

From the Modern to the Postmodern.
Gender in Cuban Cinema, 1974-1990.

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Abstract

The *Instituto Cubano del Arte e Industria Cinematográficos* (ICAIC) was the first cultural institution to be created by the new Cuban revolutionary government in 1959. One of its aims was to create a revolutionary cinema to suit the needs of the Revolution in a climate of transformation and renewal. At the same time, issues of gender equality and gender relations became extremely important in a Revolution attempting to eradicate some of the negative social tendencies of the past.

This thesis brings together these two extremely significant aspects of the Cuban revolutionary process by examining issues of gender and gender relations in six Cuban films produced by ICAIC from 1974-1990; a period of dramatic change and development in both Cuban cinema production and in Cuban civil society. The films are: *De cierta manera*, *Retrato de Teresa*, *Lejanía*, *Hasta cierto punto*, *¡Plaf! (o demasiado miedo a la vida)*, and *Mujer transparente*.

The thesis argues that the portrayal of aspects of gender relations in Cuban cinema developed along a progressive path from expressions of the modern to expressions of the postmodern, closely following a cultural transition in the nation as a whole. This does not mean that there occurred an absolute rejection of all the principles of what it meant to be 'modern', but that, in the latter half of the 1980s, expressions of the postmodern can be seen through the prism of gender relations in the films produced during the latter part of the period concerned.

One of the goals of this thesis is to illustrate how, through the prism of the gender debate presented on film, analysed using a number of theoretical approaches, Cuban cinema both reflected and produced some of the central ideological concerns on the island during this period. It will be possible to see how the gender debate both helps to create and, at the same time, makes reference to, more general cultural debates on the island. As such, the issues around gender explored through Cuban cinema can be seen as one of the most important cultural topics of this period.

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CONTENTS

CONTENTS	i
PREFACE	iii
INTRODUCTION	1
The films, the hypothesis and the organisation of the thesis	1
The Cuban Film Institute and the Gender Debate in Cuban Cinema	6
Women and Gender in Cuba	22
Theoretical Approaches	40
CHAPTER ONE: <i>MACHISMO</i> , MASCULINITY AND THE MODERN	43
Introduction	43
<i>Machismo</i> and Masculinity	45
The Modern	57
Identification and Ideology	65
Conclusion to Chapter One	74
CHAPTER TWO: <i>MACHISMO</i> ON SCREEN	
PART ONE: <i>De cierta manera</i> (1974, Sara Gómez)	75
PART TWO: <i>Hasta cierto punto</i> (1983, Tomás Gutiérrez Alea)	94
Conclusion to Chapter Two	114
CHAPTER THREE: SEXUALITY AND MOTHERHOOD	116
Introduction	116
Female Sexuality in Cuba and Latin America	118
Female Sexuality and Desire in Cinema	123
Motherhood in Cuba	133

The Mother in Cinema	136
Conclusion to Chapter Three	146
 CHAPTER FOUR: THE MOTHER ON SCREEN	
PART ONE: <i>Retrato de Teresa</i> (1979, Pastor Vega)	148
PART TWO: <i>Lejanía</i> (1985, Jesús Díaz)	170
Conclusion to Chapter Four	192
 CHAPTER FIVE: CUBA AND THE POSTMODERN	194
 CHAPTER SIX: THE POSTMODERN ON SCREEN	
PART ONE: <i>¡Plaf! (o demasiado miedo a la vida)</i> (1988, Juan Carlos Tabío)	227
PART TWO: <i>Mujer transparente</i> (1990, Héctor Veitía, Mayra Segura, Mayra Vilasís, Mario Crespo, Ana Rodríguez)	244
‘Isabel’ (Héctor Veitía)	246
‘Adriana’ (Mayra Segura)	254
‘Julia’ (Mayra Vilasís)	259
‘Zoé’ (Mario Crespo)	263
‘Laura’ (Ana Rodríguez)	268
Conclusion to Chapter Six	273
 CONCLUSION	276
 BIBLIOGRAPHY	290

Preface

Clarification of terms used throughout the thesis

Modern

This is an important term throughout the thesis and refers to the sense of change that Cuba experienced after the 1st January, 1959, with the onset of revolution. It refers to the desire for change across all levels of society. In the particular case of aspects of gender relations, it refers to the development of what may be regarded as a socialist feminism in Cuba with the creation of the *Federación de Mujeres Cubanas* (discussed in the Introduction) and the attempt to create equality between men and women across all sectors of society.

Modernity

When the term ‘modernity’ is used in the thesis, it refers, in general terms, to the notion of Cuba’s entry into revolution and the subsequent (Marxist) search for emancipation of the human subject. It is not the same modernity as experienced in the ‘West’ in the industrial age, but a specific Marxist modernity that, in the case of gender relations, attempted to liberate women from domesticity by allowing them access to work and education, and by attempting to influence male perceptions of women both at work and at home.

In terms of the cinema, the thesis argues that Cuban modernity begins with the formation of the Cuban national film institute (ICAIC) in 1959.

Modernisation

The term ‘modernisation’ refers to the Cuban Revolution’s drive to increase productivity, centralise political power, develop participatory politics, increase education and create equality of the sexes. In terms of the Cuban cinema it refers to the setting up of the national film institute, the nationalisation of cinema production and distribution and the drive to create a national cinema designed to construct and reflect the Cuban revolutionary reality. In purely aesthetic terms it refers to the desire to innovate

and create a new style of filmmaking – in the Cuban case pertinent to the demands and desires of the Revolution.

Modernist

I use this term to refer exclusively to the aesthetics of a film or work of art and the formal characteristics of such. As such it refers to the way in which Cuban cinema developed an alternative aesthetic after 1959 to oppose and counteract influences from the USA (particularly from the Hollywood studios) in order to try and develop a type of filmmaking that could construct and reflect the Cuban, national, revolutionary reality.

If a film is described as ‘modern’ it is because it reflects the desire for change within the revolutionary process. If a film is described as having ‘modernist’ characteristics it is because it contains elements of what might be regarded as modernist filmmaking.

Modernism

The tendency to be modern (as described above) or the support of such. In cinematic terms it refers to the tendency to break with the old and look for change and innovation. In this sense the work of the Cuban national film institute, in its desire to bridge the gap between high and mass culture by creating a new cinema for the Revolution, forms part of Cuba’s modernism.

The Marxist Revolutionary Project

Where the term the ‘Marxist Revolutionary Project’ is used it refers to the Revolution’s drive to modernise, across social, political and cultural fields, using the terminology of modernisation as described above.

Postmodern

This can refer to either a period (eg the ‘postmodern age’) or it can refer to the formal characteristics of a film (eg a film can be described as having postmodern characteristics). I do not use the clumsy term ‘postmodernist’ to describe the aesthetics of the films in the thesis, I prefer to use postmodern in

such instances. The postmodern is discussed with reference to various critics that have proposed a particular kind of postmodernism emerging in Cuba, but also with reference to critics who speak of the postmodern in 'Western' terms. Thus, when the term 'postmodern' is used it refers, in general terms, to the reformulation of previously held certainties, the most obvious of these in Cuba being Marxism itself. Postmodern in this sense means a questioning of the previously held values of the Cuban Revolution and a search for new ways to develop the Revolution during a period of extreme economic and political uncertainty at the end of the 1980s.

A Cuban film might develop postmodern characteristics if it then questions the way early revolutionary Cuban cinema tried to develop its alternative to the Hollywood schema.

Postmodernism

This term is used to refer to the tendency to be postmodern, or the support of such.

Marxist modernity and the unified subject

When the thesis speaks of Marxist modernity, part of that modernity involves how the notion of individual subjectivity is approached. The Cuban Revolution has been and continues to be a nationalist project and Cuban revolutionary cinema has long been identified with the search for nationhood. As such, within the parameters of this search exists the attempt to develop a Cuban national revolutionary consciousness, the creation of a Cuban Marxist/socialist subject, the 'perfect' Cuban as it were, perhaps in the form of Che Guevara's 'New Man'. Thus, when the thesis links Marxist modernity with the unified subject, it does so within these specifically Cuban parameters.

Postmodernity and the breakdown of the unified subject

In Chapter Five, when discussions of the possible breakdown in this search for a unified subject take place, again the assumption is that the postmodernity that Cuba enters into during the late 1980s is specifically Cuban; a part of which involves a breakdown in the essential possibility of discovering a unified Marxist/socialist subject. As explained in Chapter Five, this does not mean that the notion of revolutionary consciousness is dispensed with, or that the search for a specifically Cuban national

identity is ended; just that all-encompassing notions such as these needed to be re-assessed within the parameters of the ongoing Cuban Revolution.

Chronology of the thesis

Analysis of the films in the thesis begins with *De cierta manera* (Sara Gómez). Made in 1974, it was not released until 1978, for reasons that will be made clear in Chapter Two. It was a highly significant film in Cuba's history and opens up a wealth of issues concerning gender, gender relations and *machismo* in Cuban society. It was made one year before the law on male-female relations, known as the *Código de Familia* was promulgated (to be discussed shortly), and the time-span between its production and its release straddles a hugely important period in Cuban cultural history, as explained in the Introduction. The thesis does not analyse to any extent films made before *De cierta manera* (although brief mention is made of three films made in the 1960s). This is because only one other film made prior to *De cierta manera* deals specifically with debates around gender (*Lucía*, 1968, Humberto Solás).

