

**CUBA: THE INTELLECTUAL DEBATE
OR
THE LITTLE WAR OF EMAILS
THE “D”s (by first name of author, alphabetically)**

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Declaration of the UNEAC Secretariat

Translated by Regina Anavy and Gustavo Loredó

The Cultural Policy of the Revolution is Irreversible.

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

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

UNEAC Secretariat

Desiderio Navarro

Translated by Regina Anavy and Gustavo Loredó

Dear friends and colleagues:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Desiderio Navarro
January 6, 2007

Message from Desiderio Navarro to Reynaldo González

Dear Rey:

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

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

A hug,
Desiderio
January 6, 2007

Another message from Desiderio Navarro

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

A hug,
Desiderio
January 8, 2007

Dear Loly:

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

It is not a question of a "group" of intellectuals who protest. Its relatively massive character and its lack of articulation due to ties of friendship, generation, aesthetic orientation, etc. doesn't allow them to be spoken of as a "group" but, at most, as "a great number of intellectuals; I added that it was not only a question of some of "our most important" intellectuals, but also of many others equally or less important who immediately added their voices and reasons; that the lack of any mention of the true concrete cause of the intellectual indignation, that is, the sudden reappearance of these three nefarious characters of Cuban cultural politics, after 30 years, in three television programs so close in time, would make people, the millions in the street, wonder what had happened that was so bad in those programs: an attempt at another live wedding? Sexual indecency? Corruption, bribery? A counterrevolutionary comment or joke? and so on, many other questions about possible attacks against the irreversible cultural policy of the Revolution, thus leaving in the shadow the figure of these characters and the concrete political meaning of what happened and placing the teams of the three programs that, collectively or not, could have been complicit with external ties, or mere adherents of directions from higher levels (which people are inclined to

believe in your case), or clumsy ignorant people with initiative and naivety (which almost nobody believes in the case of “Impronta” and “The Difference”).

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

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

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

Desiderio Navarro

Message from Desiderio Navarro to Zenaida Romeu

Dear Zenaida:

I agree with you and thank you very much for including me among the recipients of your letter.

Now, in the text of the Declaration it is stated that in the two meetings a consensus response was sought with some of the protesters (in fact, with the first ones, chronologically), which is totally and absolutely true. But neither I nor Arturo Arango, nor other authors of protests, participated in the subsequent written formulation of that response, nor in its final review and approval, which explains that, as it should be, only the UNEAC Secretariat signs it, and not any of the protesters, none of whom is a member of the Secretariat. Unfortunately, the wording gives the impression that we are co-signers of the document, despite the fact that some of us—as far as I know so far, at least Arturo Arango and I—have numerous objections to make to the text itself, the formulation of which does not reflect the frankness, depth, and firmness with which, with names and surnames, facts, dates, and the corresponding qualifiers, these topics

were discussed in those two meetings, meetings of which UNEAC, our UNEAC, can be very proud and would have nothing to hide.

As a member of the National Council of UNEAC and as a member of the ranks, I trust that what happened will be corrected.

With kind regards,
Desiderio Navarro

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

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

Friends and colleagues:

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

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

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

A hug, Desiderio
January 7, 2007

Dear Fernando:

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

Those who saw in the semantic-lexical resemblance a family relationship between the names *Criterion* [*Criteria*] and *Pensamiento Crítico* [*Critical Thought*] were not mistaken. Those who saw a relationship of catalysis in the irruption of *Criteria* only seven months after the disappearance of *Critical Thinking* were not wrong either. In the history of the cultural struggles of the Cuban Revolution, both editorial endeavors will always be united by the desire to practice and preach Martí's ethos of grafting the world onto the trunk of our republics and the Marxist ethos of radical criticism. As I told Abel¹ about three years ago, in a meeting with Fowler² and Reina María in his office, I do not lose hope that a Cuban magazine of social thought will appear today, *mutatis mutandis*, like *Critical Thinking* that even bears its name and be directed by you. What an encouraging sign of health, strength, and renewed ideological and cultural youth that would be for a socialist Revolution. What an announcement it would be of that critical and creative socialism that your essay work lucidly and passionately advocates and prefigures! Then, dear Desiderio, keep dreaming until the end of time.

