for thirty-odd years? It's what our revolutionary fathers would have done, instead of clogging the (electronic) mailboxes with their complaints and suggestions.

“Senseless anguish and vulgar pastime are comfortable valves for human restlessness, the idea of making art a weapon of denunciation is combated,” Guevara continues in his praised document. And isn't this precisely what the anti-parametration domesticators, Abel Prieto and Pedrito de la Hoz have achieved? A few years ago, at a concert in Los Angeles, Pablito Milanés refused to sing his revolutionary hymns in front of an audience that demanded them with flag waving. They were too compromising; they didn't work anymore, and the bard couldn't bring himself to sing them. As long as they meant nothing, as long as they were nothing more than “senseless anguish and vulgar pastime” he didn't mind foisting them on an entire Hemisphere. But the modern pro-Castro mobs have imposed on the old rhapsodists—as an unanticipated consequence of their youthful whims—an untenable commitment to the cause of transnational fascism. How well Guevara saw through those fakes! They were not and never were, genuinely revolutionary. That is their original sin, for which they're now paying.

The songs that were once “weapons of denunciation”—even among us—are today sold in Madrid and Montevideo as praises to a dictatorship. We owe the metamorphosis, in part, to the duplicity inherent in the Trova, but, above all, to the growing pressure of a global movement of sympathizers with fascism, who believed the lies of Silvio and Pablito to the letter. Could Pavón, or Papito Serguera, boast of such an achievement, such a service?

After the “exodus of the totally domesticated, the others, revolutionaries or not, saw a new path,” Guevara prophesies. It was the dawn of Abelprietism, with his Velvet Exile and his travel agencies. “If the laws of the game are respected, all honors are achieved, those that a monkey could have when inventing pirouettes. The condition is not to try to escape from the invisible cage.”

Reading these immortal pages, we understand that those who celebrated and still excuse the rise of Abel Prieto neither correctly understood his intentions nor had they ever read Che. If anything, the new cultural policy was much closer to orthodox Guevarism than

the *pavonato* ever was. In fact, a correct interpretation of “The New Man” leaves us no choice but to understand it as a momentary setback.

Abelprietism would then be a rectification of errors, but only in the sense of a stricter compliance with Guevarist artistic guidelines. This is how the inception of Senel Paz and his New Man in the panorama of national emblems could also be interpreted: the cultural offensive called *Strawberry and Chocolate* was only a transmutation of the Red and Black Moncada supporters into a platonic variant and a return to the old orthodoxy. The *pavonato*, at least, didn’t lie. It presented himself as the healing of post-capitalist spiritual corruption and carried out its program, rigorously and in full view of all.

It was an episode of what Fidel called “moral compulsion”: there was no room in it for apologies, retractions or mea culpas—those ugly practices—so common during Abelprietism. It was what it was, and the sides were perfectly defined, or as Che said, “pressed into definition.” In that sense, the *pavonato* was a real cleanup. As a balance, these questions remain unanswered: Isn’t the clearest symptom of our lack of character the fact that, after 48 years, we can barely put together a list with four names that represent absolute evil, one capable of getting us out of our boxes, one on which we can all finally agree, and that, of the four little names, only one provokes universal animosity? Are there only four characters who deserve to appear in this municipal history of infamy? When the moment of truth comes, don’t we always fall short? Here I see Guevara frowning, brandishing a corncob pipe and laughing at us: “Another little push, Cuban intellectual, another little push towards the bottom, Creoles, if you want to become authentic revolutionaries!”

And finally: should we rush to defend, as if it were really “a step forward,” the time that saw the rise of Silvio Rodríguez to the National Assembly; Pablo Armando Fernández and Lisandro Otero picked up by the Academy; the Lezamian cohabitation; the looting of artistic heritage; the auction of original memory; the rise of the Taliban; programmatic prostitution; the sentences of 30 years for journalists; the marches of the combatant people; the reintroduction of colonialism as a device for commercial transactions; the export of doctors to the Bolivarian jungle; the restoration of the Daughters of Galicia for the exclusive treatment of imperial shitheads; the aestheticization of Castroism; the conversion of the Nobel Prize winners; the executions of Ochoa and La Guardia; the shooting down of four small planes; Elián’s lobotomy; and, above all, the resigned acceptance of a 75-year-old Dauphin as the legitimate heir to the throne of a despotism that has now reigned in two centuries?

Nestor Díaz de Villegas

NORGE ESPINOSA

Translated by Regina Anavy

The resurrection of other corpses

As if the cultural and political memory of the country were an inconsistent essence, capable of adapting like a gentle liquid to any container without a hint of discomfort, we Cubans who pride ourselves on being part of that same memory have been invited to oblivion. Through Cuban television, our most powerful means of public legitimization, two figures whom we supposed were silent for good have been resurrected to show us how we can be taken in, and above all, to induce in uninformed viewers an image that, being uncritical, ends up being intensely dangerous.

You know what happens to someone who doesn't want broth. It seemed that the presence of Jorge Serguera wasn't enough in one of the programs with the highest audience and in which more resources and risks are delivered by or television, so cautious when it comes to broadcasting live. Now, just last Friday, in a no-less stellar time slot, a space entitled *Impronta* burst onto the television schedule, the objective of which seems to be to dignify and highlight the work and lives of important figures in our culture. Which isn't bad, half-remembered as are almost always the truly living figures of Cuban arts, almost never found in the front rows of what our television insistently spreads when broadcasting certain public acts. But if that was what we expected from the sudden program, the error is increased and double, because in the absence of creators with better résumés and careers, the guest at this impromptu was none other than comrade Luis Pavón.

You could say I'm exaggerating, because the author of *El tiempo y sus banderas desplegadas* [*Time and its Flags Unfurled*] barely had five minutes of television fame dedicated to him. Serguera, appropriately interviewed on the dark and gloomy set of something that pretends to be called *La Diferencia* [*The Difference*], was given thirty minutes of dialogue, where he sang, joked (if Alfredito Rodríguez sings badly, he makes his guests sing worse: oh, miracle). He chose between yucca and caviar, and acknowledged having made some mistakes. "Like everyone," he underlined, washing his hands, which Livio Delgado was photographing, while recalling Enrique Arredondo and Carlos Moctezuma, actors from the old vernacular school, capable of breaking out of the rigidity of the script to put on edge with their blood sausages the quasi-military control that television obtained under his command. But Serguera didn't boast too much of his contacts with the political order: his gestures, his voice, continued to identify him as a man of strong military background. However, the five brief minutes dedicated to Pavón made on that side the pillar of his whole space.

This broadcast of *Impronta* enjoyed a unique dramaturgy, which began by citing Ernesto Guevara's dedication to Luis Pavón. Some absent-minded person might think that Che really dedicated an entire volume to the former president of the CNC, when in truth what was being read were the words stamped on a copy of *Passages from the Revolutionary War*. The maneuver wasn't naive: to use the lines of a sacred figure, who appears to us in the history and mythology of the Revolution as an unblemished image,

to offer a reference to this other character, with a frankly disastrous history in our and others' cultural memory, exposes a whitewash that, far from being effective, sullies and tarnishes many other things.

Pavón, who in his interview seemed like the nice old man from next door, reviewed without detail his political career at the head of a cultural world that he almost undid, working like a soldier under the orders of other characters whom he represented with a heavy hand. At the end of the program, the voice of the announcer insisted on highlighting him as a figure who will be remembered for his status as an intellectual of infinite revolutionary commitment. If that is the tone of the program, if that is the selection criterion by which we will know who deserves to be chosen to appear before the television public as a point of reference, it's worth asking why the organization that produces that program didn't prefer to interview Roberto Fernández Retamar or Graciela Pogolotti. These are just two examples of intellectuals who not only create work of much greater firmness, deserving of the National Prize for Literature, but also whose commitment to the Revolution has been expressed in much more prolific ways, which we understand as culture and dialogue.

Of course, it would also be worth wondering why others can't be the guests at *Impronta*. Why the selection, among us, for those spaces, brings with it a hangover that, while choosing some, obviously imposes a share of silence or rampant invisibility on others. The resurrection of these corpses is a symptom that, read in sequence, can and should provoke reflection and concern. If Cuban culture is aware of its past and its tradition, if it's really able to revisit itself and understand what it is—above its real achievements, not just its triumphalism and mistakes—then these presences shouldn't be received with indifference.

The victims of what Serguera and Pavón organized as a censorship and parameterization command should shake off the dust and mud that this return throws at them, and stand up with a voice of alert. What it implies, when such names occupy the main spaces on television, gain attention and promotion that others of much greater value and importance don't have, is a serious sign that can unleash other concerns. A review without a hint of respect for the Cuban cultural past, without due delicacy or real awareness of what is accumulated there: this is what these events seem to introduce among us, as a painful attitude. I hope that the shame of those who suffered these excesses is raised and doesn't silence the indignation that has run through the streets of Havana, through the discreet Cuban city of letters, after these phantasmagorias that we have had to see, feeling the blow of what is called "embarrassment."

It would be an attitude that would dignify and remind us of the way in which culture, to be manipulated, must above all have a moral value and regenerative dignity. Taking into account, above all, that many of those, who were removed from their work during the five-year gray period under the command of Serguera and Pavón, are still waiting for a real and palpable apology for what they must have suffered. My generation didn't have to suffer any of these characters. It suffered others, copies of lesser power, whom we have seen enter the rank of non-persons, when little by little the dialogue that they themselves denied began to relax. Perhaps it could be argued that I exaggerate by

reacting with a horror that is more justified in those who did see these characters face to face when they were something more than these television ghosts of the present.

But I have known that man repeats his mistakes with more joy than his successes, and there is too much coincidence and too much uneasiness that facts like these offer us as reading. Cuba is experiencing a moment of particular care; it is going through a moment in which questions about the immediate future must be asked with a dose of respect towards the other, towards everyone, which allows us to believe that in that future we will be able to respond to each other without fanaticism or myopia. In this state of hypersensitivity, signs can generate other signs, life can prefigure other forms of life. I don't think that this kind of resurrection is profitable for that life. But let's breathe; we may still turn on the television one of these nights, and the nice man from next door appears on the screen, smiling and forgetful, in the ghost of Armando Quesada.

Norge Espinosa

OCTAVIO MIRANDA

Translated by Regina Anavy

The right of the “unhappiest entity”

“... the supreme achievement of life lies in the exercise of free choice.” Thornton Wilder, *The Ides of March*.

José Martí—so often quoted by everyone, all the time—wrote many times about the right of the “other.”

The end of his letter to Máximo Gómez is memorable: “[A] town is not founded, general, like a camp is commanded.” And, also: “[R]espect for the freedom and thoughts of others, even of the most unhappy entity, is in me fanaticism: if I die, or they kill me, it will be for that.’ (New York, May 12, 1894) A writer like him, aware of the weight and strength of words, chose, among many, the word “entity.” He did not write “person” or “individual” or “citizen.” He selected “entity” and added “most unhappy” to it, for clarity.

As a result of the debate provoked by the presence on Cuban television of three characters of sad memory for the culture—Pavón, Quesada and Serguera—many opinions have been published, from writers living in Cuba and abroad, of different ages, who left Cuba years ago, or very recently. I think it’s the first time that such a debate, thanks to the power of e-mail (which in Cuba is a privilege to have, not a right), has been made public and has transcended territorial limits (although nothing has been said in the national press; that is, the debate is public only for those who have access to e-mail, which are few). I want to make some reflections on this topic, as everyone has; I want to remember things from the past and the present because it seems to me, it could be a good time to define concepts and propose changes.

The Cuban Revolution, which has always proclaimed itself “of Martí,” is, in my modest opinion, the most anti-Martí thing that could be imagined, in relation, specifically, to the issue of individual freedoms (of expression, association, movement, etc. I’m not talking of the other human rights, as some “comrade” would surely remind me. It is true that social progress has been made in our country, but it is also a reality greater than Pico Turquino that public health and education are of poor quality, And they’re not totally free either. If you pay a doctor, for years, a salary equivalent to 25 dollars, you are charging him for health and education—with what he’s left as pay—at first world levels, not even mentioning the lack of respect for private property: If you don’t have the right to your house, for example, if you can’t sell or rent it, is it yours? But I don’t want to deviate from the initial topic).

The restrictions on freedom of expression began as early as 1959, simply because Fidel Castro—as evidenced by his actions and the testimonies of combatants and close collaborators throughout his life—is unable to support and respect any opinion other than his own. Martí’s letter to Gómez could have been written for him, cover to cover. Fidel has been in charge of changing, altering, mutilating and distorting history

according to his interests. It is said—they assure me that it's documented and published outside of Cuba—that the 20,000 dead during the fight against Batista was a typographical error (instead of "2,000" they put "20,000." And he loved the error).

His self-defense during the trial that was held after the failed attack on the Moncada Barracks didn't last more than ten minutes, according to eyewitnesses who have not dared to make this statement in public. The version of the death of Camilo Cienfuegos is questioned by many, since it's very strange that no trace of the plane was ever found. Ochoa and La Guardia were accused of being drug traffickers who acted "on their own account," when everyone knew (and knows) that in Cuba it was (and is) impossible for them to manage and carry out these types of activities without their being involved, authorized or, at least, known, by "the highest leadership of the country"—that is, by the Commander in Chief. "We enjoy a shining present; a future of success awaits us, but we have a past, without a doubt, uncertain" Gorbachev supposedly once said, and Fidel seems to be a master at adjusting history to his interests.

Since 1959, the most important newspapers in the country were closed down, and inflexible censorship began to be applied, always under the pretext of the right of the Revolution to defend itself. The famous "Words to the Intellectuals" (1961) that are presented by the government as proof of democracy and freedom could not be, without a doubt, clearer: "Everything within the Revolution; nothing against the Revolution." Who sets the limits, what are they? Why can't you be against the Revolution? Aren't those words equivalent to saying, "Either you're with me or you're against me"?

The cultural policy was set, then, from that speech (the political rigidity would be accentuated in the seventies with the celebration of the First National Congress of Education and Culture in 1971, the entry of Cuba into the Economic Aid Council, in 1972, and the celebration of the First Congress of the Communist Party, in 1975). Culture was "Stalinized," with its fatal copies of the worst of socialist realism (don't forget the UMAP, 1964-1969, sinister antecedent of what would be the witch-hunt for homosexual intellectuals and artists and, in general, for the "different people": free and non-repetitive thinking was severely punished). It was a difficult decade, not a "five-year gray period," as some define it. And a decade that has multiplied, with its ups and downs, until today. It's true that the forms have changed, attitudes that were previously persecuted are tolerated, but, as Neruda said, "We, those of that time, are no longer the same." "The times, they are a'changing," Bob Dylan would say: they had to adapt, they had to "change everything so that everything remains the same." (*El Gatopardo*)

Much has been remembered these days about the damage that Pavón, Quesada and Serguera did to the national culture. But it cannot be forgotten that in this case, as in everything else, they were not the ideologues of that policy but its executors. Politics has always been designed by Fidel Castro, from when and where coffee is planted, bananas watered, or study plans made or unmade, etc. Fidel and his loyal brother, Raúl. Pavón, Quesada and Serguera were "Raúl's men," who complied with what was established by the Party, that is, by the Castro brothers. They were, however, executors with initiatives, and ended "with the fifth and with the mangoes" when, perhaps, they only wanted one of the two things to end. You would have to ask them.

The scars left by the National Council of Culture, directed by those disastrous characters, were not closed; the wound was skin deep. Seeing those ghosts emerge from the past, “Raúl's men,” at this time, those who suffered their excesses firsthand and those who knew about them through stories (because very little, and badly, has been written about this time) were frightened. “Will the dark vultures come back?” they wondered. And the exchange of letters began.

I believe that the intellectuals who live in Cuba and who have criticized, without fear of reprisals, what happened have been honest and brave. I do not think they're doing it, as some say, to defend their privileges. I think they are people who were very hurt and do well to speak, remember and warn about the danger that a return to the past would mean. It's true that they haven't criticized other things, much more serious, such as the execution of three young people who had not killed anyone and who didn't even receive a decent trial. It's true that they have been silent and that they have tolerated the intolerable. But it's also true that in this country, no matter what is said, there is a very well-instrumented repressive system and, although “those of that time are no longer the same,” whoever decides to openly criticize the system or question the decisions of “the highest leadership of the country,” runs the risk of losing his job, going to prison or, in the best of cases, going into a kind of limbo; that is, his books will stop being published, his films will stop being made nor his music recorded; he will lose any opportunity to travel, to fulfill himself as an artist and as a human being. He won't physically disappear but simply cease to exist.

The official discourse has been determined, for a few years now, to show that they are tolerant, that there is no longer censorship, that there are new spaces open to debate and criticism. Yes and no. As always, half-truths are worse than lies. Writers who live abroad have been published, it's true, but they are not controversial writers for the government, little or not at all critical; their novels don't touch on or graze “delicate” issues. Another method is to publish a slightly uncomfortable book, make its presentation. and then it disappears from the bookstores and is never reviewed: total silence.

It's as if he never existed. With artists who live outside the country, other techniques are also applied. For example, the Cuban Eliseo Alberto won the first Alfaguara Prize for a novel, shared with the Nicaraguan Sergio Ramírez: in Cuba the news broke that Ramírez had won the prize but they never mentioned the author of *Informe contra mí mismo* [Report against Myself]. Why, if there's no censorship, wasn't the news given? The obituary vocation is one of the most refined: one of the unmentionable writers dies in exile and, in a few months, their works (not all...) are published in Cuba, unless, like Cabrera Infante or Reinaldo Arenas, they would have left in writing their wish not to be published in their country while the current government was in power.

The government has multiple ways of exercising blackmail and repression: it grants financial aid to writers and artists that fluctuates between 100 and 40 convertible pesos per month; baskets with turkey, cheeses, varied canned goods and wine are distributed at the end of the year and, also, for birthdays and other indicated dates; the insulting mechanism of entry and exit permits to the country, something that many foreigners do

not know or understand, is a card that the government holds to grant or not, depending on the person's behavior: "If you behave well, I'll let you travel; if not, you stay here." I would like to know what all those left-wing intellectuals, most of them excellent people, would say or do if something like this were applied to them in their countries.

But the little Cubans can put up with that; they are used to it and, ultimately, the final objective is so sublime, the confrontation with the United States is so necessary for the world, that it doesn't matter whether the islanders sacrifice themselves—half a century isn't so long—and meanwhile, we remain here, informed of everything. We read all the newspapers we want; we criticize whenever we feel like it; we travel the world explaining the wonders of Fidel's Cuba and how self-sacrificing and heroic Cubans are. Don't you think there's something rotten...somewhere?

Likewise, the position of some intellectuals residing outside of Cuba who ask for and demand a more daring level of criticism seems unfair to me, when they all know very well that criticism of the system or the government is absolutely impossible. Or possible, if you assume that long prison sentences await you, as happened to Raúl Rivero and to all the people who have had the courage to openly say what they think. I don't think Cubans are cowards, nor do I think the Russians, Bulgarians, Poles, or Hungarians were. Socialism has subtle and also barbaric ways to silence consciences. Fear enters the body and becomes part of oneself.

It's not possible to cover all aspects of this problem; it would be very long. I think, to conclude, several things:

1. that the debate that arose from the television presence of Pavón-Serguera-Quesada has revealed the need in this country to talk about things, to call them by their name, to question issues and decisions.
2. that it would be very important that, based on what happened, a serious and open discussion be convened on all the topics that are desired, and that everything could be criticized, without the fear of being accused of being traitors.
3. that all Cuban intellectuals, wherever they live and think what they think, and foreigners who so wish, could participate in this debate.
4. that the entry and exit permit to the country in which one was born be eliminated, since this measure is nothing more than blackmail and a violation of human rights, which limits the individual's capacity for freedom and free choice.
5. that economic aid and the granting of other privileges, crumbs granted in order to maintain a complicit silence, be eradicated; that "aid" be replaced by decent wages that allow everyone to live with dignity and without anguish. This would not be a claim only of artists and intellectuals since these mechanisms of "financial incentives" are applied in other productive spheres. (For many years we were told that "the economic base defines the superstructure." The government has always feared economic independence

because it knows full well that economic independence enables and facilitates freedom of thought.)

6. that there is true and free access to the Internet, to foreign television channels, to newspapers and magazines; that people can really draw their own conclusions and not through round tables, news and newspapers that filter and manipulate all the information and deliver the part that seems politically correct. It's true that in almost half a century of history tremendous progress has been made in the education of the people, illiteracy has been eliminated, schools and universities have been created: "I am not telling you to believe, but to read," said Fidel; everything can be read and it's the person himself and not an official who decides what is healthy or not, ideologically.

7. that censorship be eliminated on radio and television; that there is an alternative public medium where different, contrary, controversial criteria can be expressed.

8. that it is not a sin to question, not only the cultural policy, but also the policy in education, public health, etc.

9. that no one be accused of "working for the enemy," as affirmed in the "Declaration of the UNEAC Secretariat," of having an "annexationist agenda," or expressing points of view opposed to those of the government or, simply, that are different.

10. that everything, absolutely everything, can be reversible; that the "Words to the intellectuals" be read as a historical document and not as a sacred text.

11. that the current monologue, dense and old, be replaced by a true and constructive national dialogue.

12. that other voices be heard; that voting in the National Assembly be truly free, that there be votes for and against and not a suspicious unanimity.

13. that, finally, "the unhappiest entity" has all the rights and freedoms, that it can make mistakes without fear, that it questions dogmas, that it be heard and respected.

Perhaps I'm asking too much. Will the UNEAC want the writers who have expressed their opinions in this debate to have their emails approved? Will we have to sign new emails? The declaration that the UNEAC has just distributed uses stagnant and recognizable language: it's the same as always, the same as in the seventies. I hope I'm wrong.

Octavio Miranda
Havana, January 17, 2007

OMAR VALIÑO

Translated by Regina Anavy

With the same astonishment and indignation as the others I have been following in detail the just and timely exchange of messages. Of course you can continue to count on me in the front row for anything.

Omar Valiño

ORLANDO HERNÁNDEZ

Translated by Regina Anavy

Dear Desiderio:

I apologize for my delay in joining the debate, which has been enriching day by day. It has not been out of caution, nor out of fear, but out of a certain apathy or pessimism that I hope to get rid of. Unfortunately (or perhaps luckily), I did not see the program dedicated to Pavón's "imprint" on Cuban culture. I even thought that Pavón had died. I watch little television, and that's the kind of show that usually prompts me to change the channel.

In any case, I have read your rigorous messages, those of Arturo Arango, Reynaldo González and others that have reached me, and in truth my stomach turn over to think that the true story of such a disastrous character has not only been able to remain discreetly silenced for so many years, but can now be unabashedly softened by presenting himself as a poet, surrounded by medals, photos of high-ranking figures, in the manner of an old work hero or something. Sounds like a joke in the worst taste. And it's not, far from it.

I can't imagine where such a grotesque and offensive decision could have come from, but it is alarming, I have no doubt. I don't think something like this can be unintentional, or the result of an enthusiastic programmer, especially on our television. But, on the other hand, I think there are very young people, Desiderio, who have not even heard of Pavón or Papito Serguera, even though they have suffered the same dictatorial effects of other officials of the same kind, so the matter should not deviate both towards the already old and proven guilt of Pavón, or the cultural direction of those years, not even towards the possible "secret intentions" of the ICRT or of the instance that deliberately ordered the construction of that program. Instead, we should clearly break down all the components of that prehistoric model that Pavón represents and that, as Dr. Rodríguez Coronel says, is something that has always been there, that has not disappeared, and that continues to keep our cultural policy strained and strangled, our intellectual and artistic creativity and everything else.

I don't think the Pavón model can be cloned so easily if you start by explaining (as you and other intellectuals have already begun to do) the reasons for its decrepitude, its ineffectiveness, and its malevolence. And for this it's not enough to write a list of victims or bitter anecdotes of those years (although there is nothing better than concrete examples), but a discussion of the Pavón case and the "Five gray-year period" would be old Bohemia if it doesn't include the analysis of all its sequels and "updates" up to the most recent contemporaneity. After all, these are very persistent viruses that mutate with the context and often present themselves with many varied camouflages that should be located and reported. The fact that your magazine *Criteria* has given us multiple contemporary examples of analysis of similar issues and other collateral issues (racism, corruption, fear, sexism, etc.) constitutes a very optimistic advance towards understanding how to seriously address these phenomena.

I think that many of us (I speak for myself, of course) have gotten out of the habit of thinking and writing directly about these issues because they are outside our “specialties,” which frees us from commitments that we should all really assume, even if it is in an unprofessional way. Seen from the positive side, perhaps the appearance of that program and that absurd tribute should be interpreted—not so much as the counterrevolutionary gesture that Dr Rodríguez Coronel pointed out, which is very sensible—but as a very useful provocation to reflect more energy on censorship and self-censorship, bureaucratism, opportunism, silencing and the whole string of scourges of a new type that we already know and that keeps many educators, thinkers, creators, and artists in a state of discontent, anxiety, insecurity, and fear, and, of course, our population in general.

The fact that the platform of these debates is email and not the media themselves, publications, or public (or at least institutional) discussion could gradually turn it into a gossip of old, pitiful, and spiteful writers and artists. And these are issues that have infected everyone and not just intellectuals and artists. I think the worst thing is to discover in very young people or people belonging to popular sectors or linked to other supposedly non-intellectual or artistic activities (I am thinking of the religious environment of Ifá, for example, where there is currently a rich and heated intellectual debate on ethical issues, political, and even philosophical, aesthetic, etc.), the same symptoms of those illnesses of thought that we are talking about here.

The old syndrome of “that doesn’t fix anyone,” or “this is not the right time to discuss these matters,” or “that is up to the corresponding authorities to decide,” etc., has been prolonged beyond what is owed to a lot of things that we all suffer daily in our respective jobs. As you well know, what we call culture is not just a matter of the “cultured” nor of the theoreticians of culture. That’s why I don’t think it’s necessary to reduce the list of voices for fear that someone sneaks in and takes advantage of this circumstance. This—as it should be in any other sphere—is everyone’s business.

I even received a very interesting message that a friend sent me and that Doimeadios wrote, where mischief, double meanings work like good surgical instruments, which, as we know, is typical of good humor, now almost extinct. I believe that even the “accused” or those referred to should also give their points of view. I would not like this whole matter to end with an official opinion “from above” that would close this interesting and very useful debate. It would be very sad to see that the pessimistic thought that dogs can continue barking uselessly at the wheel of the car is true. Especially when we know that this car (call it revolution, Cuban culture, our country, the homeland, or whatever anyone wants to call it) is a common good, a collective property.

A hug
Orlando Hernandez

Message from Orlando Hernández to Arturo Arango

Dear Arthur,

I was very happy to receive your message. Some other day we will have to meet and talk. About this or something else. Now I prefer to get to the point. I learned yesterday from Desiderio that they (who?) had had a meeting with the Minister and that they were waiting for “some” decision. Which? Whose? I don’t know how things have continued to move in recent hours, but the truth is that, until now, none of the participants in said meeting has said anything concrete about what was discussed there. Was there some commitment to maintain secrecy?

