

**CUBA: THE INTELLECTUAL DEBATE
OR
THE LITTLE WAR OF EMAILS**

**THE “A”s
(by first name of author, alphabetically)**

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INTRODUCTION

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

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

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

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

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

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

Abelardo Estorino

Translated by Regina Anavy and Gustavo Loredó

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

Abelardo Mena

Translated by Regina Anavy and Gustavo Loredó

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

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

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

Abelardo Mena to Pedro Pérez Sarduy

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

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

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

Dear Pedro,

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

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

Best wishes, Abelardo Mena
January 28, 2007

Abelardo Mena to Eduardo Jiménez

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

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

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

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

Abilio Estévez

Translated by Regina Anavy and Gustavo Loredo

Dear Ones,

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

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

January 29, 2007

Alberto Acosta

Translated by Regina Anavy and Gustavo Loredó

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

Alfredo Guevara

Translated by Regina Anavy and Gustavo Loredó

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

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

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

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

Ambrosio Fornet

Translated by Alicia Barraqué Ellison, Regina Anavy, and Gustavo Loredó

The Gray Quinquennium: Revisiting the Term

1

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

Incredible as it may seem, the person who directed the program *Impronta* [*Imprint*], dedicated to Pavón—whose script had been written by a colleague—assured us that she didn't know who he was or more precisely, that she didn't know what imprint he had left on Cuban culture during his tenure as President of the National Cultural Council. Nor would she know later, because it was carefully covered in a mantle of silence during the program. It wouldn't do to mention a rope in the house of the hanged man. Well, we hadn't yet come out of our stupor when a little voice began to hammer in our ears: Why is this so hard to believe? How could the young director have known?

Have you, the old folks who lived and suffered through that period, written a book or a pamphlet, published a series of articles, or given a series of talks on the subject? In recent years there have been denunciations of individual abuses, perverse displays of prejudice, and cynical explanations from the victims in interviews, articles, and speeches accepting awards, but the analysis of the phenomenon was always postponed, as well as other things that deserved to be discussed, all of them for the same reason: to not endanger unity. Along with the historical validity of our national project, unity is the only thing, in effect, that guarantees our superiority over our enemies and adversaries.

But just as we shouldn't forget, in a permanently besieged country like ours, that insisting on discrepancies and disagreements is the same as “giving arms to the enemy,” neither should we forget that pacts of silence can be extremely risky, because they create a climate of immobility, a simulation of unanimity that prevents us from measuring the

real magnitude of the dangers and integrity in our ranks, where loquacious opportunists often slip in.

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

2

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

And Virgilio Piñera, in a public message addressed to Fidel in March 1959, said: "We Cuban writers are 'the last card in the deck'; that is, we mean nothing economically, socially, or even in the field of letters. We want to cooperate shoulder to shoulder with the Revolution, but for this to happen, we need to be removed from the miserable state in which we are struggling." As you can see, the profession's self-esteem was very low. Perhaps the anecdotes told by vain or boastful writers irritated or amused their *confrères* in the intellectual cliques of Madrid or Paris, but here they were tales of extraterrestrials, since the writer literally did not exist outside the circle of his closest friends and the four cats that read *Origenes* [*Origins*](lucky cats, by the way). It still seems to me a miracle that two years after Virgilio's message, I was already editing *The*

Adventures of Tom Sawyer and a book on testimonials from the Sierra Maestra children in the Ministry of Education, under the direction of Herminio Almendros, and very soon also Proust, Joyce, and Kafka at the *Editorial Nacional*, under the direction of Alejo Carpentier. From this perspective, it became clear to us that an alliance between the political and artistic avant-gardes was beginning to consolidate. The Revolution—the real possibility of changing one’s life—appeared to us as the political expression of the artistic aspirations of the avant-garde.

