Film and Revolution in Cuba

The First Twenty-Five Years

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In the initial moments of Tomás Gutiérrez Alea's *La Muerte de un Burócrata* (*The Death of a Bureaucrat*, 1966) there is an audacious and brilliantly comic sequence. The deceased worker around whose disinterred remains the plot will revolve is seen in semi-animated flashback at his workplace. An "exemplary" proletarian artist, he has reduced art to a science, having devised a machine which produces busts of Cuban national poet and patriot José Martí with the monotonous regularity of cogs emerging from a press. In a moment of carelessness, the worker falls prey to his own invention. The last bust to emerge is his own; he has been martyred to his misguided concept of art.

The sequence imaginatively conveys the Cuban film industry's rejection of mechanical concepts mechanically imposed on the creative process. In 1973, to their surprise, American audiences discovered the delightful unpredictability which characterized many Cuban films of the 1960s and 1970s with the theatrical release of *Memories of Underdevelopment* (Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, 1968). Disarmed by its complexity and inventiveness, by its sophisticated wit and sympathetic portrayal of its bourgeois protagonist, U.S. critics greeted the film with ringing praise. *The New York Times* listed it among the year's ten best films. The National Society of Film Critics offered its

Originally published in Sandor Halebsky and John Kish, eds., *Cuba, 25 Years of Revolution, 1959–1984* (Praeger Publishers, an imprint of Greenwood Publishing Group, Inc., Westport, CT, 1985).

director a special award, though the State Department's refusal to grant him a visa prevented him from attending the ceremony. However regrettable, such a response was not unexpected given how the Treasury Department had shut down the First New York Festival of Cuban Cinema the previous year, confiscating all prints on the second day of the week-long program and eventually driving American Documentary Films, co-sponsors of the festival, into bankruptcy.[1]

For a quarter century, the U.S. has sought to isolate Cuba from the rest of the world by imposing an economic and cultural blockade on the island. During this period, Cuban cinema and the related arts of music and poster design have continued to break through the cultural blockade to assert the creative energy of this struggling socialist society.

Cinema and Cultural Priorities

The leaders of the guerrilla struggle were quick to perceive the artistic and educational supremacy of the film medium. In early 1959, soon after Fidel became head of the new revolutionary government, he ranked cinema and television, in that order, as the most important forms of artistic expression. A decade later, the First National Congress on Education and Culture pointed to radio, television, the cinema, and the press as "powerful instruments of ideological education, molders of the collective consciousness whose use and development must not be left to improvisation or spontaneity." The congress singled out film as "the art *par excellence* in our century."

Histories of postrevolutionary Cuban cinema customarily begin by observing that the decree which founded the Cuban Institute of Cinematographic Art and Industry (ICAIC) on March 24, 1959, was the first cultural act of the revolutionary government, coming less than three months after the overthrow of Batista. In fact, another revolutionary film organization preceded ICAIC. Cine Rebelde, part of the Rebel Army's National Board of Culture, was founded as soon as the rebels took power. After producing two documentary shorts, Tomás Gutiérrez Alea's *Esta Tierra Nuestra (This is Our Land)* and Julio García Espinosa's *La Vivienda (Housing)*, Cine Rebelde became part of the newly founded film Institute. Alfredo Guevara, founding Director of ICAIC, insists that film was in fact the second priority of the new government, preceding but subordinate in importance and in impact to the national literacy campaign of 1960–61.

Prerevolutionary History

Cubans frequently stress the absence of a cinematic tradition in prerevolutionary Cuba, as Fidel did in his Report to the First Party Congress (1975) when he commended the achievements of "a new art form, without a history or a tradition in our country." Leading filmmaker and theorist Julio García Espinosa concurs regarding the dearth of constructive models but emphasizes the potential impact of what was in fact a powerful negative heritage.

Cuban film historians emphasize the parallel historical development of the film medium, the U.S. drive toward extraterritorial expansion, and the history of Cuba as a nation. Cubans were exposed to the moving image as early as citizens of any country on the continent when the first Lumière films made their debut there in 1897. By 1898, Cuban audiences were already being treated to the cinema as a vehicle for historical falsification imposed upon them by their neighbors to the north. *Fighting with Our Boys in Cuba, Raising Old Glory Over Moro Castle, The Battle of San Juan Hill*, and the like alternated authentic footage with blatant simulations filmed not in Cuba but in the U.S. Their purpose was less to relay an accurate picture of the Cuban War for Independence from Spain than to rouse patriotic Yankee sentiment in favor of U.S. intervention in that war.

In the early years of the American movie industry, independents fleeing the watchful and monopolizing eye of Edison's Motion Picture Patents Company took refuge on Cuban shores before eventually setting up shop in southern California. Sporadic attempts to establish a national Cuban film industry capable of competing with entrenched foreign concerns seemed doomed to perennial failure and were virtually abandoned after the advent of sound. Film production, distribution, and exhibition in Cuba became the province of American and Mexican companies. From the thirties through the fifties, Cuba's major cinematic role was to furnish exotic sets, sultry sex queens, and a tropical beat for Hollywood and Mexican productions. Cuba offered an audience as well. In proportion to its population, the Cuban movie market was the most lucrative in Latin America. A population of less than seven million produced the astonishing number of one and a half million movie-goers per week despite the fact that large segments of the rural population had never seen a single film.