The film analyses end in 1990 with *Mujer transparente*. It was released shortly after the collapse of the Berlin Wall, a symbolic event that ushered in the collapse of the Soviet Union, provoking enormous changes in Cuban society. The period in question, then 1974-1990, offers a period of only 16 years but, in that short time Cuban cinema moved through a period of intense debate surrounding the topic of gender and gender relations, with a number of films that dealt with the subject. What came next (the 'Special Period') was very different both politically and culturally as Cuban cinema was affected by various financial difficulties that meant the necessity for co-productions with foreign production companies and therefore a different set of rules applied in the making of films on the island.

Originality of methodology

This thesis combines two important elements of the Cuban Revolution: cinema and gender relations. In doing so it illustrates how, through the prism of gender relations, Cuban cinema is seen to express concerns with both the modern and the postmodern, in a process of transition. Other writers have

discussed both Cuban cinema and gender relations in Cuba, often writing about the same films as discussed in this thesis. The most influential author of Cuban cinema in the English language is Michael Chanan, whose work has proved invaluable in the creation of this thesis. It is sometimes difficult to move away from Chanan's work as it is brilliantly researched and well argued. However, he takes a largely historical approach to the films and often uses far more analysis of camera angles and cinematic techniques than used here. This thesis takes a different approach. By analysing the films using theory emanating from feminist film studies and feminist studies in general, it hopes to shed more light on the process of transition from modern to postmodern, but always within the specific frame of reference of gender relations; something that has not previously been done in such detail. It is hoped, therefore, that this thesis adds to the canon and can be read alongside Chanan's general historical analysis of Cuban cinema to provide the reader with a more specific analysis of its relation to the much debated topic of gender.

Introduction

The films, the hypothesis and the organisation of the thesis

Lucía is not a film about women; it's a film about society. But within that society, I chose the most vulnerable character, the one who is most transcendently affected at any given moment by contradictions and change...the effects of social transformations on a woman's life are more transparent. Because they are traditionally assigned to a submissive role, women have suffered more from society's contradictions and are thus more sensitive to them and more hungry for change. From this perspective, I feel that the female character has a great deal of dramatic potential through which I can express the entire social phenomenon I want to portray. This is a very personal and a very practical position. It has nothing to do with feminism per se.¹

(Burton and Alvear, 1978: 33)

El deber de un cineasta revolucionario es hacer la revolución en el cine.

(García Espinosa, 2000: 28)

Humberto Solás' classic film *Lucía* (1968) provoked the above quotation from the highly acclaimed Cuban film director, who died on 17 September, 2008.² It is cited in many studies of Cuban cinema as it encapsulates perfectly Cuban cinema's relationship to its portrayal of female characters.³

Marvin D'Lugo, for example, argues that the female figure has long been identified with the Revolution and 'with the emergence of a truly national cinema in Cuba, that is, with the expression of the narratives that embody and circulate the values of the revolutionary

¹Film-maker, and one of the founders of the New Latin American Cinema of the 1960s, Humberto Solás, quoted by Julianne Burton and Marta Alvear in an interview with the Cuban director, 'Every Point of Arrival is a Point of Departure', in *Jump Cut*, no. 19, December, pp. 32-33 (33). McGillivray cites a shorter Spanish version: 'Lucía no es un filme sobre mujeres; es un filme sobre la sociedad. Pero dentro de esa sociedad, escogí el carácter más vulnerable, aquél que es más afectado en cualquier momento por las contradicciones y el cambio...el carácter femenino tiene una gran relación con el potencial dramático, mediante el cual quiero expresar todo el fenómeno social que quiero reflejar. Esta es una posición muy personal y muy práctica que no tiene nada que ver con el feminismo per se' (1998: 25). However, the reference given by McGillivray ('Que es Lucía? Apuntes acerca del cine por Humberto Solás', in *Cine Cubano* 53: 20), is incorrect as nowhere in this article does this quotation appear. I have therefore used the more reliable English translation from Burton and Alvear.

²Solás's film *Lucía* is considered by world critics as one of the ten most important films in the history of Spanish American cinema. Some of his major credits as a director are: *Manuela* (1966), *Cecilia* (1981), *Un hombre de éxito* (1986), *El siglo de las luces* (1991), *Miel para Oshún* (2001) y *Barrio Cuba* (2005). From: *Cine cubano* online, no. 10 at:

<http://www.cubacine.cu/revistacinecubano/cap01.htm> (accessed 14/08/07).

³ See D'Lugo, 1997, p. 155; Spinella, 2004, p. 151; Chanan, 1985, pp. 225-6.

community', arguing that female characters in Cuban cinema of the Revolution often retain the one 'cardinal feature' that Solás designated as the essential feature of the female characters of *Lucía* – 'transparency'; i.e. that the female protagonists are 'seen through rather than seen' (1997: 155). He argues that during the first decade of the Revolution, in productions such as *Lucía*, *De cierta manera* (1974, Sara Gómez) and *Retrato de Teresa* (1979, Pastor Vega),⁴ 'the ethos associated with a revolutionary national identity was elaborated in fictional films through an insistent focus on the narrative destiny of female characters' (Ibid). He puts the 'revolutionary mythology' within the figure of the female arguing that it creates identification with the audience at a new level, in order 'to develop a form of address to, and identification by, the Cuban audience' (Ibid). He goes on to argue that between 1987 and 1997, a change occurred, in that images of women in Cuban cinema were used not only to embody the concept of nation (this has remained, he suggests) but also to express 'critical discourses about Cuban culture in general and the Revolution in particular...', and that this is an evolving process responding to changes in contemporary Cuban society (Ibid: 156).

Via the examination of six films that each address, to a greater or lesser extent, issues of gender in contemporary Cuban society between 1974 and 1990, this thesis will argue that the portrayal of aspects of gender relations in Cuban cinema developed along a progressive path from expressions of the modern to expressions of the postmodern, closely following a cultural transition in the nation as a whole. This does not mean that there occurred an absolute rejection of all the principles of what it meant to be 'modern', but that, in the latter half of the 1980s, expressions of the postmodern as described by Jameson and others, can be seen through the prism of gender relations in some of the films produced. The films to be examined are: *De cierta manera*, *Retrato de Teresa*, *Lejanía*, *Hasta cierto punto*, *¡Plaf! (o demasiado miedo a la vida)*, and *Mujer transparente*.

The choice of some of these films is immediately obvious. Chapter One theoretically and contextually introduces the notion of *machismo* in Cuban society, while Chapter Two

⁴ The last two of these films are analysed in depth in Chapters Two and Four respectively.

analyses two films that focus on this aspect of gender relations. *De cierta manera* debates *machismo* using an experimental cinematic approach. It is often cited as one of the films that encapsulates the Revolution's early, modernist approach to its treatment of gender and gender relations. I will argue that it formulates a dialectical discussion that powerfully challenges traditional notions of gender in Cuban society via an aesthetic mechanism that breaks with traditional narrative in a number of ways. *Hasta cierto punto* is a pessimistic account of attempts to change basic attitudes towards male-female relations in the Cuban population. In its portrayal of a central female character, who resists the forces of *machismo*, it is critical of *machista* values that exist in both the working class and the bourgeoisie; and in many ways pays homage to *De cierta manera*.

Chapter Three discusses the figure of the mother – its representation in film and in Cuban society – while Chapter Four highlights two different representations of the mother-figure. *Retrato de Teresa* is an examination of domestic marital relations and was highly controversial at the time. It poses many questions regarding relations between men and women in Cuban society (this time on a much more personal level, on the domestic front) and opens up many issues regarding the cultural representation of the mother-figure, not least from the point of view of sex and sexuality.

Lejanía, however, is not such an obvious choice in a study of the representation of gender, as it is a film about exile as much as it is about a mother and her son. But its inclusion is justified for two reasons. First, its representation of the character of the mother makes an interesting comparison with that of the mother in *Retrato de Teresa*, six years earlier, and second, in its bold aesthetic, it illustrates the beginnings of an emerging critical and resisting postmodernism that continued into the late 1980s and on into the early 1990s.

Whilst Chapter Five debates the emergence of postmodern culture in Cuba, I have discussed both *¡Plaf!* (*o demasiado miedo a la vida*) and *Mujer transparente* in Chapter Six. In *¡Plaf!*, the tradition of allegorising the nation through female characters is intentionally parodied in postmodern style, and the film is a direct critique of aspects of the Revolution, including the status of women within it; while *Mujer transparente* discusses women's

struggle for equality at one of the most significant moments in Cuba's history. It also revisits and reworks, in postmodern style, Humberto Solas' notion of the 'transparent woman' in Cuban revolutionary cinematic history.

The period of study, 1974-90, is self-evident. 1974 was the year in which *De cierta manera* was made, although it was not released until 1978 for reasons that will be made clear in Chapter Two. It was a highly significant film in Cuba's history and opens up a wealth of issues concerning gender, gender relations and *machismo* in Cuban society. It was made one year before the law on male-female relations, known as the *Código de Familia* was promulgated (to be discussed shortly), and the timespan between its production and its release - 1974-78- straddle a hugely important period in Cuban cultural history.