I must confess that in the current circumstances and given the tone of sincerity and “transparency” that has prevailed in these public exchanges, any manifestation of “secrecy” seems out of place. Don’t you agree? If we are launching a style of virtual debate that has the grace—and the courage—of not being anonymous, why not show us all the cards? It’s bad enough that many stakeholders are excluded because they don’t have email or cellphones, or because they’re not on our mailing lists. It seems to me that we ALL should have the privilege of sharing ALL information.

No one knows what kind of “decision” is being expected, or was agreed to be expected. A simple apology from the ICRT for their blunders? Some proposed sanction perhaps? For one person or more? In my opinion, none of this seems really important. We’ve all seen those movies. Neither apologies (true or false), nor sanctions (where those sanctioned often “fall further up” or are even rewarded years later with programs on television) are going to fix anything. At this point, most are hoping for more serious, more respectful decisions, and above all, ones that are broader, more comprehensive, that allow a glimpse of solutions to a whole range of discomforts and concerns that have been raised here (and many others that have not been raised) concerning the Pavón case.

You don’t have to be very intelligent to notice that they aren’t problems of a trade union or “union” nature; that is, that they affect only or mainly the workers of the “culture,” but rather that they are problems that interest everyone. Are we vainly defending our miniscule “freedom of expression, of creation” as writers and artists? Our right not to be censored and of course not to have to censor ourselves for fear of being censored?

This, it is true, has been catastrophic for our intellectual, literary and artistic production, but I am convinced that the other sectors of our population would like to claim these same rights to be able to express themselves without having to lie, whisper or live double lives, to be socially, ideologically, politically honest, without fear of censorship and reprimand from the many other institutions with which we are related as citizens. From which it follows then that it is not only a matter of “cultural policy.”

It seems that we continue to understand culture in its reduced, elitist format, as referring mainly to “art and literature,” or to intellectual creation of a single type, separated from all other intellectual, aesthetic and creative activities of social, economic or religious life. The fact that the corner winemaker, or the family doctor or the

babalawo on the block cannot accuse the excesses of a certain Pavón or a Serguera does not make them any less victims of those same factory defects that we have been discussing here. I like to insist on the idea of making this issue a social problem and not just a union problem. It would really be very sad if all this fell into the ridiculous mailbox of complaints and suggestions of the Ministry of Culture, or became the collective catharsis of a minority.

On the other hand, I have the impression that this matter is taking on too many sides, most of them more or less unproductive. Some have taken advantage of the occasion to air old grudges in public, others to show off their intelligence and eloquence, or to show off their very worthwhile scars. Perhaps all this is normal within our world. But we have to get out of this vicious circle and stop looking at our navel—which is exactly the same as everyone else’s—if we want something more than a new Band-Aid. I have just received an invitation from Desiderio for a conference in *Criterion* on “The Five Gray Year Period: Revisiting the Term,” by Ambrosio Fornet as part of the Cycle “The Cultural Policy of the Revolutionary Period: Memory and Reflection,” where you will also make an appearance. It seems very good, of course, but I am also concerned that this will turn into an academic, “terminological” debate, etc. Outside of this message from Desiderio, I have hardly received any new messages, only Amir’s text and the discussion between Rosa Ileana and Desiderio. And the article in *El País*, of course. Anyway, is there anything new to say or has everything been said? Hopefully it’s neither of the two.

A hug and let’s keep in contact,
Orlando Hernandez

P.S. Of course, I have directed this message to everyone on the list, or the initial list, since there are many other parallel lists

Another Message from Orlando Hernandez

Did we want an answer? We already have one. The ICRT has responded. And now that? Does anyone know what the next step is? Besides feeling mocked again, outraged, we can do nothing concrete, but wait. Apparently, the “widespread indignation of magnitudes and unpredictable results” that Desiderio mentioned, is silenced. Or maybe I’ve been going deaf. Of that *mambí* bugle call from the beginning, which all Cubans listen to with so much pride, now we are only left with the Chinese trumpet of the oriental conga. Sitting in front of my PC, I also wait. Smoking, of course. I am disappointed to see how many responses to unsolicited requests enter Cubarte with impunity: Viagra, Rolex and university degrees at low prices. From time to time I startle with some message, but it’s private, for personal consumption.

I don’t know if we had really made some petition, if we had requested a response, nor from whom, nor for what. But one of our main sins has always been precisely that: waiting for answers, decisions, measures, conclusions, and not being able to take them. Indeed: it’s something that is not in our hands. It’s been a long time since we handed over the hands with the gloves. (But it seems that I am rushing to prejudice, as Desiderio

amicably reprimanded me, and I don't say this sarcastically: it's true that the response from the Minister is still missing, and from the UNEAC Presidency, and of course, the responses that will inevitably come after the conferences in *Criteria*.

Should I keep waiting? Some already only expect the generally slow, unpredictable responses (or reactions) of other even more elevated instances. The matter has been left in the hands of the experts. We wouldn't know what to do. We are too poetic, idealistic, romantic. Or we use too much common sense, emotions. Either way, we wouldn't know what to do with the answers because we didn't ask the right questions, make the right requests. Or maybe they weren't clear enough. Not even for ourselves. Did we want retrospective relief? Apologies? Was it a lynching? Or did we know that what we wanted was impossible; that is, a moon like the one that mom promised us? To have the moon you have to look for it and not just ask for it. And we were already all looking for it. As Francis Sánchez, from Ciego de Avila, said in a message: "The best is not yet to come, the best is already happening. Think hard and openly, dialogue boldly, exchange opinions..."

Twice our tribal chiefs have sat around the campfire and failed to light the peace pipe or declare any real war. And now our warriors don't know whether to keep brandishing their axes or retreat back to their tents and consult their oracles. There has been no debate, no controversy. We have all agreed. We have been shooting symbolic arrows to defend Honor, Freedom and other such abstractions. Some arrows (many of them poisoned) have wounded our own side. But the enemy remains invisible, especially since a part of it is still inside us. We have only pointed out some of its old disguises: Pavón, Quesada, Serguera, "the five gray year period"

Thank God I had to interrupt this kind of metaphorical ethnography I was doing. I just received the text from Roberto Cobas. I don't know who he is, but I have found there many intelligent, direct, and sincere ideas, that is to say, revolutionary. Or at least it seems so to me. I haven't finished reading his text, but he has stuck many fingers in many wounds. You have to read it without suspicion. I have also read very interesting ideas by the historian Pedro Campos Santos on 21st century socialism, and I would very much like to invite him to share in this dialogue, as I mentioned to Desiderio last night by telephone.

Taking this whole issue out to the corresponding battlefield, which is much broader than the one in which we move, includes economic, social, and political analyzes for which I don't think we all have much competence. (I speak for myself, of course.) Looking for a little clarity would not hurt us at all. It's a good time to do it. While we wait for "answers," let's be prepared to ask (and ask ourselves) questions, lots of questions. There is no need to be discouraged. We can't be wrong. Hugs.

Message from Orlando Hernández to Pedro Campos

Dear Pedro,

I thank you very much for your prompt and decisive letter. And I apologize for not responding to you right away, but I've been immersed in these pursuits, and now I've found the time. I knew in advance what your position was going to be. I have read almost all your essays and articles in *Kaosenlared*, and I'm very happy to know that we can count on someone like you. The presence of your ideas in our current debate is of great importance. Your positions are very clear and point to very urgent needs of our society. To a large extent, if I dared to circulate your name and email within my message, it was to precipitate your appearance among us.

To the extent of my limited knowledge, I have tried to divert this whole matter from the limited union tone (vengeful, etc.) with which it was presented at the beginning, and direct it towards the social, economic and political level that you know very well, but I lack the resources to structure the discourse that is now needed. And that's where you come in. If you need me to send you the messages that we have been passing around this week, I will do it immediately, so that you can have a broader perspective of all the aspects (even those that are emotional, not very coherent, and of course, the opposite ones). Yes, we really have to do things together; we have to know who we are and how we think, so that too abstract theoretical models don't go to our heads. I'll give you my phone number in case you want to call me at any time: 41 40 18. I repeat, your letter has given me great joy. I look forward to speaking with you as soon as possible. As you may know, Desiderio Navarro has organized conferences on these issues on the 30th in *Cristerios*, which will be held in one of the halls of the Casa de las Américas. Your participation there seems essential to me.

Tell me if I can send your letter and my response to the rest of the interested parties.

A hug,
Orlando Hernández

Message from Orlando Hernández to Carlos Sotomayor

Dear Carlos Sotomayor,

Thank you for your message. I have little time to respond individually to all the letters. Those that are addressed only to my address I keep private until the author authorizes me to make them public. Unfortunately, many still remain on the sidelines of this forum for fear of future reprisals (sometimes in the small circuit of their workplace, for example, or from their base committee of the UJC, etc.), a feeling of mistrust that I consider very logical(?). But we must gradually lose that fear and begin to circulate all the ideas on these issues, in an open and sincere way, if we want to solve all (or at least some) problems.

I don't know what you mean when you say you are a "simple cultural worker," because one of the things we are discussing refers precisely to that: to stop thinking that cultural workers (and this concept of culture should be understood in the broadest way) have more right than others to assert their opinion (and even to establish it as law) because they consider that they have greater competence, or greater intellectual hierarchy, or greater political, administrative power, etc., within the management apparatus, etc.; when what it is about is that we all understand that the leaders, the "cadres," the institutions, at all levels, are only our "delegates," the spokespersons and defenders of our needs, and not just our bosses, or our employers, or our overseers.

The idea is very simple. If we don't decide things together, someone is going to want to decide them for themselves, which is what has been leading our country to the generalized discontent in which it finds itself. Remember that the revolution was made above all so that the "simple workers" would have all the rights that only a few possessed. With regard to the fact that the "firemen" have already gone to put out this fire, I have a very different opinion. Remember that it's a fire to burn old and useless things, and there are many people interested in that fire not going out. Quite the contrary. If it goes out, it will not be the fault of the "firefighters," but rather ours, the "simple" and "complex" workers.

Tell me if you allow me to circulate your message and my response. Your concern (which I suppose is based on a concrete fact and not on an assumption) introduces an element that should be stated.

A hug,
Orlando
January 18, 2007

Message from Orlando Hernández to Francis Sánchez

Dear Francis,

I apologize for not having responded to you personally from the beginning, especially considering that you have been one of those who has always been very aware of everything and very concerned and active during the development of this forum, debate or whatever it's called. I haven't done it with anyone. Sometimes due to lack of time, or for other considerations (respect for requested privacy, etc.), which I stand by. Most of them (with the exception of Desiderio, Arturo Arango, etc.) I don't have the pleasure of knowing personally, and it seems enough to me to invade their privacy through the use of their addresses. All my messages—with very few exception—have been sent to everyone who appeared in the letters I received from Arturo and Desiderio, and I'm not very good at those email matters.

From what I have read of your messages, I think we agree on the essential things, which is more than enough. And that makes me happy. I perfectly understand your feeling—which I hope has been disappearing—of being "belittled" for being or living "inside," as you say, but, as you well know, those from the "outside" have at some point

felt equally dismissed from the “center” of the debate. The presence of a large group of prominent intellectuals and artists has also inhibited (or auto-dismissed) many other cultural workers who would have the same right (and the same desire) to express themselves. I believe that the widest participation of all is important, since the variety of points of view is what can enrich a possible solution. But I myself have never been in that “center,” nor have I wanted such a thing. And I apologize if my messages have given that impression.

I’m an “independent” writer; that is, I have not received a salary from any institution since 1989, and I am simply a “rank and file” member of UNEAC. Therefore I have not participated in the meetings that have been held there, nor have I been able to be part of any of the institutional decisions that have been made. Like you, and many others, I have expressed my opinions freely, with the utmost sincerity. I appreciate the mentions you make about me in one of your messages, which now I don’t know if you addressed only to me or to everyone. I have also quoted your words in one of my messages, I think number 3. Have you received it?

I never sent you the *El País* thing that you asked me for, nor the one of Rosa Ileana, since I considered that especially the second could divert the matter towards internal conflicts between intellectuals, an issue that seemed very dangerous to me from the beginning, and still seems so to me. In short, I have sent you others that I have received and I am ready to continue these dialogues and increase friendship, good understanding, and get rid of so much suspicion and fear that keeps each of us separated in his cave. I am convinced, Francis, that together we are going to solve something; I don’t know how much, or when, but it’s inevitable. I look forward to meeting you. Until then, a hug.

Orlando Hernández
January 21, 2007

Message from Orlando Hernández to Yoani Sánchez

Yoani, of course. From the beginning I was bothered by the conversion of this problem into a simple “terminological” academic agenda “topic” (Five-year gray period: revisiting a term), which cost me a public reprimand from Desiderio, which I preferred not to answer to avoid “disunion in the ranks.” His argument was that this would allow in some way to establish debates towards other aspects of the problem and incorporate opinions from other areas of our society. By now closing the margin of admission (for reasons of physical “space”), many people will be left out and of course many opinions!!!

Well, let them move it now to the Karl Marx or a ball field or a pasture, as Macho said!!! I am very pessimistic, and I don’t even have the slightest enthusiasm for this conference anymore. I would rather have received a message from some of the speakers than go and listen to their long-drawn-out reasoning now. We have all done it spontaneously, risking making mistakes, inconsistencies, etc. Why has none of them publicly participated in the debate so far? Can we now hope that their texts will finally give us “the key” we are looking for? It doesn’t seem to me that it’s a key to open, but to close. I hope I’m wrong.

Cheers,
Orlando
January 22, 2007

Message from Orlando Hernández to Pedro Campos

Dear Pedro,

I sent you the message about the Conference that apparently was only sent to the “users” of the Cubarte mail, and I was afraid that you wouldn’t receive it. As you may remember, from the beginning it bothered me that they tried to turn this issue into a “topic” on the academic, terminological agenda (Ambrosio Fornet’s conference was entitled “Five-year gray period: revisiting a term,” for which I suffered a public reprimand from Desiderio, who has been its organizer as the director of *Criterion*).

I refrained from answering him so as not to create divisions, and I resignedly accepted his arguments, which foresaw the appearance of a broader debate than the “five-year gray” issue, since it included the participation of other sectors of society and not just the “intellectuals and artists.” Admission has now been reserved for members of these institutions of intellectuals, writers and artists for reasons of “physical space.” I don’t see why then it couldn’t be moved to a ballpark or a pasture, as the journalist Reynaldo Escobar said. The truth is that none of the intellectuals invited to give conferences (with the possible exception of Arturo Arango) has expressed himself through any email, which has been the medium accepted by all, preserving the privilege of not making mistakes as citizens, although they can do it later only as lecturers.

All this has me very upset. It seems to me that the idea of holding these conferences has great value, but it’s far below the value that the call for a broader and more participatory debate could have. Unfortunately, that other call has never been made, because perhaps only the Government itself, or the Party could do it. This is not a movie prohibited for minors.

A hug,
Orlando
January 22, 2007

Message from Orlando Hernández to Desiderio Navarro

Dear Desiderio:

I’m sorry. I have accumulated many doubts and grievances. I confess that I had already returned to my shop to consult the oracles, to ruminate on discontents, to avoid, to take precautions. I had slammed Sun Tzú’s book shut and continued with my readings of the *Odus* of Ifá and the *Tao Te Ching*. A painful inflammation of the trigeminal (a nerve that I only knew thanks to the Matamoros Trio), a tooth extraction (the 33rd), an *osorde ni* Ifá [secret act that the Awo must not disclose](where Baba Eyiogbe, Oddí Takofeño, Ogbé Ate saw me, although with Iré Ashegún Otá lese Orúnmila), the advice of my wife

and many friends, the crash of my PC, etc., combined harmoniously for me to abruptly walk away from the debate.

The serious thing for me is that I am disobeying the precise warnings of Orula who advised me to stay away. And I'm not kidding. Living in a country like ours, I am fortunate to enjoy multiple identities, to use a large number of traditions that many times—like now—come into conflict. Ifá, Tao, Kimbisa, Martí, el Ché, etc. But I am not Chinese. The trigeminal can be removed (if a “mystical man” tells me so, as the song says). And I'm sure that neither Orula nor Sambiampongo have wanted to censor me, but to warn me, take care of me.

But the many messages and events of these last days have fired my spirits again. I must admit that the Inbox has become one of the books that has been offering me the most “cultural” knowledge lately. I suffered in silence the UNEAC Declaration, that of Alfredo Guevara, which have already become too old, and also the announcement (the third) of the conference organized by *Criterion*, and which luckily I had the opportunity to discuss with you by telephone. Upon receiving, after our conversation, the fourth invitation (!) already arranged by you, (with its corresponding gray background) and discovering that my disenchantment continued, it seemed to me that it was better to leave my opinions where they were, because they could be misunderstood.

Pedro Campos, who visited me the day before yesterday, recommended that I let the events unfold, that it was inevitable that the discussions would reach everyone and that—contrary to what I thought—things were going even faster than usual, after decades of lethargy. If he sent you a message with all my doubts, it could create “disunity in the ranks,” or it could seem that he was sabotaging an activity that can be very productive. Unfortunately I couldn't hear you at the Round Table, so I can't comment on that.

Now I have just received the news of the new space “Words to intellectuals” in the Library that Dr. Hart has proposed “to organize meetings and a line of debate, of serene analysis, on the most difficult problems that affect the intellectual field and the Cuban culture.” Then I read the letters from Gustavo Arcos and “Betty,” the letter from Enrique Colina, and many other previous ones, from Reynaldo Escobar, from Yoani, Felix Sánchez, etc., etc., and I haven't been able to stop recovering the message that at that time I was going to send you. Or parts of it. I put the rest in the Recycle Bin. Maybe I should have given this one the same fate.

I am sending you these disorganized fragments privately, with the hope that you will know my opinions and send me yours, but deep down I believe that your answer should be known by all those who have been interested in this matter and especially in the positions of *Criterion*. I apologize for the fragmentary state of the writing. They are text ruins, patches, which is what I can do now. I'm in a lot of pain and not able to give much shape to my ideas. So please don't pay attention to verb forms. My message is the expression of sincere concern, without internal folds, and in no way an accusation or anything like that against you or *Criterion*. Take it as an unequivocal sign of respect and friendship. We already talked about it a few days ago.

Right now I read your message to “Betty,” and it seemed disproportionate. I don’t think, Desiderio, that everyone who writes to you with concerns, doubts, or discomfort (and I’ll do it in a while) is trying to question you or accuse you, or involve you in compromises. But *Criteria*s has taken center stage in this debate, and people are writing to you what they think. I don’t know who Betty is, really, or if she deserves everything you’ve told her. Maybe not. I also had an exchange with her and urged her to publicly express her opinions. I seem to remember that she is a friend of Magali Espinosa.

But we are in a very complex “revolutionary situation,” my brother. Don’t lose your temper. People respect you and try to take care of you, and *Criteria*s, for being the space for reflection that it is been for many years, so don’t be suspicious. Sometimes that’s the price that must be paid for having visibility in the “public thing.” Words play tricks right now. And you have to take care of yourself like a fine rooster when using certain words or ideas, since semiotics do not abound. But they can be fair for sinners, don’t forget that.

I think that by now most of the issues that concern us all have come to light. At least the fundamentals. Luckily, we have heard few personal complaints, very brief accounts of losses, and much less “annexationist” proclamations financed by any enemy, but quite the opposite. It has also become very clear that it is not—as the UNEAC Declaration stated—about “the just indignation of a group of our most important writers and artists,” since this matter goes far beyond those important figures, even beyond those of us who belong to the UNEAC, or those who were specific victims of that historical period called—perhaps provisionally—the “five-year gray period.”

What has been seen has also been the righteous indignation of many common and current writers, intellectuals and artists, not important, almost unknown, some perhaps too young to have published something, or who have done so in “the provinces,” etc. But it was also clear that it was an issue that interested many others who do not even write or make art, but are part of our educated and creative society. At least for a few days, everyone has felt they have the same rights to publicly express their concerns, their disagreements, their fears, and those who have not been able to do so, or have not wanted to, will have their reasons, and their decisions will have to be respected.

The other concern, whether the discussion was taking place from “revolutionary” positions, has also become clear: practically all of them are. Even those positions that in appearance can be too exalted, ironic, explosive, scathing, incendiary, etc. At least, that’s my impression. Many Cubans who considered themselves intimately rebellious, hypercritical, and even dissidents, or who fell into the category (always imprecise) of “counterrevolutionaries” because they didn’t agree with many things that have been happening in our country, have discovered with surprise that they were profoundly revolutionary. And this is a very positive sign and we must understand it and prevent it from deteriorating, because the important thing is to fix our society. and the more people who are interested in doing it, the better. Inclusion has to give better results than exclusion.

The Declaration of the UNEAC Secretariat has been timid, insubstantial, bloodless, as many of the participants have already expressed directly. The other “declaration,” that of Alfredo Guevara, is aimed exclusively at energetically denouncing the “belligerent mediocrity and ignorance” of the ICRT, and it is placed—energetically it’s true—only in the initial stage of this debate, already much more advanced.

Armando Hart’s proposal—in my humble opinion too orthodox—attempts to mechanically transfer our current concerns to a historical moment and to a pronouncement (*Words to the Intellectuals*, 1961), whose problems of interpretation, and above all of application, we have all already verified during these years, and still we continue suffering. Seen in the current context, I don’t believe it’s a proposal that satisfies the broader needs that this debate has generated, which should go beyond the “intellectual field” and “Cuban culture,” as it continues to be conceived, to become a matter for the entire people. Reducing it to our “sector” will again be pernicious. It’s true that—as you told me—there are other spaces to discuss other issues (economic, political, etc.); that is, the Assemblies of People’s Power, The Rendering of Accounts, the CDR Meetings, etc., but you already know how they have been working.

So, dear Desiderio, the only thing we were all waiting for was the announced Conference by Ambrosio Fornet (and those that would follow later), because it promised to provide that space for public debate that was being denied or postponed. The changes of venue, seeking to give more space to those interested, were proof that *Criterion* and other institutions (Casa de las Américas, UNEAC, the Ministry of Culture) were trying. But now they have frustrated him, and they have let everyone down. That is a reality that cannot be covered with a finger.

And although the conferences are generally, as in any other literary genre, a matter of authorship, we listen to them and then applaud them. And of course, in the end we will hear: “Does anyone want to say something, ask something, etc.?” That second part—without tarnishing the speakers, of course—was seen by all as the main course. I think that the authors could even make a mistake as authors, as speakers, or fall short of the expectations or needs of their audience, but the interventions of the public would allow it to be enriched. Now the audience has shrunk extraordinarily.

I was wondering, however, and so I told you, why I would have to wait until the 30th to know—not just the ideas—but the opinions of the invited speakers? They would have the privilege of having several weeks to string together and explain many issues that those of us who participated in the emails didn’t have. It’s okay. Perhaps Fornet will give us a “key” to get into the heart of so many problems. I would have preferred a preview of his views. We can all have been wrong about something (Francis Sánchez himself recognized it with respect to Ambrosio), but we have done it as citizens, with our passions, our ironies, etc., and not only as authors or producers of knowledge or lecturers. It is something quite different.

I think *Criterion* is assuming a very delicate responsibility. Very brave in the sense that—as you have said—it has been the only academic institution that has organized an event on this subject in record time. And you have also made it clear in your personal

messages. But your new decision (or acceptance) to limit entry to one of your events adds a meaning to *Criterion's* policy that needs to be explained more clearly, to prevent people from getting confused and jumping to conclusions.

Some remain hopeful that the issue will be narrowed down to “intellectuals and artists” (because they find it too ambitious or frightening to consider the obvious fact that this perspective has already proven to be too narrow and sectarian in the face of making the debate a matter of the people of Cuba). Then, I believe, at least a declaration by the Minister of Culture is necessary. No? Is it imprudent in these circumstances to summon a Minister or admonish him to give his opinions? Or to other instances of the State, the Party etc.? Can only Ministers make final decisions, concluding statements, etc.? I don't see why we haven't received any of those opinions yet.

Well, here's another piece of letter that I'm not going to rewrite.

Dear Desiderio:

If I decide to write you this message—a few days before the conference is held—it's because it would be a dishonest act, even treacherous, to keep quiet about what I think, or to comment on it behind your back (or publicly, without first discussing it with you). I already did it a few days ago, by phone, but I still have almost the same doubts. I've gone around and around trying to convince myself that I'm wrong, but I don't manage to do it. If they are “unfounded” thoughts, it's best to unfound them. The thing is that I have (or still have) reservations, misgivings, or objections to these conferences, which, on the other hand, I'm sure can be very successful. My objections have nothing to do with the intellectual quality of the speakers, and much less with yours, nor with the demonstrated public utility of *Criterion's*. They are reservations and misgivings not because of the conferences themselves, nor because of their analytical, clarifying function, but because of what these conferences represent at this time. For what they avoid more than for what they propose. Let's call them strategic or tactical misgivings.

Perhaps I'm being too suspicious or distrustful, but I believe that the conference has become a meeting, an unscheduled meeting, but one where the Minister will attend and probably speak, together with the presidents of the UNEAC sections, and some selected colleagues from various institutions, etc. Isn't this true? The conference could go beyond the academic, the analysis of the damned five-year period, of Pavón, etc., or so it seems, but only obliquely. It will be a meeting (with the Minister) masquerading as a conference. And that is what worries me, or bothers me: that the conference (and incidentally *Criterion's*) becomes a fire extinguisher or an escape valve that avoids or postpones a broader call. Do not misunderstand. It is not comfortable for me to attend the Fornet Conference. At least with these concerns in mind. Am I going to exercise my right to participate in an event where I have privileges over others?

Waiting for the conference, many people—including myself—have stopped the exchange of messages.

The problem is not that I don't believe—as you might have thought—in the importance of theoretical, historical, terminological analyses, etc. (because after all, *Criteria*s, as you yourself have said, is an “academic cultural institution,” and that is the main product it offers), but in the current circumstances, its performance has acquired a character that goes beyond its usual function.

In short, I don't understand how *Criteria*s decided (or accepted) that the “free entry” with which its invitation began on the 13th became this restricted and controlled entry “by invitation,” aimed at certain members of certain institutions and associations and distributed by them. Really, I didn't recognize the language, nor the style of *Criteria*s in that bureaucratic and exclusive message sent from *Cubarte*, and I told you so. And *Criteria*s—as you already know—is you, yourself.

Under the argument of reserving space for intellectuals and artists, they are segregating, excluding, discriminating against too large a number of those interested in a subject that, as you yourself said, would not be just the “five-year gray period.” It is as if only musicians, musicologists, composers and conductors were invited to listen to the symphony, and the public was left outside. If the space offered by La Casa was still too small, couldn't a larger space be managed, like the Karl Marx Theatre, for example? Many have said this.

On the other hand, why invite many of those institutions of the “cultural sector” that haven't expressed (and there has been an opportunity and space to do so) their real interest in the problems that the theme of these conferences has caused, and that go beyond that topic? In my opinion, if a sector should have been prioritized in these selective invitations, it would be the one made up of those who have participated with interest in this public debate by email. Perhaps we should start from those. Whether or not they belong to those institutions.