Escapist tropical musicals, melodramas, and detective flicks characterized national film production during the twenty years preceding Batista's overthrow. The 8,000 workers in the industry were primarily employed in the production of advertising shorts for theaters and television, newsreels for local consumption, and technical or scientific

films for specialized audiences. One other specialty of the prerevolutionary film industry deserves mention: Cuba had more than its share of enterprising pornographers.[2]

During the fifties, most serious film activity was centered in film societies, in particular the *Nuestro Tiempo* (Our Times) and *Visión* groups. In 1954, two members of the former, Julio García Espinosa and Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, fresh from two years of film study at the Centro Sperimentale in Rome, collaborated with several other Cubans on a short dramatic feature in the style of the Italian Neorealists, called *El Mégano* (The Charcoal Worker). This denunciation of the hardships of charcoal production on the island's southern coast was confiscated by Batista. Though its style and formulation now seem embarrassingly naive, the film still enjoys the special distinction of being the only recognized antecedent of postrevolutionary cinema. All who collaborated on it have gone on to become leading figures in ICAIC: screenwriter Alfredo Guevara was head of the Film Institute from its founding until 1982; production assistant Jorge Fraga, now a director in his own right, has also served as Head of Film Production since 1978; cameraman Jorge Haydu is a leading cinematographer; Gutiérrez Alea is ICAIC's foremost director, and Julio García Espinosa—filmmaker, script consultant, theoretician—was appointed to succeed Guevara as Head of ICAIC in 1982.

Despite the remarkable size of the national film audience, the most reliable estimates conclude that the Cuban film industry produced no more than 150 features in its six decades of prerevolutionary history. Aside from newsreels, noncommercial documentaries were virtually unheard of. In the succeeding 24 years, ICAIC produced 112 full-length films (feature and documentary), some 900 documentary shorts —educational, scientific, and technical as well as animated and fictional films—and more than 1,300 weekly newsreels.[3]

Emphasizing Documentary

As these production statistics demonstrate, ICAIC has given priority to documentary over fictional subjects. Both economic and ideological factors motivate the preference. The economic motivations are obvious: when funds and equipment are limited, professional actors, elaborate scripts, costuming, and studio sets can be regarded as nonessentials. In a society which subscribes to the principles of Marxism-Leninism, it is believed fitting that creative activity be based on the confrontation with material reality. The impulse to document the euphoria of the rebel victory and popular response to the resulting social transformations brought aspiring filmmakers out into the streets. What had previously been an impossible dream—making serious cinema in Cuba—was now an immediate possibility for scores of young cinemaphiles. This attempt to record the first convulsive moments of revolutionary victory had a profound effect on artists who had previously conceived of filmmaking as above all a vehicle for personal expression. In their documentary apprenticeship, Cuban filmmakers came face to face with unimagined aspects of national life. Their newly found growth in awareness and social sensitivity is largely responsible for the intense dialectic between historical circumstance and individual response which informs fictional as well as documentary production in postrevolutionary Cuban cinema.

The newsreels, produced under the direction of Santiago Alvarez and aimed not just at Cuban audiences but toward all of Latin America, are exceptional examples of the genre. Alvarez explains that his concern

> has not been to make each news item independent of the others, but to connect them in such a way that they pass before the spectator as a unified whole, according to a single discursive line. This accounts for the deliberate structuration which we use to achieve this thematic unity. For this reason, many classify our newsreels as genuine and autonomous documentaries.[4]

Initially restricted by the shortage of funds, material, and resources, Alvarez was one of many Cuban filmmakers to successfully turn practical handicaps into expressive assets. Obliged to draw from existing film archives and such "second-hand" sources as news photos and television footage, he developed a methodology which circumvented the need for on-the-spot footage and elevated the film-collage to a high level of political and artistic quality.

The innovative display of secondary footage, rhythmic editing with dramatic variations in pace, graphically innovative titles and eclectic musical selections (in preference to any spoken narration), superimposition and other experimental montage techniques characterize his early films. Material and political circumstances encouraged Alvarez, like his spiritual ancestor Dziga Vertov, to create the essence of his art on the editing table. As circumstances changed and more resources were put at his disposal, he shifted from black and white to color and began making longer films in which primary footage predominates. More recent films are characterized by more traditional cinematography, longer takes and less experimental editing, and the frequent use of voice-over narration.

In general, we can loosely divide Cuban documentary production into five thematic categories. Films which deal with *domestic politics* promote governmental policies and encourage popular participation and mass mobilization. *Historical* films chart various aspects of the formation of national identity through the five centuries of the island's recorded history. Documentaries of a *cultural* nature may be either national or international in their focus. Films which take *international relations* for their theme might focus on Cuba's role in international affairs, analyze the developed sector, or express solidarity with other Third World nations. Finally, *"didactic"* documentaries, highly technical or scientific in nature, are generally produced by specific agencies rather than ICAIC.