The years 1971-76 were defined by writer and cultural critic Ambrosio Fornet as the '*quinquenio gris*' of Cuban cultural production: a period of cultural authoritarianism stemming largely from closer political ties with the Soviet Union, when Cuba's politics became more dogmatic and, as Fornet commented, 'a vain attempt was made to implement, along with the Soviet economic model, a sort of *criollo* socialist realism' (Chanan, 2003: 313).⁵ These years were marked by a pathway of rigid ideological and cultural thought, and the 1971 Congress of Education and Culture proclaimed art as 'un arma de la Revolución', declaring such activities as homosexuality (and any others not in accord with the revolutionary process) as extravagant and counter-revolutionary. However, after the Ministry of Culture was set up in 1976, there began a process of cultural institutionalisation alongside the 'Institutionalisation' of the Revolution, with a huge expansion of cultural activities.⁶

⁵ Michael Chanan discusses the politics and history of ICAIC throughout his book on Cuban Cinema (1985 and 2004). For more on the politics of ICAIC see Quiros, 1996, pp. 279-93. For other general histories of ICAIC Burton, 1997, pp 123-142; Caballero y Del Río, 1995, pp. 102-115, and the official website of ICAIC at: www.cinecubano.com.

⁶ After the failure in 1970 to produce a targeted 10m tons of sugar, Cuba joined COMECON (Council for Mutual Economic Assistance – an economic organisation of Communist states) in 1972 and moved from a so-called 'moral economy' based on moral imperatives to work, to a more incentivised economy. This became formalised 'in the various moves of 1975-6' (Kapcia, 2000: 193) in the process of institutionalisation of the Revolution's practices, that included, in 1976, the formation of the Ministry of Culture, and the subsequent decentralisation of publishing houses in the world of literature.

As Michael Chanan remarks, in 1977, in a country with only 10 million people, ‘there were over 46,000 professional artistic performances that recorded an attendance of almost 12 million, and nearly 270,000 aficionado performances with an attendance of almost 48 million’ (1985: 16).

De cierta manera was made during the ‘*quinquenio gris*’ but was not released until after the process of institutionalisation had been put in place. This, combined with the introduction of the *Código de Familia* in 1975, and the fact that one of the central concerns of the film is the prevalence of *machismo* in Cuban revolutionary society, makes it the perfect place to start an examination of gender relations.

1990 is a very convenient point at which to end the study, as it was the year in which the final film to be discussed, *Mujer transparente*, was released. It is a film that pays much attention to Solás’ opening quotation and was supervised by the great director himself. It was also released shortly after the collapse of the Berlin Wall, a symbolic event that ushered in the collapse of the Soviet Union, provoking enormous changes in Cuban society. What came next (the ‘Special Period’) falls outside the remit of this thesis. The last two chapters of this thesis, however, deal with the emergence of postmodernism in Cuba and in Cuban cinema and, in this way, point towards the impending changes that were to occur after 1990.

One of the goals of this thesis is to illustrate how, through the prism of the gender debate presented on film, Cuban cinema both reflected and produced some of the central ideological concerns within the nation’s society during this period (1974-90). It will be possible to see, through the examination of six films of the period, how the gender debate both helps to create and, at the same time, makes reference to, more general cultural debates on the island. As such, the issues around gender explored through Cuban cinema can be seen as one of the most important cultural topics of this period.

The importance of cinema to the development of the Cuban Revolution cannot be overstated and the significance of the debate on gender and gender relations within it plays a crucial part in Cuba’s revolutionary cultural evolution. It is necessary, therefore, to consider how Cuban cinema developed its particular framework for expressing issues of gender on-

screen, and why such a topic became one of the most important areas of expression, from the inception of a Cuban national film institute until at least the early 1990s. A brief outline of the growth and progression of the Institute will serve to establish the context within which this thesis operates.

The Cuban Film Institute and the Gender Debate in Cuban Cinema

Historian, film-maker and film critic Michael Chanan provides a valuable insight into Cuban culture generally in his article, 'Cuba and Civil Society, or Why Cuban Intellectuals Are Talking about Gramsci'.⁷ In an examination of Cuban 'civil society', Chanan argues that 'Cuban society has gone through four phases since the Revolution of 1959, each corresponding to roughly a decade'.⁸ The 1960s, he argues, was the decade of revolutionary euphoria and 'direct democracy';⁹ the 1970s, the decade of institutionalisation and 'Sovietisation', when there was an evident move towards orthodox Marxism 'and the hegemony of Moscow';¹⁰ the 1980s, that of 'rectification', when such negative tendencies as inefficiency, absenteeism and corruption were attacked; and the 1990s, 'following the collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, and officially called the 'Special Period' – was the decade of '*desencanto* or *desconfianza*'.¹¹ Such generalised temporal divisions are obviously somewhat simplistic, but actually serve an examination of Cuban cinema very well indeed.

The Instituto Cubano del Arte e Industria Cinematográficos (ICAIC) or Cuban Film Institute, was the first cultural body to be set up by the revolutionary administration in March 1959, and was created in the whirlwind of revolutionary fervour that was sweeping Cuba and the rest of Latin America at the time. As John King argues, Cuba seemed like an exemplary

⁷ The essay, written in 2000, can be found at:
<http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/nepantla/v002/2.2chanan.html> (accessed 02/12/08).

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Chanan takes the term 'direct democracy' from Jean-Paul Sartre, C. Wright Mills, and Paul Baran, who all described the socio-political state of Cuba in this way in the 1960s. As Chanan states this was, 'a fair enough, though inadequate, description of a social system in embryonic form still trying to establish itself'. At:

<http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/nepantla/v002/2.2chanan.html> (accessed 02/12/08).

¹⁰ Ibid

¹¹ Ibid

solution that offered artists and intellectuals an attractive model for ‘fusing artistic and political vanguards’ at least until the ‘grim realities of the ‘70s’ (1990: 67) and ICAIC, even today, retains a virtual monopoly on cinematic production and distribution within the nation.¹²

Under its first president, Alfredo Guevara, ICAIC found it easy to become an organic and creative movement with film-makers free to be artistic and experimental. It became a school where the principle was to develop talent – ‘a revolutionary cultural project’ (García Espinosa, 2000a: 202). As such it has had a powerful and significant role to play in the creation and fostering of a revolutionary ideology, and became decisive in helping to unify the country, standing, as it did, in the vanguard of culture (Ibid).¹³ Although it has maintained a degree of autonomy from the state, it has always been very strongly linked to the search for and expression of a new, revolutionary, Cuban national identity.¹⁴

Since its inception, then, ICAIC has been the promoter of national cinema and, according to Cuban critic García Borrero, from a critical point of view, virtually nothing of value was made before 1959 (2001: 11): ‘...antes de 1959, Cuba produce un cine plagado de maracas, rumba, casinos, nightclubs, bailarinas (Álvarez, 1995: 114). Cuban spectators in the major cities were fed a diet largely consisting of Hollywood films. Those in the rural areas had no access to cinema at all.¹⁵

Thus, the increasingly Marxist Revolution made possible the expression of a new cinema that would be plural, diverse and aesthetically open to experimentation; counter to the

¹² Cinema in Cuba is not made entirely by ICAIC. As Juan Antonio García Borrero points out, films are also produced by the Estudios Cinematográficos de Televisión de las Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias (ECTVFAR); la Escuela Internacional de Cine y Televisión (EICTV), at San Antonio de los Baños, outsider Havana; los Estudios Cinematográficos de la Televisión (ECTV); el Taller de cine de la Asociación Hermanos Saíz (TCAHS), as well as via co-productions with other countries, and in small ‘cine-clubs’ (2001: 11). However, ICAIC has been the major power in Cuban cinema since its formation, its films having more national and international significance than any others. This thesis acknowledges that there is an alternative contribution to Cuba’s cinema history but only considers and analyses films produced by ICAIC. Analysis of Cuba’s ‘alternative’ cinematic production would itself make for an interesting full-length study.

¹³ The law that created ICAIC declared cinema an art and a body to serve the creation of a collective consciousness, able to contribute to the deepening of the revolutionary spirit. So, as Chanan argues, the creation of ICAIC was the creation of socialist cinema (1985: 18).

¹⁴ See: ‘The History of Cuban Cinema’ at: www.cinecubano.com/persona/titon.htm (accessed 25/02/02) and King, 1990: 149.

¹⁵ See: The History of the Cuban Film Industry – A Conversation with Julio García Espinosa at: www.stg.brown.edu/projects/projects.old/classes/mc166k/espinoza.html (accessed 13/08/02).

dominant codes and structures of Hollywood, and the literary codes of the nineteenth century that, as García Espinosa argues, force the spectator into a passive acceptance of the image viewed, rather than into a critical position (2000a: 205).