You say: “numerous people and institutions in the cultural sector”... I am lucky, as I have told you, to actively participate in many cultural “sectors” that are not included within that “cultural sector” that this message speaks about. As I told you (to give just one example) the Yoruba Cultural Society of Cuba is not among the guests, and it brings together a vast mass of *babalawos*, *paleros* and *abakuás* who together constitute a considerable mass of the Havana population and the Cuban, without counting all those who do not belong to that Society, or who belong to other societies and fraternities that are also cultural, producers of culture, even if they're not institutionalized.

I mentioned this to you, but in the fourth invitation, this time sent by you, neither this institution nor many others is included, probably because the order to distribute the “credentials” from that first list was already given. Continuing to handle that restricted concept of culture, of “cultural sector” in which we are privileged, let's say, to reserve space for the participants in a conference (because it's just a conference, isn't it?) implies a position with which *Criteria*s could not have agreed, bureaucratic and elitist. And you know that. Especially in these moments and with so many things that have been said. All this worries people, Desiderio, and they tell you, because you are at the center of this matter. Not for anything else.

Every so often I read these sentences again, and I'm ashamed to be privileged to have an invitation: "To guarantee that our writers, artists and intellectuals in general can be present, we have decided to reserve the entrance, through invitations. The invitations will be distributed next week by the respective associations and institutions."

There are some who even want to write memoirs of this matter. You have already planned a book with the lectures. This is all very well, of course. But I think it's too early. They are trying to bury a dead person who is completely alive, who has not even shown fainting symptoms, quite the opposite. And what it is about, I think, is that we don't have to continue digging up corpses who, like this one, have still continued to turn over in their graves. Memoirs and books will come later.

Well, this is not a letter or a message—it's very incoherent—but I think you are capable of knowing where things are going. I repeat, do not take badly what many people are writing to you, or thinking. If I could, I would talk to you better on the phone about all these things.

A hug,
Orlando
January 28, 2007

Message from Orlando Hernández to Roberto Cobas

Dear Roberto,

First of all let me thank you for having participated in this debate with your magnificent texts. I had already read some of them in *Kaosenlared*, as well as those of Pedro Campos, and in one of my messages I took the liberty of provoking a greater intervention from you in this matter, which was taking a path that was too small and unionized. It is possible that some have since begun to think more broadly, but still I believe that many have decided, or have been content, to keep the discussion within the confines of that tiny "cultural sector" that was the main guest at the "conference." In my opinion, the very "conferences" organized by *Criteria*s have helped to restrict it, which is why I resisted them from the beginning.

I don't dispute the partial usefulness of the historical, "archaeological," etc. analyzes of that period, but at that juncture (which I like to remember as a "revolutionary situation"), it would have been much more profitable to cancel or postpone it in order to provoke the State, the Party, etc., to have to take on larger discussions with a much broader audience. It ended up being, to my disappointment, a semi-informal (and even humorous) "meeting" with the Minister of Culture, which was masked as a "conference" on the "five-year gray period."

The "academic" (and then the bureaucratic) gargled and then swallowed all that effervescence that was timidly taking on a popular and therefore "dangerous" character. I had the opportunity to discuss by telephone with Desiderio, and I sent him a private letter about my reservations and disagreements, as well as about the position that the

*Criterion*s Theoretical-Cultural Center was assuming (or accepting) with respect to selective “invitations,” etc., but it was an unproductive management. I probably made a serious mistake. If I had made my disagreements public, perhaps I would have achieved better results. A new confrontation with Desiderio (which would have been the second) could have been seen as a kind of “split in the ranks,” and at that time it didn’t seem prudent to me, but the truth is that having been the *Criterion*s center that had organized the conference, he was the only one who could call it off. And Desiderio didn’t want to do it, of course. But it’s no use complaining now.

Unfortunately (or perhaps luckily) I have had to momentarily distance myself from this whole matter, although I keep myself informed. The stress of those first days damaged a maxillo-facial muscle that I’m still treating with painkillers and laser-puncture. Which, by the way, is somewhat more benign than facial paralysis or cerebral ischemia.

Sorry for all this unloading. I will now answer your questions. Nothing has been published about the statements that night except Fernet’s text, which Desiderio also sent by email to those who requested it. I don’t think anything will be published about what was said there that night unless they have recorded the statements and decide to make them public 30 years from now. The Minister’s statement was not read, but improvised, and only Desiderio Navarro read an introductory text before Fernet that you may be able to request.

I attended the conference (quite embarrassed to enjoy that privilege), and after the Minister spoke, I left. The conclusive tone of his words (“this is not the moment,” “we’re in line after Iraq,” “we must not break our institutions,” etc., as well as his meticulous defense of the timorous declaration of the UNEAC, etc.) were enough for me. According to what I have been told, at the end there was a rather strong and interesting exchange between the Minister and Enrique Colina, and also with Zenaida Romeu, but I don’t know anything about its content. The next conference will be read by the architect Mario Coyula at the end of this month, although the “right” place has not yet been determined, so I don’t know if it will be in the Che Guevara room, in *Criterion*s or in the National Library. And then there will be another one by Arturo Arango, etc.

Those are the ones that they will send to those who request them and will then be published in book form. It would be much more instructive—as someone has proposed—if all emails are published as well, which I highly doubt will ever happen. With this it is assumed that the corpse (still alive and kicking) of this brief and hopeful rampage will be buried. Until new notice. And in relation to the socialism of the 21st century—as I jokingly told Pedro Campos—perhaps we should leave it for the 22nd century. Excuse so much pessimism. Keep in touch.

A hug,
Orlando Hernández
February 8, 2007

OSVALDO DOIMEADIÓS

Translated by Regina Anavy

Message of Osvaldo Doimeadiós to Xiomara Palacio

Dear friend,

I have been amazed by all the ideas that move around these days in the intellectual field. It seems that television, to entertain Cuban artists in the new year and the intellectual gossip, instead of a turkey, offered them a “Pavón.” At this time, I imagine that those media leaders go through the corridors—and faced with so many burning letters—running like rats, with the faith that characterizes them (rat faith), and justifying that Pavon was an “error of *Impronta*.”

It seems that in their eagerness to rebroadcast old stuff, they are rebroadcasting old mistakes as well. The Papito Serguera thing the other day was only a preview, and if it was about progress I would have put it in a science and health program, like a preview of the League Against “Cerguera.” And the wonders of operating with lasers ...with laser-pointer in hand....

As a result of all this that is happening, I have made the commitment to become a voracious (I should hope so) viewer this year and not lose for a second anything that our television officials are proud to show on the small screen. because... look, I missed the *Impronta*, and it was something imprinting, and I missed the open dialogue with Quesada, which luckily I did not suffer in person, but we still suffer from his disciples. He clouded the dreams of many artists who saw their dreams reduced to true “quesadillas” (mixture of a Mexican dish where the cheese melts and you sleep badly). In both cases you end up melted.

For now I see that a great reality show is coming, and why not, at any time we can see a program with the most requested enemies of the week. Just in case, I’m already making my list and not to waste time tomorrow, I’ll send my first letter to “Against Oblivion.” It’s time to put the cards on the table. Who know? The program might become a success, and the best enemies will go to a monthly, annual or five-year competition, like the enemies that are still remembered from the “five-year gray period.”

As you can see, the meteorologists were not wrong in forecasting a very, very hot year.

A hug and please don’t circulate this message and if you do, try to reach as many people as possible.

A kiss,
Doime
January 8, 2007

PABLO MENÉNDEZ

Translated by Regina Anavy

Hello friends,

I have felt inspired and encouraged by the courage and decency of those who have wanted to express their disagreement with forgetting (or worse, forgiving) abuses and outrages committed in our past. Those deviations, those abuses, were committed in the name of our Revolution, which makes them more shameful, and we really have a duty to speak up now. These people (or these policies) caused a lot of pain.

Unfortunately there was never a public debate about those times. That is a mistake we must now face.

I am not convinced by the arguments about any possible advantage in not discussing these things publicly.

It seems to me that in every way, this discussion strengthens us. It seems good to me that a statement from the UNEAC has come out, but I feel the same as some of the others who have seen it as flat and cautious. And it doesn't add the names of the members of the Secretariat. The debate does not end. There is no talk about any measure that is going to be taken with those responsible for these programs, much less ask them for a public apology to the people and the affected creators. Of five paragraphs, it dedicates two to talking about "the enemies of the Revolution" (nobody cares what they say or not about all this). The very fact of discussing extensively and without fear is a defeat for those who deny the possibility that this type of democratic, revolutionary debate could take place in Cuba. Why talk about them and much less "towards them"? Marti's cultural policy, anti-dogmatic, creative and participatory, of course allows broad debate and allows moving forward, not backward, as those who brought these characters on our television would like. "Irreversible" does not mean static or stagnant. To deny improvement is to deny the Revolution.

I have now lived in Cuba for 40 years.

During the times of Llanusa, Pavón, Quesada and Serguera, friends outside the country asked me why the ICAIC Experimentation Group (of which I was a member) was banned and absent from Cuban television, radio and art schools. Silvio, Pablito, Nueva Trova, Cuban jazz, Cuban rock, or rock from other countries, etc. etc. They asked me if the Cuban Revolution defended the rights of women, the vindication of the cultural values of the African heritage, the right of human beings to decide whom to love. They asked me why those with long hair or short skirts were persecuted...

Now instead, in these years, they ask why Bush forbids rock groups and other artists from the US to visit or perform in Cuba (after the AudioSlave concert Bush tightened the restrictions). Now they ask why the US does not give visas to Cuban artists who nevertheless travel and perform regularly in the rest of the world. Now they ask why they don't watch the video clips of Carlos Varela or Equis Alfonso and other Cuban

artists on MTV... Now they want to know why the artists of the Buena Vista Social Club or the Muñequitos de Matanzas can no longer enter the US , Los Van or Chucho Valdés and many others, including our group Mezcla...

Our vital objectives are clearly seen in our art: we fight for love, human solidarity, tolerance, respect for the rights of others, art, poetry, tasteful, rich and intelligent music: freedom!

Those who prohibit, burn books and paintings, persecute those of different races, religions, sexual orientations, are those who invade other countries and bomb, those from the prisons of Abu Ghraib...those from Auschwitz...the Inquisition... the repressors...

The fascists burn books and ban artists who don't follow their line. They cut off the hands of the troubadours. They cultivate racism and hatred of what is different. They hate life and happiness. The Inquisition asks the faithful of other spiritual expressions to renounce these, under penalty of death, exile, confinement or torture. Fascism prohibits or erases what it does not want to be read or seen or sung about. It limits the freedom to travel. Separates families. It's against all this that a Revolution does. Despite all the difficulties of the real blockade and material limitations, and our own "blockades," our art flourishes in all genres, and even Cuban artists residing abroad aspire to perform on the island and be part of the active life culture of the country. Important artists and international groups come to perform for free in Cuba so they don't miss out on all this.

The Culture of the Cuban Revolution is Silvio, Pablito, Formell, los Van, Mayito Rivera, Titón, Carlos Varela, Gerardo Alfonso, Frank Delgado, Síntesis, Abelardo Estorino, Lázaro Ros, Virgilio Piñera, Chucho, Leonardo Acosta, Lezama Lima, Fernando Pérez, Zenaidita Romeu and her Camerata, Alejo Carpentier, Enrique Pineda Barnet, Orlando Cruzata and the Lucas Awards, *rumberos*, young rockers, rappers, reggaeton players, jazz players, pop rockers, comedians, Ramiro Guerra, the Ballet, the Dance, the Folkloric Ensemble, Senel Paz, Wendy Guerra, Léster Hamlet, Abel Prieto, John Lennon, Manu Chau, AudioSlave, Desiderio and Criterios, the Pablo of the T. Brau Center, Juan de Marcos...an endless list of brilliant artists from all the generations and all the styles, new, less new, traditional, innovative. It really impresses to think of all the names that I could put in this letter, and I wouldn't have to write anything else, and almost all of them were or would have been affected by the measures symbolized by those officials. If someone has the highest responsibility of directing our television, it's totally unacceptable that they don't know all this history even if it concerned damage to just one of these artists.

Well, I can't mention everyone, nor will this letter be perfect. I wish I had the opportunity to be as brilliantly concise as Humberto Solás or Mario Coyula or Adria Santana herself and others. But I cannot remain silent in all this debate.

This is OUR LIFE.

Pablo Menendez, January 20, 2007

PANCHO GARCÍA

Translated by Regina Anavy

I have been aware of the controversy unleashed as a result of the unusual, unexpected and incomprehensible appearance of Luis Pavón's on the *Impronta* television program, an abhorrent character from that decade that I hope we could forget. As you well know I was one of those who did not meet the parameters to belong to the Cuban culture. I am moved by your reaction to such an event and of course feel that I am part of that protest. Needless to say, you can use my opinion for whatever you want.

Pancho García

PAQUITO DE RIVERA

Translated by Mary Jo Porter

Message from Paquito de Rivera to Marta Valdés

Dear Marta (Valdés):

I congratulate you for your courageous adherence to the group of Cuban intellectuals against the infamous ex-ex-ex-cultural leader Luis Pavón, who, by the way, has been a perfect zero to the left for a long time (forgive the redundancy). I hope that this is only the introduction to attack Ramiro Valdés and those who actually physically carried out all that bloody repression against long hair and short skirts that Zenaidita Romeu so rightly refers to; because in any case, neither you nor I ever saw Pavón, nor the idiot Papito Serguera, nor any Culture leader go out with scissors in hand to cut hair and lock up young “foreigners” in Coppelia, right? ... and given your recognized sense of “timing,” I dare to say that you will have prepared a song in commemoration of the UMAP, an idea shared by Raúl Castro and Che Guevara (A naughty Che-Che-Che, it could be, right?)... Pablito Milanes had to add a good verse first-hand... (the left-wing gay community would go crazy with that binomial: Marta and Pablo!)

I look forward to supporting you in your next protest against the staff that caused us so much pain (not dying rams like Pavón and Serguera); I say the same to Antón Arrufat, Jorge Ángel Pérez, Zenaidita Romeu, Desiderio Navarro, Arturo Arango, Reynaldo González, César López, Norge Espinosa, Abelardo Estorino, Ramiro Guerra, Jaime Sarusky, Monsignor Carlos Manuel de Céspedes, Nancy Morejón, Ambrosio Fornet, Luciano Castillo, Sigfredo Ariel, Marta Valdés, Ena Lucía Portela, Waldo Leyva, Enrique Pineda Barnet, Jorge Luis Sánchez, Senel Paz, Rebeca Chávez, Reina María Rodríguez, Luisa Campuzano, Carlos Celdrán, Pancho García, Adelaida Fernández de Juan, Aries Morales, Magaly Muguercia, Pedro Pérez Sarduy and the other “protestors” who so “heroically” have made firewood from the fallen tree. Now is your chance to vindicate yourselves... The two big Rs await you: Ramiro and Raúl. Let’s see if they have what Tito Puente had plenty of to do it: TIMBALES!!!!!!!

Until the Victory (the neighborhood of cheerful girls) forever.

Paquito de Rivera
United States

Message from Paquito de Rivera to Fefé Diego

Hi, Fefé,

Yes, it’s true that we don’t know each other personally, but you are very familiar to me, because I have always heard you spoken about with great affection by Lichi, Rapi, Felipe Dulzaides, and above all, by who I consider, for many reasons, the best of all that Vitier-Garcia Marruz-Dulzaides family, which is my old and dear friend Sergio Garcia-Marruz, with whom I never had a great friendship in Cuba, but who was the one who first broke

with what made no sense since Marx wrote the first lyrics from his book of German jokes.

I don't have the time or desire to delve into all this "terrifying" gossip, but I have mockingly read some of the "nonsense" that our, or rather "your brave intellectuals" have written. One named Jiménez said, copying the dissidents (I'm a worm, not a dissident, worth clarifying) that "The revolution belongs to everyone"... Solavaya, at this point, so impudent! And even your very own brother Lichi thought of saying from Mexico that "regardless of what you may think, in Cuba there are still revolutionary writers." Also in Germany there are writers who still yearn for Hitler, and in the United States there are thousands and thousands of idiots who belong to the KKK, and for that reason we are not going to stop despising them and boycotting their filthy ideas, my dear Lichi. And, as my grandmother used to say, the goat clings to the mountain, only there are some (few) of them that the stream of the earth does NOT please them more than the sea. Especially the sea of happiness that the Chávez talks about (or rather barks at). Well, yes, the damage and injuries have been great, but that damage did not start with Pavón and Serguera, nor did Quesada act alone, my dear Fefé. The thing came "from above," or are you going to tell me that you also believed the story that the Ruler in Chief didn't know about the UMAP and the cocaine traffic?

Believe me, as the Argentines say, spending my time talking about platitudes makes me sick, but you and everyone knows that the "special period" began very early in the twentieth century, and that those "mistakes" that were made and that cultural, economic, social and all kinds of disasters already goes back a long way. Don't let those tinpot intellectuals tell me that they didn't know about Stalin's purges, socialist realism, Mao's dark cultural revolution and how cruel, bloodthirsty and homophobic Che Guevara, Breshnev and Ho Chi Minh were.

As for the omission of my name in the cultural circles of that country, I am in very good company, and I'm glad. I don't want them to use my name like they have used Lecuona's and John Lennon's. Nor am I interested in having as colleagues and fellow travelers the group of Cubans who have most irresponsibly supported such a bloody regime: the writers and artists. Here on this side we have Cachao, Bebo Valdés, Carlos Alberto Montaner and many others who fill us with personal and artistic pride.

Counterrevolutionarily,
Paquito D'Rivera

PEDRO CAMPOS SANTOS

Translated by Regina Anavy

From Pedro Campos Santos to Orlando Hernández

Orlando:

In one of the emails that have reached me, on the occasion of the Pavón case, it suggests the possibility of inviting me to the discussions, given that some have begun to understand that we are facing a complex phenomenon that encompasses society, the economy and politics. We don't know each other personally, but I understand and share the controversy's sense of concern.

I will gladly participate in the conversations and exchanges that invite me. I think it's very correct to seek a broader social, economic and political approach to understand the causes of these phenomena and find solutions.

Cuban society needs cohesion, not false unity, capable of interweaving the interests of all. In *Kaosenlared*, a left-wing digital magazine, you can find a page that contains most of my essays and articles on socialism and current Cuban society. Anyway, if you wish, I can supply them this way. We are in contact.

Pedro Campos Santos

Another Message from Pedro Campos Santos to Orlando Hernández

Dear Orlando,

Of course you will have my presence on the 30th; you can circulate my answer and I will contribute what I can to these debates. Close friends have sent me a good number of the emails exchanged, and I have seen many positions, in my opinion all respectable although not necessarily shared.

In any case, it doesn't hurt to send me the exchange—especially the emails that you may consider more controversial—so as not to be absent from the wide spectrum of opinions, since it most likely I don't have everything.

If I hadn't appeared before among the messages, it was precisely because in the emails that I received it seemed to me that there was an interest in keeping the debate in a narrow circle. Lately I have noticed a broader spirit, far from some criteria that survive in seeing the world of culture and intellectuality as something outside and on the margin of society and its times.

Unfortunately for Cuban culture and intellectuality as a whole, there is a kind of sectoral pigeonholing that instead of contributing to the sediment, the solidity of our entire broad cultural movement, disperses, divides and even confronts it. The writers and artists are dispersed and isolated, as are the economists, the jurists, the great intellectual

volume of university professors, the journalists who appear in turn as divided between the official press and radio and television, the historians, the musicians, and the architects, the different medical professionals, the philosophers, more remote than they can be, the politicians who are also intellectuals, defending something to which others seem indifferent, and so on. Humanists all.

Sometimes I hear people talk about the ideological battle as something separate from all that broad, diverse, educated, revolutionary intellectual mass of ours, and I wonder how it would be possible for the new world, the best possible world we want, the one that can only be new-socialist, could succeed if it were not precisely for the real and effective cohesion and participation of all of it from its diversity.

Right now this debate of yours, which some will want to minimize, but with an unquestionably deep socio-political framework, is a matter that concerns, I think, the entire wide range of intellectuals, because more than with the past, it has to do with the future of our society, which belongs to everyone. In short it's very good. I congratulate you for thinking about this broader way that allows the interweaving of all culture in its broad spectrum. We all need a comprehensive and constructive vision of these matters. The problems that have affected and affect writers are the same ones that have affected and affect the rest of society, although with a different intensity and not always the same perception.

Our people are going through difficult times. In the great social, political and ideological battle, which is essentially cultural, to advance our society, the entire intelligentsia has a determining role.

Count me in.

A hug,
Pedro Campos

Message from Pedro Campos to Orlando Hernández

Dear Orlando,

I learned that they had changed the venue for the debate on the 30th, from ICAIC to Casa de Las Américas. There are people who don't know about this change. I also don't know what capacity the Casa de Las Américas venue has, but from what I've been seeing, attendance may exceed 500 people and from now on it may increase.

A hug,
Pedro Campos
January 22, 2007

Important space is opened in Cuba, to the revolutionary debate

By Pedro Campos Santos

(Dedicated to all the intellectuals who have participated constructively in this revolutionary controversy)

The newspaper *Juventud Rebelde* of January 27, reports that: “At the proposal of Dr. Armando Hart, director of the Office of the Martí Program, the theater of the National Library will bear the name of “Words to the intellectuals,” alluding to the meaning of the homonymous speech delivered by Fidel there in 1961. This room will be the right place to organize meetings and a line of debate, of serene analysis, on the most difficult problems that affect the intellectual field and Cuban culture.”

This announcement opens an important space for revolutionary and constructive exchange on issues that interest the Cuban intelligentsia, which includes writers, philosophers, economists, politicians, historians, jurists, sociologists and professionals from all branches of national knowledge. It is now up to all thinkers to make the most of this opening, for the good of the Cuban nation and its future.

It is disclosed, when a wide debate is still going on in the Creole Intranet, regarding some television programs in which characters appeared related to the so-called “five-year gray period,” a time when excesses were committed, determined by circumstances—for many—not yet overcome.

The electronic exchange led to a declaration by UNEAC, the National Union of Writers and Artists of Cuba, which ratified the cultural policy of the Revolution, but left many dissatisfied among the polemicists. The traffic in cybernetic letters, a modern version of the English “Chartist movement” of the mid-nineteenth century, also led to the programming of a colloquium on the “five-year gray period,” promoted by the Cuban intellectual Desiderio Navarro, National Edition Award 2006, with limited attendance, by invitation.

In this framework, several intellectuals expressed the need for a more comprehensive analysis, which would transcend that five-year period and help identify the economic, political and social causes that made possible the excesses of that time, in order to help ensure that they don’t happen again. There was no shortage of calls for a more active and supportive role for the Party.

In this sense, an email that circulated throughout the Cuban Intranet, signed by Mariela Castro Espín, stated: “... as a Cuban identified with a revolutionary social project that aims to achieve all justice, I feel moved by these comments and the fear that they will be diluted. Although they hurt and embarrass us, those moments should be deeply analyzed to prevent them from being repeated. Obviously the experiences of the past were not sufficiently clarified, nor properly regulated, and that is what worries me.

“In my opinion, these television programs show only the tip of the iceberg, and the reaction provoked responds to deeper discomforts that still don’t have the necessary support of our society, expressed in its policies. This is precisely what interests me the most, that as a result of the concerns caused by the careless? or clumsy? television programming, we can analyze and discuss styles of thinking, ambivalence, absence of

coherent definitions in the institutional policy of the ICRT that should know how to express our cultural, educational, women's policy, etc.

“As a militant of the PCC, I aspire to an intelligent response from the organization, as a facilitator and coordinator of the debate, so that all the concerns and suggestions that are responsibly made are considered, and we can collaborate with this permanent and necessary dialectical process of addressing and elaborating the inevitable contradictions of all processes.”

Another of the emails circulated, with the signature of *compañero* Alfredo Guevara, indicated: “A town of just over twelve million inhabitants, with more than eight hundred thousand university students and hundreds of thousands of people educated at a level above the average, a town without illiterates and in which education up to the ninth grade has been generalized; this is the town that deserves to be and is and has to be the real protagonist of the battle of ideas...”

“I ratify more than I subscribe to the Declaration that the UNEAC has just made, and I hope and call to prevent the usurpation and distortion of the rights of the Revolution and its cultural design from continuing. I do it from serenity but emphasizing urgency. Where the battle of ideas should have its first bastion, it will not make any sense for gravediggers to appear. Belligerent ignorance and mediocrity are the worst internal enemy of the Revolution.

“What has happened in these days is not only an affront to the Cuban intelligentsia, to our culture in its artistic expression, but has been, is, a trap set from that belligerent mediocrity and ignorance for Fidel and Raúl; a game of interests determined to confuse and divide. I salute the effort now focused on the UNEAC Declaration, aimed at preventing it.”

These paragraphs and many others that could be cited, reflect the broad revolutionary and constructive sense predominant in the cybernetic debate, which counterrevolutionary elements—from abroad—without any standing within our intelligentsia, tried to use in their favor, and whose limited presence in the exchange could have been used by the delayers and divisionists identified in *compañero* Guevara's message, to try to confuse and impede the revolutionary progress of the discussions.

Most of the many emails circulated in these days showed evidence of the responsibility with which the intelligentsia has assumed the defense of our socialist values and Martí Revolution, which is one of the guarantees of its continuity and irreversibility, far from any questioning type of *glasnost* pro-capitalist restoration. As the debate has turned more socialist, the few outsiders on the right have distanced themselves.

Dr. Armando Hart published in the newspaper *Juventud Rebelde* on December 9, an article on the socialism of the twenty-first century. The subject, little handled by the intelligentsia of the courtyard until now and forgotten in the press, has begun to manifest itself in this debate, every time that concerns increase about the inability of the

centralized and salaried state economy system to solve the multiple socio-economic problems of the country, and the interest in finding solutions to them.

In general, these anxieties were stimulated by the concerns expressed on November 17, 2005, by the Jefe of the Revolution, in his speech at the University of Havana. More recently, Comandante Raúl Castro has been insisting on the need for debate, discussions and discrepancies to face these problems and find adequate answers.

The opening of a concrete dynamic space, so that the thought of the Cuban nation develops and expresses itself with all revolutionary freedom, is an important achievement, the natural outcome of this brave electronic debate of our intellectuals, a sign of the maturity reached by the Cuban Revolution and a significant contribution to its consolidation and progress.

Havana, January 28, 2007. On one more anniversary of the birth of our National Hero, José Martí.
Pedro Campos Santos

Message from Pedro Campos to Abelardo Mena

It did come to me, only respecting his opinions, that I don't share some of his considerations, nor does it seem prudent to emphasize the differences, but rather the coincidences. I don't believe that the word "indicated" used by *compañero* Hart should be taken to invalidate the entire meaning of the new fact of relying on a channel that unites the debate institutionally with the official world.

If that word brings up so many doubts, wouldn't it be better to ask Hart what he meant by "indicated"? And I'm not inviting Gustavo unless he says what he thinks.

And courtesy and valor are not mutually exclusive. Accepting and giving life to the discussions in the National Library doesn't invalidate—on the contrary, it recognizes—the importance of what happened on the Intranet.