Project and Process

Two central themes run through all of Cuban cinema, fictional and documentary production alike—history and underdevelopment. Cubans interpret each of these terms in a broad and fluid way: underdevelopment as the economic and technological heritage of colonial dependency which has its more stubborn manifestations in individual and collective psychology, ideology, and culture; history as a complex of formative influences which elucidates the present and informs the future. Both themes have had an impact on the form as well as the content of revolutionary Cuban cinema. The dialectical tension between practical limitations and artistic aspirations has encouraged innovation and spontaneity. The filming of *Memories of Underdevelopment*, for example, became itself a "memory of underdevelopment" as Gutiérrez Alea describes it: "At each step we felt the touch of underdevelopment. It limited us. . . . It conditioned the language with which we expressed ourselves." "I have to say," he concludes, "that this is the film in which I have felt most free . . . in spite of the ever-present limitations imposed by underdevelopment. Perhaps I felt free precisely because of those limitations."[5] After his visit to the island in 1975, Francis Ford Coppola attempted to compare the situation of Cuban filmmakers with their U.S. counterparts. Having perceived the kind of creative freedom which comes from overcoming practical constraints, he observed, "We don't have the advantage of their disadvantages."[6]

At an early stage in the development of ICAIC, founder Alfredo Guevara expressed the organization's determination to lay bare the form and technique of the filmmaker's craft, formulating the purpose of the Cuban film project as follows: "to demystify cinema for the entire population; to work, in a way, against our own power; to reveal

all the tricks, all the recourses of language; to dismantle all the mechanisms of cinematic hypnosis."[7] In part, this determination grows out of the conviction that all forms of artistic expression carry an ideological dimension. If this ideological bias is veiled in the vast majority of art works produced in capitalist societies, Cuban filmmakers reason, it should be made explicit in the artistic production of a revolutionary socialist regime. Thus the eclecticism of Cuban film style is in part the result of the effort to appropriate forms of cinematic expression from the developed capitalist sector in order to dismantle them and expose their inner workings. Cubans call this operation "decolonization" and consider it the first priority of their film effort.

Cuban filmmakers have used many formal devices in their attempt to convert the audience from passive consumer into active participant. The Bazinian realism of the first postrevolutionary feature, Tomás Gutiérrez Alea's *Historias de la Revolución* (*Stories from the Revolution*, 1960), soon gave way to more self-reflexive forms, exploring the paradoxical Brechtian contention that dislocation and distancing, rather than unbroken identification, increase the conscious and critical participation of the spectator. Formal self-consciousness, initially apparent in the allusions to leading world filmmakers in the early feature *The Death of a Bureaucrat* (1966) and in García Espinosa's picaresque farce, *The Adventures of Juan Quin Quin* (1967), has subsequently found expression in multiple self-reflexive devices. García Espinosa's feature-length documentary *Third World, Third World War* (1970) incorporates the actual filmmaking process into the finished picture, as do the subsequent feature-length documentary *Bay of Pigs* (Manuel Herrera, 1972) and the historical biography *Mella* (Enrique Piñea Barnet, 1975). Established film genres are often parodied and subverted: the Hollywood war movie in *Bay of Pigs;* the ahistorical Latin melodrama in *The Other Francisco* (Sergio Giral, 1974). Octavio Cortázar's poignant account of one mountain community's first exposure to moving pictures—*For the First Time* (1967)—is an early example of the film-within-a-film device. *With the Cuban Women* (1974), by the same director, opens with startling disjunction between aural and visual information. Films like *Memories of Underdevelopment* (1968), *Lucía* (1968), and *The Other Francisco* (1974) are characterized by a marked shift between lyricized and naturalistic visual styles. Experimentation with film stock, laboratory techniques, lighting, and camera lenses accounts for the visual expressionism of films like Manuel Octavio Gómez's *The First Charge of the Machete* (1969), Part I of Solas's *Lucía* (1968), and the same director's first color film, *Simparele* (1964), as well as many of the Alvarez documentaries. Other self-reflexive devices include the experimentation with musical and nonmus-

ical sound and the print medium which also characterizes Alvarez's work and that of several other directors and, finally, the dramatization of the documentary form through the appropriation of narrative techniques traditionally associated with fictional filmmaking as in shorts like Alejandro Saderman's *Hombres de Mal Tiempo* (*Men from Mal Tiempo*, 1968), Oscar Valdés's *Muerte y Vida en El Morrillo* (*Death and Life in El Morrillo*, 1971) and Miguel Torres's *Historia de una Infamia* (*History of an Infamy*, 1983). The reverse of this operation informs films like *Memories of Underdevelopment* (1968), *The Other Francisco* (1974), *Bay of Pigs* (1972), *One Way or Another* (1974/1977), and Gutiérrez Alea's latest feature, *Hasta Cierto Punto* (*Up to a Certain Point*, 1983).

But formal self-reflexiveness is not a *sine qua non* of Cuban film production. As Jorge Fraga, head of artistic production at ICAIC, puts it in our first interview, "We are not in favor of firing merely for the pleasure of hearing the shot. We shoot in order to hit the target." Many recent films seem to have subordinated issues of formal candor to other considerations and other goals. Gutiérrez Alea's *The Last Supper* (1977) and Pastor Vega's *Portrait of Teresa* (1979) are but two examples of recent films which opt for classical over modernist form. The power of Hollywood's "transparent" style continues to fascinate the Cubans, whose goal is to use that capacity to galvanize an audience for less ideologically veiled and alienating ends. In a society which purports to derive its vitality from a constant process of reexamination and renewal, even apparently conventional strategies can be used in innovative ways, and what was once innovative can become constrictive.