In the first few months of the Revolution, the larger cinemas, most of which were owned by large US corporations, were nationalised while the smaller ones became cooperatives under the government. This was the only way to guarantee the production and distribution of Cuban national cinema. To enable the rural population to watch films, mobile cinemas were taken to remote parts of the countryside where a variety of films (including Charlie Chaplin classics) were introduced to those that had never before seen them.¹⁶ John King quotes Fidel Castro: 'The work of the mobile cinemas is the most interesting experience in the formulation of a new public' (1990: 150).

ICAIC was set up because the Revolution's leaders understood, as did Lenin, the value of cinema in promoting the ideals of a new socialist movement.¹⁷ In essence ICAIC wanted to create a cinema with national characteristics. However, it would take nearly ten years before Cuban cinema asserted itself with the production in 1968 of the films *Memorias del subdesarrollo* and *Lucía* (García Espinosa, 2000: 198). Cuban cinema, García Espinosa asserts, arrived at modernity in the 1960s almost from nothing (Ibid: 8) and became a very important tool in developing a revolutionary consciousness. It helped transform a large majority of the Cuban people from a nation of viewers, dumbfounded by their first experience of cinematography, to that of active participants in a revolutionary process. A part of this process, as we shall see, included the eradication of certain negative tendencies, some of which, like *machismo* for example, are displayed in relations between men and women. The production of films, then, that presented these issues to an increasingly critical audience, became an important part of ICAIC's *raison d'être*.

¹⁶ Octavio Cortázar's 1967 short film *Por primera vez* illustrates the use of the mobile cinemas, and '...produced for its audience a vision of its own self-discovery as an audience' (Chanan, 1985: 14).

¹⁷ Michael Chanan comments that for Lenin it was film that helped develop the mission of the Soviet Union as Lenin said: 'for us, film is the most important of all the arts' (1985: 15). This is not simple propaganda, Chanan argues, but a way of mobilising energy towards a new way of life.

In line with Chanan's division of Cuban cultural periods into separate decades, the early years of ICAIC represent a period of experimentation, using various artistic styles and filmic content, in a search for an appropriate genre that might best serve the requirements of a national film institute firmly attached to the revolutionary process and searching for ways to express this new radicalisation of society. 'What happened in the 1960s was that the triumph of the Revolution completely recast civil society precisely because it radicalised the political domain in a manner that redefined the political subject and the character of citizenship'.¹⁸ The first president of ICAIC, Alfredo Guevara, was a college friend of Fidel Castro, and the early film-makers were Julio García Espinosa, Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, Jorge Haydu, Jorge Fraga, Néstor Almendros and Santiago Álvarez, amongst others. Both García Espinosa and Gutiérrez Alea had studied cinema in Rome and were influenced by the European avant-garde style of film-making and Italian neo-realism in particular.¹⁹

Thus, during the 1960s, a process of social revolution was being developed that could also be seen in the so-called 'Boom' of Latin American literature at the same time. But, although many aspects of Cuban cinema throughout the Sixties were extraordinary in their revolutionary aspirations, techniques and, indeed, results, the images of male-female relations produced in the popular films of this period often sit uncomfortably alongside this 'revolutionary' practice. It is questionable whether the cultural modernity that García Espinosa rightly posits as being combined with this sense of social revolution (a modernity stemming from economic growth and industrial development, derived from Marxism) stretched as far as the development of new and radical images of male-female relations that might have aided the drive towards egalitarian politics.

¹⁸ <http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/nepantla/v002/2.2chanan.html> (accessed 02/12/08).

¹⁹ In 1960, ICAIC made its first feature films, of which the first to be shown (though it was the second to be completed) was Gutiérrez Alea's *Historias de la revolución*, made in the Italian neo-realist style. 'The inspiration of Italian neo-realism came from the desire to expose the true face of the nation from behind the façade of development, to create the 'cinema of the humble' and discover on film the Italy of underdevelopment'. See: Jaskari, M., 'Tomás Gutiérrez Alea and the Post-Revolutionary Cuba'. At: www.helsinki.fi/hum/ibero/xaman/articulos/9711/9711_mj.html (accessed 21/02/06). Julio García Espinosa believes that the New Latin American Cinema movement of the 1950s and 1960s was heavily influenced by Italian neo-realism. He argues that it was a useful way of filming with few resources, no effects or stars. It offered a cinema of resistance and a spirit of change, but, ultimately, was limited in developing a new narration specific to the Cuban problematic (2000a: 203).

Films that take as one of their central concerns issues of gender relations, have formed a significant and disproportionate part of ICAIC's feature-film production. Indeed, Jean Stubbs believes that 'it is probably safe to say that hardly a single film has not addressed, in some way or another, changing gender relations within the Revolution' (1995: 3). This is a strong claim and has a great deal of truth in it, although the presentation of gender relations is often not the main objective of many Cuban films. However, such has been the ferocity of debate surrounding the subject throughout the Revolution (and particularly during the mid-1970s) that any film presenting any relations at all between men and women (and what film does not?) can be viewed with this debate in mind.

Catherine Benamou also believes the issue of gender has been fundamental to the development of a revolutionary society but questions whether issues of difference along lines of gender, race, or sexual preference have been adequately explored at an institutional level in Cuba or whether there should be more '*autonomous* spaces within which diverse subjectivities and identities need to be represented' (1999: 67). So, has Cuba been too concerned with its search for an independent 'cubanness' (a singular identity in defence of itself against cultural imperialism) that it has failed to consider sufficiently the various diverse spaces of difference that exist in a debate as wide and complex as that of gender? This is one of the central questions of this thesis.

Despite the revolutionary practices carried out at the level of form and construction, it can be argued that most of the films of the 1960s do not portray radical or novel images of gender relations. A brief outline of three of the most important films of the first decade of the Revolution will serve to present an initial idea of how gender relations were first dealt with in the new, radicalising Cuban cinema; and from here it will be possible to establish how these representations evolved through the 1970s and 1980s. If one considers the images of woman presented in these films, at a time in the history of Latin America when the cultural space was being increasingly shaped by new and exciting aesthetic forms and practices, perhaps the risks taken were subsumed by a desire for wholeness, oneness, in the creation of a Latin American sentimentality; a desire for a solution to the continent's problems that overlooked

the concerns of 'marginalised' groups, such as women. For it must be argued that, in cinema at least, women were left on the fringes, both in terms of production and, as we shall see now in the case of three Cuban films, where the image of Woman is concerned, in terms of reception.

A brief analysis of three of the most important films of the 1960s will serve to locate the relationship between Cuban cinema and its representations of gender relations and will provide a backdrop for the analysis of the films that are central to this study. If we take, for example, the film *Aventuras de Juan Quin Quin* (1967) by Julio García Espinosa, one of Cuba's most important film-makers and film theorists – and today head of the film school, Escuela Internacional de Cine y Televisión (EICTV) at San Antonio de Los Baños – it would appear that its highly experimental nature often subverts any attempt to display woman as anything other than a feminine object.

As Michael Chanan states, *Aventuras* was 'Cuban cinema's first fully accomplished experimental film' (1985: 209) and also a comedy. The film represents García Espinosa's attempt to unite pure entertainment with a revolutionary aesthetic and is a precursor to his essay on the development of a film style pertinent to the contemporary Cuban reality (written after the film was made), which is entitled 'Por un cine imperfecto'.²⁰ *Aventuras* is a parody of Hollywood cinema genres, this parody being designed to produce a highly artificial and comical aesthetic, with the viewer's attention being deliberately drawn to this artificiality and cinematic illusion.²¹

But the parody is often undermined by the film's apparent support (without the irony that is attached to the male characters) of conventional notions of female representation. As Taylor argues, there are areas of underdevelopment that the film still evades, and a straight reproduction of certain codes of behaviour (albeit tinged with an ironic aesthetic) is simply not enough to break with traditional codes. Where they appear, the women characters feature

²⁰ This essay will be discussed at length in Chapter One.

²¹ For a more detailed analysis of this film see: Taylor, A. M. At: <http://www.ejumpcut.org/archive/onlinessays/JC20folder/JuanQuinQuin.html> (accessed 05/12/08).

as asides, aids or confectionery for the revolutionary hero and others. If the truth of this film lies in its brilliantly funny ironic swipe at capitalist culture then a part of that truth is left out.²²

Before 1974, the most significant film to address issues of gender relations was Solás' *Lucía*. It is divided into three parts, each part being set during a significant time in Cuba's history.²³ In each of the parts (and in many other of Solás' films with a central female protagonist) the principal character is a woman whose personal life serves as a backdrop to a narrative that opens up questions about Cuban national identity at each significant historical moment. Like *Aventuras* it is a highly experimental film that is made using a variety of different styles and techniques and is 'one of the films that supports and defines the ideals of promoting a radical new vision' (Martin and Paddington, 2001: 2).²⁴

In Part One the character *Lucía* is finally driven to murder her lover, a man who represents the Spanish colonisation of Cuba. Here, 'Woman' and 'Nation' are fused, i.e. the female figure is mobilized to function as national allegory, and driven through circumstances to take up arms in a collective, hysterical moment of revenge against oppression. In Part Two, the *Lucía* joins the fight against dictator Machado in 1933, and develops a female solidarity with her factory colleagues, but is ultimately alienated by her lover and remains eternally trapped in a one-sided relationship with him, and marginalised by the processes of revolution. In Part Three, she becomes physically trapped by her jealous husband, who refuses to let her out of the house, only for the Revolution (in the form of her other female work colleagues who represent its drive to get women into the workforce) to rescue her from this traditional *machista* behaviour.