That it's discussed in the Library doesn't mean excluding discussion in other places and that other spaces continue to be sought and won. A constructive approach to events should see it that way, I think.

I try to assume a constructive, integrationist position and take advantage of the spaces that open up. For me it's important that from the ranks of the Revolution there is this opening. The truth is collective, it doesn't belong to anyone in particular. That we intellectuals, not just writers, are able to use this space well, integrate thinkers from different sectors and from different angles and gain other heights is already proof of our ability.

It's important to draw attention to the fact that this is something earned, a position, and we are capable of consolidating it and using it well.

I share Gustavo's concern that other spaces are necessary, that the press has not played its role, that the debate could and should be at the Round Table, and inside which, that our problems will be solved by the participation of all Cubans, etc., but I believe that this is something to gain little by little, to the extent that awareness is gained in the population, in the Party itself. It seems to me that being equally in favor of "winning all justice," we must understand that it is not a one-day battle, nor can it be achieved immediately.

I think that these discussions are beginning to be felt in Cuban society, although they have always been in the homes, in the corridors, in the corners, we are leaving one phase to enter another. Requesting more space is fine, but let's use the one that opens up to us without disdaining it, and let's continue using the one we already have as well.

The revolutionary camp must be united, and it would be a serious mistake to believe that this is exclusive to the 'debaters.'

Greetings,
Pedro Campos
January 29, 2007

PEDRO PÉREZ SARDUY

Translated by Regina Anavy

Desiderio:

A hug for the courage and brilliance which you have shown again. I support your message, unconditionally 100%, because I was one of those who suffered the consequences of that period and before. I am glad, then, that you have stepped out for what may come.

Pedro Pérez Sarduy

Message from Pedro Pérez Sarduy to Desiderio Navarro about his response to the message signed as “Betty”

Well said, Desiderio. You have a courage in your temper that’s as sharp as the blade of the best sword. I’m glad that you continue without letting yourself be provoked.

Betty who!? Betty Booo!!!

Everything you have done is excellent.

Your initiative is more than rewarded with the wonderful letter from my old classmate, Enrique Colina.

One of the best alumni of those professors we had at the School of Letters in the 1960s, from Mirta Aguirre to Camila Enríquez Ureña, passing through the slender Roberto Fernández Retamar and A. de Juan.

Remember those times?

Happy is the man. . .

Step by step, and this step is transcendental. Let it be taken with restraint and great intelligence, as Colina suggests, in his formidable oratory, from there where you all are, next to the good ceiba.

And whoever doesn’t know shouldn’t get involved!

Luck to all,
Sarduy
January 28, 2007

RAFAEL ALCIDES

Translated by Regina Anavy

The reversible sofa

There is a story that, due to everyday life in today's world, is already becoming boring. It is the one of the postmodernist husband who surprises his beloved wife, the woman of his life, up to her balls on the sofa in the house. Quickly, in order to save his honor, he throws away the sofa.

Something similar, hasty analysts think, is happening with a group of Cuban intellectuals. An increasingly numerous group positioned inside and outside the country, whose catharsis, as profound as it is resonant, has put those in the government had designed the future in a state of alert. Did I say something? Almost an avalanche, which began earlier this year with the surprise appearance of Luis Pavón in a television program dedicated to exalting and disseminating the values of the nation, honor and the honor of the homeland.

Who, and why, they wondered wildly, could have planned such an outrage? What is he doing again on Calle Pavón, now showing photos and trophies of his past importance, as if he had returned from Olympus after a very long trip? The emails came and went desperately.

The terrifying Pavón no less, they insisted, as if repeating it would stop that television slap in the face from being true; Luis Pavón Tamayo in person, who for years, who during several years was, back in the very dark decade of the '70s, president of the National Council of Culture (now the Ministry of Culture), and who is credited with having devised and put into practice torments that didn't exist even in Hell? Why? To what end? they said.

A test balloon launched by some Stalinist planted in the leadership of the Government? Sabotage to the government of Raúl Castro?

Quickly, before the terrifying situation created, the Secretariat of the UNEAC (Union of Writers and Artists of Cuba), which "shares the just indignation" of said intellectuals, summons them, listens to them, evaluates the facts with them, and nothing, everything is fine, false alarm, take the bottle of tranquilizers out of your pocket and sleep soundly again, life is short.

See in this regard the statement issued and published in the *Granma* newspaper on January 18. Historical jewel, by the way, in which, by mentioning the dangers that the annexationist enemy practiced, already putting its hand into what was a debate between revolutionaries (said as if in passing), took me back to the gloomy 1970s.

One day during those years, a middle-aged militiaman who had lost an eye in Girón found an almost-alive cockroach in the lunch peas of the workers' canteen and had to shut up immediately, drop the cockroach and, ashamed, sit down again in front of his

plate when, fattened and final, in the most perfect silence, the arm of the dining room administrator extended from the other end of the very long and dark room to point out with his forefinger a sign on the wall with the old slogan of that time. In very large and very red letters, the sign said: SILENCE. THE ENEMY IS LISTENING.

Be careful, adds the UNEAC Secretariat in its statement, that in the meeting with the “justly outraged” intellectuals, from the beginning it counted on “the absolute support of the Party leadership.”

Or is it to be believed, I ask, that the Party remained absorbed watching a prolonged game soccer match in the days when Pavón was operating in those worlds, without a god (I mean, without a Party) and without law? Without wishing to excuse him, Luis Pavón Tamayo, and the Cuban intelligentsia know this very well, if only in the sphere of our culture, that he was the Fulgor Sedano de la Comala then. Only that: the right-hand man of that time.

However, Pedro Páramo, who also knows how to play crazy, has gotten the message. Knowing that it's not always intelligent to govern by making the past a mirror of the future, the precautions to say without seeming so from those who have seemed to repeat the strategy of the postmodernist husband in the story to the undocumented observer, do not deceive him. He knows that by thundering past Pavón's windows, these intellectuals are suddenly “justly outraged” (which by their number are already crowds) and are not throwing away the sofa. They are, quite the opposite, making History. (Making History, not telling it). They are (we are) telling Pedro Páramo that his time has ended. That in Comala the dead have begun to rise again.

Rafael Alcides

RAMIRO GUERRA

Translated by GH

I just received your message about Pavón's unusual appearance on national television a few days ago, of which I saw the announcement, which I unreasonably did not allow myself to bother to see because of the repulsion I have towards the character. He used to go out as the ghostly dead from time to time, in important places and then disappear. A few years ago he appeared in the halls of UNEAC, and I told Aurora Bosch, who was then president of the Dance Section, that she should not count on my presence there while that character stepped on the UNEAC tiles.

After a time that I have now forgotten, she let me know that he had already disappeared and that I could return my presence to the institution. I didn't bother looking for the program in which the character would appear, unconsciously, it seems, rejecting the possibility that you now make clear that "a revival" could occur when the well-forgotten Serguera also appears, a sidekick in the colossal cultural disaster of the 1970s. Only one other remains to appear, whose name I have forgotten, who took the reins of the performing arts in that sad opportunity and swept away the theatrical movement that emerged in the shadow of the revolution. Dance suffered the disaster by making me disappear, although unusually, I think I was one of the few who kept a salary that had to go to a ghostly bag that was created and kept alive for several years in also ghostly places in the area of the National Council of Culture.

Important names in the theater movement were "parametrized" and sent to the Ministry of Labor, where they found only patching potholes and cemetery burials as job options. The puppet theater was mercilessly devastated and its beautiful dolls were sent to Cayo Cruz for garbage, which still exists in the bay, and the Camejos persecuted in a special way, erased from the national culture. Meanwhile, the *Decálogo del Apocalipsis* [*Decalogue of the Apocalypse*] was suspended, my work that was to be released according to an invitation printed in beautiful bright red dated April 15, 1971m after a year's hard work and an enormous cost for costumes and set design and to mark an important milestone in the development of contemporary dance in Cuba, and the lack of which has been lamented by the generations that emerged after me in that area by graduates of art schools, who lost the dance references promoted by me in 12 years, and who they marked the successful development of a dance movement rooted in a national identity but successfully updated by of the avant-gardes of the time.

Much has been written about this phenomenon by the choreographers who followed me, especially Marianela Boan, heir to my creative work with her group *Danzabierta*. What you have said in the message that I have received has opened my eyes to a danger that seems to be based on these days of possible changes in the course of the country's cultural policy when those ghosts of the past appear who want to return in search of new laurels in an opportunistic situation. The fact that national television takes them out of the grave of oblivion could herald a new storm.

Ramiro Guerra

REINA MARÍA RODRÍGUEZ

Translated by Regina Anavy

Letter to not be a prisoner spirit

About four years ago I read a book entitled *Un espíritu prisionero* [*A Prisoner Spirit*], published by Galaxia Gutenberg and translated from the Russian by Selma Ancira, which compiles texts by Marina Tsvetaeva, fragments of her diary, stories and poems. Also appearing, towards the end of this book, are documents taken from the KGB archives.

Un espíritu prisionero has an introduction that says: “Russian writers, who grew up in places where freedom has not abounded, have always felt they were bearers of this freedom; for this reason their luck has almost always been unfortunate. The early death of Pushkin and Lermontov, the madness of Gogol, the captivity of Dostoyevsky, the censorship, the faithful companion of all who protected with special zeal the work of Tolstoy and Chekhov, are some examples from the past.” And it continues: “this tradition has been perfected in Soviet times: years of praise, of cantatas and also of silence, prisons and exterminations...”

Let’s remember, I think now, Mandelshtam, Pasternak, Akhmatova, who didn’t even have a cemetery. After having read these authors and knowing how they lived and died (Mayakovsky, for example, and Marina, who hanged herself in Yelabuga), I cannot remain with my arms crossed before something that seems to me, at a distance from those events, and on this island in the center of the Caribbean, a tragedy for the Cuban nation that already experienced expulsions and censorship in the 1970s and is still experiencing them.

“Some favorable conditions?” writes Marina. “It is known that for the artist these do not exist... Life itself is an unfavorable condition...” But conditions can get even tougher, and this is what I’ve felt for the past few days. When I met in Stockholm in 1994 with writers in exile, I understood that the tragedy of separation was not resolved with events or dialogues. That disease (open and unhealed) was there, where revenge and remorse had created a festering Yaga, a spirit that confiscated any possibility of cure. The participants on one side and the other insulted each other first inside the meeting and then hugged in the corridors, as if the two shores were united in those ephemeral embraces. My ingenuity served as a bridge to give Heberto Padilla some poems by young authors unknown to him (among them, those by Antonio José Ponte) that Heberto later used for a presentation on Cuban poetry, which he read in Madrid that same year during “The Whole Island” meeting.

I thought that only things like affection and poetry could erase hatred and resentment, because I have always believed in writing as a way of salvation or therapy. Well, since we were all sick with paranoia (even those of us who, because we were very young, didn’t participate directly in the tensions and ruptures of the seventies, carried that ghost and the guilt complex of “not appearing to be revolutionaries” when we gave our opinions or did something different). We had to apply the ointment against pain, the italicized letter

of the lived experience and the examples (to which so many letters of these last days now refer), as a part of the healing: that “hard” period cannot return, but how do we eliminate today the sequels that still remain? How do we face its causes without thoroughly examining the motives?

By delivering those poems by unknown young people to Heberto Padilla (who wanted to come visit Cuba and was always denied “permission” until death granted it to him), I was doing an act of personal cleansing, trying to communicate, to understand each other, because it couldn’t happen now what happened in the past, because we believed, we were different.

With the events of February 2003, after discussions that took a year in the executive bosom of the Writers’ Union and the final, but rapid, deactivation (“death by silencer” I call it, without the right to have a written statement or an appeal) by Antonio José Ponte, poet, storyteller and essayist, writer of the generation that follows mine, despair has not left me calm. Very few didn’t accept that measure and the majority remained silent. If I were silent now, I would feel a shame that would not let me live in peace. If I have worked for culture, it’s because I think that any deviation towards areas of mutilation, censorship and repressive methods for artists would be abolished with confidence in creative work, which is the first source of culture that allows the proliferation of voices, nuances, styles and ideas, all in a diverse bundle.

When I remember the words of Luther that Marina puts in her mouth: “I will not submit! Nothing and no one will bind me, because the good that I value most is my own free will to choose, because without it the spirit dies!” I think that by destiny it’s the only objective that a writer has. I know that no literature has value if we yield to the ease or vanities that come from it without sacrifices of the spirit, without opinion, without character, and if we endure any wound inflicted on a writer, because what is the work of an artist, but a small rung on the ladder built by so many others? What is a writer, if not a hungry fish that devours another meat, the substance? A bone of the same vertebra, its trial; that verb of disagreement, of the rupture between tightrope and abyss. Between power and reality. Between reality and desire.

“Deactivate” is a foreign word. A writer always lives off others; he is activated with others, and does not deactivate, without also deactivating the group with which he trained, bought books, discussed authors, their lives. For art there is no such term that does not belong to the range of aesthetics. A writer who has undertaken this task with his destiny does not deactivate even after death, but by doing so by decree, they deactivate us in spirit with him; in spirit with those who inhabit the books he lent us, the ideas and stories we share together. Well, there is no regulation or code that puts into practice that word that can only exist for bombs, machinery, artifacts, not for the voices of a nation. Because we would be deactivating all the literature accumulated with it (in it) and disassembling all those gears of the past and wisdom.

I am writing this letter to remember other scenes in which Pavón and his acolytes did not participate, but where they were also present. It is retroactively complicit. One is complicit (even unintentionally) in the future. There are images burned inside our

minds that are models that we must overcome. “Discipline and punish” are models that we must overcome, fears that we must overcome to get closer to the risk of the truth. Horrors that we must overcome and that are not overcome with formalities, with commitments, decrees, deactivations. The easy and abrupt exit from now will be a black hole in our heads, one more darkness, and all harshness highlights the fragility of another dark and gloomy act. Only flexibly stretched nets will make a crack-free weave possible.

I hate this crack in my writing, in my life. The crack of loss of confidence, of the life that another is living without me, in some book, in any past that I now remember. My silence would also determine the atrocity committed, the pain. I only obey the illustrious dead on the shelves, to their voices that say: “everything that has been recounted is infinite. Thus, an unconfessed crime, for example, continues.” I don’t want to have my spirit imprisoned, there is no prison worse than that, that of the spirit. One is imprisoned in oneself, unable to say or do, feel or think. One becomes a puppet, a zombie, a beggar. A writer is not worth two fragments of any newspaper. There is no expulsion for a work, for every detail achieved in a trade that costs life. Take care of the page, the poem, the opinion, the challenges to reality, the positions and the ambiguity, even the mistakes, the political differences and the “No”. That *non rifutto* of the poem of Cavafis.

I have received some literary prizes; I request the highest prize for an artist: that of respect for one, in all and for differences. The homeland of a writer is the same, but at the same time, double and different, because it is also a mental homeland. Getting him out of that first homeland doesn’t cost much: visas, permits, passports, it’s easy. Taking him out of the writer’s homeland, not supporting him in it, divorcing him from his context is a crime against that legion that watches from the shelves and for them, for those who can never be removed from his books; for all those dead that we no longer judge except for his works, we must support him, one, in many, all, in some, even if it costs tons of differences and subtleties.

During sleepless nights, a stain that doesn’t belong to me has clearly remained inside me. I don’t want that stain! I discussed it with all the arguments I had at every opportunity, but I don’t want to be an accomplice to it, even without wanting to. There were also no subsequent meetings where I could discuss that topic, because there have been no more meetings since then, and four years have passed! that decided my affective separation from the group that decided that sanction and murder: and the No.

Today, while I read emails and emails from different parts asking for a healing (and to cure you have to scrape first and it hurts), I think about what Antonio José Ponte felt when none of his letters to the writers of the guild were answered. I think of Heberto Padilla, who was unable to physically return to the Island when he was already very ill.

Poetry has a freedom that is only conferred on her. In the name of that (utopian) freedom that poetry gives an artist, I condemn the measure taken with the creator of *Corazón de Skitalietz* [*Heart of Skitalietz*], [*Tales from Everywhere in the Empire*], of *Contrabando de sombras* [*Contraband of Shadows*], of *Las comidas profundas* [*The Deep Meals*], of *Asiento en las ruinas* [*Seat in the Ruins*], of *Un seguidor de Montaigne*

mira La Habana [A Follower of Montaigne Looks at Havana], of *In the Cold of the Malecón*, of *El libro perdido de los origenistas* [The Lost Book of the Originists], of *La fiesta vigilada* [The Monitored Party], and I appeal today (in 2007) as if not a second had passed (because this time is measured by the destiny of art and the artist's work "for eternity") to the still small, incipient space for reflection, created from the criticism of the *pavonato* reactivated by a group of Cuban writers and artists, to return it (symbolically) and others to the only homeland of writers of all times and places: the homeland of the page of the culture to which they belong.

If there no public space exists for the defense of artists, for their ideas; the place for a broad polemic of the spirit, the differences, the critique and the confrontation of thought reactivated at every moment, then what shelters us?

And what I wonder when other examples come to the surface and so many silences are broken in an unusual way (since we lack other ways to name ourselves intellectuals), is what we are. It is not a problem of this name today or of that other one from yesterday; of the faces that hold power for a while, but of the mechanism of the clocks that say: stop, expel, repress. Of the legality with which the artist can defend his utopias and even his denials. Although these are not problems that concern only artists and writers: it is a problem for everyone. Because as long as there is a straw or rubbish left in someone's eye, there will be no vision to build that cabin in Dersu Uzala, if we do not first clean the mountain that we have to climb together, without geographical, mental or political limits (those inside, those from outside); if we don't think about what we are going to leave to those who will come and with what leaves they will ignite that fire of culture, we will only be left with the sterile emptiness of silence as a judge.

Reina María Rodríguez

Message from Reina María Rodríguez to Zenaida Romeu

Dear Zenaida,

It gives me great discomfort and a sour taste that the note sent in this way and published today in the press by the UNEAC secretariat is so far from reflecting the spirit and tension that we have all had these days, during this open and unusual debate that could benefit and resolve so many obscurities and unresolved dilemmas if we were to leave our personal resentments, cowardice and opportunism on a terrain where the things that affect us all, in one way or another, and that could also affect our children in an endless and deadly chain, could be discussed widely and without language being removed by some to the detriment of others. That note today is a plug and has, in my opinion, the same taste as any written many years ago, from a time we would not want to relive.

All the best,
Reina María Rodríguez
January 18, 2007

REINALDO ESCOBAR

Translated by Ariana

The journalist Reinaldo Escobar enters the debate

“Little war of emails,” “little *glasnost*,” “rebellion of the intellectuals” or “the situation created” have been some names with which this phenomenon has been baptized, which I prefer to name as “words of the intellectuals” with “of” in bold and underlined. Obviously, an augury was opened in this Pandora’s box (which was a gift from Zeus himself), where the evils that now populate the world not only were hidden but also the abuses that were committed against freedom of expression.

I promise not to use this space for personal complaints, first of all because I am deeply grateful to those who in December 1988 prohibited me from practicing the profession of journalist. To them I owe my freedom, which I exercise from Cuba, although unfortunately not in the ways allowed in Cuba.

Since it’s not possible to respond, argue or stand in solidarity with each of the ideas that deserve it, since that would imply writing a book, I’m going to limit myself to giving my opinion on what I believe is fundamental in this matter, which is certainly not, not even remotely, the appearance on the small screen of those who were once the obedient enforcers of a policy. What seems to be clear to everyone is that there are unhealed wounds, self-criticism to do and discussions to encourage.

I can understand the horror of the vindicated in the face of the vindication of their executioners; what I cannot fully understand is the simplicity of confusing the systemic with the casuistic.

As in those crowded buses, some of those who manage to climb to the first rung of this discussion ask that the door be closed because there is no room for anyone else, but those of us who remain below, those of us who are down here, think differently.

I believe that at the bottom of all the evils that have occurred is the intolerance to differences, which is not limited to the almost defeated intolerance towards differences in religious creed or to that other in the process of being overcome, which repudiates different sexual preferences. I’m talking about the undefeated intolerance of differences in political opinions. I would like to know on which general principle tolerance for a particular difference can be built, which is not also applicable to accept the others.

Since that fateful day when the cultural policy of the Cuban Revolution was subjected to a sectarian phrase: “Within the Revolution everything, against the Revolution nothing.” the abyss opened, because from that moment on a group of people it conferred or they conferred the right to decide where the borders of what could be classified as revolutionary were, which meant what could be published, shown and disseminated. As the creators of literature, painting, music or cinema usually achieve when their work is objective in something tangible for the public, they began to create in that direction, and self-censorship began there, because there is only one way to be sure that what we do

cannot be described as “outside the revolution” and to do only what is clearly with and within the Revolution.

That gray five-year period was only the act of drawing the dividing line a few meters from the border. The original sin was conceiving the border.

Some of those who participate in this controversy don't dispute the right of the government to decide the publication of a work based on its political affiliation. The only thing they dispute is that they and their work should be considered unwavering affiliates of the line of the Revolution. Others want to go further, which is why many things are being discussed at the same time in this debate.

Víctor Fowler, with his usual lucidity, introduces the idea of a “catalogue of practices of cultural violence.” In this catalog all the anecdotes fit: the prison of the one who translated the prophecies of Nostradamus, the famous Padilla case, the defenestration of Eduardo Heras, the sanctions against Norberto Fuentes, the ostracism of so many illustrious names: Cintio, Eliseo, Lezama, plus the endless list of the usual strangers, who in obscure municipalities of the country dared to read a controversial poem in a literary workshop session or who dared to introduce an uncomfortable song by Frank Delgado on a provincial station.

The question is how far to take the list, and if we listen to those who have already joined, who are yelling to close the door once and for all to continue the journey, or if we continue to let people in until the bus bursts. Who ordered the closure of the exhibitions of the Arte Calle group? What was the name of the decade or triennium in which Pedro Luís Ferrer was banned? What color was the five-year period in which Antonio José Ponte was expelled from UNEAC? Who was Minister of Culture when the film *Monte Rouge* was prevented from participating in the Film Festival? What, if not the “Black Spring 2003,” is that moment called when the poet Raúl Rivero was imprisoned?

Esteban Morales himself, former dean of the Faculty of Humanities, describes as “Saturns devouring children of the Revolution” not precisely the subordinates of Luís Pavón but the militants of the Communist Party who in the 1970s carried out relentless purges at the school of journalism and today publish in *Granma* and aren't disturbed by anyone.

And all this is being discussed today perhaps because some advisers at the ICRT who deal with the *Impronta* program are only historians trained in the 19th century, and they didn't know who directed the National Council of Culture 30 years ago. I wonder what would happen if in the space “50 years of Victories” someone recounted the exploits of Hubert Matos in the capture of Santiago de Cuba, or if someone who doesn't know the secret versions of history, speaking about the events in Granada, mentioned Colonel Tortoló as an emulator of the Bronze Titan. I bet that no one will ever make a mistake by giving an *Impronta* for Dr. Hilda Molina, as she well deserves.

What has really happened is not that one day someone who deserved to be buried in silence was mentioned, but quite the opposite. He has been silent too much, for an

inordinate amount of time and not only in the cultural sector. As the critic Orlando Hernández has courageously pointed out, “it would be very sad if all this fell into the ridiculous complaints and suggestions mailbox of the Ministry of Culture, or became the collective catharsis of a minority.”

I believe that criticism or self-criticism remains pending not only in the case of that First Congress of Culture, which changed its name in its second session to become the Congress of Education and Culture. The Military Units of Aid to Production, the Revolutionary Offensive of 1968, the repudiation rallies of 1980, the unfulfilled food plan of the 1990s, the sinking of the March 13 tugboat and the infinite catalogs that so many victims can open with so much right: they are also in need of a self-criticism, otherwise it will be very difficult to honor someone on television without running the risk that the interviewee has another hidden imprint in his illustrious biography.

Not only revolutions, but history as a whole is carried out by men who, when participating in the projects that are proposed, have successes and errors, greatness and baseness, nobility and vileness. That of Cuba is far from being heavenly history, although many have endeavored to sweeten it. It seems as if someone once again tried to marry us with the lie and force us to live with it, but fortunately, someone also taught us that the world is worth collapsing before living in the lie.

I don't want to end this intervention without referring to the cryptic Declaration of the UNEAC Secretariat published on Thursday, January 18.

To say that the cultural policy of the Revolution, founded with Words to the Intellectuals, is irreversible, is to affirm that Luis Pavón failed to reverse it and therefore was only consistent with it to an extreme degree. On that we agree. What I cannot agree with is the element of terror that the text introduces by mentioning a supposed annexationist agenda in those who have wanted to take advantage of the situation created. I demand that you point to a single paragraph of the debate that has an annexationist flavor. Although it is suggested that this is the response agreed upon by the initiators of the debate, it is evidently a text that Leopoldo Ávila would proudly sign.

I propose a broad debate on all these issues. Since the UNEAC does not decide to hold its congress, since the Communist Party of Cuba does not hold its congress either, let us do it in a theater, in a ball field or in the middle of a pasture, without the rapid response brigades impeding its celebration, and where everyone speaks, the communist, the social democrat, the Christian democrat and the liberal, and if the annexationist has something to say, we are going to listen to it too. Finally, it seems healthy to me that those of us who participate in this discussion do not have a common position. We are not going to repeat the scheme stating that “this is not the time to have differences between us because we must unite against the common enemy.” Much less will we proclaim something like: “Against the *pavonato* everything, for the *pavonato* nothing.” Please, let's not start with the same thing. Fortunately, as in the mythical Pandora's box, the only thing that has not escaped is hope.

Reinaldo Escobar

REINALDO MONTERO

Translated by Regina Anavy

According to the dialectic that I like, chance is nothing more than an expression of necessity. The need, as if that were not enough, is so fertile that it quickly expands, takes root, flourishes; that is, it leaves a lot of traces and does a lot. I want to give the news, for those who still don't know, of a flourishing, of a recent censorship. The management of Cuban television prohibited the broadcasting of the play *Marx en el Soho* [*Marx in the Soho*] (text by Howard Zinn, acted and directed by Michaelis Cué), announced for December 25, according to the spot that was promoting it.

Of course they didn't ban it for aesthetic reasons, or the news wouldn't even be on television. *Marx en el Soho* premiered two years ago; it was seen by thousands of viewers, including Howard Zinn himself, Ricardo Alarcón and Abel Prieto. The play traveled to many countries and returned. Michaelis' work was awarded by Cuban critics, the ones there are. *Pavón De Venus* coincides with *Cisne De Juno* glass window. Chance that obeys some necessity, at least in the dialectic that I like. Depending on the specific need to show *Pavón y el Cisne* today, the prohibition of *Marx en el Soho* confirms the scope of double nonsense, or double success.

What it is about, following the dialectic that I like, is not to be scandalized by these scandalous facts, but to prepare and soon for what is to come.