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

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

3

Socialist realism—literature as pedagogy and hagiography, methodologically oriented towards the creation of “positive heroes” and the strategic absence of antagonistic conflicts within the “bosom of the people” —produced in us, my petty-bourgeois friends and myself, the same reaction of someone who finds a fly in a glass of milk. Among the Cuban narrators, no one that I remember had accepted the invitation, but the newly created *Imprenta Nacional* [*National Imprint*] was profusely publishing Soviet novels (some respectable, by the way, like those of Sholokhov and Alexander Bek, *Volokolamsk*

Highway and *General Panfilov's Reserve*, actually two parts of the same epic, that accompanied many militiamen in the frequent mobilizations of those times). In any case, as a young intellectual with no more political ideology than the *fidelista* (I used to say at the time that I had become a Marxist by listening to Fidel on television), I already had two things absolutely clear: go back to the past? It wasn't going to happen. Use a Konstantinov manual as a cultural model and an aesthetic norm? No way.

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

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

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

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

In reality, what we saw was that under this rigid and precarious model of artistic orientation, the dividing line between art, pedagogy, propaganda, and advertising was becoming blurred. The funny thing is that capitalism produced tons of publicity and propaganda without even mentioning it, cleverly disguised under the labels of information and "entertainment," but socialism was young and inexperienced. In the famous debate in December 1963 between Blas Roca and Alfredo Guevara on the

showing of several films (*La Dulce Vida* [*The Sweet Life*], by Fellini, *Accattone*, by Pasolini, *El Ángel Exterminador* [*The Exterminating Angel*], by Buñuel, and *Alias Gardelito*, by Lautaro Murúa), Guevara referred to the newspaper column by Blas Roca, a very respectable man in other regards, as a column that superficially addresses the problems of culture and cinematographic art; in particular, by reducing their significance, not to mention their function, to being mere illustrators of the revolutionary work, seen by the rest in its most immediate perspective.

It goes without saying—because in politics, as Martí said, what is real is what is not seen—that these aesthetic disputes were part of a struggle for cultural power, for control of certain areas of influence. This became evident in 1961 with the controversy about *P.M.* and the subsequent closure of *Lunes de Revolución* [*Revolution Monday*], which led to the creation of *La Gaceta de Cuba* [*Gazette of Cuba*] a UNEAC literary publication that still exists today. The *P.M.* controversy turned out to be historic because it gave rise to “Words to the Intellectuals,” Fidel’s speech that fortunately has served since then—except during the dramatic interregnum of the *pavonato*—as the guiding principle of our cultural policy.

P.M. was a modest, free-cinema essay, a documentary by Sabá Cabrera Infante and Orlando Jiménez Leal that had been shown almost unnoticed on television in a program sponsored by *Lunes de Revolución*; that is, by Carlos Franqui and Guillermo Cabrera Infante. The two—Franqui and Guillermo—had a great concept, a modern and dynamic vision of art, literature, and journalism, as evidenced by the newspaper *Lunes de Revolución* and its literary supplement, *Lunes*. But both also had a major flaw, given the circumstances: they were visceral anti-communists, hating anything that smelled of the Soviet Union and the PSP [Popular Socialist Party]. ICAIC [the Cuban Institute of Art and Cinema Industry] had refused to show *P.M.* in movie theaters, which sparked controversy. One would say that at some point both the ICAIC leadership and the PSP intelligentsia brought these dramatic questions to the top leadership of the government: Who will make films in Cuba? Who will institutionally represent our writers and artists? The answers were obvious.

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

The unfortunate UMAP initiative, the idea that both young homosexuals and religious people—especially Jehovah’s Witnesses, who rejected the use of weapons out of conviction—would do their military service in work units, not combat units, was clearly

related to the macho vision of those bourgeois parents who sent their most fractious or timid children to military schools to “become men.” I remember telling the friend I alluded to earlier, when he asked me about discrimination against homosexuals in Cuba, that this attitude had nothing to do with the Revolution; it came to us from the olden days, through the double path of Judeo-Christian morality and ignorance, but that perhaps the emotional climate of the besieged city—which included the constant exaltation of virile virtues—as well as the obsession to straighten out so many crooked things from the old society, led us to want to straighten or rebuild the homosexuals, who, not for nothing, have always been described with euphemisms as “inverts” or “misfits.”