Although the film is replete with images of revolution and change (a revolution conducted by men), for the women in the film, the process of liberation is more one of 'evolution' than 'revolution' as many of the old principles appear very difficult to break. But

²² Ibid

²³ Part One is set in 1895 during the Wars of Independence, Part Two in 1932 during the overthrow of dictator Gerardo Machado, and Part Three in the 1960s in the first few years of the Revolution.

²⁴ For more on the aesthetics of *Lucía* see Chanan, 2004, pp. 275-288.

Lucía, unlike *Aventuras* is trying to develop possibilities for a new definition of gender relations within Cuban revolutionary society (even when it is accepted that this society is still loaded with patriarchal prejudice). Solás' film illustrates woman's position in an evolving culture, whereas García Espinosa presents ironic critiques of another society's filmic representations of women.²⁵

The most important Cuban film of the 1960s was *Memorias del subdesarrollo* (1968, Tomás Gutiérrez Alea). Although its central theme is not the debate on gender, some critics argue that it fails to address sufficiently the question of male-female relations in the new, revolutionary Cuba. Catherine Benamou, for example, argues that, although the treatment of women by the main character, Sergio, is criticised as pre-revolutionary decadence, 'the preclusion of an oppositional reading from a feminine viewpoint is due to its detainment in the audiovisual documentation of Sergio's conscious and preconscious experience' (1999: 68); and at no time does there exist a unity of women in any combined opposition to male forces. Women in *Memorias* have no 'agency' as Benamou puts it. She believes that there is no real critique of *machismo* in the film, and no real alternative to patriarchy. It is as if the criticism of Sergio is that he is not *macho* enough to belong to the new revolutionary order (Ibid).²⁶

The problem with all three films, from the point of view of developing a radical new vision of male-female relations, is that priority is given to ideology over subjectivity, as the female protagonists sit alongside men in the revolutionary processes observed.²⁷ The image of Woman is created always as secondary to the development of a (male) revolutionary purpose. Women then have to fit into and alongside that purpose, their definitions only being created in relation to it.

²⁵ For more on *Lucía* see Chanan, 2004, pp. 275-288.

²⁶ For various takes on *Memorias*... see: Chanan, 2004: pp. 288-302; Lesage at: <http://darkwing.uoregon.edu/~jlesage/Juliafolder/MemOfUnderdevt.html> (accessed 02/04/08); Sharman, 2007.

²⁷ Chapters Five and Six discuss the questioning of the very notion of subjectivity and the possibilities for its representation in film.

As the initial quotation reveals, Solás was interested in the parallel between the representation of women and the expression of Cuban national identity. His other films include *Manuela* (1966), in which a peasant woman is transformed into a revolutionary guerrilla fighter; *Cecilia* (1981), an adaptation of the novel *Cecila Valdes* by Cirilo Villaverde, and an attempt to reconstruct the past from a new standpoint;²⁸ and *Amada* (1983), a film about a bourgeois wife who falls in love with her cousin, a young idealist fighting against the Cuban government in 1914. Solás, then, developed the idea that the representation of female protagonists served well his concern with the projection of a new vision of Cuban society, be it an attempt to rewrite history or understand the present.

As the debate on male-female relations intensified in Cuba from the mid-1970s, so representations of this debate increased across the cultural spectrum. This coincided with the 'Institutionalisation' of the Revolution, discussed earlier.

The two most important films from this period for the purposes of this thesis are *De cierta manera* (1974) and *Retrato de Teresa* (1979) and both will be discussed in detail in Chapters Two and Four respectively. The 1970s can be split into two parts (1971-76 and 1976-80) with the production and release of *De cierta manera*, the first film to be examined in this thesis, creating a bridge between the two periods. With the failure of the sugar harvest in 1970 (a misguided attempt to produce 10 million tons of sugar due to the fact that the Soviets would buy it at pre-established, inflated prices, by diverting resources away from other industries and revolutionary efforts) and the Padilla affair,²⁹ there was a concerted attempt to redefine (or at least re-appraise) all artistic production. This is when, Julianne Burton argues, the process of defining and producing a national culture begins, with a reduction in the kinds of cinematic experimentation seen through the 1960s, in favour of moves towards more non-fiction features (1997: 131).

²⁸ See González, R. 'Some Historical Themes in Cuban Cinema'. At: www.cubaupdate.org/art32.htm (accessed 15/03/06).

²⁹ The poet Heberto Padilla (winner of the UNEAC prize in 1968) was arrested and imprisoned in 1971 for 28 days for criticising the government after he became disenchanted with the deepening associations with the USSR. He also lost his job on the newspaper, *Granma* (Chanan, 1983: 257).

But many of the changes were brought about through economic necessity rather than ideological priority. The lack of resources due to the US embargo, and the failure of the sugar harvest of 1970 reduced the money available to ICAIC and, as Chanan points out, there were 24 documentaries made in 1970 and only one 30-minute fiction film, plus one animation (1985: 256). In 1971, however, there were five fiction films produced, including José Massip's *Páginas del diario de José Martí*, *Los días del agua* (Manuel Octavio Gómez), and Gutiérrez Alea's *Una pelea cubana contra los demonios*; these helped to develop the anti-colonial, nationalistic intent of Cuban cinema at this time.³⁰

Historical films were prominent in the 1970s. Perhaps this points to a desire on the one hand to avoid commentary on contemporary events, or on the other hand to redefine and relocate Cuban history in the manner described by Chanan. *El otro Francisco* (1974, Sergio Giral) forms part of this historical reconstruction, along with Giral's other two features in the 1970s, *Rancheador* (1977) and *Maluala* (1979). The battle, then, was not only fought in the mountains and at Playa Girón, and subsequently on the international stage, but was also being fought in the cultural arena – but nowhere more visibly than in the cinemas. Both Burton and John Hess argue that the 1970s were marked by artistic decline in an 'attempt to define and produce a people's culture' (Burton, 1997: 131), as ICAIC lost a degree of the autonomy it had experienced during the 'golden era' of the 1960s. So it does appear that both political necessity and socialist practice were evident in the film-makers' choice of genre and topic at least in the early part of the 1970s as the film *El hombre de Maisinicú* (1973) by Manuel Pérez would illustrate, as it deals with a struggle against CIA-backed banditry in the years immediately after 1959.

³⁰ Many of the documentaries produced in the early 1970s had clear and evident overtones of the philosophies of José Martí, illustrating a desire to forge a new identity for Cuba through the medium of film – an attempt to relocate the nation away from its colonial past. In feature films too, this process is evident. *Páginas del diario de José Martí* is an expressionistic homage to the Cuban hero, a 'truly hallucinatory film' as Chanan argues (1985: 258) while *Una pelea cubana contra los demonios* forms part of what Chanan calls 'cine rescate' in its attempt to rescue the image of Cuba from its colonial past (Ibid). *Los días del agua* by Manuel Octavio Gómez also deals with a reformulation of Cuban identity, using a real historic event of the 1930s to point to the ease with which ordinary people can be exploited by political and religious opportunism.

Timothy Barnard also asserts that, after a period of experimentation in the 1960s, the period of the late 1960s and the 1970s saw an increase in historical themes being passed through ICAIC for fear of reprisals if contemporary subjects were dealt with. He cites *Ustedes tienen la palabra* (1974), by Manuel Octavio Gómez, a story of corruption and opportunism told in flashback and contrasted with present day revolutionary unity, and *Una pelea cubana contra los demonios* by Gutiérrez Alea, that recreates an account of religious fanaticism in 1672.

Both juxtapose historical and contemporary images in a re-positioning of Cuban history that has definite political overtones (1997: 149). These films were entirely necessary in establishing a new and more meaningful perception of history for the Cuban people and, as Barnard comments, they are formal representations of an ideology of intervening in history in order to create a need for the present (Ibid: 153). The previous carriers of the cinematic monopoly in Cuba had forged their own version both of history and of a contemporary reality largely erroneous or irrelevant to the majority of Cubans, but now a different interpretation of the past was being created.

Michael Myerson makes a good point concerning the lack of contemporary criticism in films of the 1970s. He argues that, while the documentaries dealt with a present day reality, Cuban feature films attempted to rewrite Cuba's negative and badly portrayed history, not because the film-makers feared government reprisals but because they themselves were revolutionaries, many, committed communists, and they did not want to weaken the position of the Revolution by making anything overly critical; and also because they did not want to make simple propaganda in favour of the Revolution as this was detrimental to the artistic values of ICAIC. The reason that they did not deal with contemporary subjects in feature films (such as gender relations) was largely because in the first years it was too soon to critically observe contemporary reality in fictional form – an analysis that is much better observed at a temporal distance. Later, particularly in the 1990s, however, contemporary reality was dealt with in fiction largely because the historical rewriting process had been

underway for some time and the themes (and forms) had been overused and overplayed (1973: 84).