Reinaldo Montero

RENÉ VÁZQUEZ DÍAZ

Translated by Alicia Barraqué Ellison

Cuban forgetfulness

Last year, several Cuban television programs interviewed, over a period of several months, some figures committed to the policy of cultural repression of the 1970s. The reappearance on the small screen of hateful characters, who recall the ferocity of management mechanisms hostile to creation, art and human dignity, culminated on January 5 with a five-minute interview with Mr. Luís Pavón Tamayo, who directed the National Council of Culture between 1971 and 1976, and whom most Cuban writers believed to be physically and politically deceased.

Opaque, cunning and unscrupulous, Pavón was a powerful official who implemented a dogmatic and shameless cultural policy that anathematized homosexuals, plunged the Cuban intelligentsia into what has come to be called *El Quinquenio gris* and ostracized leading writers, such as Antón Arrufat, Pablo Armando Fernández and César López. All of them have been recognized for the imprint of creativity and beauty that they have left in Cuban culture.

In all countries there are issues of national importance on which, for long periods, a tacitly agreed-upon silence hovers. In Sweden, it has been the surveillance and booking of the secret police against so-called “security risks,” which affected more than 300,000 people and ruined the working lives of many of them. In France, the excesses of the genocidal war in Algeria. In Spain, the silence about Francoist figures at all levels, from vulgar torturers to businessmen and characters like Fraga, whose television appearances never caused rejection in Spain.

Upon interpreting that the surprising reappearance of Pavón implied his public rehabilitation, and with it a regressive movement in which the Cuban intelligentsia lost a space for action that has grown without ceasing, numerous intellectuals protested with indignation and freedom. Immediately there were meetings in the Writers’ Union, the Institute of Radio and Television and the Ministry of Culture. It was soon seen that it was not a conspiracy or an institutional attempt to revive the past times of the *pavonato*. Nor was it about harming current politics, represented by the Minister of Culture Abel Prieto, and the majority of the island’s intellectual community. But the ensuing controversy offers some history lessons.

The first is that a rigorous study of that period is lacking, and that in Cuba there are still officials nostalgic for dogmatism and narrow-mindedness. With a sectarian spirit and a notable ahistorical sense, and taking advantage of the lack of culture typical of the small world of television in all parts of the world, someone wanted to test the possibility of giving a thrust to the current cultural policy. The sword was made of wood. The reaction of the intelligentsia and the authorities showed that this past has no possibility of returning. Another lesson is that the intellectuals who live and work in Cuba are engaged in a productive process of change, and they appear to have much to defend.

Their protest, open and constructive, started from the territory of responsibility and a feeling that their dignity had been injured, along with the dignity of the Nation. Instead, the reactions of many exiles were characterized by an exercise in selective oblivion, which draws them to write from the territory of revenge or gratuitous mockery. One wrote that there is an amnesia of the past and the present; another said that the 1970s were a decade of horror. This requires a separate analysis, to contextualize the horror and open the shutters of past and present amnesia.

How did that decade start? On April 17, 1970, a group of Cuban exiles, armed and financed by the United States, disembarked 22 kilometers from the city of Baracoa, killing four militiamen and seriously wounding two. On May 10, another group of exiles attacked two vessels belonging to the Caibarien Fishing Cooperative and kidnapped eleven crew members, who were abandoned to their fate on an islet in the Bahamas. On July 12, 1971, the same year as the Padilla case and the Congress on Education and Culture, a group of exiles declared themselves the authors, in Miami, of a terrorist act carried out in Guantánamo that produced a railway catastrophe with a balance of four Cubans dead and 17 wounded.

In October, an armed boat from Miami attacked the village of Boca de Samá. They killed the citizens Lidio Rivaflecha and Ramón Siam Portelles; there were four serious injuries, two of them to minors. On April 4, 1972, the same year that I came to Poland to study naval engineering, a plastic bomb exploded at the Cuban Trade Office in Montreal. The employee Sergio Pérez del Castillo died destroyed, and a Group of Cuban Youth claimed responsibility for the attack in Miami. On August 3 of the following year, a member of the terrorist group Acción Cubana died in Abrainville, near Paris, when the bomb he was preparing to launch against the Cuban embassy in Paris exploded in his hands. The explosion completely destroyed six rooms in the hotel where he was staying.

On February 13, 1974, a postal package addressed to the Cuban embassy in Madrid exploded at the Central Office of Cibeles. An employee was injured. On April 22, 1976, a high-powered bomb exploded at the Cuban embassy in Lisbon, killing officials Efrén Monteagudo and Adriana Corcho. On July 9 of that same year, a bomb that had been placed in one of the suitcases that was going to be introduced on a Cubana de Aviación plane in Kingston, exploded on the ground due to a delay in departure, which purely by chance prevented the plane from exploding in mid-flight. How did the Five Year Gray Period end?

Covered in blood: on October 6, 1976, the Cubana de Aviación CUT-1201 plane, which was on a regular flight between Barbados and Havana, exploded in mid-flight: 57 Cubans, 11 Guyanese and 5 Koreans, a total of 73 people, died in the first terrorist attack against civil aviation in modern times. Posada Carriles, the terrorist responsible for that monstrous attack and many more, is today in the United States enjoying absolute impunity without any Cuban writing in the United States-financed media demanding his extradition.

That period of horror cannot be analyzed using a relative, selective and opportunistic civility, as the majority of the Cuban exiles have done who say they sleep with a clear

conscience, while writing in a magazine like *Encuentro*, financed by the same State that maintains the horror of the so-called Commission for Aid to a Free Cuba. The danger of this document should unite all Cubans—regardless of the position we have towards the Revolution—in the same ethical and human effort to ensure a peaceful future for our compatriots.

The Cuban exiles will be able to reclaim their properties and evict the tenants who now own their houses, or charge them rent and even increase it. The United States will demand that its transitional government close down existing security institutions and swiftly prosecute officials of the “former regime,” with a long list of officials against whom “revenge” will be sought. As such measures (according to the report) can lead to violence and social unrest, “the domestic food supply, transportation, infrastructure, and storage base,” says the State Department, “could be disrupted by the chaos that would result from a vacuum of power.” But since the transfer of power has already taken place, and there is no chaos or power vacuum because no Cuban wants it, Washington has announced that there is a secret annex by means of which this chaos could be manufactured.

I propose that this secret annex be called the horror clause. Well, it’s not enough for them to appoint a special espionage mission against Cuba and a proconsul named Caleb McCarry, who with full powers (granted by a foreign power!) will lead the reconquest of Cuba: they also have that secret plan that cannot entail anything other than a military intervention against the people of Cuba.

Disregarding these facts in the analysis of the difficulties and atrocities of that time and the one we live in, speaking of Cuba as if it were not a country exposed like no other to criminal policies such as the blockade and the Helms Burton law, is a way of reproducing the propaganda that the United States promotes to justify its aggressions. But it will never be the honest exercise in historical introspection that we Cubans need, inside and outside of Cuba.

René Vázquez Díaz
Sweden

REYNALDO GONZÁLEZ

Translated by Regina Anavy

Anyone would say that freshening up the non-constructive image of Luis Pavón is a vindication of his daunting wealth. I don't think it's pure coincidence. There is a tendency to think that the victims of an outrage—in this case a historical error, although the word has been trivialized—increase the crime suffered. It is seen like this from those who committed the crime and from the silence of the indolent wedged into their positions. It happens with the Holocaust of the Hebrews by Nazism. By paying homage to the culprit—direct or instrumentalized—of a huge mistake, someone who cannot be cured with changing direction, his actions, his fault, are being favorably sanctioned.

Television and its managers—those who live on L and 23 and those far away—have taken a treacherous, contemptuous step towards the suffering of the protagonists of Cuban culture who were submerged in contempt and condemned to ostracism in a period whose wounds have not yet healed. The voice of the offended is silenced, and voice is returned to the showable face of the facts. Their claim is our mockery. You're right, Jorge Ángel, in all of this there is something more than clumsiness and insensitivity, or inadvertence. Will it be long before we see Carlos Aldana once again dictating “guidelines” to “the soft parts of society”? Are “the tough ones” back? How many true creators, who contribute to Cuban culture, have not yet been recognized by television while they recycle their “protagonists,” drawn from a tyrannical die, always crouching down waiting for the turn of revenge? Is television an entity apart from Cuban culture?

I authorize you to use these opinions,

Reynaldo González

January 6, 2007

Message from Reynaldo González to Desiderio Navarro

Dear, I know that it can seem different, but I wish that many would be sensitized to point out a mistake. Only one, but a big one. And I think that by combining ideas and expressions from your letter, from Arango's reflection and from my brief response to Jorge Ángel, we could put together a document, collect signatures and deliver it to the ICRT and our managing sources. Tell me something about this.

Reynaldo

January 6, 2007

Response from Reynaldo González to Desiderio Navarro

I agree with you. Like Arturo, others will send us opinions, or we can provoke them. And looking for a tone, the most difficult, that does not overwhelm ideas, because we are right. And that it shouldn't seem spiteful, but righteous. Obviously, the matter was

elaborated, documented. When I learned that he was not mentioned in his work as an official, I see that they wanted to save him from what he could reveal, but they give him the category of poet. A poet without a poetic environment. He must have been seen alongside Guillén, of course, but they highlighted his non-literary trajectory and his extra-cultural ties. That's what they tell me.

I only saw a parade of decorations and posters, which constitute his heritage. At once him, who spoke with the voice of a tired old woman. Nothing more. I had more detailed information from Antón. Okay, but let's stay tuned. I already know that this matter will constitute an impact, an incision in the roost. Not because someone doubts the son of a bitch, but for the same reasons that you mention in relation to the past. At present there are crossed interests, more interests. Let's see, but I don't think we should wait too long, because it gets cold. The indolent tropics, the tropics.

Until tomorrow, Rey

Message from Reynaldo González to Jorge Angel Pérez

I agree with the answer you give to Sigfredo. Today Rebeca Chávez called me. She thinks that this implies the whole culture, including the filmmakers and everyone. Zenaida Castro Romeu wrote to me, and Cira Romero. And I think they are right. We will lead the national awards, offended or not, with which they want to join. And everyone. But now, with the summons for Tuesday, for Abel and Carlos Martí, I'm worried that they want to stop us. Anything we did would not have the massive reach of television.

We must record, once in a while, that this so-called gray five-year period was a cancer. The operation has been good, but it has not been disclosed directly and that is why these audacities occur. A part of culture, of para-culture and of other disciplines don't have an understanding of the true drama, of the bias cut that was given to cultural life, a terrain where things are not corrected with decrees, with which they did such enormous damage. We must leave these things very well established in the meeting on Tuesday and persist in making them explicit.

Hugs, we continue in the fight,
Reynaldo

Another Message from Reynaldo González

Dear Abelardo,

Perhaps you are informed of the movement that has formed in repudiation of the *Impronta* program last Friday, dedicated to exalting Luis Pavón, ignoring his past by the National Council of Culture and how terrible it was for Cuban culture, the lives of his protagonists, including the deaths of some and the exile of many. We are promoting an adherence to the protest. In the dossier that I send you I include the greatest amount of information. I will be at the ministerial table, in a meeting that five of us will have with the minister tomorrow, Tuesday. It will be a first, to better prosecute the matter. Almost

all the national awardees have already joined, and those of theater should not be left out, those who suffered the most from the broadsides of the *pavonato*. There are no messages in this dossier, received by Desiderio, or Arango, or Jorge Ángel. I include what I have. Between today and tomorrow we will have the set, where I ask you to show your adhesion if you consider it pertinent.

A hug, Reynaldo González
January 8, 2007

Message from Reynaldo González to Waldo Leyva

You are right, Waldo. And we will do something, promptly, to put it in the hands of those who direct culture from the corresponding ministry and from the Party. The staging of the “interview” was very elaborate; the images, which, as has been said, “say more than a thousand words,” those of placed Pavón on a patriotic altar. Those who orchestrated this perhaps overlooked the suffering, the disappearances, the horror of a cruel, cruel period that has not been ventilated in its virulence and its subsequent consequences. Everyone sees the show as if they were in it. I have always thought that Pavón followed orders, but with the pleasure of a Nazi torturer, in an effort to position himself as a “poet.” We already know another “poet,” Aldana, who saw us and treated us as soft and manageable, and who went too far; and others from that time, including those who now, with the same fury, attack the revolution from the other shore and never stop discrediting it.

We could figure out how many privileged people of the Aldana *or pavonato* period are today in the opposite trench: simply, the most renowned. What is happening now is an insult to the memory of Virgilio Piñera, Lezama Lima and others who died without being vindicated. Look at the dates, something that demolishes the theory of a short period. The recognition of this man, who now, like the old lady of the play, “shows his medals,” has avoided, with an overly explicit trick, the period in which he brought evil to Cuban culture and the destinies of its creators as a colonial dictator...

The photos in which he is exhibited with the leaders of the revolution have been put up as a rehabilitation, a consecration. For him, who demonized so many. To accept it is to suffer once again the ridicule. It has been, due to the latency of this possibility, perhaps like a scalded cat, that for years I have argued for a fair and strong review of what happened in those dark years and their sequel. I don't want to think that the occasion will return. And I think we must quickly stop it. The insensitivity and insolence with which the ICRT, following mechanisms of the commercial era—Guastela, Sabatés, Crusellas—which continue to be its formal standards in terms of managing intelligence, with the method of trivializing the fundamental ideas. He takes his commitments too far, of whatever kind they may be. Obviously, they are not the commitments and ideas of the current cultural policy. I must understand it as an attempt to revive the most disastrous era that Cuban culture has experienced. I'm glad you're holding firm right now.

Hugs,

Reynaldo

A nightmare without forgiveness or forgetfulness

On the evening of January 30, at the Casa de las Américas, I was unable to read the following pages. I knew that the dialogue would branch off due to the innumerable pending issues of Cuban life, already present in the initial exchange of messages. Without minimizing the importance and indispensability of long-postponed claims, I wanted to highlight information unknown to those who came to public life after the nightmare euphemistically called the *pavonato* was extended and affirmed in a no less execrable variant, the *aldanato*.

Carlos Aldana, with his actions and “theory,” constantly overvalued the hard-core and was pejorative towards intellectuals and artists, defining us as “the soft parts of society.” They were “hard” and solid, the trustworthy people, the ones who “called the shots.” In plastic arts they preferred the marble archetypes of Stalinist socialist realism. In literature, poets also “reliable” and “firm as granite,” without excluding the commanding officers, determined that we consider their martial enthusiasm poetry. In narrative, the “literature of violence”—a definition that they owe to me, but not its hypertrophy and its canonical exaltation—and sycophants of all kinds.

The whole was a volley of *katiuskas* thrown like hosannas to well-known Soviet generals, more present in the mythology proposed by the mass media than our pro-independence heroes. The invitation was attended by emerging talents who took advantage of their time and moment, highly installed and willing to impose their fearful monstrosities, and a bureaucratic army that imposed what we call “mystery syndrome.” But how did he get to such aberrations? In the pages that I had to read that day, written in a torrent, dictated by the desire for justice, I included some giant leaps.

Today, anticipating that among many things of great importance the initial reason for the protest will be blurred, I send them to you and I want them to have the widest possible dissemination:

“Gray five-year period,” “black decade”: both definitions are ineffective to qualify the sectarian and dogmatic behaviors that generated an extensive rosary of suffering for Cuban cultural life. It cannot be reduced to a semantic disquisition, which dissolves into a farce what we experience as drama and, in some cases, as tragedy. The dates blur when the television resurrection of some of its culprits strikes the painful memory—without forgetting that they are figureheads. Supposedly cultural tributes on television were alarming because they allow us to assume accolades for their past performances and a validation of the events that gave them sad notoriety.

The protest that such transmissions aroused were responses to a serial provocation, behind which we could not help but see a purpose. On the highly monitored and politicized Cuban television it would be naive to imagine coincidences, especially when it glorifies those who yesterday were allowed acts that the courts described as unconstitutional and abuses of power. The unusual presentation of Luis Pavón Tamayo together with the two highest leaders of the Revolution and the silencing of the stage in

which he viciously governed the destinies of Cuban culture, seemed like an exculpation. Those who decided, argued and carried out these programs argued that they were unaware of the exalted figure. That statement would already disqualify them as irresponsible and inept, but we didn't believe them. The refusal to publicly acknowledge their ineffectiveness or guilt gave the matter the most unacceptable overtones of obstinacy and mockery. We could no longer see them except as culprits, and imagine the affair as a plot whose ramifications escaped us. Were we facing an attempt to revive the old nightmares?

From the beginning of our revolutionary life, tendencies and groups appeared that entered the fight with different aesthetic budgets and participated in a struggle for power. They represented—or took refuge in—programs and convictions. One group arrived rooted in the aberrational and abortive Soviet cultural practice, its theories and its propaganda. They had a better organization and enough officials to fish in troubled rivers. Other groups, intuitive and inexperienced, responded to artistic conceptions active in the country and to the works of creators who experienced our eminently Western and avant-garde culture.

When the definition of the socialist character of the Revolution privileged committed art, it was assumed mainly by our intellectuals and artists, who throbbed in the hopeful consensus awakened by the Revolution, in the understanding that this did not imply the imposition of a particular school or tendency, much less the twists of socialist realism that were alien to our idiosyncrasies and our history. But we were not so uninformed about the tragedies experienced by the Eastern European intelligentsia as to accept the obstinacy of those who, accusing us of foreignizing, appropriated defining spaces and proposed, themselves, explicitly foreign formulas under the pretext of serving revolutionary ideals and the conformation of a new thought.

We understood—and their actions left no doubt—that it was not just about aesthetic conceptions and that they carried other objectives under the guise of ideological coherence. They were an extension of the aforementioned struggle for power. And they gained spaces. Their criteria would predominate in the black period, when they committed crimes against culture, overwhelmed, despised and destroyed. Then the environment did not favor them and they had to withdraw, but they became strong on weak terrain by inadvertence, or by collusion, or—as I see it—by explicit ineptitude. This history has ups and downs, twists and turns that have defined the terrain, sometimes disguised as philosophical conceptions, others as service records, always imposed dogma. In the foreground, or camouflaged, in advances and retreats, the representatives of the hard line have persisted in a sinuous struggle.

Once enlisted, hopeful at a peculiar and very delicate situation in our political life, they considered that it was time to emerge to openly contradict a cultural line that seeks a new type of dialogue. We are witnessing an escalation whose most obvious skirmishes we denounce. Some will have gone unnoticed. They became emboldened and assumed that they could exalt their symbols with impunity and refresh the ghost of dogmatism, which is not an understanding of art or the chicanery of communication, but a

stubbornness in formulas that have already demonstrated their failure. What is astonishing in recent events is their domination and their vindictive arrogance. I don't think it's pertinent to reconstruct the steps that led to the implantation of the disastrous period that we call the *pavonato* and the subsequent attempts to defuse it, revive it and return us to preaching that ignores our traditions. I do remind you that this tragedy did not begin in 1970, but was laboriously put together, taking advantage of the loopholes of venal, egotistical actions, the bewilderment of novices and the stubbornness of groups that first served their own interests and then found themselves under the black cloud of the instrumentalization by those who were more opportune in the fight. In their saddlebags they carry the "reasons" that fueled the creation of the UMAP, the university purges, the raids, the instrumentalization of homophobic prejudices, ideological intolerance as a persistent element.

There was behavior of all kinds and very few constructive ones. Some, masters of the land that fell to them, adopted messianic poses, believed they were leaders of lives and works. Others justified their inaction with "discipline" understood as the highest virtue of the revolutionary, forgetting the rebellious assertion of Martí: "Unjust law is not law." There were the compliant and the conservative, the insensitive and the indifferent, those who "took care of the chair and looked out the window," as our people say. Those procedures are very fresh in the memory of those of us of a certain age. Then came the silence, imposed or tacit, the "it will be for something" to ignore the misfortune of the ousted, the warning to "not give the enemy reasons" and silence the protests, the hard training in the experience of living a revolution and the mistakes of those who could oppose those plans and didn't do it.

And there were the minions, those who owe their prestige to the work of messengers, those who don't count but make a difference. It's understandable that there are those who came out into cultural life at that time, and those who owe their names to such horrors. They were silent, they were accomplices and some do not regret anything. We must understand that formed in such a long process, they are in places where they can do harm. They are joined by the faint-hearted and the cowed who do not believe in the triumph of justice. There are those who still listen to the dehumanizing sirens of Stalinism. They, and not others, embody enmity and intolerance. They, and not others, offend and despise, entrench themselves and act treacherously. They, and not others, gave weapons to the adversary. Remember that sexist policies have been a boomerang: the UMAP, the persecution of homosexuals, the programmatic intolerance.

We all know the character of the *pavonato*. It was the disqualification of those of us who thought in the opposite or even nuanced way, the order and command, the deactivation of institutions that were the pride of our culture and, above all, a criminal contempt for the different. Those of us who did not fall within its "parameters" were declared enemies deserving of public contempt. UNEAC, an institution that should have defended us, turned its back on us. In the name of these criteria they stigmatized, disabled and divided. The last straw was that they took as fetishes the symbols they destroyed, when exacerbated homophobia led them to dismantle the National Puppet Theater, and, in imitation of the Nazis, they burned the puppets. It was the glorification of *machismo*, its gratuitous violence, its cruelty and bestial loss of meaning. It was extreme politicization.

The “revolutionary face masks,” the imposed silence, the fear, the fear. As in the title of a movie, fear devours the soul, intimidates, strangles.

It should be understood that a possible vindication of those executioners is held as a mockery of the memory of those who suffered insults from before and during the *pavonato*, revolutionaries and true artists like Roberto Blanco, stigmatized, subjected to an onerous trial in the presence of his colleagues; Servando Cabrera Moreno, the brothers Pepe and Carucha Camejo and the talented Pepe Camejo; Raúl Martínez, the iconographer of the revolution, Virgilio Piñera and José Lezama Lima, who died in ostracism, and many others. Their individual stories cannot fit into these tightly packed notes.

The dogmatics seized the power for which they worked so hard, conferred privileged positions on some groups and individuals over others; they were merciless with those of us who did not respond to their exemplary patterns. They determined right or wrong, legal or criminal, sinful or healthy. They implemented methods of terror and persecution, police work, denunciation. Their criteria elevated them to hegemonic, not only in aesthetic conceptions, but also in intimate life, monitored and constrained, and they implanted mistrust as a habit. We know that damage of these dimensions can occur by decree and from positions of power in the culture, but they are not cured by similar methods because they weigh down generations, they inhibit thought and action. Nothing will return the damaged lives, the impeded vocations, the provoked absences, the fear planted in the mind.

Revanchism, which once again wants to claim its plausible purpose, cannot hide its true essence, which is hatred; its true ambition, which is power. We are here to unmask it. We are grateful that our work is recognized, but we have not lost hope for the “turn of the offended” that a poet told us about. Those of us who denounce recent acts do not harbor grudges, we are not encouraged by revenge, we do not hide the place of those who, thinking differently, can display works that enrich the Cuban cultural heritage. In the desire for justice, we exchange electronic messages spontaneously, without prior organization, to jump out of the horror, the same one that dictates these pages. It was the path we took, a minority in front of the television that in each house presented as a benefactor someone who seriously damaged our lives. We are not cloaked or in cahoots. And I warn you that we are not soft, nor moldable, nor will we allow ourselves to be confused by distorting propositions, from whatever direction they come.

Reynaldo González
February 4, 2007

RICARDO REIMENA

Translated by Regina Anavy

The brilliant, orchestrated comeback on television, of the more than unspeakable guy named Luis Pavón; tip of the dark iceberg of an era..., and worth the contradiction between the iceberg and the darkness. It doesn't matter that the servers are blocked, as the delinquents of digital globalization claim when they ask the naive to forward prayers or silly cartoons about luck. Now it would happen due to the serious fault of the worst criminal of Culture and Art.

Ricardo Reimena

RICARDO RIVERÓN ROJAS

Translated by Regina Anavy

Let's eat the unborn turkey!

Where do you want me to put the plate?

It might seem that Cuban cultural policy is risking its life based on a silly dichotomy. This is: the chronic demonization or rehabilitation (pyrrhic and extemporaneous) of three figures: Pavón, Serguera and Quesada. And that the whole story is summed up in those years, in the capital's space, in those people... It might seem, but it's only a perpetual mirage, a distortion magnified by the centralization of the protagonisms, always monopolized by the logic of the capital.

In Havana, between 1971 and 1976, atrocities were committed, it is true, but not everything related to the evolution of Cuban culture has its epicenter in the period that we know as the *pavonato*. There are other realities, where the geographical, the non-canonical, the marginal and alternative suggest nuances and different readings of a certain period and certain phenomena. And such is the case of the one that has (badly) occupied us today.

Reprisals, marginalization, censorship, abuses of various kinds experienced by some Havana intellectuals during the mandate of Luis Pavón Tamayo in the then National Council of Culture. Oblivion, discrimination, almost absolute minimization have been received, and still are received, by many worthwhile Cuban intellectuals residing in the provinces, or abroad (mostly writers) during the pre-, post-, and *pavonato* itself.

And since we are talking about *pavonatos*, I will take advantage of the funny neologism and try to define, based on its use, some differences in focus and circumstances that prevent a uniform reaction throughout the Island in the face of the recent resurrection, on Cuban television, of the three cultural corpses.

The structural deformations of underdevelopment, it is known, generate hegemonic states of concentration of ideas and processes in the capitals of countries. The media make a decisive contribution to this. Physical proximity also does its thing, in Cuba in a more notable way, given the catastrophic state of the public transport system and the hotel veto imposed on those born on the Island. Going from a Cuban province to the capital is an odyssey; staying: the greatest of utopias. Let's take just one example: that of the poet from Villa Clara, Luis Manuel Pérez Boitel, winner of no less than the Casa de las Américas award, for whom the prestigious institution didn't provide transportation or lodging for the award ceremony, nor for the subsequent presentation of the award-winning book, all this at the height of 2002. The *pavonato* had been left far behind, but no authorized voice was raised to denounce the outrage, except those of the province, of course, and those are now less "authorized."

The interior territories establish closed preserves, of pedestrian self-validation, with very little participation in the tryouts of the "national" states of opinion. The debates,

excesses and reparations of the *pavonato* are concrete examples of this marginalization: while in Havana they were burning heretics, in the provinces we were witnessing the birth of a movement that, more Pavón, less Pavón, proposed to trace the inherited cultural prehistory of the colony and the republic. While in that same Havana the skin of the previously burned was being reconstructed through institutional biotechnology, in the provinces and abroad we continued to have no significance in the summary of all the possible imaginary and nominated produced in the country.

First with Pavón, and then without Pavón (even better), literary workshops were born and grew in the provinces—debatable spaces, yes, but also instances of initiation of the majority of those who, between 1970 and 1990, have illuminated excellent pages for Cuban literature, both in Cuba and in other parts of the world. The great praise for the post-*pavonato* rightly lists the growth of institutional spaces for promotion as one of its best trump cards. And although I am very far from praising what happened in the seventies, where in some way, as a student, I suffered my own *pavonato*, that was also a moment of inauguration of institutional spaces: literary workshops being one of them. Would it be logical that provincial writers would then praise the *pavonato* based on institutional growth (rather birth)? The answer would be obvious.