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

4

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

I don’t need to elaborate on the tense climate that prevailed in those months, because a group of colleagues, as many Cubans (Retamar, Desnoes, and I) as Latin Americans (Roque Dalton, René Depestre, and Carlos María Gutiérrez), in a kind of round table that we held in May 1969, had already presented our ideas on the matter, and what we

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

discussed was first published in the Casa de las Américas magazine and later in Mexico in *Siglo XXI [Twenty-First Century]*, under the foreseeable title of “The Intellectual and Society.”⁷ The ideological tournament announced by Ávila was hinted at in occasional skirmishes but had gradually acquired an increasingly international character due in part to the attacks on the Revolution by various intellectuals in Europe—Dumont, Karol, Enzensberger—and in part because the English critic, J.M. Cohen, one of the jurors who awarded Arrufat and Padilla, decided to participate in the debate in his own way. Added to this was the appearance in Paris of the magazine *Mundo Nuevo [New World]*, directed by the Uruguayan critic Emir Rodríguez Monegal; very soon his compatriot Ángel Rama denounced *Mundo Nuevo*, following a report in *The New York Times* that it was a front for the CIA.”⁸

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

The magazine *Pensamiento Crítico [Critical Thought]* and the excellent catalog of social science publications already produced by the recently created Instituto del Libro [Institute of the Book] also played an important role in this daring process that we called “consciousness raising” or “cultural decolonization,” and to which, of course, none of the famous manuals recently imported from the USSR could contribute anything. The Cultural Congress of Havana was held in January 1968 with the participation of hundreds of intellectuals and artists from all over the world, in a climate of revolutionary optimism that objectively, however, was reduced to its minimum expression by the fact that barely two months before, Che had died in Bolivia, thereby frustrating the birth of the great project of continental emancipation that began to take shape in 1959.

Meanwhile, the international prestige of Cuban culture had grown thanks to the professionalism and creativity of artists and writers, on one hand, and the cohesion and

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

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

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

dissemination work carried out by the Casa de las Américas and ICAIC on the other. The culture was thriving; there was cinema, ballet, graphic design, theater, music (with the emergence of Nueva Trova), the Folkloric Ensemble, and literature (this last with two emerging modalities: nonfiction novels and narratives of violence). Observing such a panorama, anyone could have said, alluding to Ávila's diagnosis: "If all this is the product of a depoliticized intelligentsia, may God come and see it."

5

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

Due to a character problem, Padilla could not remain in the background for long; he took advantage of a poll by *El Caimán Barbudo* [*The Bearded Caiman*] to attack publishers because they were interested in *Pasión de Urbino* [*Urbino's Passion*], the recently published novel by Lisandro Otero, while they "ignored" *Tres tristes tigres* [*Three Sad Tigers*], by Cabrera Infante. We heard every so often that he was very active as a spontaneous consultant to foreign diplomats and journalists in transit through Havana, whom he instructed on the most dissimilar topics: the fate of socialism, world revolution, and young Cuban literature.

And one fine day in April 1971, unfortunate rumors reached us, which were later confirmed as fact: Padilla had been imprisoned—for three weeks, according to some, for five, according to others—and that he was going to make a public declaration at UNEAC. This turned out to be a pathetic mea culpa and a hasty inventory of incriminations against friends and acquaintances, both absent and present. Knowing Padilla as we knew him, knowing that his long experience as a Moscow press correspondent had made him an incurable skeptic—to the point that even under the tropical sun he felt haunted

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

by the ghosts of Stalinism—it was hard to believe that his statement, which was so reminiscent of the painful “confessions” of the Moscow trials, was not formulated as an encrypted message, intended for his colleagues around the world. Be that as it may, the truth is that the message, a self-fulfilling prophecy, reached its destination. When news of Padilla’s arrest reached Europe, the mechanism on this side of the Atlantic that would lead to the First National Congress of Education and Culture had already been set in motion.¹¹