One film during the 1970s that does present some criticism of a contemporary reality and could well have been included in this thesis, however, is Manuel Octavio Gómez's, *Una mujer, un hombre, una ciudad* (1973). Complex and with a contemporary focus, it is a film that explores the physical modernisation of Cuba via the interactions between architects, male and female, who are constructing *las casas del futuro* and, as Chanan states, 'takes the role of women very seriously' (2004: 275). However, an analysis is not included in this thesis as space does not allow it. All six of the other films discussed pay far more attention to issues of gender *per se* and *Una mujer, un hombre, una ciudad* has a tendency to idealise the figure of the 'New Woman' of the Revolution as the 'model imagined by men' (Ibid).

But, out of the so-called *quinquenio gris* of the early to mid-1970s, came *De cierta manera*, a film regarded by many to be one of the most important in Cuba's cinema history and that, as Caballero and Del Río say, started the move, in the latter part of the 1970s, towards popular cinema and certainly started the first wave of anti-*machista* films that appeared in the 1980s (1995: 104). This film will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Two and is certainly one of the most important films regarding the representation of male-female relations to ever come out of Cuba – not least because it still remains the only feature film from ICAIC to have been made by a Cuban woman.

The early part of the 1970s was a confusing and slightly troubled time for ICAIC, finding its feet after the heady experimentalism of the 1960s but not knowing in which particular direction to step next. Michael Chanan delves into this rather more deeply in the second edition of his book on Cuban cinema, commenting that the 1970s saw the production of several different genres of films but with a conspicuous absence of contemporary subjects. However, this makes for an extremely interesting period in Cuba's cinematic history – some would say more interesting than in the more prolific days of the 1980s, when production rose dramatically but, thematically, there was perhaps less diversity and a move towards more popular cinema.

The end of the 1970s was a significant point in the history of Cuban cinema, with the launch of the first Festival of New Latin American Cinema in Havana, a festival that has grown every year to become the most important event in the calendar for Latin American and Cuban cinema. Seen as a promotion of the concepts delineated by Latin American film theorists such as Jorge Sanjinés, Julio García Espinosa, Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino, the festival can be described as a post-colonial offensive against the Hollywood/Europe monopoly that cannot deal with the type of repression suffered by Latin American countries.

But, if the 1980s kicked off positively with an affirmation of all that was good in Latin American cinema, ICAIC was soon to be grappling with a polemic that saw the removal of Alfredo Guevara as president. It all revolved around the attempt to make a bigbudget spectacular in order to sell around the world. Guevara put a whole year's budget into the making of *Cecilia*, directed by Humberto Solás. Adapted from Cirilo Villaverde's well-known and loved nineteenth-century novel *Cecilia Valdés*, the film failed as it drifted markedly from the original story thereby upsetting, as Chanan remarks, 'both the traditionalist and popular audiences' (2004: 388). Guevara was dismissed as president and replaced by García Espinosa, although neither the Institute nor Solás himself suffered to any degree, both getting on with the job of making more films; perhaps illustrating the extent to which ICAIC was seen at the time as an important part of Cuba's cultural make-up and something that needed to be reformed rather than removed, with artistic experimentation and risk-taking still being seen as an essential duty of the film-maker. With García Espinosa as president, ICAIC set about mending the damage done by the after-effects of *Cecilia*.

This period of the Cuban Revolution was marked by the Mariel exodus of 1980 when 120,000 people were allowed by the Cuban government to leave the country in a makeshift flotilla to Miami after a period of discontent with the Cuban economy. So, in a moment of political instability, both within ICAIC and the nation as a whole, how would García Espinosa handle the running of one of the government's most important and influential cultural bodies? He began by increasing production using low budgets, time restraints and fresh creative

blood, although one of the first films under his jurisdiction, *Amada* (1983), was directed by the experienced Solás. *Amada* is another historical drama and love story, set in 1928 and is interesting for its psychological study of the main protagonist and for its optimistic ending, with the people taking to the streets in protest at the worsening economic situation in Cuba.

But perhaps the most influential film of the early 1980s is *Hasta cierto punto* (1983), by Tomás Gutiérrez Alea which, as García Osuna states, ‘gives a pessimistic account of the effort by the government to change basic attitudes in the population’ (2003: 105). A film about sexism, *machismo* and the difficulty of changing entrenched social codes, it is partly a homage to Sara Gómez’s *De cierta manera*, and employs similar techniques in mixing documentary and fiction, but is also a critique of ICAIC itself, as we shall see in its detailed examination in Chapter Two.

Gutiérrez Alea had recently written his own Marxist theory on cinema called *Dialéctica del espectador*, in 1982, arguing that film should create a shift from everyday reality to fictional reality, where one informs the other, ‘a kind of formal credo of an independent Marxist intellectual’ (Chanan, 2004: 407). This is discussed further in Chapter One, but in his book Gutiérrez Alea profoundly problematises the art of the film-maker, arguing that the old juxtaposition of form and content is far too simplistic to be relevant to a Cuban reality.

At the beginning of the 1980s, then, it was García Espinosa’s plan to move away from the experimentalism of the Sixties and the historical recovery of the 1970s, to make more popular (rather than populist) films; popular in the sense that they dealt with popular issues (such as gender relations). In this sense the films of the 1980s were most certainly aimed at producing a dialogue with the spectator. *Se permuta* (1983, Juan Carlos Tabío) is a contemporary comedy about the difficulty of moving house in Havana, as a single mother desires to move upmarket to a better neighbourhood. The film was seen by more than two million people in Cuba (with a population of 11 million) and was a commercial hit, being both funny and critical of a contemporary reality, easily identified by the audience (Chanan, 2003: 411). The following year, Rolando Díaz released his first feature, *Los pájaros tirándole a la escopeta* that drew an audience of nearly three million and again was an acclaimed hit

(Ibid). Díaz's film is a generational comedy and again critical of a modern-day reality, hence its popularity. Both films have simple and fairly traditional narrative structures, using popular and contemporary themes.

García Espinosa's policies were appearing to work and eight feature films were released in 1984 (Ibid: 413). During the 1980s, there were approximately 40 features produced by ICAIC that covered a variety of film genres, from historical drama (e.g. *Cecilia*) to contemporary social comedy (e.g. *Se permuta*, *Los pájaros tirándole a la escopeta*), historical satire (e.g. *Un hombre de éxito*, 1986, Humberto Solás), and social commentary (e.g. *Habanera*, 1984, Pastor Vega, and *Lejanía*, Jesús Díaz, 1985). As Davies states, at this point in its history ICAIC seemed to be 'broadening its appeal at the expense of its thematic and linguistic audacity' (1997: 346).

Thus, there was a renewal in style and content in the 1980s that produced a number of films critical of a contemporary reality. Some, like *Los pájaros tirándole a la escopeta*, could have been included in this thesis in far more detail but, again, space does not permit it as around the same time, both *Hasta cierto punto* and *Lejanía* were released. Both of these last two films are extremely important regarding gender relations and could not have been replaced. The important thing about the films *Se permuta* and *Los pájaros* though, is that they opened the way for topical Cuban comedy because they attack bad habits under socialism, and are contemporary and immediate (Paranagua, 1988: 91-93); and they prepared the ground for the production of the best of all the social comedies in the 1980s, *¡Plaf!*, that is analysed in detail in Chapter Six.

Habanera is also a film that could figure in any discussion of gender relations in Cuban cinema as it deals with a woman's desire, her psychological introspection and how she can be incorporated into the revolutionary process (Caballero y Del Río, 1995: 104), while *Otra mujer* (1986, Daniel Díaz Torres) portrays a couple's conflict and masculine infidelity (Paranagua, 1988: 91).

Lejanía, that is about exile and the relationship between an émigré mother and her son, was one of the most interesting films to come out of this period during the mid-1980s and is

discussed at length in Chapter Four. Later, in 1988, *¡Plaf!*, would set out to parody the very idea of using female characters to represent the nation.

What is evident from this period are the number of films dealing with social concerns (generational conflict, the pain of exile, housing problems, inter-marital relations etc), attributed by some observers to the maturation of new film-makers, uninhibited by the necessity of recreating a new history for Cuba, and with the desire to question and even criticise aspects of the Revolution (Aufderheide, 1989: 498). I have chosen *Hasta cierto punto*, *Lejanía*, *¡Plaf!* and *Mujer transparente* from this period as I feel they best give a sense of the overall changes occurring in ICAIC over this time and, indeed, in Cuban culture as a whole. We can witness, in this maturation of film-makers, through the prism of male-female relations, an evident move from expressions of the modern - in support of the relatively young revolutionary process - in films like *De cierta manera*, or *Retrato de Teresa*, for example, to expressions of postmodernism; which cast a critical and questioning eye over many aspects of the Marxist revolutionary project in some of the films of the late 1980s, including *¡Plaf!* and *Mujer transparente*. Comedy was one of the genres used to make this type of critical social commentary, illustrating a light-hearted way of handling societal problems.³¹

In 1986, as the economy suffered increasingly from the tightening US blockade, and the Soviet Union entered into *perestroika* and *glasnost*, Cuba's period called the 'Rectification of Past Errors and Negative Tendencies' (Kapcia, 2008: 42) began. This was a process of 'deep reassessment' (Ibid) that included an austerity programme, the reduction of permits given for private businesses (with a corresponding increase in the enticement of foreign investment in cooperation with the Cuban government), a denunciation of the USSR's 'betrayal of Marxism-Leninism', and an attempt to reinvigorate *conciencia* via an ideological purification of the population (Bunck, 1994: 18). As Julie Bunck points out, at the Third Party Congress in 1986, Castro called for a rebirth of 'consciousness, a communist spirit, a revolutionary will'

³¹ This comedy turned more satirical in the early 1990s and took one step too many as far as the authorities were concerned with the release of *Alicia en el pueblo de maravillas* by Daniel Díaz Torres, a 'scathingly satirical' film 'about the society created by Castro's revolution' (García Osuna, 2003: 53), that was pulled from the cinemas after its first screening.