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

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

Desiderio
January 7, 2007

Another message from Desiderio Navarro

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

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

Desiderio Navarro

¹ Abel Prieto, Minister of Culture.

² Victor Fowler Calzada (Havana 1960), a Cuban poet, essayist and researcher on cultural issues.

Desiderio Navarro's response to Orlando Hernández

Dear Orlando:

It seems to me that there are some somewhat unfounded and unfair statements in the final paragraph of your letter to Arturo Arango, which I reproduce here:

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

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

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

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

Ambrosio's lecture is entitled, in effect, "The Five Gray Years: Revisiting the term." Do you really think that discussing the expression "The Five Gray Years" is a mere superfluous terminological discussion? Of the participants in the electronic correspondence in recent days, myself, in *In medias res publicas* seven years ago, and César López before me—according to what Ambrosio himself told me the day before yesterday—we have questioned "The Five Gray Years" as a period name and as a chronological delimitation. Now, do these questions of expression—and others, such as Rine Leal's, and with which Ambrosio will surely dialogue or polemicize on the 30th—raise a useless debate of aseptic academic terminology or a crucial problem of historical periodization of cultural politics, in which a position has to be taken before everything analogous that happened with so many creative works and lives already years before 1971 and still years after 1975? Suffice it to remember that the last attempt to impose socialist realism in its most dogmatic Soviet version as official doctrine was made between 1980 and 1983, in the midst of a tense ideological-political struggle between personalities and cultural and political institutions, given the change in the correlation of forces in the prolonged transition from total control to fighting for positions. None of that is just a matter of words.

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

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

A big hug, brother.
Desiderio
January 14, 2007

Response from Desiderio Navarro to Rosa Ileana Boudet

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

The Name of the Rose

It so happens that now Rosa Ileana Boudet, on the Miami website www.teatroenmiami.com, writes what here, from 1994 until her still recent emigration to the USA, she never expressed in a public conference or in writing, although she had, among others, the pages of the theatrical magazine *Conjunto*—directed by her for years until her departure—to give her opinion on any Cuban or foreign theatrical publication.

In her endeavor to promptly deliver praise—which she did not write here either, as far as I know—of the relations of the also Cuban émigré Gloria María Martínez (former professor of the Higher Institute of Art installed at a university in Chile) with the work of Patrice Pavis, she considers it necessary to create a dramatic counter-figure residing in Cuba that would have hindered the achievement of the lofty cultural goals for which his heroine would have fought like Prometheus here until her departure. Below I quote a passage from her recent article entitled *Patrice Pavis: His own Gaze*, accessible on the aforementioned website:

In 1989 [Pavis] participated in the II International Meeting organized by Criterios, celebrated in Havana, invited by Desiderio Navarro, who years later compiled and translated The Theater and its Reception, Semiology, Crossing of Cultures and Postmodernism, published in the same collection of the magazine of thought and culturology in 1994, and perhaps still in existence in the Rayuela bookstore of the Casa de las Américas. Navarro has recorded the author's concern for this "other" Latin American. Unfortunately, a history of contested translations—and a certain pedantry—prevented the book from bringing us up to date with Pavis at the time of its appearance and from publishing unknown texts in our language belonging to Le Théâtre au croisement des cultures [The Theater at the Crossroad of Cultures] (1990) or from The Theater at the Crossroads of Culture, (1992) and Confluences. Le Dialogue des cultures dans les spectacles contemporains [Confluences. The Dialogue of Cultures in Contemporary Theater] (1992).

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

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

The fifth theoretical text, an analysis of the situation of theatrical theory written in 1985, was not included because by 1993 it was already obsolete, and Pavis himself in two

footnotes or post-scripts from 1990 stated: “This chapter led me to a degree of subjectivity that I would not like to have to face anymore today,” and, regarding his own observations on the theory in the East, “I am glad to see in 1990 that all this belongs to the past.”