ICAIC's leadership stresses each film's potential for "communicability" (*comunicabilidad*) as the crucial determinant of its worth but continues to recognize multiple strategies for achieving this end. In Julio García Espinosa's words, the greatest responsibility of Cuban filmmakers is to create a kind of cinema "where the human factor, imagination and talent are more important than technical considerations; where artistic conception is completely in tune with actual existing resources."[8]

However impressive the quantity and quality of film production in a country which had no national film industry prior to 1959, this is but one aspect of a comprehensive national film program whose primary goals are universal film literacy and universal access to the medium. Consistent with the priority placed on human development over technical acquisition in the production sector, scarce financial resources channeled into exhibition in the early years were concentrated on providing the largest number of uninitiated viewers with access to film.

Faced with the dire shortage of movie theaters in rural areas, and the financial and temporal obstacles to constructing the number needed, the Cubans devised the famous "mobile cinemas." Trucks, mule teams, even small boats, fitted out with projection equipment and stocked with an eclectic repertoire of film titles, were sent to the most remote sections of the island. In more densely populated regions, topical film "cycles" are continually presented at eleven theaters throughout the island. This program, run by the Cinemateca de Cuba, a division of ICAIC, provides films for 100,000 spectators per week—presumably a world record for an institution of its kind.[9] Two national television programs provide ongoing education in film history, language and technique.[10]

Though the prevalence of praxis (filmmaking and active organizational work) over theoretical deliberation in written form has been characteristic of the Film Institute to date, ICAIC's contribution to film theory has been far from negligible. Alfredo Guevara, founder and director of ICAIC, has continually given ideological direction and theoretical orientation through speeches and essays. His leadership has been a guiding force not only within Cuba but for politically committed filmmakers throughout Latin America who have been invited to Havana to use ICAIC's facilities or to participate in the International Festivals of the New Latin American Cinema held annually since 1979.

Efforts to define in writing the nature and role of film in a revolutionary society began in 1960 with the first issues of the Cuban film magazine *Cine Cubano*, and related deliberations continue to appear in its pages. The first theoretical formulation to generate broad impact outside the island was Julio García Espinosa's "For an Imperfect Cinema" (1970; see volume one for full text). García Espinosa has subsequently written several other essays which attempt to build a bridge between practice and theory. In 1979, these were collected under the title *Una imagen recorre el mundo* (Havana: Letras Cubanos). Tomás Gutiérrez Alea has also recently turned to parallel pursuits. His *Dialéctica del espectador* (Havana: Cuadernos de la Revista Unión, 1982) was named one of the ten best books of the year (see volume one for essay by Alea).[11]

The Evolution of ICAIC: A Chronology

My research suggests a tentative chronological division into four periods: 1959–1960, 1960–1969, 1970–1974, 1975–1983. The initial period, from 1959 to 1960, was characterized by explosive optimism and a great sense of release, by the jubilant return of many exiled artists,

the influx of foreign talent, and the artistic debut of many young and untried nationals. Enthusiastic organizational activity included the founding of ICAIC and the nationalization of all film-related holdings in foreign hands. The attitude of the government and the population at large was one of uncritical enthusiasm for artistic and intellectual activity of all sorts. Among the artists themselves, united-front politics predominated. The first film efforts were generally celebrative works in an epic or journalistic style which focused on the trajectory and triumph of the insurrection and on the corruption and injustice of the former regime.

In the second period, 1960 to 1969, the concept of revolutionary art and of the revolutionary artist became gradually more defined through a series of debates and polemics as well as the lived experience of the Revolution. Ideological maturation and intensified class conflict began to curb the "anything goes" atmosphere in the artistic sector. The concept of art as praxis and of the artist as militant participant rather than detached observer began to dominate. The broad and initially uncritical assimilation of foreign models, the virtually unlimited hospitality to visiting artists and intellectuals, and the attentive quest for their approval gave way to a more critical stance and to the growing influence of artistic inspiration from national sources and other Third World countries—particularly other Latin American nations—in preference to the developed sector.

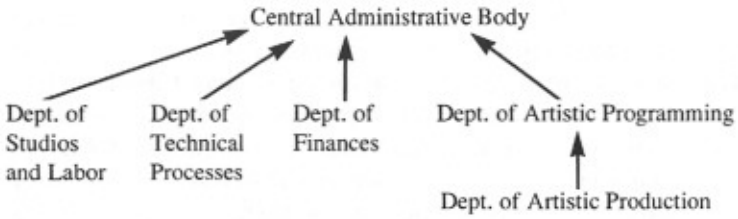
At the beginning of this period, the prevalence of visiting foreign filmmakers at ICAIC and the organization's involvement in a number of co-productions with various countries contributed to a rather superficial and exotic interpretation of Cuban culture. The celebration of "One Hundred Years of Struggle" in 1968 to commemorate the fight for national autonomy which began a century before sparked a much richer and more penetrating analysis of national history and identity. The pervasive influence of Italian Neorealism in the early sixties and the fascination with the French New Wave in mid-decade had, by the end of this period, given way to broad-based stylistic experimentation and characteristically Cuban eclecticism. By 1964, the Cuban documentary was beginning to gain international attention through the work of Santiago Alvarez. Fictional production came into its own four years later with the release of *Memories of Underdevelopment* and *Lucía*. This period also saw signs of diminishing tolerance for a liberal interpretation of artistic freedom and responsibility. For numerous reasons, the process of defining the role of art in a revolutionary socialist society met with more difficulties in the realm of letters, with its centuries-long tradition of isolated individual production, than in the film sector or the other more cooperative and social arts. The tensions between individual ambition and the needs of the collectivity were played out between the years 1967 and 1971 in the life and career of one particular poet, Heberto Padilla, who became an international *cause célèbre* upon his imprisonment in 1971.[12]