6

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

The Congress was held in the salons of the Habana Libre hotel between April 23 and 30. In his closing speech, Fidel accused “those arrogant and overbearing bourgeois liberals,” the instruments of cultural colonialism, of intervening in our internal affairs without having the slightest idea of our real problems: “the need to defend ourselves from imperialism, the obligation to care for and feed millions of children in schools. You have to be absolutely crazy, numb to infinity,” he said, “cut off from the reality of the world” to think “that this country’s problems are the problems of two or three lost sheep [those who strayed from the correct path], or that someone from Paris, London, or Rome could set themselves up as judges in order to dictate policies to us.”

For now, intellectuals of this type would never return here as jurors in our literary competitions, nor as collaborators in our magazines.¹² Seen from the current perspective, the reaction may seem excessive, although consistent with a whole policy of affirming national identity and sovereignty; in any case, the truth is that the situation as a whole marked a breaking or cooling point between the Revolution and numerous European and Latin American intellectuals, who, until then, considered themselves friends and fellow travelers.¹³

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

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

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

Retamar's essay, *Caliban*,¹⁴ written just two months after the Congress closed, continues to be a mandatory reference, as the revolutionary manifesto of the moment, which, by the way, transcended it to become a Third World cultural manifesto.

The country was then going through a period of accumulated tensions, among which stood out the death of Che, the Soviet intervention in Czechoslovakia, which the Cuban government approved albeit with great reluctance, the so-called Revolutionary Offensive of 1968, a premature process, an unnecessary expropriation of small and private businesses, and the failed 1970 Harvest of the Ten Million, which, despite being “the largest in our history,” as the newspapers proclaimed, left the country exhausted. Subjected to the imperialist economic blockade, in need of a stable market for its products, especially sugar, Cuba had to radically define its alliances. There was a greater rapprochement with the Soviet Union and the European socialist countries. In 1972 the country joined the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CAME), which would structurally link our economy to that of the socialist camp.

7

From the Congress of Education and Culture, a transformed CNC emerged, headed by Luis Pavón Tamayo, and none of the leaders, as far as I remember, had natural ties to the avant-garde. The links of continuity had been carefully broken or at least reduced. Judging by their actions, the *pavonato* was precisely that: an attempt to dispute the power or rather to remove from power those groups that until then had been dominant in the field of culture, and who apparently were not, with few exceptions, “politically trustworthy.” Only those who belonged to autonomous institutions headed by prestigious figures, such as the previously cited cases from the Casa de las Américas and ICAIC, were saved, although with rather limited power. We know that in this type of conflict, not only are esthetic discrepancies or personal phobias settled but also, perhaps above all, questions of power, the control of mechanisms, and the hegemony of rhetoric.

It's enough to take a look at the situation of the publishing houses, theaters, magazines, galleries, and other spaces for the promotion and dissemination of artistic and literary culture in the Sixties to realize that the most importance groups that dominated the culture, directly or indirectly, were the ones that we considered avant-garde. An obtuse official could say what he liked about Farralúque [a character in *Paradiso*] or the theater of the absurd, but *Paradiso* and *La soprano calva* [*The Bald Soprano*] were there, close at hand; he could reject pop or *La muerte de un burócrata* [*Death of a Bureaucrat*], but Raúl Martínez and Titón¹⁵ remained, engrossed in new projects.

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

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

In 1970, to celebrate Lezama's sixtieth birthday, a long interview appeared in *Bohemia* (reproduced in *Cuba Internacional*), a whole dossier of tribute in *La Gaceta de Cuba*, and the volume of his complete poetry (to date) published by the Instituto del Libro [Book Institute] in its collection *Letras Cubanas*.¹⁶ If I had to summarize what happened in two words, I would say that in 1971, the relative balance that had favored us until then was broken, to our detriment, and with it the consensus on which cultural policy had been based. It was a clear before-and-after situation: at a stage in which everything was consulted and discussed—although agreements were not always reached between the parties—that of the *úkases* [orders of the Tzar] followed: a cultural policy imposed by decree and a complementary one of exclusions and marginalizations, turning the intellectual field into a wasteland (at least for the carriers of the virus of ideological diversionism and for the young people prone to extravagance; that is, fans of long hair, the Beatles, and tight pants, as well as the Gospels and the Scapulars).