(Ibid). In order to make ICAIC more economically efficient, García Espinosa split the institution into three *grupos de creación* that had their own separate production processes, each under the control of a supervisory director. With increased production, no single person could oversee the entire schedule in one year and so this appeared to be a sensible move, especially as each group would be headed by an experienced film-maker who would therefore concentrate on the artistic merits of the films he supervised, rather than on budget restrictions. Each group would therefore have control over itself thus allowing for, as Chanan points out, a more flexible process (2004: 429-30).

At the end of the 1980s came a film that, this thesis argues, embodies Cuban cinema's entry into the postmodern era through its treatment of issues of gender and gender relations, and ushered in the transition to the 'Special Period' as world communism collapsed. Under the guidance of Humberto Solás' creative group, the film *Mujer transparente*, an assemblage of five short films each by a different director, reworks and reinvents Cuban cinema's approach to issues of gender. Contemporary and with a documentary feel, the five shorts deal with various aspects of women's lives in 1980s Cuba (male-female relationships, self-esteem, hopes for the future, non-conformity and relationships with friends). The film as a whole explores themes that are extremely sensitive to a Cuban political and human sensibility and portrays controversial episodes surrounding the relationship between Cubans living on the island and Cubans abroad. It is discussed at length in Chapter Six and concludes the film analyses in this thesis.

Women and Gender in Cuba

In any study of gender and male-female relations, a major focus will be on the position and role of women in the society to which it refers. This thesis provides no exception to this and asserts that it is important to explore the position of women in Cuban society in order to provide a socio-historical backdrop to the examination of how gender issues are presented on the big screen. If, as García Espinosa argues, the project of human emancipation characterises modernity (García Espinosa, 2000a: 201), then it will be interesting to analyse whether or not

Cuban cinema provides evidence of such emancipation through a period of rapid modernisation in Cuba's history.

Cuba has been and continues to be a type of social laboratory in the way that it has undertaken, for a number of generations, multiple economic and social transformations. Amongst these, the incorporation of women into all aspects of the revolutionary process has been one of the most important. To that end, the Cuban Women's Federation, the *Federación de Mujeres Cubanas* (FMC) was set up in 1961, led by Vilma Espín, wife of Raúl Castro, and has always been seen as part of the revolutionary vanguard.³²

Since the triumph of the 1959 Revolution, Cuban society has been centred on the notion of *solidaridad*. Solidarity for Cuban society is the basic principle of human co-existence, the opposite of individualism that is seen as simply egotism. Cuban women have been seen as essential contributors to the demands of the Revolution. Yolanda Ferrer, Secretary General of the Federation of Cuban Women (FMC), comments:

Nuestro papel en la sociedad es contribuir a hacer realidad en todos los ámbitos y a todos los niveles, el ejército pleno de la igualdad de la mujer... trabajar por el fortalecimiento de la familia...y defender esta Revolución que desde su triunfo se situó como objetivo de especial importancia enaltecer a la mujer y garantizar que ocupará el lugar que le corresponde en la vida nacional.

(Ferrer, 1998, no page numbers)

Before 1959, as Bunck asserts, going back as far as the early 1930s, women in Cuba compared well in status with other Latin American countries. They received the vote in 1934 before all but Uruguay, Brazil and Ecuador. There were similar numbers of female and male students between the ages of five and 15, and literacy levels for women were higher than men at around 79 per cent (only Argentina had a higher female literacy rate). More women worked outside the home than in most other Latin American nations. They were elected to the House of Representatives and the Senate, were mayors, judges, cabinet members, and local

³² For a more detailed history of the FMC see Azicri, 1998, pp. 457-471; McCaughan, 1998 at: <http://168.96.200.17/ar/libros/lasa98/McCaughan2.pdf> (accessed 28/11/08); and the website of the FMC at: www.muieres.cubaweb.cu.

councillors. The 1940 Constitution, which prohibited discrimination and called for equal pay, was one of the most progressive in the western hemisphere regarding women's rights. But, she comments, there were certain inequalities, and women were far from equal in terms of the power wielded in the governing of the state, and they were usually relegated to subordinate roles (1994: 89). There was an authoritarian and patriarchal family structure that was a product of the Hispanic legacy and highly influential, especially in the rural areas that made up more than 43 per cent of the population. Infidelity amongst men was accepted but not tolerated amongst women. *Machismo* was seen as a good quality in this society – 'a Latin notion of male superiority and aggressiveness demonstrated by virility, strength, confidence, courage, and power. Young girls were expected to be gracious, attractive, retiring, virtuous, and virgin' (Ibid: 91).³³ Women only made up some 17 per cent of the labour force in 1959, the majority of these working in traditionally female occupations such as nursing, teaching and domestic service (Ibid).

After 1 January 1959 the majority of the female population of Cuba supported the Revolution, as the promotion of women into the public domain was an evident goal of the Castro government. As Espín commented in 1987:

En 1959, el primer año de la Revolución, nosotros sentimos con mucha fuerza la presión de las mujeres que deseaban unirse, organizarse para participar mejor en las tareas de la Revolución.

(Espín, 1990: 90)

The formation of the FMC came about without a preconceived structure or design programme, only with the will to defend and participate in a revolutionary process to create a better society for everyone. Thus, the FMC does not strive only for the furthering of the female cause but does so within the confines of the revolutionary process. As Max Azicri argues, the dominant concept of the 'liberation' of women has a different meaning in Cuba from that in the USA or Europe as concepts such as 'status-seeking and achievement orientation or some kind of hard-core individualism...' are rejected; and instead this

³³ Chapter One deals in depth with *machismo* in Cuban society to theoretically introduce two films that approach the subject, *De cierta manera* and *Hasta cierto punto*.

‘liberation’ is developed through ‘the act of being freed from bourgeois, capitalistic domination’ (1998: 457) within the auspices of the Revolution. ‘Rather than fighting the government for recognition of their demands, Cuban women have struggled for their emancipation, and scored substantive gains, within the parameters of a socialist society whose goals are actually prescribed by an almost all-male leadership’ (Ibid).

So the government works alongside the FMC and at the same time expects the FMC to in turn comply with certain modernising policies decided by the government. For Vilma Espín, what has been of most importance to the FMC is obtaining parity with men within the revolutionary process.

...el mayor aporte de la Federación es haber contribuido decisivamente a la transformación del pensamiento y la vida de las mujeres cubanas, haber cambiado radicalmente su situación social, haber iniciado el proceso complejo de reconceptualizar los roles sociales y familiares y desempeñar por las mujeres en la sociedad que estamos construyendo, comenzando a crear las bases económicas, culturales, jurídicas y sociales necesarias para asegurar la igualdad de oportunidades y posibilidades a hombres y mujeres y así impulsar el pleno ejercicio de sus derechos a la igualdad social.

(Ferrer, 1998a: 3)

The Federation sees itself as struggling alongside men, rather than against them, to arrive at the transformation of both women and the world in which they live. Theirs is a popular brand of feminism, a concentration on the contribution of women to the process of changing their disadvantageous position and removing age-old negative traits concerning gender issues, in order to participate in and defend the Revolution and its leaders. ‘...Fidel ha estado siempre, sistemáticamente, planteando con mucha fuerza la necesidad de que estos rasgos se borren en nuestra sociedad’ (Ferrer, 1998a: 16).

Some of the achievements of the FMC have been impressive and it is important to analyse the most relevant ways in which the situation of women in Cuba has been advanced in the last four decades, at the same time as demonstrating how a patriarchal culture has been perpetuated and has therefore provided points of detainment to this social progress.

In the first years of the Revolution, the idea of the liberation or emancipation of women was deliberately not discussed. However, since 1959:

(...) se habían establecido, a nivel gubernamental, políticas generales y sectoriales en correspondencia con la estrategia cubana de desarrollo económico y social que incluía como un derecho inalienable de las mujeres, participar en la vida económica, política, cultural y social del país, en igualdad de oportunidades y posibilidades que los hombres.³⁴

The FMC from its beginnings assumed the role of changing the discriminatory mentality against women as well as consolidating them as a force of civil transformation. In 1961 the FMC had about 17,000 members, a number that grew to approximately three million by the 1990s (Leiner, 1994: 62); and it constitutes a Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) that plays a decisive role in the recuperation of female dignity, by both making women conscious of their rights and responsibilities in the construction of a new society and making it possible for them to be integrated into the economic and political structures of the nation.