The failure of the projected ten-million-ton sugar harvest in 1970 brought about a critical reappraisal of policies and priorities in all sectors of society, beginning with Fidel himself and including ICAIC and other cultural agencies. The period between 1970 and 1974 saw an increased emphasis on mass participation and the search for more indigenous cultural forms. Elitism and manifestations of artistic privilege were rejected in favor of an attempt to define and produce a genuine people's culture. At ICAIC there was a consequent decline—by no means absolute—in formal experimentation, which had reached a peak of virtuosity in the late sixties. The emphasis on documentary production extended during these years to the realm of feature-length films, where for the first time nonfictional subjects outnumbered fictional ones.

Nineteen hundred and seventy-five, the year of the first National Congress of the Cuban Communist Party, marks the inception of a period of sweeping reorganization within ICAIC, a process which may or may not have culminated with the naming in 1983 of Julio García Espinosa to succeed Alfredo Guevara as head of the Institute. In 1976, the process of "institutionalization of the Revolution" which began in 1970[13] reached the cultural sector. The formation of a national Ministry of Culture, which incorporated ICAIC under Guevara's continuing direction as one of its five vice-ministers, marked the symbolic loss of the privileged autonomy the Institute had enjoyed since its founding. Lest the motivations for the economic reorganization and redefinition of ICAIC appear to have come largely from outside the agency, it is important to note that these directives coincided with internal concerns to lower costs and increase productivity which date from the beginning of the decade. As Jorge Fraga, Head of Artistic Programming, explained in a personal interview in 1977:

> Filmmaking is a living contradiction, because as an industry, it would have its optimal technical-economic efficiency if it were producing standardized products. But as an art form, it cannot be governed by standardized norms. This contradiction lies within the nature of film itself because film cannot cease to be an industry nor can it cease to be an art. The only possible answer is to seek out the organizational mechanisms that will prevent these two factors from entering into conflicts which might be harmful to the development of either component.

FIGURE 1. Phase I: Before 1975



Predictably, ICAIC's structure has grown progressively more complex during the successive stages of this reorganization process (see Figures 1, 2, and 3).

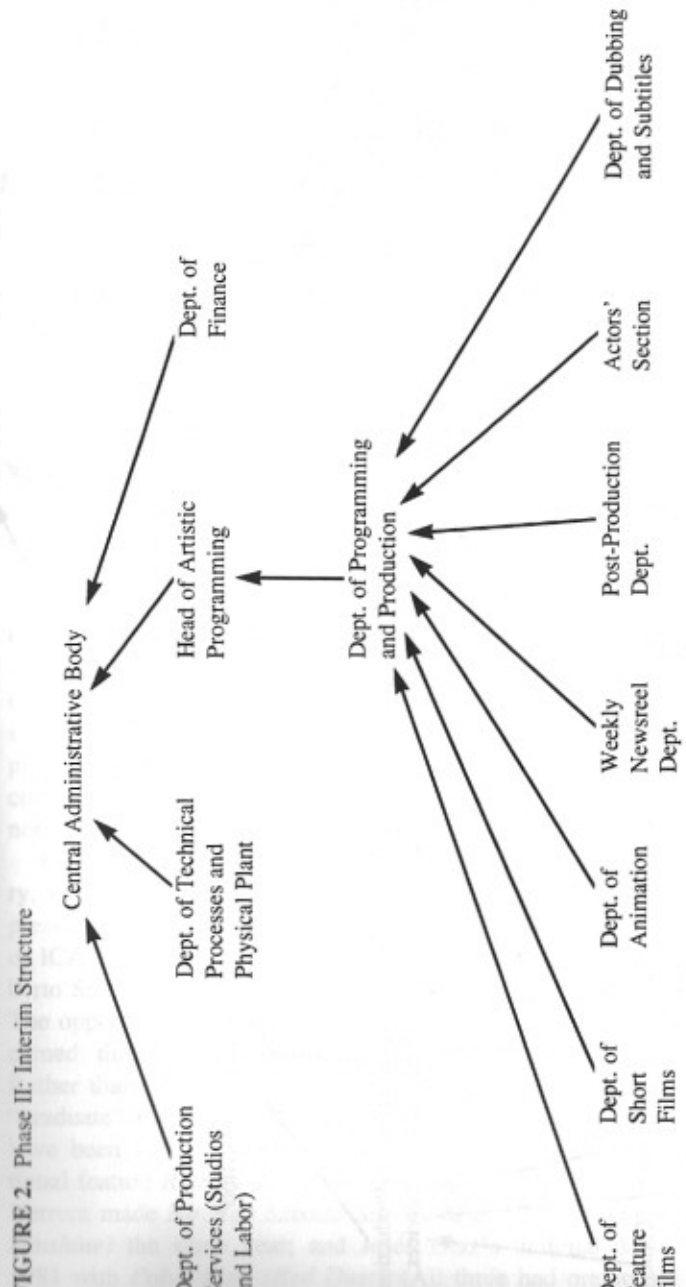
Alfredo Guevara has stated that the greatest innovations of the Cuban film industry have been in the social relations of the labor process, and other leaders within ICAIC have seconded this claim. The Cubans have tried to balance the needs of the collectivity with those of personal creative expression through their commitment to workers' control and the collective evaluation of each other's work, as well as through the high degree of initiative granted to the director. *Conciencia* (sociopolitical awareness and sense of responsibility) and *subjetividad* (personal artistic judgment) are regarded as the dual components of the creative process.