In the provinces we were behind (what a shame!): we never had a Heberto Padilla, an Antón Arrufat, a Virgilio Piñera or a José Lezama Lima. We had literary workshops. Look at that! We also had and continue to have, yes, the misty quality of not existing. Notices have been posted on all roads ever since, but it's best not to see them. Those who suffered so much with Pavón, enjoy with Abel and enjoyed with Hart enough demands. The “fed up” and the *abelato* were and continue to be prodigal in papering over the cracks.

Both those affected and their disciples enjoy the benefits of perpetual therapy. The official delegations abroad and within (let's review Abel's entourage that travels the country during book fairs), the editorial spaces, the awards, the presence in the media, conform and open more promptly for those invested with the authority conferred by being a *patrontronado* or adjunct; almost never (I don't want to be absolute) a provincial or resident abroad. Havana is the country. The province, almost as much as the foreigner (and this one too) is an exile, even if the contrary is claimed.

What is there to condemn in the attempt to “repair” those sad tigers? Good: condemned. But let us also condemn the other injustices and the most numerous omissions, the exclusive concentration of “literary power” in those who possess the safe-conduct issued by the author of *El tiempo* and the flags displayed by him. Another thing: let's not be naïve. Cuban television and the media in general have never left the *pavonato*. There is a reason why they are not subordinated to the Ministry of Culture, but to the PCC. There is a reason why they have remained with such devotion within the narrow limits of infinite apology, with no space for debate and criticism.

With Hart and especially with Abel in the Ministry of Culture, it is true, the spaces were expanded (without exceeding the closed union preserve), and not only physically, but also in the relative flexibility for debates, but the devastated building by Pavón is not the

only one that must be repaired, precisely because it is not the only one devastated. The misuse of open spaces, or their tendentious, enshrined and sometimes negligent use needs new and fairer props. A blind eye to almost everything that remains outside the limits of the “aristocracy” branded with a hot iron by the *pavonato*, or the limits of the capitals (and the country) require dynamite for their demolition.

The debate, definitely open, to the problems of the entire nation, seen from the perspective of culture and without suspicions or suspicions around the polemicists, calls for a pick and shovel to bury the corpse of the gray five-year period. As long as that annoying corpse accompanies us, the unfeasible recovery of Pavón and others in the operating room on national television will generate alarm, stir up the pool where the same fishermen from then and later will continue to fish. And to the entire world it will continue to appear, unfairly, that Cuban culture is risking its life around a silly dichotomy that in the end is pathetic. That’s as far as we could go, don’t you think?

Ricardo Riverón Rojas
Madrid, January 15, 2007

ROBERTO COBAS AVIVAR

Translated by Regina Anavy

Dear colleagues, friends!

I follow with interest and in detail the important Intranet debate that you are leading. I join the same and remain yours with all my solidarity and my willingness to exchange inside and outside our country. Below I attach the article that, motivated by the debate, I have just published on *Kaos en la Red*.

A hug,
Roberto Cobas Avivar

“A burden is needed to finish the work of the revolutions /.../ so that our children do not beg on their knees for the homeland that our fathers won for us standing up” [1] Rubén Martínez Villena

This has been the transcendent idea of one of the founders of Cuban thought and the emancipatory process. And, for this, nothing more revolutionary in the Martian sense[2] than “going to the roots” of the contradictions, those that coerced, underestimated or misrecognized by the political power today in Cuba, are sharpened unresolved but unrepentant to sow the antagonism with the obsolete that has to give way to the necessary socialist renewal.

The current official resurrection that has taken place in Cuba of antithetical symbols of democracy embodied by former representatives and executors of government cultural policy imposed in a period of frank political, bureaucratic and criminal coercion of the free revolutionary spirit and creative autonomous action—known in intellectual sectors such as the “gray five-year period for Cuban culture”[3]—has unleashed an enveloping “unauthorized” debate among said intelligentsia.

The discussion that unfolds through the so-called Intranet in Cuba comes loaded with other symbols. It takes place among those few who, due to the political paradox of active party and state discrimination, have access to email. Its tone exudes the breath of “conspiracy” forced by another institutionalized paradox, the factual monopoly that the people don’t exercise, but the political-state power does, over the media. The predominant foundation of the debate is cloistered in the interests of the group (class?) that feels directly not so much the breaths of an apparently surpassed past but, for that apparent reason, the return of an experience as retrograde as it is lacerating. All this, beyond tremendous or apologetic interpretations against the supposed original sin that embodies the Cuban Revolution, indicates that the process of sociopolitical transformation is alive, struggling and pushing for its progress.

The importance of an official outbreak of undeniably counter-revolutionary evidence such as that conveyed by state public television when paying homage to the champions of the former National Council of Culture, an instrument of a government cultural policy that is reactionary by cultural definition and repressive by mistaken ideological

definition, demands that the discussion of Cuban intellectuals transcend the approach of divorce between form and content, between the apparent and the essential. Therefore, the initiated discussion doesn't have the right to "private property." The ongoing debate is a debate that belongs to the Cuban people. And that is nothing more than the vindication of the fair- and free-access principle of the organic [Italian Marxist] revolutionary intellectual, Gramsci.

There is no problem of Cuban culture that is not a consequence of the unresolved problem of the citizen sovereignty of the Cuban people as subject of the socialist project that is intended to continue advancing.

Ex officio political dissidents or occasional ones shouldn't rub their hands for the assertion that I put on the table once again. But neither should the partisan state bureaucracy do so with this necessary delimitation. Both currents ignore the legitimate interests of the people.

The fact that certain voices of the "unauthorized" discussion that reverberates on the Cuban Intranet have agreed of their own free will to discuss in "private" with representatives of the state and the Party the issue that concerns them as a social group, regardless of the necessary understanding of the parties, can denote citizen responsibility but not citizen sovereignty. The apparent can only unfold the essential. That is the responsibility of the revolutionary intelligentsia in Cuba. Since not only the legitimacy but also the political effectiveness of the battle of ideas that is appealed to as a bulwark of the Revolution itself depends on the roots of critical thinking.

The fact that the intellectuals involved in the "unauthorized" debate about the meanings that they glimpse in the official counter-revolutionary media outbreak do not realize that it constitutes a reflection of the deep contradictions that exist within the entire Cuban society, of its socioeconomic movement, could become a mediating factor of the current revolutionary momentum.

The project of socialist transformations in Cuba is at a high point. A moment that needs the revolutionary drive of the people and critical thinking; all that, contrary to existing official and common orthodox political reluctance, contributes ideas and convictions that overcome both the self-confinement of convictions and the will to free and political participation, committed to the viability of a socialist project that can only be perceived as a process of socio-human emancipation and, for that reason alone, of cultural emancipation.

Freedom of artistic expression is neither a port nor a premise of the right to free expression and creative citizen action—a right, whose fullness must be synonymous with popular redemption to the exact extent to which it is personified by the meaning of the post-capitalist transformations unleashed by the Cuban revolutionary process. The premise and expansion of all creative and transforming freedom of reality is, first, the citizen's right to self-determination, a right at the center of the debate about the need to situate the socialist project on a definitively viable trajectory summons Cuban society.

That right and no other is the very legacy of the revolutionary triumph of 1959, and that is the liberating burden that the Revolution needs today more than ever.

If the “words to the intellectuals” (1961)[4] were expressed in the context of political definitions of class reaffirmations or denials, not only contradictory but for that reason highly antagonistic, the discourse of the University of Havana [5] in 2005 revealed that the sociopolitical contradictions of the Cuban revolutionary process, without being class-based, when left unresolved, also become antagonistic. The antagonism, as in childbirth, lies in the creative rejection of the body that has given rise to the embryo of the new forms that will come. But, unlike human birth, that will not occur without the frontal confrontation of the ideas up for bid, and that, similarly, will carry the genes that identify it with its parent.

The fact that the recent congress of the *Central de Trabajadores de Cuba* has ignored the discussion of the problem of the property system over the means of production (material and immaterial) and that it has been preferred, according to subsequent central political decisions, to grant it the patrimony of the analysis of one of the keys to the viability of the socialist project to a group of experts, speaks more about the distrust in the revolutionary wisdom of the workers than about trust in trained and committed thinkers. It is the determining difference between the essential and the apparent.

This is the case because the concept of citizen sovereignty remains imprisoned in political dogmas that resist the dialectical negation of controlled democracy, fostered today in the Cuban reality by an extemporaneous immanence of the historical concept of the dictatorship of the proletariat. A dictatorship that, in such a self-legitimized way, comes to be conducted by the only party of the Revolution.

Citizen sovereignty is not given in a vacuum nor will it be the exclusive work of society’s legitimate right to freedom of political, artistic and intellectual expression, or the result of the free expression of popular opinion. And it will not be so as long as its genesis in economic democracy is not conceived. Since the pillar on which the concept and practice of political dictatorship is sustained is the monopoly of state property over the means of reproduction of human life. The all-encompassing economic power enables the state to accommodate the forms of authoritarian governance of the entire movement of society. Bringing this observation to the forefront of analysis and debate means taking sides for the socialist renewal of the foundations of the prevailing mode of production and socioeconomic relations.

Consequently, I’m speaking of a principle of economic democracy that assumes the right of worker-citizens to free association as producers, to self-manage production processes (and immaterial creation), to the rights to self-distribute the profits of the work and to determine the economic budgets that promote the social and cultural development of each and every one. A revolutionary principle of socioeconomic relations that definitively places the social being, the citizen, at the center of the transformation processes of the cultural quality of life.

Both concepts—economic democracy and citizen sovereignty—constitute a synergistic pair that is called upon to frame the political viability of the Cuban socialist project. The historical continuity of the Cuban Revolution and the trajectory of the viability of its socialist project require an intellectual and popular responsibility that assumes the imperative of critical thinking and speaking, not as a personal risk, real or imagined, but as socio-cultural self-emancipation. A self-emancipation that generates the spaces for direct participation and political decisions that today, paradoxically, the other dissidents dispute, not without success, however unsustainable it may seem without the economic and political encouragement of external intervention.

It's the essential beyond the apparent. The partisan state bureaucracy, the one that entrenches itself in political conservatism in the face of a social reality marked by economic and citizen insufficiencies as pressing as systemic, will always be incapable of understanding the need for such spaces. The party itself does not escape unresolved internal contradictions, today subsumed for having been left out of the control of Cuban society. By dispensing with the control of society, the party has disdained its revolutionary condition to become a state party and supra-societal political power.

This is the key that allows us to understand the nature of state-partisan bureaucratic power. This basic problem becomes a destructive factor of social cohesion and, therefore, of the viability of the socialist project around which it has to take place. Old schemes of political thought do not work where reality requires overcoming the new contradictions generated by the process of socioeconomic and political transformations.

Those handcuffed contradictions that occur within the Cuban party will not be able to release their creative potential without the critical thrust of the self-emancipation of thought and the revolutionary word of society itself. That and no other dialectic of political interaction is the call to remove the obstacles that today condition the peak moment in which the process of social and economic transformation is found in Cuba. Not because the Revolution is established, the support and viability of its socialist project will depend on the role of political vanguard that the party signifies. It has been the critical interaction between the people and the political leaderships that emerged from it, as free subjects, that has set and will set the course and pace of the revolutions.

The commitment of critical thought and revolutionary action is with the viability of the socialist project, with the determination to enrich the cognitive horizons of a revolutionary process that must be emancipatory *par excellence*. Conquering citizen sovereignty, in the same sense that Antonio Maceo[6] also appealed not to beg for freedom, unquestionably enthrones the citizen as a transformative and self-transformable subject.

Waiting for the authorization of the party and the state representatives and not owners of the popular will for the open recurring debate about the best social and economic organization that the people must give themselves as a culture of democratic participation has always meant contributing to the stagnation of the revolutionary forces of society and of the party itself. It means giving up the condition of free men and women. Allowing open popular debate to be replaced by intramural debate means

leaving the state and party apparatus out of social control. That is why, for intellectuals and the people in general, the renewal of the role that the media must play within the socialist project must be the subject of greater debate.

If the appearance of ghosts from a past of contradictions that seemed to have been overcome mobilizes the Cuban intelligentsia today in legitimate defense of their group interests and doesn't allow them to distinguish that the essential thing to question is the self-complacency of the propaganda of success, induced or imposed, which at the same time occurs in the recently closed VIII National Festival of the Written Press[7], it will not mean more than legitimizing the violation of the revolutionary role of the media, of their status as a means of communication of the people in function of the critical sovereign exercise of information and opinion on the sociopolitical process, its daily life, its complexities and ideas about its projections, as well as the evaluation and democratic control of its institutional actors: the party, the state, social and cultural organizations.

If the debate that today moves a wide spectrum of intellectuals and artistic creators is reduced to lamenting injustices suffered, past and present, compensated or not, it will be devaluing the need for a greater debate that Cuban society should convene. Trying to make overcoming specific contradictions irreversible without taking sides in the face of structural contradictions will become a recurrent sisyphic effort. That is where the determining field of revolutionary action is and the guarantee of the renewing capacity and viability of the socialist project, which is assumed precisely as the path towards that cultural emancipation for which work is being done and discussed.

It cannot be forgotten, on pain of alienating the intellectual debate, that despite the complex web of internal contradictions and the pronounced wear and tear of society in the face of its perennial urgencies, these same village folks have not stopped working and weaving another web of advances, economic, social and undeniably cultural. Nor can the fact be underestimated that the majority of the adult Cuban population—70% born after 1959—don't consider the problems that afflict them in terms of debates on issues that they have not directly experienced. These generations are interested in debate about the present and the future, about solutions and projections, about reality from the perspective of expectations. And it will be like that no matter how hard you try to assert that it's necessary to learn from past mistakes. There is no antagonistic contradiction here by definition.

It is of the utmost importance to understand that in conditions of chronic economic deprivation and the mediatization of citizen sovereignty, the immanent social conflict leads to reactionary or progressive changes by sectarian interests. The only guarantee so that the flow of contained creative energy is not concealed by internal forces identified among themselves by sectarian interests—always fertile ground for foreign interests—is in the full participation of society in open popular debates. Everything that is discussed and decided outside of the transparency of popular participation will be an unequivocal sign of internal struggles for economic and political power that extends and consolidates the privilege of bureaucratic power. They will be attempts to consolidate the monopoly of state property as sustenance of that bureaucratic power. They will,

therefore, be attempts to perpetuate the media coverage of citizen sovereignty and with it the viability of the socialist project. The Revolution cannot be usurped.

Roberto Cobas Avivar
Spain, January, 2007

1. CIVIL LYRICAL MESSAGE

(To José Torres Vidaurre, Peruvian poet. In Madrid).

José Torres Vidaurre: Cheers! Health and glory, brother Apollonida. Health for the miserable scum of the body and glory for the exquisite and suffering soul; let the kiss of the palm and the laurel descend on your fertile temple. Fight with the storms! May your vessel sink!

Perhaps what a beautiful beach the shipwreck will bring! Always fight and trust: your last name is a harbinger of brilliant battles and resounding triumph; that over the anonymous darkness of Oblivion,

Vidaurre, *Vita aurea*, for his golden life, The symbolic towers of your last name will shine. (Another etymology, of Biscayan origin, also gives me Vidaurre as “first path”.)

And after my greeting, I will tell you my sorrows for the things in Cuba that are not alien to you, and that they cannot be foreign to you because of my brother, and because of your fervor as a South American.

I well know that the land of the Inca-Yupanqui did not suffer from the sad Yankee protectionism, although a future fear well justifies appealing to Washington about Tacna and Arica, but my homeland, which you also love as I love the glorious stamps of Peru, our Cuba, you know well how conducive to the hunting of nations, and how it supports the permanent threat of the North that its ambition incubates: Florida is an index finger that points to Cuba.

We have destiny in our own hands And it is sad that we, the Cubans, are the ones who achieve the probable misfortune, adulterating, infamous, the noble democracy, living between concerns of Charybdis and Scila, and ignoring the danger of the North that keeps watch.

Because you look closely at our strange dementia I will tell you the sweet story of Santa Clara, a convent that the State—a foolish merchant—wanted to buy at triple the true price.

And if in the big business there was a “secret” with a change of letter, it became a “decree.” Such a thing was carried out by the President, Buy, and by decree! most

devoutly, although our Charter, foreseeing some excess, left such a delicate power to Congress.

(But the Honorable Chief regarding Santa Clara said that it be acquired, but not that it be paid for). Thus, as a lawyer, he entrusted himself to San Ivo; he hatched his foundation, improvised a reason, and consistent with his own nonsense, walled himself in sophistic Chinese reasoning.

But, since a distinguished colonel of the noble contention was then Secretary of the Treasury, who carried the sacred keys of the Treasury with merits equal to the same decorum as his epic stripes and his immaculate last name, the Honorable Chief neutralized the obstacle, and this is what we saw with unanimous astonishment:

He endorsed the decree to the seraphic Erasmus!, lord incapable until Sin and Vice, with a maximum crime: his drama “The Sacrifice.” Thus the sad fable of the old convent was an embarrassing pact between a fox and a donkey, since vile cunning and imbecility came together in the shadow of a single wickedness.

And who tells you, friend, that because I made use of a right to criticize what was provided for by the magical decree, and I told the Secretary himself face to face how the people were against such a measure, they judge me a criminal?

I’m living in the first act of a judicial drama!

And since twelve illustrious friends supported me, we will suffer strong punishments together.

The seraphic Minister was bitten by the Furies: we suffered a ridiculous process of insults!

But this is only a symptom: a barricade is needed to save Cuba from the cursed waves: there is the aspiration to perpetuate the crime and the fierce politics surrender to the scoundrel.

There is false patriotism, flashy and pompous, accompanied by timpani and horn; Secretaries are changed in a very critical situation for petty “high political reasons.”

But where do we go, forgetting everything: History, Honor and People, through muddy roads, if you no longer recognize the fatal stubbornness or even the sacred and sad right to protest?

Where are we all going, brutally misguided, but to the Platt Amendment and Uncle’s boot?

to the repeated clash of the iron on the pebble, went the troop of hooves walking to the stars!

It takes a charge to kill scoundrels, to finish the work of revolutions;
to avenge the dead, who suffer outrage, to clean the tenacious crust of colonialism;

to be able one day, with prestige and reason, to remove the Appendix from the
Constitution;

so as not to make useless, in humbling luck, the effort and the hunger and the wound
and the death;

for the Republic to maintain itself, to fulfill Martí's marble dream;

to guard the earth, glorious of spoils, to save the temple of Love and Faith,

so that our children do not beg on their knees for the homeland that their parents won
for us on their feet.

I swear by the blood that flowed from so much injury, to yearn for the salvation of the
beloved land, and despite all unjust persecution, continue administering the caustic and
the whip.

The sacred obligation increases in danger. (The opprobrium deserves the word choleric).

I pull my soul, as if it were a sword, and I swear, on my knees, before Mother America.

(1923)

2. José Martí Pérez (1853-1895), Cuban revolutionary (killed in combat), poet,
distinguished exponent of Spanish-American letters, intellectual, founder of the Cuban
Revolutionary Party with which he organized and led the war of independence against
Spain, hero of Cuba and Latin America.

3. 1965-1971, period in which the National Council of Culture (CNC) functioned. Its
then director, as well as the director of the Cuban Radio Broadcasting Institute and the
director of the theater sector, are identified by the Cuban intelligentsia as relentless
commissioners of a factual policy of violation of freedom of artistic expression. At that
time, the director of the CNC was tried for abuse of power and unconstitutional action.

4. See: <http://www.cuba.cu/gobierno/discursos/1961/esp/f300661e.html>

5. See: <http://www.cuba.cu/gobierno/discursos/2005/esp/f171105e.html>

6. Cuban revolutionary (1848-1896), General of the Mambí Army that defeated the
Spanish Army in Cuba. Together with José Martí Pérez, hero of Cuban independence
(killed in combat) and Cuban libertarian thought.

7. See: <http://www.granma.cubaweb.cu/2007/01/14/nacional/artico6.html> Message
from Rogelio Rodríguez Coronel.

ROGELIO RODRÍGUEZ CORONEL

Translated by Regina Anavy

Dear Friends:

I have followed the debate with great interest. It is possible that I do not know all the opinions expressed, but I firmly subscribe to the concern shown and the denunciation of television irresponsibility. I believe that the articles by Desiderio and Arturo collect, with moderation and depth, the most outstanding aspects. However, there is another one that seems extremely disturbing to me and that I have not seen reflected with complete transparency: Why now, precisely, this display of what could be understood as opportunism, now that Commander Fidel Castro delegated command to the Second Party Secretary and Minister of the Armed Forces?

I think it's something more serious than manifest political opportunism. I believe that resurrecting these ghosts at this time is profoundly counterrevolutionary, since—as in the game of billiards—the resurrected figures (or better, the tendencies that they represent, which are there, have always been there and have never disappeared, above all in education) have wanted to identify, through television speeches including iconographic resources, with the highest leadership of the Revolution, which is harmful not only for its image, inside and outside the country, but also because it exhumes scars that have not completely healed (impossible in such a short time; an error of this nature in culture and education can only be corrected with the passing of generations), and this conspires against the unity that is needed in these times and corrodes the claimed trust. It's more serious, I think, than simple opportunistic attempts, perhaps vengeful.

Dr. Rogelio Rodríguez Coronel

ROLANDO A. PÉREZ FERNÁNDEZ

Translated by Regina Anavy

Hi, Tomasito:

I am writing to you with the request that you send this message to the mailing list, and with it my adherence to the feelings of the Cuban intelligentsia in relation to the Pavón issue. In a few days (February 27) I will be 60 years old and, although it's true that I didn't suffer firsthand the excesses of Pavón and Quesada, I did suffer the consequences of a prejudiced, arbitrary and unfair policy towards artists that manifested itself in all areas of life for those years (which should never return), before and after the so-called "gray five-year period."

I also wish to express my total agreement with Enrique Colina's opinion expressed in his lucid message to Desiderio Navarro. In it, Colina writes: "If the light we radiate will continue to shine eternally only because of the humanism of our doctors or because of the splendor of our education, of which I am proud and know very well that it counts for a lot, but they ignore contradictions that undermine the democratic sense of the system, its economic efficiency, which cries out for reforms and internal changes; if we continue to believe a state that controls and takes care of everything without being able to take care of everything or control everything; if we do not face the deformations of all those recognized that go to the core of the problems, which is the essential issue that is in the pipeline of these concerns, I sincerely believe that the lighthouse and guide, sooner or later, will go out, and we will remain only as a historical reference of nobility, resistance and dignity, but we will lose the public sphere."

By way of testimony, allow me to narrate the following personal anecdote. On January 29, on the eve of the meeting at the Casa de las Américas, which I would have wanted to attend, I was the victim, along with other citizens, of an outrage that I could never have imagined. After having dinner at the El Asturianito restaurant, in front of the Capitol, and going to my home on Amistad street, between Bernal and Trocadero, Centro Habana, I was arbitrarily arrested at the corner of Prado and Teniente Rey when I stopped to greet an acquaintance. After waiting for half an hour or more at that corner, I was taken in a patrol car, along with other detainees, to a nearby police station, where I had to remain behind bars in a cell for about two hours, without knowing what the reason for that injustice (executed, as I could hear, under "Operation Plane") (?), and without being offered any apology when they finally returned my identity card and allowed me to get out of that humiliating place.

It was useless for me to show the guards my UNEAC card, signed by Abel Prieto, and a copy of my book *La música afro-mestiza Mexicana* [*Mexican Afro-Mestiza Music*] published by the Universidad Veracruzana, which I carried in my backpack, since I had used it that afternoon in the course he taught at the Center for Research and Development of Cuban Music, entitled "The study of traditional and popular music seen from the South." Great paradox: some participants in said course, which included research work on Cuban musicology within the framework of internationalist collaboration agreements in Granada and Angola, had dropped out due to its strong

political charge (I know that some ironically compared my course with the well-known "Round Table").

In the midst of this unexpected event, I was extremely indignant, burning with the fire of anger and my high blood pressure, and I told the prison guards a few things that their inexcusable behavior deserved. But the many young people who surrounded me, victims like me of that abuse of power, displayed an enviable serenity. One of them whispered to me: "Father, don't look for a fight." That made me reflect on something important: their detention was so unjust, being the same as I, Cuban citizens and residents. And I was no more a human being than they were for the simple fact of being a musicologist and a member of UNEAC. After all, they also had to be released, since none had committed any crime or infraction.

All this is relevant because, as Colina rightly says, contradictions like these "undermine the democratic sense of the system," and "the deformations that are all recognized" are "the essential issue that is in the pipeline of these concerns." When will the "Round Table" address this and other issues that concern us all? Not only the impunity of Luis Posada Carriles, the unjust arrest of the Five Heroes, neoliberalism and US barbarism in Iraq are issues of general interest. The present and future of our people and our country demand a deserved and urgent space.

Rolando A. Pérez Fernández

ROSA ILEANA BOUDET

Translated by Regina Anavy

Intellectual debate?

Intellectual debate It may be that I have a lot of respect for the word but I cannot consider the exchange of emails a debate between a group of intellectuals who came to me through third parties. Everyone who uses this procedure knows that he has an avid network and a captive reader. If they wanted to promote intellectual debate, they would place their messages and their ideas in the newspapers, in their columns on *La jiribilla* and *Cuba Literaria* or on the dozens of Cuban Internet sites. They would demand an explanation of the minister and the president of UNEAC and something would be done. They would call a meeting somewhere and do something more constructive, because Cuban society needs to heal that wound that, like so many others, is open as long as the victims and their censors share—and it has to be like that, there is no other way—the beaten “public sphere.”

I understand the indignation of those who saw one of those responsible for cultural policy who reigned during the black five-year period reappear on television—not gray as Fornet coined—and it’s very clear that they want to go ahead and prevent the ghost from reliving the years of “civil death,” marginalization and ostracism that caused irreparable losses to the intellectual and artistic movement. But the ghost is like Pachencho waiting in the coffin, not because the old Pavón appears in one program or the sixty-year-old Quesada in another, but because the breeding ground that made it possible for them to have power remains.

Not only because they weren’t the ones most responsible, but because their victims have been rehabilitated and the period continues “in silence it has had to be,” while books have are not written, nor essays and rectifications published, and there have been no mea culpas so that those who were children at the time can understand what we are talking about. And there will be those who will tell what happened with *Pensamiento crítico* and the censored works and the prohibited premieres, as some novelists and writers have already done. And the lists of prohibited premieres and the resolution of the “parameterization” will be published, and only when that documentation and testimony circulates in freedom, will it matter very little to us that someone had their little piece of glory on television in a program in bad taste.

Desiderio Navarro may accuse me of not having said it before. He now uses against the censors the same email technique that he used against me in 2002, when I dared to touch him “with the tip of a *Criterio*” * (he added the disqualification of émigré to the many of the public sphere). If you read his text “In medias res publica” calmly, you will see how many rhetorical figures he uses to not call bread “bread” and wine “wine,” and yet how much arsenal he uses to argue with a colleague. In “In media ..” he writes with tweezers about the period that cost others losses and disappointments, small indeed in comparison with the sufferings of others.

What we have to do is write and rectify and analyze with serenity and continue denouncing the Pavón that we still have inside.