We were all guilty, indeed, but some were more guilty than others, as could be seen in the case of homosexuals. Not only political suspicions weighed on them, but also scientific certainties, perhaps derived from some positivist manual from the late nineteenth century or from some precept of the Chinese Cultural Revolution: homosexuality was a contagious disease, a kind of leprosy incubated in class societies, the spread of which had to be prevented by avoiding contact—not only physical, but even spiritual—of the plagued with the most vulnerable sectors (the young, in this case).

In other words, there were tensions and disagreements, but things were not so simple: what publishers and magazines published, what galleries exhibited, what theaters premiered, and what ICAIC filmed served to show that we were the ones who pulled the strings of the “cultural industry,” and to what extent our discourse turned out to be hegemonic, despite the rejection and suspicions that it aroused among those professional ideologues whom we used to piously call “the guardians of doctrine” (headed by a senior official of the Party who, according to rumors, was the political godfather of Pavón).¹⁷

As incredible as it may seem to us today—in effect, the dream of reason engenders monsters—, it's not unreasonable to think that this was the foundation, let's call it theoretical, which served in 1971-1972 to establish the “parameters” applied in the high-risk jobs, such as teachers and, above all, those who worked in theater. It had been concluded that the simple influence of the teacher or the actor on the student or the adolescent spectator could be risky, which explains that in a commission of the Congress of Education and Culture, when addressing the issue of the influence of the medium on education, it was ruled that it was not “permissible for recognized homosexuals to gain a prestige that influences the formation of our youth through artistic quality.”

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

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

Furthermore: “The cultural media cannot serve as a framework for the proliferation of false intellectuals who seek to convert snobbery, extravagance, homosexuality, and other social aberrations into expressions of revolutionary art.”¹⁸

In the centers dedicated to teaching or theater, the workers who didn’t respond to the demands or “parameters” that would qualify them as trustworthy individuals—that is, revolutionaries and heterosexuals—would be relocated to other work centers. The cleansing or “parametrization” process would be carried out under the strict supervision of an improvised commissar known since then in our milieu as Torquesada (who not long ago, by the way, appeared on another television program, although not as an honoree). You will be pleased to know that although at that time there were still no Marielas¹⁹ in our environment capable of discussing the phenomenon rigorously and sensibly, there were, of course, courts willing to enforce the law. Through their respective unions and protected by the Labor Justice law, the parametrized took their appeals to the Supreme Court, which ruled, in a historical and unprecedented case, that “parameterization” was an unconstitutional measure and that the claimants should be compensated.

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

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

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

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

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

8

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

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

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

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

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

²² Cf. A.F. *Sobre las iniciales de la tierra* [*On the Earth’s Beginnings*], in *Las máscaras del tiempo* [*The Masks of Time*]. Havana, Editorial Letras Cubanas, 1995, pp. 56 (n.4) and 62 (n.12).

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

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

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

I have no qualms about apologizing to so many colleagues who, having suffered firsthand the abuses of the *pavonato*—the cruelest of which was undoubtedly their civil death as professionals, sometimes for prolonged periods—consider that the term Gray Quinquennium is not only euphemistic but also even offensive, because it minimizes the dimension of the grievances and therefore reduces the responsibility of the guilty. Most

²³ For example, among the Theses and Resolutions approved by the First Congress of the PCC in 1975, there is not a single mention of socialist realism, although numerous passages reflect the conviction that it is ideology that governs the entire process of production and evaluation of the work of art. Especially significant is the passage about “the nexus of socialist art with reality” and “the quality of the living and dynamic reflection of which Lenin spoke” (in contrast to realism as a photographic copy). Do not forget, moreover, that Che’s condemnation of socialist realism, in *El socialismo y el hombre en Cuba* [*Socialism and Man in Cuba*], was categorical. (Cf. *Sobre la cultura artística y literaria* [*On artistic and literary culture*] in Theses and Resolutions of the First Congress of the Communist Party of Cuba. Havana, Department of Revolutionary Orientation of the PCC, 1976, pp. 467-510, and esp. 506.