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

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

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

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

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

Desiderio Navarro

Los Naranjos, October 24, 2002

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

- Here is a small sample, formed at random, of a translation of “The classic inheritance of postmodern theater,” published in *Apuntes*, Santiago de Chile, 1-101, spring, 1990, pp. 117, 127.
- It says: ‘Vitez wants to reinvent tradition by removing the mark from it [*en s'en démarquant*].’ It should say: “Vitez wants to reinvent tradition by distancing himself from it” (*se démarquer*: “distance yourself from”; here and hereinafter dictionary definitions come from *Petit Robert*).
- It says: “. . . opening [the text and the staging] to a series of contradictory settings, they are cut out [*se recouper*].” It should say: “. . . opening to a series of contradictory settings, they overlap” (recover, pronom., “Intersect. Fig. Occurring simultaneously”).
- It says: “The work that rigorously denies meaning is considered, by this logic, with [*est tenue par cette logique à*] the same coherence and with the same unity as those that were supposed to evoke meaning in another time.” It should say: “The work that rigorously denies meaning is bound by this logic to the same coherence and the same unity that in the past should evoke meaning.” (*être tenu à*: “to be obliged to (an action).”)
- It says: “Postmodernism, conceived as a practice of destruction.” It should say: “Postmodernism, conceived as a deconstruction practice.”
- It says: “This memory is carried out (...) by the recovery [*des reprises*] of phrases.” It should say: “This memory is carried out (...) through repetitions of phrases.” (reprise: “Act of saying again, repeating”).
- It says: “Stockhausen’s music, like Wilson’s theater, is in fact neither remarkable nor respectable [nor remarkable, nor reprehensible].” It should say: “The music of Stockhausen, as well as the theater of Wilson, are, in fact, not capable of notation, nor repeatable.”

- In the same translation from which these samples come, more than one case of conversion of negation into affirmation can be found: “Even the theater of the absurd belongs to modernism (and [not] to postmodernism)”; “The post: ‘of the postmodern’ means [*ne signifie pas*] [does not mean] a comeback movement [flashback]”; of neologisms due to ignorance of the original meaning: “Jacobism” for Jacobinism; “Anamorphis” [*anamorphose*] for anamorphosis—, large jumps.
- “Man no longer has anything of an individual inscribed in history or history that regulates all problems” where it is missing, after the word “or” and instead of the word “historical,” the passage: “historicized by a radical stage treatment, by a socio-historical explanation,” all of them attributable to misprints if they were not multiplied in other translations bearing the same signature (e.g., “From the text to the stage: a difficult childbirth” and others published in *Conjunto y Tablas*, Havana).

Another Casual Oblivion of Cuban Television

Dear Friends:

In the program *Mediodía* on TV today (Tuesday, February 6), intended to celebrate the Day of Camagueyan Culture that takes place these days, a segment, prepared by the journalist Aimée A. Margo, was dedicated to presenting the main cultural and historic merits of Camagüey, which began, as it should, by the *Espejo de Paciencia* [*Mirror of Patience*] from which it passed to Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda and Carlos J. Finlay, but, in a somersault to the present (or did I have a black-out?), omitted, under the expression “and others,” any mention of neither more nor less than a Camagueyan poet of the XX century who is our National Poet, our greatest communist social poet: Nicolás Guillén, and even more, the President-founder, until his death, of our Union of Writers and Artists of Cuba. Those of us who still hope that Camagüey will completely shed its pre-revolutionary and “pavonian” prejudices, in its local version, “Giordano-Atiénzar,” and take pride at the end of the novelistic and essay work of the internationally famous *émigré-mulato*-gay, Severo Sarduy, we see miles away from that horizon with this step back, which leaves, even more inconceivably and inexcusably, even the great revolutionary poet of Cuba and the world, Nicolás Guillén, out of the historical cultural memory of our city, province, and nation.

With kind regards,
Desiderio Navarro
February 6, 2007

Desiderio Navarro’s response to the message signed as “Betty”

One of the most unfortunate things for me these days has been seeing how people who have been uncritically silent for a lifetime in the public sphere—in assembly, on paper, in email—after cautiously waiting a week or two to see “what happened to me” after my initial letter of condemnation, and after my call to the cycle on taboo topics, join the debate only to question me as a moderate, for not saying or doing this or that—always

something that they themselves have never said or done in the Cuban public sphere. And I'm not just talking about the political *jineteras* who, today abroad, never wrote in Cuba even a polemic line like any of those in *In medias res publicas* (2001) or, decades ago, "Literary criticism: also a moral question" (1981); nor did they earn a reputation as "conflictive" by participating in a congress, assembly, or colloquium from the '70s to today, paying the consequent biographical and intellectual price.