* If you touch me with the tip of an opinion, touch me with love, Desiderio.

* Anonymous verse widely circulated in the intellectual milieu.

You will find the texts if you search in the nooks and crannies of Google, which doesn't let us forget. Mine, if you search for "Patrice Pavis' own gaze," Desiderio's, in "Desiderio en Teatro en Miami."

SENEL PAZ AND REBECA CHÁVEZ

Translated by Regina Anavy

We share your views and look forward to the immediate opportunity to act firmly and respond quickly and forcefully to this action. These messages are very useful and mobilizing, but we must move right now to a more concrete and frontal action.

Senel Paz and Rebeca Chávez

SIGFREDO ARIEL

Translated by Regina Anavy

Dear Jorge Ángel,

Has someone really summoned on television, in person, the ghost of Luis Pavón, executioner of the worst period that the culture of this country has gone through? If today were the day of the Holy Innocents, I would not have been surprised to receive this news, inconceivable for more than one reason: this exhumation in the most influential and mass media cannot be understood—it received flattery, you say—after so many congresses, public meetings and all kinds of obviously official meetings that have examined those dark days and judged its leadership very negatively. It is clear that the ICRT—especially the political body that monitors and ultimately designs its programming—doesn't remember that long season, the *pavonato*, for what it was: a lasting shame that opened wounds that have not yet healed, if indeed they can.

I hope this is not a sign of revalidating the vulgar Stalinism, witch hunts, prejudices, denials and limits of the 1970s, God forbid. In any case, it will be a new attempt to restore the dubious intellectual relief that no one knows for what artistic merit this character once enjoyed. I remember that in the early 1980s, a sample of his “poetry” appeared—to the ridicule of *Letras cubanas*—in a luxurious hardcover edition, along with other anthologies of true intellectuals who had not made the press groan for many years (Lezama dixit): Fayad Jamís, Dulce María Loynaz, Fina García Marruz, Rafael Alcides and other poets who were returning to editorial life: Pablo Armando, Díaz Martínez, Arrufat... Why was Pavón in this select group? Let the editorial leaders of the time respond, if they want, although it's not worth it.

In the years that followed, that name was not heard again except to publicly deplore his management at the head of the National Council of Culture, and that is how many of those who suffered the forced silence, the non-existence, the accusations often evoke him whenever they can, for this or another stigma, and to whom Pavón and his collaborators dedicated various forms of humiliation. This is a delicate subject that no one should talk about by parroting other people's opinions, and I will not, of course. I believe that some of today's respected writers and artists who have received National Awards in the last ten or twenty years have an opinion on the new resurrection of their victimizer. Could this unexpected appearance open a new dialogue, hopefully keeping extremes and rancor at bay? We, who didn't experience the *pavonato* itself, who received only a few lashes from his agonizing beating, would have to listen, pay attention and connect the dots. By the way, did you watch the show?

A hug,
Sigfredo Ariel

Message from Sigfredo Ariel about the Conference of January 30, 2007

Photos and messages that I have received over the last few hours from young people interested in entering the Casa de las Américas on Tuesday afternoon have reminded me of very hopeless days when the then-young writers—without being scandalously adolescent—could not even dream of intervening in “the things” that were taking place at UNEAC, which was then the enemy headquarters of what we wrote, and of us ourselves.

Let’s remember together, friends in our forties and fifties, so many contest prizes left unjustly deserted—by advice, pressure, dark interventions—the weekly attacks in *Tribuna* (and even in *El Caimán Barbudo*) on poetry and narrative—intimate, escapist, “originist”; that mansion of 17 and H with fine little roosters fleeing from the hesitant footsteps of writers and artists (not all of them very brilliant, by the way, about whom almost nothing is known now), who “ran the show” in rooms frequented by opaque Hungarian colleagues, Bulgarians, Czechoslovakians...

It seems, when reading some of the angry messages from young unknowns that have arrived in this mailbox, that one of the ways of “the Pavón” is now called “secretism,” which, as I understand it, is a buzzword very close to hypocrisy, previously called the *doble moral*, the double standard. “Mystery Syndrome,” I have heard this aberration called some time ago, or something like that.

Like it or not, the guests who climbed the stairs of the Che Guevara room last Tuesday, before the eyes of hundreds of young people who tried in vain to enter the Casa, took part in a kind of secret meeting that for our benefit (or who knows what privilege of listening and talking they attribute to us) excluded them.

The explanations that were given to them—true, by the way, those referring to the magnitude of the premises and its architectural limitations—were not received with satisfaction, nor twenty years ago would similar reasons have left us satisfied.

These young people want to fight their Pavóns, which are also—who can doubt it?—ours. Perhaps they thought that the time had come to denounce, ask for explanations, or at least find out about matters from a past that is not taught or mentioned in classes or homes (again “secretism”).

Those boys trusted that some collective pressure (unusual insistence for attending a conference on cultural policy) would end up opening the doors of the Casa de las Américas. At midnight many were still there. I felt ashamed, and I was not the only one.

If it had been a concert, the decent thing would have been to start the show again at that time.

Sigfredo Ariel

TOMÁS GONZÁLEZ PÉREZ

Translated by Regina Anavy

After that time, where things as painful as bestial happened to me, I was left in a lethal state. What was for me the possibility of living happily and fulfilled vanished, like a furiously colored kite. I believed in the truth, but I was forgetting Brecht's "Five difficulties in telling the truth," that of "in whose hands do you put the truth." I presented a paper, written on two pages, in which I set out my views on the problems for the development of national culture in our country. I said that blacks and whites were not on an equal footing for the integration of their cultural contributions.

Racial discrimination is not erased with a decree. And in that paper I gave several examples. From the blonde doll in the arms of a black girl; the actors and actresses in a cast for a novel or a classic couldn't be black; the thousand ways of considering the black a wild and brutish being that "if he doesn't make trouble at the entrance, does it at the exit." The reaction against these arguments was extraordinary. A majority of white Cubans asked for me, with their thumbs down, to throw me to the lions of the Roman circus.

Of course, this brought me an emphatic consequence. I was left without a job and salary for a few years, during the time that Llanusa was minister. For that presentation they considered me the leader of Black Power in Cuba, in the style of Black Power and with ramifications about the "negritude" of our friend Césaire, the great poet of Martinique. From that moment I was a plague.

In the midst of all this dark period, a daughter of mine dies. Time passes and one day they call me to an ideological commission of the Party. They tell me how I had put up with so much, what did I live on... And before me was the President of the National Council of Culture, Dr. Mucio, a psychiatrist. That was the night they rehabilitated me. They watched me for a long time, despite the fact that I did not have a salary. I worked for free in the theater, not just eight hours, but many more.

I was a member of the group *Los Doce* [*The Twelve*]. When they gave me a salary again, it was the minimum. All this happens until the arrival of Torquemada who summons me to the Palacio del Segundo Cabo in a dark office, with a small lamp aimed at my face. He told me that my Hamlet was black because the actors he had cast were black. But this time they gave me a transfer to keep me away from the theater, to sing again all over the country in the Benny Moré group. I returned to the theater when Pavón's "hiccups" from a hangover took him out on a stretcher from the Palacio de Segundo Cabo.

Another Message from Tomás González Pérez

Dear beings who illuminate the path of our dark jungle. What we are seeing was to be expected, but it is not all; there are others who are behind these "Furies." Beings who know how to hate, because they have put their hate, which is their only talent, at the service of a disastrous utopia that wants to put under control everything that is beautifully human in a society. The true utopia that deserves all our effort is that of

ending the equation of the werewolf with the man. They are of such mediocrity that they depend on us, but they know that without us—all the intelligentsia and talented artists—they cannot do anything.

But all these, be careful, are the children of Manuel Sanguily; and they remember why Placido died. This is a preview of what's to come. But remember that what has just been executed is the opening of "Pandora's box." You don't have to rush. Names are missing. Once a cabaret dancer—of course she was not a good dancer, although very beautiful—asked her lover: "Hey, Papi, you who are up there. Tell me why Torquemada can do and undo?" The old official answered: "Divine power protects him." Wait until they discover the faces of those who are masked. Remember that we are close to the Bermuda Triangle. And what we have given for dead is actually masked.

What fumlbers we can become.

I love you,
Tomás González Pérez

VÍCTOR FOWLER

Translated by Regina Anavy

Pavonato, one of the names of authoritarianism

“Chance is not, nor can it be, more than an unknown cause of an unknown effect.”
Voltaire.

“The truth never harms a cause that is just.” Mahatma Gandhi.

You have to refine, or broaden, your gaze to be able to read the event in a global space; to propose that the practice is directed in directions that, in general, yield contradictory as well as complementary results. Work within the country, its history, cultural evolution, social system, ideological devices, control structures, spaces for the circulation of opinion or negotiation, educational system (for all that it has to create traditions, canonization of facts or figures), local problems or any of the many human layers that make up the whole. Move towards the relationship with the outside, while countries are part of regional frameworks as well as of the world space of nations. They belong to organizations of all kinds; they defend their autonomy and identity there, their internal policies and projects with neighbors or distant countries; they face conflicts or bitter enmities.

For several weeks, Cuban television has been broadcasting the sessions of the colloquium entitled “Fidel: memory and future” (it is already on fragment number 22 of that celebration, which took place last December and lasted several days). A surprising meeting, because—in life—it takes place without the presence of the figure around whom the attendance takes place. Fidel Castro has been recovering from a serious illness for months, and despite all kinds of speculation during the days leading up to the colloquium, he will end up not attending the event, although it may well be said that he presides over it from afar.

It is worth remembering that the colloquium, with an attendance of more than 3,000 personalities, constituted a way of reasoning about the future of Cuban socialism, as well as establishing the need and desire for its continuity. Unless something else has happened in the halls, the sessions broadcast on television speak of a stable country, homogeneous around its history, immersed in struggles for survival and development, a society without wounds or fractures that elaborates a future of shared ideals, and where, above the daily difficulties of life, happiness is a common banner.

On another stage on that same television, and just around the same time the colloquium was broadcast, a forgotten former official from the world of culture was invited to be the central figure in a program (titled *Impronta* and lasting five minutes), whose purpose, as the name indicates, was to pay a quick tribute (almost a reminder) to those people who have left an important mark on the national culture. The official’s name was Luis Pavón Tamayo, and apart from books of poems of little relevance and his journalistic work, he made his real contribution in administrative terms during the years he directed the National Council of Culture (1971-1975).

The next day, a brief email appears in which a young writer communicates his indignation at the tribute, since that former official is exactly the one who, at the head of the organization he then directed, implemented the repressive policy that, in the sector of writers and artists, is commonly identified under the name “gray five-year period.” After this, and for more than a week, dozens of electronic messages are sent within the community of Cuban writers—at the beginning in the interior of Cuba, after a few days with the participation of others who no longer reside in the country.

In reality, what happened is a kind of chaotic avalanche whose best explanation is a state of exalted anger: a person begins by sending a message to several recipients; a small group responds quickly, and the community of readers identifies them as the kind of leaders to whom, in turn, they can send new messages of support. Finally, a new group, this time of Cubans living outside the country, joins the group. The first signatures indicate that the majority of the members of the circuit are writers, especially those who today are over 60 years old and who suffered in their own flesh those excesses of which the former official Pavón is accused. This can be verified in the message where Arturo Arango, one of those who quickly adds his voice to the rejection, wonders if perhaps the youngest (he himself is over 50) are not going to participate in the exchange.

When, finally, members of said challenged group begin to participate, the consequences become dramatic. It turns out that people who were children when the events for which Pavón is held responsible took place can recount the same, similar or related events in their adult lives. In other words, they establish a solid line of continuity between the yesterday that someone tried to clean up with the frustrated tribute to the former official, to our present lives, and there are even those who extend the connection to the life that awaits our children.

To make matters worse, in the course of the exchange, threads are being discovered that connect the “Pavón affair” with other actions that, in previous weeks or months, have taken place on Cuban television: the invitation to Francisco Serguera, former director of the organization, to an interview where he assures that he does not regret anything; the interview (in another program) with Armando Quesada (who was Pavón’s subordinate, in charge of the Cuban theater world, and who is accused of having carried out the policy of “parameterization”), and even the mention (as a historical date worth remembering) of the First National Congress of Education and Culture in 1971, from which emerged the political directives for the treatment of the presence of homosexuals in educational facilities and in Cuban cultural life throughout the decade, still with profound consequences up to today.

The group of Cubans living outside their country deserves special mention. They are more aggressive; they use irony and mockery (against the community of writers to which, still very recently, they belonged). Some—while they are astonished and criticize previous silences—congratulate the unanimous rejection, and, above all, demand political responsibility. They are not satisfied with a criticism of the former official Pavón, but rather want to follow the threads of power and trace its latest consequences, Pavón’s connections to the Cuban political fabric of the time. Given that they also extend

the atmosphere of those seventies to the present, the acceptance of their proposals practically implies the need for a review of the history of national culture in the revolutionary period.

It's difficult to extract rules from something that is nothing more than a chaotic exchange where no one is the center and in which the main person questioned has not responded, nor has anyone who may share their ideas about how to deal with the problems of Cuban culture (from the point of view of someone who directs and administers it). In reality, apart from a conversation someone recounted, we don't even know what Pavón may think of his years as a civil servant in the field of culture or his current assessments of the global state of that culture (of which, at least as a journalist, poet and researcher, he continues to be part).

Now, since at one point in the exchanges one of the participants (Arturo Arango) introduces a digression in the central argument (calls for a balanced look, since television also celebrates the awarding of the National Social Sciences Award to the Marxist essayist Fernando Martínez), and since another of the participants (Desiderio Navarro) feels alluded to and responds by giving continuity to the digression, it is fair to point out that both digressions and responses—between the participants and no longer in the direction of Pavón—are possible.

If this minimum rule is true, together with the catalog of practices of cultural violence that have appeared on the scene, as in an eruption, it is equally true that no one among the participants has answered them. In other words, although it is possible that they do not know the ultimate reality of the narrated episodes or that they have even heard them mentioned, it seems that—through the permanent updating of a shared knowledge and memory—they accept them as plausible. Attenuated or activated, as needed, the practices of violence are a structural component of the universe in which these people carry out their daily lives. They are part of the “game.”

On the other hand, although the participants in the exchange are writers and artists, quite a few of the episodes they expose refer to the life of anyone (demonization of a type of music, prohibition of wearing long hair, pants cut off by the police, internment or harassment of homosexuals only because of their sexual identity, etc.). Other episodes (censorship of books, contests, self-censorship when creating artistic work, etc.) are already typical of the cultural field.

What's interesting here is to unite both catalogs and make the resulting figure intersect (we can consider that this figure is that of shared knowledge and memory) with the portrait of the nation that the colloquium offers, mentioned at the beginning, since—after complying with the task—the latter is more of a political fantasy composed for a specific audience outside the country. Due to an elementary demand for coherence, the audience of such a discourse must be external, because how can one imagine that a sector of society (in a broad sense, and given the extension of the catalogue, the entire society) celebrates and congratulates itself on its own wound?

It's important, at this point, to propose a delusional operation (to speak in the abstract when it almost seemed that we were going to specify responsibilities and names) and set aside two things that the colloquium unifies: the leadership of the nation and the portrait that is offered of it. If this is so, then it must be accepted that it is not only a sweetened portrait, but false to a great degree, and was enough to demonstrate the amount of pain that has flowed in barely a week of electronic exchanges between a small group of writers and artists, which, after all, doesn't reach even fifty people.

Seen from another angle (that of possibilities), we cannot even imagine what would happen, what would rise to the surface, if instead of the narrow circuit of these exchanges, the process of reviewing this pain is carried out, in an open way, in the most diverse media, educational centers, political or social organizations; if it grew to become a "topic" of debate in current Cuban society.

Of course, this forces us to raise the issue of responsibility. What do we do with Pavón, the official who structured a device for the control and repression of differences at the level of an entire country, but of whom no other trace remains? There are no books that compile his speeches or essays on any topic; his journalism is scattered enough to make it difficult to follow him or contains so few ideas that, in general, his thought doesn't exist; except that he is, from any point of view, an executioner.

In historical terms, there is a scheme proposed long ago by Hannah Arendt in her famous study on the trial of Adolf Eichmann (from which the idea of the "banality of evil" was born): the modest civil servant who is a model of dedication and honesty; who never opposes any ordinance of superiority, but rather goes ahead to deploy the actions that satisfy what he interprets as the desires of an abstract "command" (which, although its main figure is a concrete leader, is also fragmented into dissimilar figures placed on a higher level), and whose only defect is that he puts all his energy at the service of a horrible idea.

But, even taking for granted that the idea could have arisen solely in the mind of the official (with which only his accomplices would be those who, throughout the country, are willing to comply with it, with fervor on many occasions), what do you do with your peers or hierarchical superiors in the apparatus, and how do you evaluate them? And, this time in greater depth, where are the ideas that opposed the one that took flesh in the exemplary functionary? Not only within the "world of culture" (which, in the first place, suffered the onslaught), but especially outside it and, above all, within the administrative and political apparatus.

Said in another way, what classes of society (above all, the administrative and political system) opposed the deployment of control and repression? What social personalities, "cadres" of management, departments or offices, and at what hierarchical level were they? What were their destinations? Which of those suffered the effects of the apparatus?

Given the extension of the device (media, educational centers and the world of culture, at least) to cover the entire country, it is natural to assume that the effects were suffered

by the entire population, only that here it is necessary to consider the presence of gradations, since the consequence has to be more serious, the greater the deviation from what is supposed to be the norm. That is, there will be people (many) who consider that either the events in the catalog didn't exist, or that they weren't touched by them, in their private lives.

This, mathematically acceptable, leads, however, to an even more serious and complexly interwoven reasoning, since it forces us to imagine subjects who were "ignoring" and for whom it seemed normal that in Cuba, young men with long hair dressed in western fashion, who listened to music sung in English (especially rock), who read authors not sanctified by the most "official" portion of the literary institution, who expressed pride in their religious beliefs or who lived alternative sexual identities openly without conflicts in the public space were non-existent.

In other words, if the conflict existed (and it did), the only way to appeal to the benefit of ignorance is to have been part of the repressive device, either by being one of its various links (those who applied the directives or monitored their compliance), by manifesting a substantial lack of solidarity with those punished (either by sharing the deployment of the device, or by simple fear of also ending up being part of it or accommodating it by considering that it's not one's problem). Thinking statistically, the linked individuals must have been strictly a smaller quantity, reducing the relationship with the environment to practically the relationship with oneself in order to be sure that it's really a matter of "ignoring"; that is to say, one must have remained silent in the face of the problem of the neighbor, the close or distant family member, the co-worker or simple acquaintance.

This exemplary brand of lack of solidarity is one of the most harmful effects of times like those discussed here. Nor do I forget that, in order to qualify those who suffered, it is essential to add one more element to the analysis: the fact that Cuban legislation prevents any citizen from leaving the country if they don't have an exit permit beforehand. This is not free information, since it implies that the pariahs of the universe designed by the former official were unable (as an option to not suffer) even to leave the country if they so wished. They were, in the fullest sense of the word, victims.

Culture (publications, award systems, shows, events and artistic exhibitions of all kinds); Teaching (study programs, textbooks, conditions for permanence or access to this or that level); Media (topics covered, circulation and, more than anything, the possibility of proposing not just alternative opinions, but simply nuanced ones around the basic elements that make up the ideological nucleus of the repressive structure); Political-Administrative Apparatus (directives, decrees, laws or modifications of the law, operating routines during problem solving, interaction practices regarding proposals or demands of the citizenry) and Public Space (conditions for its use, stigmatized or encouraged behaviors, introduction of new meanings or reformulation of traditions).

The main thing here is to elucidate whether the period, under any of its denominations (*pavonato*, *quinquenio gris*, "repressive period," etc.), was the result of the enunciation and implementation of policies enunciated by a man (arch-responsible) or if (as the

data—the universalization of certain control and repressive practices—allow us to suspect) it was rather the implementation of a State policy, a project of the Nation and human engineering typical of the context of the Cold War.

Here it's fundamental to analyze and reveal the fabric of relations of that particular area of Cuban life directed by the former official with the rest of the areas that make up the administrative, political and, in general, leadership apparatus of the country—an analysis that cannot but encompass the refraction and effects of the ordinances at the lowest levels, as well as the way in which the “superiority,” the summits of the apparatus, knew about them, controlled, encouraged or rejected them.

As long as the investigation (in particular, the one carried out in Cuba) does not propose (or is not possible) to advance in all these fields, the environment of the former official will remain a black hole, less and less important as he himself. This is true, as the need to understand the overall design of the device and its management from higher levels gains in importance (to the point that any search for culprits pales before the formidability of the device itself and its consequences up to today). I point out the latter because the pretense of finding exact culprits can also function as a trap that forces infinite mobility in the web of the administration and the political estates and structures; that is to say, along with the question in a positive sense (who was it who enunciated, defined, accepted, stimulated, rewarded or did?), the opposite should also be asked (who conceded, kept quiet, dissuaded, falsified, concealed?).

Even deleting names, out of pity or with the desire to protect, proposing both series of questions in a merely operational sense (how did it come to be?) can generate answers of interest. Otherwise, for the questions to end with Pavón, we would have to accept the ridiculous premise that he managed to direct the sector of “culture” as head of a sort of parallel government of the country, and even in this case we should ask how he could do it and where the real government was.

However, what we have called the Now, what we have called the “catalog,” encompasses much more than Pavón's particular period and, in reality, threatens to become a temporary quantity as long as the lifetime of the Cuban Revolution up to the present. (I insist once again on the fact that none of the “facts” has been, at least until now and within the exchange of messages, refuted.) There has been talk of repression for reasons of sexual identity (which, among us, opens the way to the years of the UMAP [1965-1968]; the “Gray Quinquenio” (1971-1975, although some propose starting the period earlier and extending it to the early 1980s) and then a long chain of “facts” that goes right up to the present day.

Giving as a reality the acceptance, on the part of the participants, of the existence of the aforementioned “catalog” (which, I repeat, seems to bring together moments that are plausible enough so that no one has quickly ruled them out), then we have to add a new and a much more sour element to the analyzes to be carried out: the continuity of the practices of the so-called *pavonato*, which even precede the appearance of Pavón himself; this last thing means, in reality, the constitutive nature of said practice to the daily life of Cuban socialism.

Condemning Pavón's appearance on television (as a praiseworthy figure for his work in the cultural field) in an email exchange is simple and even elemental, although it does not imply that it's not also essential. Linking his presence to that of other characters who were leaders during the same period, even though it may be the effect of chance or unpredictability, is also a message or a wink in various directions to past and future history, to the citizens who see one of their nightmares return—surreptitiously and even without being able, due to ignorance, to identify it—and, finally, to the country's top leadership.

It would be naive to the point of idiocy if the strange situation Cuba is experiencing is not known now, when its leading figure has been absent from public life for more than half a year for health reasons; a context where, suddenly, former officials who seemed forgotten begin to reappear, people around whom there was a kind of pact of silence. They were there, but so little was said about them that there have even been those who now, in the middle of the exchange, are surprised that they continue to work in positions of responsibility and even that they are alive.

Voltaire's tremendous phrase ("Chance is not, nor can it be, more than an unknown cause of an unknown effect") calls us, however, to continue even deeper. What can the appearance of this group of commanding officers of a vanished army mean? As much as there are messages from the exchange that try to convince us that "everything is the same," it's a self-evident truth that the life of the country has changed (and a lot) with respect to the repressive atmosphere of the seventies. Of course it can be answered that the change only serves to introduce the continuation, under new forms, of the same and identical previous repressive atmosphere, but at any rate it can be granted that the external signs have changed.

Put with the previous directive of the country there seemed to be an agreement that Pavón would live, until physically disappearing, in a kind of low profile. What other target can the message have that isn't the current directive? As I recently heard, imagining a very murky scenario, there would be the possibility of a positional power play or an outcry translatable into a martial "the troops are ready!" (of course for a presumed return). Following the joke, and within a greater scope, the most interesting task would then remain, locating that sector that never stopped brushing the horses and ironing with starch the grimy suit kept in the window display for the moment of return; not only of the "old" ones, but the fusion of this hard wing with today's new ones, who, deep down, share identical ideas about the ways of governing (actually, disciplining) a Nation and the lives of its inhabitants (who, by their essence, stop being citizens inside similar projects).

It's appropriate now to imagine a very distant possibility, to travel to the other side of the globe and for someone who doesn't know us to wake up from his dream and read us. He is an Australian aborigine learning the Spanish language; he may not even know exactly where Cuba is; he has no particular emotion about our lives. He simply reads us; we are text before his eyes, and he must face two sets of meaning that run in parallel. He will try to form an opinion about this. On one track is the country of the official

celebration, on another that of the complaint of its intellectuals, and there are several questions: what is this world of ours? what are its operating laws? What is it worth for him? Can what's not valid be changed and how?

If I assume this somewhat crazy possibility, it's because the crossing of a limit reveals to us what is really at stake with this "rebellion" of the intellectuals, this staging of pain that—for the first time in a long time—has not only taken place, but has been opening up more and more to fields that perhaps weren't considered during the first messages. At this point I draw attention to the fact that some of the messages call for controlling the geographical area that the circuit should cover (only within Cuba) and that another explains the non-participation of the person who writes it with the argument of not giving weapons to the external enemy.

Beyond the particular period of the so-called *pavonato* or its effects, what is at stake is the judgment about life (cultural and social) in the universe of the Cuban Revolution, from its origins until today. It might seem like a highly extreme approach, but if one of the series operates as a tacit denial of the splendor or opacity of the other, which vision do we finally have? (For example, what questions do we expect from our Australian Aborigine the day we meet in person?).

Although the indignation at the tribute to former official Pavón is fair, the aspiration to prevent any other similar episode on the stage of Cuban television (and, by extension, the country's mass media) leaves the strange aftertaste of ambiguous flavors. One feels uncomfortable applying to the former official, the same directives that he, in the past, promulgated. In the end, as much pain as it may have caused, this is not Adolf Eichmann organizing the "final solution" within which millions of Jews and other human beings died during World War II (at this point, and this is important for the human being, it's appropriate to apologize to Pavón for the excessive use of his name, since he was only a small figure within the tide that contributed to his unleashing and administering).

In other words, by imagining a possible pain-grading table, society can afford for these former officials to appear, but it also has to have and stimulate (especially the latter) spaces where actions that are harmful to the community are criticized. In this sense, the recent episode is an example of the immaturity of the Cuban institutional system (its mass media and, very especially, its political apparatus) in regard to the mere existence of criticism (which is not only pointing out whether an artistic product is "good" or "bad") and public debate on sensitive issues for national life (in truth, on almost any type of issue). It is known that here, precisely at this point, the argument will arise that "this is not the time," "the conditions are not created" or any other similar excuse (which, moreover, those of my age have been hearing since childhood and now for almost half a century), but then it is worth reviewing the idea that Gandhi proposed to us when he stated that "The truth never harms a cause that is just."