The reorganization process has included a revision of the salary system (under discussion since 1979) and the introduction of a system of bonuses (*primas*) to encourage directors to finish their films within the time and budget allotted to them. Differential pay has been instituted as a means of rewarding those who perform their job particularly well, as judged by a blue-ribbon committee of their peers. Whether such changes will eventually have a positive or negative impact upon the social relations of production at ICAIC remains to be seen.

The prolonged and time-consuming efforts to restructure the film sector constitute a tentative response to a number of ongoing problems within ICAIC and within the larger society. These include: limited financial and technical resources; a demand for film products which exceeds existing production capacities; lack of procedures and resources to develop and incorporate new talent; a tendency to rely excessively, for both artistic and organizational leadership, on a limited number of recognized figures without adequate mechanisms for distributing responsibility; the persistent separation and subordination of documentary to fictional filmmaking in practice if not in theory.

ICAIC's entire annual budget is only 7,000,000 pesos ($7,000,000). According to Jorge Fraga, this allocation must cover not

FIGURE 2. Phase II: Interim Structure



only production expenses but salaries for all of ICAIC's 1,100 employees.[14] Current production levels stand at approximately 40 documentaries, 5–10 animated cartoons, 4–6 features, and 52 weekly newsreels. Though documentary production has remained fairly steady over the past decade (1972–1983), with high points of 47 in 1976–77 and 1980–81, it declined to below 40 in 1979 and 1983. Production levels for feature films have remained chronically lower than projected targets. The projected goal for 1985 is 12 features annually, or one per month, though to date feature output has never exceeded eight, and has in fact only risen to about five if one includes feature-length documentaries in the tally. The decade of the 1960s saw only two feature-length documentaries; nearly twenty times this number were produced between 1970 and 1983, closely rivaling the number of fictional features.

As Julio García Espinosa and a number of others have pointed out, though nationalization gave Cubans ownership of the movie theaters in the early sixties, they have still not been able to claim full ownership of the screens. Of the 130–140 feature films annually premiered in Cuba to supply the 510 theaters on the island, only about 3 percent are national products; the vast majority are imported from abroad. Cuban audiences' potential demand for Cuban features far exceeds current ICAIC production levels. The institution of positive and negative material incentives to increase efficiency and productivity is one strategy to make greater use of existing resources. International coproductions are another. Whether or not one views these methods as constructive and consistent with ICAIC's ideology and goals, they do not seem fully proportionate to the dimensions of the problem.

Despite the ideological importance conferred upon the documentary, fictional filmmaking continues to be regarded as the highest expression of the cinematic vocation, at least as much by the members of ICAIC as by the filmgoing public. With a single exception (Humberto Solas) all of ICAIC's filmmakers have begun as documentarists. The opportunity to make feature-length fiction films is a "promotion" earned through a long process of "documentary apprenticeship." Rather than increasing over time, the number of documentarists who "graduate" to fiction has declined. Since 1977, only three directors have been awarded this distinction: Pastor Vega made his first fictional feature *Retrato de Teresa (Portrait of Teresa)* in 1979; Manuel Herrera made *No Hay Sábado Sin Sol (There's No Saturday Without Sunshine)* the same year; and Jesús Díaz's fictional debut came in 1981 with *Polvo Rojo (Red Dust).* (All three had previously made at least one full-length documentary.) Between 1974 and 1976, as a response to the need to inject "new blood" into the institution, ICAIC

FIGURE 3. Phase III: After 1981

*Alfredo Guevara was the Vice-Minister of Film and Director of ICAIC from 1976–1983, succeeded in that year by Julio García Espinosa, who was the Vice-Minister of Music and Spectacles during the same years, after having served as Head of Artistic Programming at ICAIC. The Heads of the three "Enterprises" which now make up ICAIC are: Diffusion, Benigno Iglesias; Technical Assistance to the Exhibition Sector, José Manuel Pardo; Cinematic Production, Jorge Fraga.

took on a score of university graduates (the vast majority women) for training as "*analistas*," using them as apprentices in all sectors of the production process from script research to assistant direction. These aspiring filmmakers face an additional hurdle, the jump from assistant or apprentice to documentarist. Here, too, the process of ascent seems deplorably slow.