You question me with the following words: "Just as you did not accept Pavón on TV, you would not have to give in now to being chosen for a quorum." You don't have to be too shrewd a semiotician to see the biased ellipsis operation in that sentence: who is the subject of this action of "choosing"? Who are those "they" you don't name? By not making them explicit, you create what is called a "place of indeterminacy," which can be filled by the reader with subjects such as "the bureaucrats," "the Power," "the clique," "the elite," "the apparatus," etc., depending on the suspicions or experiences or expectations of each one. In other words, a symmetrical variant, only in the opposite sign, of the much criticized "Mystery Syndrome." No less typical of the Orwellian newspeak is its use of implicitness: the verb "give up" has two very different main meanings: one as a transitive verb: "1. to give, transfer, transfer to another a thing, action or right"; and another as an intransitive verb: "2. to surrender, submit." (D.R.A.E.) The verb "give up" in its transitive form is an action that the subject can carry out on his own initiative and will (such as giving up a seat to a pregnant woman on the bus). However, if you use the verb in its intransitive form: "give in to"; that is, not to offer more resistance to, submit to the will of, capitulate, not resist the pressure, the force of (like giving in to the threats of an aggressor), it implies underneath that there is pressure from a "they" that, again, is not explicit.

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

Therefore, it is up to the latter to question or not any decision of the bodies that they themselves have elected in the institutions of which they themselves have voluntarily decided to form part, or even the criteria themselves for making those decisions. Even so, what I did not stop doing was to insist that no diversion of invitations be allowed for favors of secretaries or officials, and that important cultural personalities were not left off the lists, simply because they didn't have elective positions in the UNEAC or elsewhere, and that critics and researchers from the cultural sector were taken into account above all, which is the natural and habitual public of *Cristerios*, a theoretical-

cultural editorial center. I am sure that if I had not proceeded in this way, indignant letters would now be raining down on me, not for having made so-called “concessions,” but for having acted in the same autocratic and undemocratic manner that I have criticized in such or such institutions or instances already and which you also seem to want to oppose.

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

Desiderio Navarro
January 28, 2007

Duanel Díaz

Translated by Regina Anavy and Gustavo Loredó

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

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

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

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

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

Stay in the Branches

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

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

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

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

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

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

Duanel Díaz
Spain

Response from Duanel Díaz to Eliseo Alberto Diego

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Now, is there a difference between there being no parties and there being only one? By contradicting me and affirming the same as me, it is he who is Byzantine, if not absurd. The difference between “Castro” and “Fidel” that I am pointing out is not without meaning. Taken out of context, in Lichi’s message, it certainly seems artificial, but in my comment it is not at all gratuitous. I insist that while Fidel cannot be called “Castro,” as long as he is not subject, like everyone else, to the scrutiny of public opinion that defines every democratic space, there cannot be an authentic debate in Cuba, although there may be voices that, like Ena Lucía Portela’s³, put themselves apart from this fallacious rhetoric.

“What it is about, now, is to add; the one who subtracts, loses. It would be a very serious mistake to be wrong about who our opponent is. If we commit this mistake we can end up becoming our own enemy. With me, those who only see spots on the sun don’t count,” ends Lichi.⁴ And I wonder if the sun that would come out if those of us who make a substantive criticism keep quiet will help someone other than that regime that restricts the freedoms of everyone, those from there, who cannot express themselves freely, and those from here, who for doing so are prohibited from entering our country. Who, Lichi Diego⁵ or us, is wrong about who our real opponent is? My opponent is not Desiderio Navarro, much less the other colleagues in Havana: my opponent—Yoyi’s, Pepe’s—is the Castro regime.

Duanel Díaz
Madrid, Spain

³ Ena Lucía Portela (b. 1972) is a Cuban novelist, essayist, and writer of short stories.

⁴ Reference to Jose Martí: “The sun has spots. The grateful see the light; the ungrateful see the spots.”

⁵ Eliseo Alberto Diego (1951-2011) was a Cuban-born Mexican writer, novelist, essayist, and journalist. He was nicknamed “Lichi.”