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

of those *compañeros*—not all of them “parametrized,” by the way, some simply “punished” for their ideological deviations, which were corrected by hard work in agriculture or in a factory—propose the alternative term of “Black Decade.”²⁵ I respect their opinion, but I was referring to something else: to the cultural atmosphere that I have been describing, in which revolutionary enthusiasm was also programmed and what had been a search and a passion became goals to be achieved. If the indicators change, it’s logical that the chronological boundaries and pigmentations change as well. If instead of defining the *pavonato* by its mediocrity I define it by its malignancy, I would have to see it as a dangerous and grotesque phenomenon, because there is nothing more fearsome than a dogmatic person pretending to be a redeemer, and nothing more ridiculous than the pronouncements of an ignorant professor.

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

9

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

I remember commenting to my friend Agustín Pi²⁸—the legendary Dr. Pi—how surprising this sudden change of atmosphere was, and when I assumed he was going to

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

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

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

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

tell me about Hart's impeccable revolutionary career or his intellectual merits, I heard him say, with a vocabulary that had already fallen into disuse at that time: "Hart is a decent person." I think it was at that precise moment that I had the absolute certainty that the so-called Quinquennium was indeed a five-year period, and that it had just ended. It's not that tensions, those conflicts of opinion or interests that never cease to surface in a living culture disappeared definitively—I remember that in 1991 we were still immersed in one of them but that the relationships were always one of mutual respect, authenticity, and interest in the normal development of our culture.

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

Havana, January 30, 2007

Amir Valle

Translated by Regina Anavy and Gustavo Loredó

The Matter from the Other Shore

Amir Valle to Desiderio Navarro

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

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

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

Amir Valle in response to Arturo Arango

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

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

A hug from cold Berlin,
Amir Valle

Reflections on Scaring Away Fear

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Intelligentsia, United?

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

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

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

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

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

The Levity of the Symptom

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

If we don't look at the root of the problem, if we don't go to the essence, this symptom will have the lightness of a sigh, and the things that have happened until today will continue to happen. It terrifies me to see how some want to put all the blame only on these fascists turned cultural leaders. Desiderio Navarro says: "Are we really a country with such little memory that we no longer remember the painful situation to which our institutions were reduced by the work of the National Council of Culture?" I'm speechless. And so as not to be the one to say it, I looked for a fragment of the documentary *Seres extravagantes* [*Extravagant Beings*], which tells the story of Reinaldo Arenas and many other "different" ones, including some of you.

There, in a gallery, a certain famous person, wearing a hat of guano, says: "In our capital, in recent months, a certain strange phenomenon happened to appear, among a group of the young and some not-so-young, who began to make a public display of their shamelessness. Thus, for example, they began to start living extravagantly, meeting in certain streets of the city, in the area of La Rampa, in front of the Hotel Capri." Can't you guess? Those who were convicted of their "sexual differences" shouldn't forget that speech. And those who want a response from the ones truly responsible for the cultural tragedy experienced in those years and in the later stages up to today have only to look at their continually exalted speeches of those years. They will find amazing things. Many, for finding and commenting on them, have been called "stateless," "mercenaries of the empire," and, at best, "not revolutionary."