North American visitors to ICAIC continue to question the dearth of women directors and the limited number of blacks. Sara Gómez, who belonged to both the above categories, died in 1974 of acute asthma on the verge of completing her first feature, *One Way or Another*. Sergio Giral, the only black feature director, made his third feature (*Maluala*) in 1979. Among the documentarists, there is one black (Rigoberto López) and three women (Marisol Trujillo, Belkis Vega and Rebeca Chávez). In response to this criticism, the Cubans reply that they reject any notion of quotas as inherently discriminatory, and that they have had only twenty-five years to try to reverse centuries-old legacies of discrimination. Mayra Vilaris, assistant director, stated in a recent interview, "I would feel personally offended if I were told to start working on a film as the director because we need more women directors."[15] Her position is representative of many women at ICAIC. In a 1977 interview, Sergio Giral stated, ". . . not even I, as a black man, can conceive of a 'black' filmmaker or a 'black' film. . . . We have to retain the concept of race as an historical, social category."[16] Their primary identification, these Cuban cineasts declare, is as Cubans, not as women, or blacks, or Chinese, and it is as Cubans that they feel they can best work together to create a society that, in Jorge Fraga's words, "permits everyone the possibility to develop fully."[17]

As an island, Cuba has always been very aware of how much a vigorous national culture depends upon the quantity and quality of visits to and visitors from abroad and what baggage they bring ashore. Under Minister of Culture Armando Hart, Cuban artists and intellectuals have enjoyed increased opportunities for foreign travel, but even more important to the people and the project of ICAIC has been the influx since 1979 of filmmakers and critics from all over the world to attend the International Festival of the New Latin American Cinema held annually under its auspices. This remarkable forum for cultural exchange and discussion also testifies to the support and leadership role which ICAIC continues to play in the evolution and development of oppositional cinema in Latin America. In order to increase the worldwide diffusion of Latin American films, the Latin American Film Market (MECLA) was launched at the Second International Festival in 1980. The Fifth International Festival (December 1983) expanded its exhibition scope northward to include more than a decade of American independent filmmaking in a program called "The Other Face: Independent Films in the United States."

Cuban poet and patriot José Marti said that the only way to do away with the need for soldiers is to become one. Leery of professional critics, Cuban filmmakers decided early on to assume the critic's task in *Cine Cubano* themselves rather than cede it to specialists. Twenty-five years later, ICAIC has only two full-time critics: Carlos Galiano, who also writes reviews for the national daily *Granma*, and hosts a weekly TV show called "History of the Cinema," and Enrique Colina, whose prime-time program "Twenty-four Frames a Second" has been one of the most popular in Cuba for over a decade. If the televised film history and criticism is remarkably sophisticated, its print counterpart is deplorably limited—both a legacy and a confirmation of the general view of the critical act as arbitrary, intrusive, superfluous. As García Espinosa wrote in 1970, ". . . imperfect cinema rejects whatever services criticism has to offer and considers the function of mediators and intermediaries anachronistic."[18]

García Espinosa's assumption of the directorship of ICAIC has been greeted with general approval and optimism. More than for his experience as a filmmaker or theorist, this founding member of ICAIC is valued for his ability to unleash the creative energies of others. He has served as adviser on scores of Cuban films and a list of his screenplay collaborations contain some of ICAIC's most outstanding and experimental films: Humberto Solas' *Lucía*, Manuel Octavio Gómez' *First Charge of the Machete*, and the feature-length documentaries *Bay of Pigs* (Manuel Herrera), *¡Viva la República!* (Pastor Vega) and *The Battle of Chile* (Patricio Guzmán).

Throughout his career, García Espinosa has been concerned with reconciling artistic practice and mass society. His goal has been to displace elitist cultural forms in favor of genuinely popular ones created with the participation of broad sectors of society. His longstanding interest in problems of genre stems from his perception of both the mass appeal and transformative potential of conventional narrative formulae. In a recent interview he recalled:

> Through the experience of filming *The Adventures of Juan Quin Quin* (1967), it became clear to me for the first time that it is in fact impossible to question a given reality without questioning the particular genre you select or inherit to depict that reality. Normally the artist's critique of the genre is done independently, and only the results of the process are shared with the viewer. The challenge I faced was to discover how this critical process

itself, rather than simply the results of that process, could be integrated into the film.[19]

In an earlier essay, he maintained:

> Until now, we have viewed the cinema as a means of reflecting reality, without realizing that cinema in itself is a reality, with its own history, conventions, and traditions. Cinema can only be constructed on the ashes of what already exists. Moreover, to make a new cinema is, in fact, to reveal the process of destruction of the one that came before. . . . We have to make a spectacle out of the destruction of the spectacle. This process cannot be individual. . . . What is needed is to perform this process jointly with the viewer.[20]

García Espinosa envisions a Tarzan film in which the hero takes part in contemporary political conflicts, marries an African woman, and is assimilated into African culture. He believes that the musical is a "natural" genre for Cuba, and his own *Son O No Son* (an untranslatable pun on Hamlet's "to be or not to be" and the Cuban musical form, *son*), which obtained a belated and limited release in 1980, is a delightfully comic imitation of the genre, both subversive and self-critical without ceasing to be enormously entertaining. Manuel Octavio Gómez' *Patakin*, billed as "the first Cuban musical," which premiered at the 1983 Festival to mixed reviews, testifies to García Espinosa's continued encouragement of such efforts. His previous experience with documentary suggests that this area, site of so much extraordinary creativity over the last decade, will not be neglected.

