

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 Hernandez  
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 Fornet—, 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 Fornet 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 TV 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 TV 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 TV 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 TV 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. Ummm, 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 Pavones 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] TV 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 TV, 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 TV 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 TV should have responded. In this case, TV 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*.

*\*\*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 Beginnings 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 TV 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 TV—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 born 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.

Rojas Bez

## **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 Pavones 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 the DRAE, "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 “microfactions,” 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, "intellectuals" 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

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1. ONE HUNDRED HOURS WITH FIDEL: CONVERSATIONS WITH IGNACIO RAMONET (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 by 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 Borrero

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 Camaguey 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 "Guantanamo." 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's 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