Very little will remain of the initial demands of those who sent messages: there will be no public apology from television (that is, from its directors). and only UNEAC will issue a statement addressed to its members (as if the *pavonato* and its consequences would

have been only a matter of writers and artists). None of those affected (who so vehemently sent electronic messages) will be granted the largest national platform to explain themselves. The offense is enormous and the satisfaction tiny. The possible revisions to the national history (even to that small period of the *pavonato*) are going to remain confined to academic spheres, union assemblies or sectorial publications.

The call for a new silence comes along with the promise not to repeat old mistakes (for which, too, there is the convenient expedient of later calling them “deformations”), and the pain will continue to persist as a result of the renewal of the social pact. As a result, the false problem (the appearance of the ex-official on national television screens) is going to bury the real problem (the form of solidarity and activism that this exchange of messages proposes; the need for the core problems of national life to be the subject of public debate; and, above all, the very content of the messages: the catalogue).

For the end I leave a more personal opinion. I believe that we have all suffered from Pavón, even those who barely encountered his name. We are his children and his victims. The very fact that such a large matter was confined to an exchange among fewer than fifty people (when what they are disputing is one of our most damaging pasts and national legacies) is as good as any other piece of evidence if one wants to analyze it, the same as the fact of having chosen to remain silent when it was so simple (and fair) to offer an apology and, making things better, even to ask for forgiveness.

Pavonato is but one of the many names that authoritarianism, violence, fear, hypocrisy, duplicity, emotionality and other harmful qualities take when it comes to leading human masses. Police cutting long hair and pulling down too-narrow pants; people willing to watch whether you listened to “American music” and “foreign broadcasters” and if you had an antenna on the roof of your house that could tune into “Northern” television stations; hostility against religious believers of any denomination, against male or female homosexuality, against “weird” handwriting: this was the food of my childhood and youth. Not just a little of it is still alive today, sometimes in new and subtle forms, and as we grow up, we continue to learn and add elements to that dark catalog (censorship, self-censorship, undesirable visits, open fear).

Many of the demands raised in the messages remain unanswered, given the solution chosen. For this reason, I want to express my total solidarity with the beautiful message sent by Reina María Rodríguez regarding the “deactivation” of Antonio José Ponte as a member of UNEAC. I am equally interested in applauding the honesty of Francis Sánchez, who raised a fundamental question, which no one has answered until now: when, at what moment in Cuban history, was it that intellectuals stopped being interested in social issues? When was it that they didn’t give an opinion about problems placed beyond aesthetics? When, from whatever position, did they stop participating in the most serious conflicts of their respective times? (to which, strictly speaking, one more should be added: where is the space for them to do it?).

Despite its meager result, if this exchange of messages is of any use, it is to verify that opinion, connection and solidarity are necessary and possible. We have, after all, to get to know each other again, care about each other and learn to respond to each other,

especially the latter. We have family, friends, children; we are not discussing a specific matter, but nothing less than the fate of all of them. In the case of children, it's the country that we are going to give them and the horizon of life that they can expect, and whether they will be people with hopes and dreams or be suffocated by new fears.

Intolerance, the renunciation of dialogue, the neutralization of difference in the public space, self-censorship, the untouchability of the official, the consecration of the directive, the simulation and the adulation are all components of the "Pavón effect." Because we must understand the cultural in a deeper dimension than that pertinent to the artistic object, as an environment where the human species develops its life and transforms it. In this sense, the deployment of a catalogue of prohibitions is also a way of manufacturing culture, but one of obedience and passivity.

Here it's worth going back to personal stories; for example, those of my age, and remembering that it's not that a group of prohibitions/sanctions were designed and applied for a certain social group that deviated from a supposed norm, but for those who, like me, were born into a universe of prohibition and fear. Or perhaps someone imagined that, because we were sweet school Pioneers we didn't have neighbors, friends, relatives involved or overwhelmed in one way or another so that trying to "cleanse ourselves" (from a methodological point of view, the traditional super-objective of these practices is to build "bright futures"), weren't they going to contaminate us too?

In this way, not even the justification that such things have not been the primary objectives of such policies exculpates their effects and still, apparently for even longer, we will continue to live within the "Pavón effect," since each new failure of direction and renunciation of open criticism updates it. Public space is the key to everything. The fascinating thing about a Revolution is that it releases forces that surpass any initial idea of it, but if it cannot bear to discuss its problems, then it doesn't deserve that name.

Víctor Fowler

VIRGILIO LÓPEZ LEMUS

Translated by Regina Anavy

You should know that I adhere without hesitation to the essential approaches that you make and which go beyond any aggression of a personal type, of “revenge” or of unnecessary “adjustment of accounts.”

Virgilio López Lemus

WALDO LEYVA

Translated by Regina Anavy

It seems to me that the silence here is too dangerous. Although I don't believe that such events respond to a "strategy," I do think that there are those who consider that it's time to revive, by other means and perhaps with other protagonists, those methods. We have sufficient intelligence and moral and intellectual authority, grounded in an inviolable commitment to the essence of the nation, to prevent a revival of such practices. I repeat, I don't believe that the presence on television of Serguera and Pavón responds to a strategy of the political or cultural leadership of the country, but if we don't stop these demonstrations, the unity, which with so much care, personal sacrifice and dedication we have achieved in these years, can be shipwrecked, and a loss of that nature, at this time, yes, would be irreversible.

From Waldo Leyva to Reynaldo González

Reynaldo, I have circulated the opinions you sent me. It seems to me that the silence here is too dangerous. Although I don't believe that such events respond to a "strategy," I do think that there are those who consider that it's time to revive, by other means and perhaps with other protagonists, those methods. We have sufficient intelligence and moral and intellectual authority, grounded in an inviolable commitment to the essence of the nation, to prevent a revival of such practices. I repeat, I don't believe that the presence on television of Serguera and Pavón responds to a strategy of the political or cultural leadership of the country, but if we don't stop these demonstrations, that unity which with so much care, personal sacrifice and dedication that we have achieved in these years, can be shipwrecked, and a loss of that nature, at this time, Yes, would be irreversible.

A hug,
Waldo

WENDY GUERRA

Translated by Regina Anavy

Hi, Carlos,

At home we have received the UNEAC statement that includes collective opinions on the matter under debate. In the same way, our phone doesn't quit ringing with calls of disgust about said "council."

If I told my personal story from the 1970s, when I was born, to the 2007 in which we live, my voyage through puppets from all over the Island, local radio station broadcasts with my parents and my own work in Cuban television, the recount would be interminable. We all have something to say. I ask then, with all respect, that a book of signatures or a collective space be opened so that those of us who sign or speak our points are sure that it is, strictly speaking, our tone, style and opinion. This book is something similar to what the institution usually does in cases of emergency.

It's not, as the letter says, "a matter of a group of our most important writers and artists." In fact there is a huge group of great, regular, unknown, brilliant or simple people who want to be heard. There are more than we imagine. I ask you to take my opinion into account. It's the moment.

All this time I have thought about that song that says: "You have the word; I keep quiet out of modesty." I prefer to speak with my work, but, please, it's now up to us in the continuous present in which we live. We need to see alive that same letter they sent to our mailboxes.

Let the language and agreements sound like oneself, that it not be "the same phrases and the same words."

Ernán López-Nussa, my husband, adheres to this petition.

Greetings and good luck,
Wendy Guerra

YASEF ANANDA

Translated by Regina Anavy

To begin with, I must say that I'm amazed, and I admire the unusual public turmoil of my colleagues—artists and intellectuals—and the fruitful assembly, unfortunately virtual, whose imprint has reached distant Tokyo, where I currently am, under temporary travel permit issued by the Union of Artists and Writers of Cuba. The youngest, that is, those of us who are now around 30 years old and have been working for barely a decade in the “cultural sector,” have always been made to understand, admire and even follow the example of the “historical” wisdom of mature Cuban artists and intellectuals, wisdom that has always been constituted by recollection, silent stoicism and the conviction that there is no evil that lasts a hundred years nor body that resists it: officials die, but art is immortal.

An attitude, in a way, inclined towards the metaphysical and contemplative. Motivated, I speculate, by a superlative devotion to that orientalist maxim, of clear Christian parallel, which expresses: “If I punish with evil the evil you have done to me, what is the difference between you and me?” And which, by the way, intersperses a warning-refrain towards the punished colleagues: “Defend yourself and leave it to me, that I defend myself as I can.” And so, the lesson has been passed down for decades, all the way to my generation, and is a truth that works and resolves a lot but is not established. It is, as the extinct shoeshine man in my neighborhood might say about napping late into the night, food for today and hunger for tomorrow.

When we evaluate the real influence of mature intellectuals within Cuban society (not the influence within the guild, whose magazines publish bold critical opinions, which my grandmother or my “ordinary” neighbors have never read nor will read; therefore, an attitude influenced by these texts cannot be founded or develop consequentially real actions), the influence could be described as insufficient or disheveled. Whose responsibility is it? That of the institutions and officials that deny the spaces of social confluence or of the guild that accepts this refusal as a sine qua non condition, and using “representative intelligence,” retreats towards other alternatives of resistance waving “the right to kick the hangman” inside and outside the Island?

Whose responsibility is it? That of the institutions and officials or of the artist-deputies (the elite), who from their seats in the National Assembly of People's Power, should be the legitimate defenders of the interests of Cuban artists and intellectuals and their most authentic aspirations, favoring the debate on the appropriate legal instruments to ensure the free development of intellectuals in the real society and prevent the “excesses of enthusiasm” of the 1970s from being repeated and our rights respected?

Have they, that unquestionable elite, like the Japanese royal house, ever been questioned, publicly and from the guild, about their babbling role in difficult events such as the most recent shootings, imprisonments, the approval of gag laws, the quality and orientation of current education and the omission to submit to constitutional review so many historical and present barbarities, among other urgent issues? Or have they opted to understand that they, that is we, represented in them, form part of the status quo and,

therefore, an artist-deputy ceases to be an artist or an intellectual when he enters the National Assembly to become a municipal or provincial conceptual abstraction that does not cast its own shadow and that is a democratic pastime, like playing dominoes every Sunday “for a few minutes” to make your elementary classmates happy?

I believe that those who read these lines know what I’m talking about. They—who represent us in the National Assembly—and we—the artists and intellectuals—are the main ones responsible for the triumphant return of characters like Pavón to the small screen, after the harassment and ignominy perpetrated. It is our representative forgetfulness that doesn’t take shape in real actions, that is satisfied with a neatly written page or a bottle of rum to remember old times, fortunately overcome (since at least we have a park called John Lennon), in which lies our weakness to implement—with all the risks involved in the foundation of a sustained attitude over time—a space of respect within civil society, where the role of the intellectual is not only oriented towards the mission of the soldier who safeguards the achievements of the Revolution. There should be and must be room for more.

The lineage of the hardline official, endorsed by the State and invested with full powers for the execution of unhealthy criteria and aggressive policies “by his balls,” directing without majority support, is a typical character in the recent history of our island, like the taxi driver who never goes where we need or the agents of swapping houses. It’s so common that it has become “familiar” and “harmless.” Serious mistake. This has happened for more than 40 years in our social system of a new type, where this little boss has always pretended to act in favor of the dictatorship of the proletariat, which is nothing more than the hand of the Government on the shoulder of the reliable official (whom it later defenestrates and accuses of being anti-government, to the astonishment of the parishioners affected).

Pavón is not the water under the bridge of the 1970s that now comes to light on television as a diploma for its outstanding attitude. Each generation, after Pavón, has had to deal with its “kick-ass bosses” that it has nurtured, and once in power they have instrumented censorship with the aim of eliminating difference and individualities, silencing criticism and advising the acquisition of “convenient invisibility” to earn their bread and, incidentally, the Chinese bicycle whose brand is Forever. Each generation has also had to deal with the gendarmes who have put these little bosses in those positions and who have even kept them there, despite the criticism and the “wake-up calls.”

Those who are not seen but exist are also responsible and must be denounced along with Pavón and other visible faces of the cultural censorship. In the 1990s my generation also suffered them in the Faculty of Cinema of the ISA, governed by the “balls” of Jesús Cabrera, who is logically remembered by the national audience for his serial whose title needs no comment: “In silence it has had to be”... but it should be remembered that Cabrera is not an isolated entity. Above him, in order of command, were the Rector of the ISA and the Minister of Culture. Because all these little bosses have a common way of operating: an opportunistic phrase of our dear Commander in Chief Fidel Castro on

the lips and the barrel of the revolver that comes out from under the guayabera. One wonders, Who gave him that revolver? Who takes it away from him? For years the antidote to ignorance, contempt and mistreatment of artists was silent stoicism, a proud version of the tropical cowardice of those who read in French and know the Orphic rite of the guild, except for a few voices of rapid extinction and little adherence. I think this historical rash suits us all very well: those who suffered from the real, televised Pavón, and those for whom the concept “Pavón” has other names and faces, equally abhorrent. It is even good for us to take out the redeeming mirror and glimpse—sooner rather than later—the Pavón that is or may be latent behind our sacred Martí conviction: with everyone and for the good of all, in the personal acts of each day.

And at this point, I wonder: Why, after so many years, does the official story continue to favor the cocky bosses on national television and in other media? Is there no regard for intellectuals and artists? Are they afraid of what we can achieve? Is it that, as we used to say in high school, “they show us disrespect”? Or is it that, deep down, we are resorting to street slang that says there are women who don’t complain no matter what you do to them and the Cuban government takes intellectuals and artists for idiots? The appearance of Pavón on television, I believe, wakes us up from rhetoric, chronic complaint and erudite protest in magazines that nobody reads, and in circles marked by the “I know that you know I know” to clarify precise attitudes against the spores of the past and the viruses of the present, expanding the radius of action. I propose:

1. that artists and intellectuals who adhere to the protest against the reappearance of cultural censors on national television refrain from participating in Cuban radio and television programs until the ICRT offers a formal apology, through its media, including the national radio news and the national television newscast, in prime time.
2. that the artists and intellectuals who adhere to the protest against the reappearance of cultural censors on national television summon the artist-deputies so that, through them, a formal complaint against the ICRT is presented to the Commission that is in charge of citizen ethics in the National Assembly of People’s Power.
3. that the artists and intellectuals who adhere to the protest against the reappearance of cultural censors on national television summon the artist-deputies to review the constitutional irregularities and legal arbitrariness that prevent the democratic and full exercise of the activities of the guild in our socialist society and its current laws.
4. that the artists and intellectuals who join the protest against the reappearance of cultural censors on national television establish a Committee for Historical Memory, whose objective is to diversify the official history of “the gray quinquennium” and provide evidence of the arbitrariness of the period. And that the information and personal testimonies, once published, can be of public consultation.
5. that the artists and intellectuals affected morally, psychologically or professionally by the cultural censorship that Pavón and other censors were in charge of leading, present a formal accusation before the revolutionary court, requesting that a case be opened against them.

6. that artists and intellectuals who join the protest against the reappearance of cultural censors on national television NEVER stop making the art they consider most committed to their own ideas.

P.S. And personally and in good Cuban, I propose that we shit on the mother of all the Pavóns and the little Pavóns.

Revolutionarily,
Yasef Ananda

YOANI SÁNCHEZ

Translated by Mary Jo Porter

Pavón, Serguera and the revolutionary cultural policy

The only victims of the *pavonato* were not only the writers, poets and critics who saw their creation frustrated, a paragraph crossed out or a book banned, but also all those who should have consumed and drunk from the natural channel of Cuban culture. What we had in the end was a parameterized and schematic product, with which we barely identified. Those of us who had to grow up learning texts by Virgilio, Cabrera Infante and Gastón Baquero at school saw the spectrum reduced to the unquestionable names of nineteenth-century culture and the texts of the impeccable Manuel Cofiño, whose stories and novels were not uncomfortable for the censors.

I wonder what would happen to us now if, in addition to the verse—repeated ad nauseam—of “I have what I should have,” we would have received the torn cry of “the damn circumstance of water everywhere.” Perhaps we would be more tolerant, we would accept differences better; for all mutilation and censorship ends up forming in the receiver a flat mentality in a single dimension, which is frightened when it discovers everything that has been hidden or denied to it. Several generations formed and nourished with the rigorous selection of “within the Revolution everything, against the Revolution nothing” ended up considering artistic production as the property of others, who were granted the right to decant and filter what we were later going to know. That is perhaps (paraphrasing Dagoberto Valdés) one of the most important anthropological damages caused by the revolutionary censorship.

For the initiators of this controversy it’s easy to point out and name the causes of many of its ills, but we cannot do the same for the millions of Cubans who missed out, without even knowing that there was something more, on what we had by the mere fact of having been born in this land rich in artistic and literary talents. For my contemporaries, names like Pavón, Serguera and Quesada are only cryptic references among academics, because for us, the shadow of the parameterization and the scissors of the gray quinquennium, did not have a specific name, but were identified with the cultural policy of the Revolution. Sometimes innocence can be wise.

That same cultural policy flooded our childhood minds with Soviet cartoons that we devoured without knowing exactly what a steppe, a poplar or a fox was. Guillén’s work was privileged over that of Eliseo Diego; he made Martí seem to us—by dint of decontextualizing and manipulating him—a boring figure. In the pretense of making us the most cultured people in the world, they choked us with knowledge, but they did not teach us to debate, to reflect or to listen to one another. We repeated and traced the style of political discourses and turned art and culture into a “weapon of struggle.”

Some of those responsible for this policy have already been removed from their chairs, but the positions they held have not been removed from the structure. What other Pavón or what new Papito Serguera lurks behind the current Cuban literary and

television production. Which of its already permanent tentacles determines that the National Television News is the crude caricature of “everything inside is right and everything outside is bad?” How is it possible that even today, the few spaces for reflection and debate on the small screen are reduced to the simplicity of whether the reggaetón or the trova is better, or if fashion is a banality or a necessity. With so much to discuss, it’s frustrating that an hour and a half is devoted every day to that dull soliloquy called the Round Table, where participants shout themselves hoarse to look more revolutionary than the others. It’s inexcusable to look at the speck in the eye of our neighbor to the north, while our own story crucifies and crushes us.

If the gray five-year period has passed, why don’t we gather to mourn the death of Cabrera Infante and have the self-criticism of the atrocity that led him into exile and pushed him to his “Mea Cuba.” What new Pavón prohibits Zoe Valdés’ novels from being sold in Cuba, so that we can assess their true artistic weight and not have to wait for the Minister of Culture to discard them in our name. The long shadow of the *pavonato* still takes away the enjoyment of the novels of Jesús Díaz, Cuban to the marrow, only because some have confused culture with Revolution, and in that injustice they have ended up parameterizing not only art, but all Cubans in schematic categories such as “revolutionary,” “worm,” “puppet of imperialism” and other stupidities, as if we weren’t, like our culture, a multiple, extensive and varied flow.

It’s significant that all this debate has been carried out, precisely, by email, since—without that being the intention—it’s a way of excluding and isolating it from the general public, which doesn’t have the good fortune of having an email address of .cult. cu and is unable to pay the prohibitive price of Internet access. If “Emilio’s Way” is the highest step that Cuban intellectuals have to carry out a polemic, that shows that other means are forbidden to them. How can they be the critical conscience of a nation if they can hardly get their opinions across to those who make it up?

If the intolerance and debauchery that moved the former prosecutor, director of the ICRT, are already dust upon dust, who then sentenced the journalist Adolfo Fernández Saínz to 15 years in prison for writing what he thought? If the *pavonato* is over and Serguera just a bad memory, why does nobody give us the warm voice of Celia Cruz on national radio, so that she shakes us with that “without permission you can’t leave,” just as you can’t prune and curtail the spontaneous sprouting of our culture?

Who holds up and maintains the fence around of those who, from within Cuba, edit the digital magazine *Consenso*? Which disciple of Pavón and Serguera is behind the expulsion of Antonio José Ponte from the UNEAC, behind the commissioners who handle and discard certain books in each publishing house, behind the university professors who brandish their authority to crush the “dangerous” opinions that arise among their students, the political leaders who suggest among their subordinates that we must “get out in front” of those who think differently?

Let’s take advantage of this opportunity to debate issues that are not exclusive to intellectuals, Cubans living on the island, much less to revolutionaries. The debate must include all sectors of our society; it must give space to the criticism, to the collective and

private catharsis that have waited so long. It must value and criticize not only cultural structures but also those of a political and governmental order, passing through the weakened civic framework. We must add to this controversy the true owners of culture, those who, overwhelmed by the problems of everyday life and disillusioned by not seeing them reflected in the media, have chosen to alienate themselves from Cuban cultural production. To stop this much-needed debate would be to censor it like Pavón, a return to prohibiting it like Serguera and to parameterizing it like Quesada.

Enough of separating, confronting and predisposing ourselves against each other. You, who started the controversy, owe it to me—and to young people like me—not to let our culture be cut off. We, in turn, owe it to our children. That is the only “parameter” that we cannot breach.

Message from Yoani Sánchez to Orlando Hernández

Orlando:

I get the impression (sorry, but the keyboard doesn't put the accents) that this idea of regulating the entrance to the colloquium by invitations that will be given to “the UNEAC, the AHS, the UNHIC and the UPEC; the professors and students of the ISA, the Schools of Art and the Faculties of Arts and Letters and Social Communication of the UH; the researchers of the Council of Social Sciences of CITMA and the Martin Luther King Center, as well as the specialists and cadres of the ICRT and the institutions of the Ministry of Culture” is nothing more than a strategy to leave out of the possible debate a large majority of people who are not affiliated with these institutions, or being affiliated, know in advance that the invitations won't even arrive.

Greetings,
Yoani

Another Message from Yoani Sánchez

Hello everyone:

A couple of weeks have passed since the Conference at the Casa de las Américas and despite having written these notes the next day, I have debated whether to send them or not, always with the argument of the estrangement that little by little all this is producing in me. In the end I decided to do so because this complicit silence scares me.

Greetings,
Yoani Sánchez
Havana, February 15, 2007

From outside

A short chronicle of what happened on January 30 outside the Casa de las Américas

I was in the group of people who waited for more than five hours on Tuesday, January 30, 2007, with the intention of accessing the debate that under the title of “The Gray Five-Year Period: Revisiting the Term” was held at the Casa de las Américas. A wall of custodians, bureaucrats and staff of the Casa itself prevented us from doing so. The arguments were more of the same: “It’s by invitation only”; “the room is already full”; “there are architectural problems that don’t allow too many people” (an argument that was dismantled when some invited people began to leave, but instead others were not allowed to enter). Fernando Rojas himself confessed that he could do nothing about the guidance he had been given not to let pass those who didn’t appear in the meticulous lists at the entrance.

So a good part of the intelligentsia of this nation joined our parade. Most seemed not to want to notice the closed filter that operated at the entrance, which assimilated them and excluded us. Others showed solidarity and questioned why there was so much exclusivity. They weren’t many, but their support was enough. There were even some who, with the invitation in hand, preferred not to enter, seeing so much “narrow-mindedness.”

We, the excluded (symptomatically the youngest) argued, uselessly, with the staff at the door. We asked for explanations; we shouted a catchy rhyme, which said “Desiderio, Desiderio, listen to my opinion!” (surely it was not heard in the protected Che Guevara room). We collected our signatures and finally waited, those of us who could withstand the intense wind of G and Malecón, until everything was over.

Our presence out there went through different stages: at first we had the illusion that once the colloquium began they would let us pass; however, around four-thirty, it was already clear that we would miss the scheduled conferences. We were left with the illusion of accessing the time allocated for the debate. Finally, when night fell, we decided to stay to listen to what the few who wanted to answer our questions were saying when they left, and above all, so that they could see that we had stayed, despite the cold, the exclusivity and the police presence.

Many will wonder why we had so much insistence on gaining access to the room. Among those of us outside there was hope that this debate would be ANOTHER KIND of debate. We thought that, for the first time in a long time, belonging to an institution, union, exclusivist and bureaucratic concepts were going to be set aside. Perhaps we bet on something rather informal, with the Guevara room full of people sitting on the floor—as we have seen in so many concerts—and each one accessing the microphone, with discipline but without hogging it. We thought we could shed some light on the “gray quinquennium” by telling our stories, *post-pavonato* but incredibly similar. Some imagined that the words spoken in so many emails would take shape and would dare to be pronounced in front of everyone. We dreamed that we would return to our homes with the taste of having started something and not with the strange uneasiness of having been “out of the game” again.

The truth of what happened inside is only known by those who participated, but something has already leaked, and it doesn’t fit with what was dreamed. It is clear that

not everyone could speak that night, but I have the impression that the long speech by the Minister of Culture smothered the time of other very interesting statements. The space to listen to the “words of the intellectuals” was reduced. The “bogeyman” of imperialism that comes to attack us silenced many mouths again, and the same old song of “this is not the time” stopped the most cautious and warned the most daring. It’s worth mentioning the brave and heartbreaking interventions that didn’t want to let the debate be hidden, but which unfortunately seem to have remained within the walls of the Che Guevara Room.

I wonder if what should have begun that January 30 will have a greater echo than the publication of the Fornet conference. Perhaps this day will be remembered as the beginning of a series of debates, which, starting with the intelligentsia, covered all social strata. Will we who were left out have space in the next opportunity to take the microphone? Will the same old panics also flair up in front of our faces to silence us? How many things are we left out of? It’s time to make our own space to debate and reflect, without waiting to be included on a list or for an RSVP to let us in.

Despite having missed what happened inside the doors, we lived a historic event, when a majority of very young people remained, literally planted, but loudly demanding their right to be, more than admitted, a core part of the debate. So we attended “the other debate” that perhaps did not have the infrastructure and academic level of the one held in the Sala Guevara, but that sprouted spontaneously among the small groups around the Casa. Although the number of “uninvited” was decreasing as it became more unlikely that we would be allowed to pass, we managed to articulate an idea shared by all: **THERE ARE STILL MANY DEBATES NEEDED, AND WE WILL NOT CONTINUE WAITING TO BE INVITED TO PARTICIPATE.**

Yoani Sánchez

ZENAIDA ROMEU

Translated by Regina Anavy

From Zenaida Romeu to Reynaldo González

Reynaldo, the anger has long been contained. It is time for voices to be raised. I myself saw Papito Serguera's program, and I wondered why they had taken that fossil out of the worst that has happened to us by giving him a prominence that distorts reality. Those were years of relentless darkness and repression. Young people could not be in a group in a corner. Not to mention the short skirts of the girls, the directors with scissors at the door to cut the boys' hair, the Fianna [small warrior-hunter in Irish mythology] at the door if they saw us with a Beatles record. A lot of *Mozambique* [dance song by Pélé el Afrokan], because jazz was the music of the enemy. It makes my stomach turn over!!!

A kiss,
Zenaida

Dear friends,

I was not impressed by the unnamed writing of the "Secretariat." It is so clumsy and the writing is so mediocre compared to so many other good ones that we've been reading that it seemed inadmissible that it wasn't even signed, because we have all spoken with our names and surnames.

That is why yesterday I requested that this statement-letter-opinion-decree, or whatever you can call what I received, be accompanied by the signature of the one who drafted it. For me it is a matter of principle. This has been an open platform, and I believe that the response must be thoughtful, intelligent and contain a statement that shows the personality of an institution that represents the best of the thought of contemporary Cuban society.

Zenaida Romeu