Beyond the production sector, García Espinosa envisions differentiated viewing environments (workplace-associated or workplace-disassociated depending upon the nature of the films screened) and a future time when Cuba will have the technological resources to make filmmaking a genuinely mass activity: "Short of this, we have only made it halfway as filmmakers." He believes that as the electronic media invade the home and make conventional movie theaters obsolete, people will seek out cultural products which offer a more direct, less vicarious, interaction, and that this *reto de masividad* (challenge of mass society), the greatest challenge facing cultural workers today, must not be ceded to purely commercial interests. As he wrote in 1970, in the closing lines of his famous essay "For an Imperfect Cinema," whose ideas still reverberate through ICAIC, "the future lies with folk art but then there will be no need to call it that [since there will be no need to connote the limits of popular creativity]: Art will not disappear into nothingness, it will disappear into everything."[21]

Notes

1. See Gary Crowdus, "The Spring 1972 Cuban Film Festival Bust," *Film Society Review*, vol. 7, nos. 7–9 (March/April/May 1972), pp. 23–26.

2. Regarding this last point, see Peter Brook, "The Cuban Enterprise," *Sight and Sound*, vol. 30, no. 2 (spring 1961), pp. 78–79. The principal source for prerevolutionary film history is Arturo Agramonte, *Cronología del cine cubano* (Havana: Ediciones ICAIC, 1966). See also Julio Matas, "Theater and Cinematography" in Carmelo Mesa-Lago, ed., *Revolutionary Change in Cuba* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1971), pp. 436–42.

3. My own updating of original figures from *Granma Weekly Review*, January 1977, based on *Filmografía del cine cubano*, 1959–1981, and Supplement: January 1982–November 1983 (Havana: Producción ICAIC 1982, 1983).

4. "Santiago Alvarez habla de su cine," *Hablemos de cine*, 54 (July–August 1970), p. 30.

5. Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, *"Memorias del subdesarrollo: Notas de trabajo," Cine Cubano*, 45/46 (1968), pp. 24–25.

6. Francis Ford Coppola, "Robert Scheer Interviews Francis Ford Coppola on Cuba, Castro, Communism and the Mafia," *City of San Francisco*, vol. 9, no. 21 (December 2, 1975), p. 22.

7. Cited in Marjorie Rosen, "The Great Cuban Fiasco," *Saturday Review*, June 17, 1972, p. 53.

8. Julio García Espinosa, "Cinco preguntas a ICAIC," *Cine al día*, 12 (March 1971), p. 22.

9. See José Manuel Pardo, "El Cine-movil ICAIC," *Cine Cubano*, 73/74/75 (1971), pp. 93–104.

10. On the most successful of these programs, see Jorge Silva, "Film Criticism in Cuba: An Interview with Enrique Colina," *Jump/Cut: A Review of Contemporary Cinema*, 22 (May 1980), pp. 32–33.

11. See *Jump/Cut: A Review of Contemporary Cinema*, nos. 29 and 30 (spring 1984 and forthcoming) for Julia Lesage's translation of this text under the title "The Viewer's Dialectic."

12. For full documentation of this famous case, see Lourdes Casal, *El caso Padilla: Literatura y revolución en Cuba: Documentos* (Miami: Nueva Atlatida, 1971). Padilla's poetry of the period appeared in Heberto Padilla, *Fuera del juego* (Buenos Aires: Aditor, 1969) and in J.M. Cohen, trans., *Sent off the Field: A Selection of the Poetry of Heberto Padilla* (London: Deutsch, 1972).

13. See Nelson P. Valdés, "Revolution and Institutionalization in Cuba," *Cuban Studies/Estudios Cubanos*, vol. 6, no. 1 (January 1976), pp. 1–37.

14. Susan Fanshel, "The Cuban Film Institute: Past and Present: An Interview with Jorge Fraga," in Fanshel, *A Decade of Cuban Documentary Film: 1972–1982* (New York: Young Filmmakers Foundation, 1982), p. 10.

15. Susan Fanshel, "Three Women in ICAIC: An Interview with Gloria Argüelles, Mayra Vilasis, and Marisol Trujillo," in *A Decade of Cuban Documentary Film*, p. 27.

16. Julianne Burton and Gary Crowdus, "Cuban Cinema and the Afro-Cuban Heritage: An Interview with Sergio Giral," *The Black Scholar*, vol. 8, nos. 8–10 (Summer 1977), p. 65.

17. Fanshel, "An Interview with Jorge Fraga," p. 13.

18. Julio García Espinosa, "For an Imperfect Cinema," trans. Julianne Burton, in Michael Chanan, ed., *Twenty-Five Years of the New Latin American Cinema* (London: British Film Institute and Channel Four Books, 1983), p. 32.

19. Julianne Burton, "Theory and Practice of Film and Popular Culture in Cuba: A Conversation with Julio García Espinosa," *Quarterly Review of Film Studies*, vol. 7, no. 4 (Fall 1982), p. 345.

20. Julio García Espinosa, "Carta a la revista chilena *Primer Plano*," *Una imagen recorre el mundo* (Havana: Letras Cubanas, 1979), pp. 26–27.

21. García Espinosa, "For an Imperfect Cinema," p. 33.