We, the Newest

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Has no one ever thought about the hell that the excellent narrator (and I mean it with all intent) and former student of the Onelio Jorge Cardoso Creation Workshop, Luis Felipe Rojas, is living in right now, for having dared to found, there in Cacocún, the Association of Young Writers of the East, condemned for the "dark sin" of highlighting works censored in Cuba, creating and disseminating independent literary projects because of their disenchantment with official institutions? And have the independent literary magazines *Cacharro (s)* [*Jalopy (ies)*] and *Bifronte* [*Two-faced*] never been persecuted and censored by the political and cultural power (and even if I don't want to, I must mention my magazine, *Letras en Cuba* [*Writings in Cuba*], and my literary column, *A título personal*, [*On a Personal Basis*], which also caused them to shut down my email on the Ministry of Culture's Cubarte network)?

And finally, although this list will surely be expanded by many of you just by thinking a little bit about what has happened in these last two decades, why did they prohibit the screening of the documentary *Arte nuevo de hacer ruinas* [*New Art of Making Ruins*] at the most recent Festival del Nuevo Cine in Havana? The German director, Florian Boschmeyer, has already won several awards at international festivals in Europe and the U.S. Think about all this, look at your own experiences, and perhaps the answer to the question is quite different: Is the *pavonato* a phenomenon of the past? Have the only people affected been those who lived at that time during the misnamed “Gray Quinquennium”? Are they the only ones who have the right to be offended and worried?

The Changing Waters

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

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

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

What remains to us? To understand that it’s necessary to seek that lost dialogue, that active participation of the intelligentsia in decisions and in the political and cultural life of the country, in a plural, open, and inclusive spectrum. Dear Guillermo Vidal kept many of his friends united for many years, telling us with that look of his, so honest, every time he saw a discussion among our class members (to which he felt attached even though it wasn’t his own): “Gentlemen, if they divide us, we’re screwed.” Don’t forget that.

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

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

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

“It’s your daughter,” Dalí agreed.

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

“It’s the changing waters of politics, General.”

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

Berlin, January 11, 2007

Ángel Santiesteban Prats

Translated by Regina Anavy and Gustavo Loredó

Dear Brother Amir,

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

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

Hugs, Ángel
January 9, 2007

Antón Arrufat

Translated by Regina Anavy and Gustavo Loredó

Shared Concerns

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

³¹ Cuban Institute of Radio and Television.

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

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

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

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

Another Message from Antón Arrufat

Dear Friends:

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

Hugs, Anton Arrufat
January 9, 2007

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

Antonio Desquiron

Translated by Regina Anavy and Gustavo Loredó

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

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

Arturo Arango

Translated by Regina Anavy and Gustavo Loredó

Desiderio,

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

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

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

With a hug, Arturo Arango
January 6, 2007

Another Message from Arturo Arango

Friends and *compañeros*:

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

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

Arturo Arango
January 7, 2007

Arturo Arango to Desiderio Navarro and Reynaldo González

Desiderio, Reynaldo:

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

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

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

denounced. Between them there are different positions. In this particular case, the fact that someone believes, like me, that the program dedicated to Pavón was a mistake doesn't imply that we both think in the same way. We can agree, if only on that point.

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

Hugs, Arturo A.

Arturo Arango to Orlando Hernández

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

My hug, Arturo Arango

Arturo Arango in response to Orlando Hernández

Dear Orlando:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Hugs, Arturo Arango

Avelino Victor C. Rodríguez

Translated by Regina Anavy and Gustavo Loredó

Beyond Cyberspace

Dear Augusto,

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

² The University Booth was a booth for cultural activities (painting exhibitions, theater, etc.) set up in Central Park of Havana by the Culture Department of the Federation of University Students (FEU) in the 1950s.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

However, not everything culminated in 1980. In 1983, personally, I was the victim of a false accusation by a policeman dressed in civilian clothes (worse than worse) in Santa María del Mar. I was talking with another guy about absolutely trivial topics (the day, the sea, Yemayá) almost two meters away from each other sitting on the sand, when a mulatto (let's not forget among the humanoid miseries multidirectional racism), after asking for my identity card (not that of the other young man, which shows that there was nothing else between us), said that there was no problem but asked me to accompany him to the station.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

⁴⁰ Derogatory term for white people.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

VELY

Avelino Víctor Couceiro Rodríguez

February 7, 2007