Amongst its most significant actions can be found: the creation of objective conditions for the relief of domestic duties and responsibilities; the development of a wide educative campaign to confront social, familial and individual conflicts that prevent or halt the presence of women in public life; the pushing forward of cultural programmes that encourage women into more complex tasks; and the incorporation of women into the economic life of the country, diversifying their roles outside of the role of housewife.³⁵

These actions allegedly allow women access to work and to decision-making, and they promote the attempt to develop a non-sexist society. However, it is worth stating here that the Revolution was conceived in such a way as to incorporate women into a masculine world and even the complete validation of women into such a world remained and, as we shall see, still

³⁴ FMC (1996), 'Las cubanas de Beijing al 2000. Conferencia ofrecida por Vilma Espín. III Congreso. Ciudad de La Habana', p. 2.

³⁵ For example the ministry of work not only overcame any restrictions to access for women to traditionally masculine jobs, but promoted regulations that actively favoured the incorporation of women, protecting their rights and guaranteeing equality of opportunity and remuneration. Work legislation did not accept any discrimination whatsoever regarding salaries, promotions etc. Also, the creation of creche's ('*circulos infantiles*') in 1961 and the system of semi-boardings schools are decisive elements in the massification of the incorporation of women into the public life of work (Abreu, 2006: 2-5).

remains to be realised. The FMC has always been, ultimately, responsible to the Communist Party. It has always been state-funded with minimal membership dues. As Bunck argues, there must be serious questions asked about whether women's voices were ever heard properly. 'This government support provided the FMC with a degree of legitimacy, and authority, over women' (1994: 93).

This study will argue that women are seen in Cuba as a body apart, distinct from the male population. For example the magazine produced by the FMC, *Mujeres*, makes a comment on the 1997 Communist Party congress:

Por ello concebimos este congreso como el mayor acicate para fortalecer la participación de los obreros, cooperativistas, campesinos, jubilados y particularmente de la mujer cubana, heroína indiscutible del Período Especial, en el desarrollo de la economía, la defensa y de nuestra democracia socialista.

(*Mujeres*, 1998: 24)

The reference to women being classed alongside the most marginalised groups in society can be read in different ways; as an acceptance of the low level of regard in which women are held, along with the knowledge that this must change rapidly, or as evidence of the nature of a paternalistic, hierarchical order. It could, perhaps, even be interpreted as the belief and acceptance within Cuban society that men and women are truly different and that this difference should be celebrated. The fact that this comment was made in a magazine written by a body that serves to protect the rights of women nearly 40 years after the triumph of the Revolution points to the latter. But does this acceptance of difference have negative overtones, whereby the upholding of it could be used against women to further the cause of a patriarchal order? This is one of the problems that I hope to tease out in the analysis of some of the films in this thesis.

One of the problems that could arise in an acceptance of difference is that the social mores of a *machista* tradition could continue in a society that is continually trying to promote egalitarian principles. This possible contradiction is illustrated in the following quote from the magazine *Mujeres*:

Y es que desde los días del Moncada y luego en la sierra y la lucha clandestina, Fidel defendió el derecho de la mujer a participar como una combatiente más, a pesar de resquemores e incluso incompreensión de muchos guerrilleros.

(*Mujeres*, 1998: 30)

Fidel Castro himself has called the struggle for female equality the 'revolution within the Revolution' (Stone, 1981: 48)³⁶ and has spoken of their 'participation' in the great struggle against capitalism and the West. As Castro said in 1962:

Las mujeres dentro de la sociedad tienen intereses que son comunes a todos los miembros de la sociedad; pero tienen también intereses que son propios de las mujeres. Sobre todo, cuando se trata de crear una sociedad distinta, de organizar un mundo mejor para todos los seres humanos, las mujeres tienen intereses muy grandes en ese esfuerzo, porque, entre otras cosas, la mujer constituye un sector que en el mundo capitalista en que vivíamos estaba discriminado. En el mundo que estamos construyendo, es necesario que desaparezca todo vestigio de discriminación de la mujer.

(*Mujeres*, 1998: 3)

But this paternalistic standpoint has not gone completely unnoticed by the FMC:

Hoy es innegable el protagonismo de las cubanas en las principales esferas de la vida del país, aunque la lucha por eliminar los rezagos de la cultura patriarcal tanto en el ámbito del público como de lo privado continúa de acuerdo con las nuevas condiciones.

(*Mujeres*, 1998: 21)

The FMC is therefore aware of the necessity for change to more than simply the role that women play in Cuban society, but also to modes of thought and behaviour. Many of these changes occurred in the 1970s, an important decade for the FMC, as important laws were created that transformed the juridical situation of women and eliminated injustices exclusively derived from the condition of gender. Such reforms included the *Ley de Maternidad* (1974), *Código de la Familia* (1975), *Ley de Protección e higiene del trabajo* (1977), *Ley de Seguridad Social y Código Penal* (1979).

³⁶ Castro made this comment at a speech at the closing of the Fifth National Plenary of the FMC, in 1966. The whole speech is translated into English in Stone, 1981: 48-54.

Important to the general debate on gender relations in Cuba from the mid-1970s was the *Código de la Familia* ('Family Code') that was created in order to try and legislate for equality of the sexes within the home; an extremely bold attempt at taking the socialist Revolution into the private sphere. Symbolically presented to the president of the FMC, Vilma Espín, in the International Year of the Woman (1975) on 8 March ('Women's Day'), it was set up to formally present the 'rights and duties of husband and wife', where marriage must be underpinned by full equality and demands loyalty, consideration, respect and mutual help (Azicri, 1989: 458). The care of the family and the upbringing of the children should be shared 'according to principles of socialist morality' (Ibid). According to Julianne Burton, the code had three principal aims in mind: to preserve and strengthen family ties, to transfer some of the housework duties to the father, and to increase citizen participation in government politics (1994: 108). Designed, as Azicri argues, to counter traditional attitudes rooted in cultural values (attitudes such as male chauvinism), part of the code included legislation to increase the collectivisation of domestic duties. '...if one of them (husband or wife) only contributes by working at home and caring for the children, the other partner must contribute to this support alone, without prejudice to his duty of cooperating in the above mentioned work and care' (1989: 468).

This came in response to the many complaints by women that the Revolution's desire to enable women to enter the workplace on an equal footing with men had simply created what was known as the 'double-shift': the idea that, although women were now able to go to work, they still were largely responsible for the maintenance of the home, as men were not prepared to change traditional patterns of behaviour in the private sphere.

The Cuban constitution in Article 44 of Chapter VI on equality, states:

...el Estado garantiza que se ofrezcan a la mujer las mismas oportunidades y posibilidades que al hombre, a fin de lograr su plena participación en el desarrollo del país...La mujer y el hombre gozan de iguales derechos en lo económico, político, cultural, social y familiar...El Estado se esfuerza por crear las condiciones que propicien la realización del principio de igualdad.

(*Constitución de la República de Cuba*, 1992: 28)

Social policies were also put in place to promote and push forward the strategies in favour of women's rights, such as the creation of the Comisión de Atención a la Niñez, la Juventud y la Igualdad de Derechos de la Mujer in la Asamblea Nacional del Poder Popular, the Centro Nacional de Educación Sexual, and the Comisiones de Prevención y Atención Social y la Comisión de Empleo Femenino (Abreu, 2006: 12).

The adopted health strategy is another element that has favoured the development of equitable gender conditions, as the majority of the population has free access to these services. Health protection programmes have been implemented. Sexual health and reproductive services are guaranteed and maternal mortality is 22 per 100,000 births (Ibid). Women receive tests for cervical uterine cancer and there is special attention paid to child maternity with el Programa de Maternidad y Paternidad Consciente, as well as programmes for the prevention of HIV and AIDS. In addition to this, abortion is considered a fundamental right. As Dr Carlos Dotres, Minister for Public Health, said: 'Quisiera comentar que el aborto es un derecho de la mujer: es inhumano que ella tenga que parir hijos que no desea o que, por diversas circunstancias, no puede tener' (Ferrer, 1998a: 11).

Cuba has had particular successes in the incorporation of women into socio-economic life, due to the literacy programmes and access to free education. Women make up 49.9 per cent of the total population of 11 million with a life expectancy of 77.6 years (Ibid). In 1997 the participation of women in the civil state sector was 42.5 per cent and in the private sector 22.9 per cent. Women constituted 66.6 per cent of technicians and professionals and 70 per cent of education workers (Fernández, 2000: 67). They occupied 31 per cent of management posts in the state economy, 27.6 per cent of parliamentary positions, 34.6 per cent of managers in the judicial system, 61 per cent of finance workers, 49 per cent of professional judges and 47 per cent of magistrates of the Supreme Tribunal (Alvarez, 2000: 126).

However, it cannot be said that the actions of the FMC or of the political environment in general, with respect to women's situation or gender issues in Cuba, were inspired in any conscious way by a theory of gender or feminism. It was not until the II FMC Congress of 1975 that the terminology of equality started to be used in conjunction with debates on

notions of stereotypes and prejudices derived from the condition of gender. Studies of gender began to develop in a rudimentary and informal fashion in the second half of the 1980s, and more intensely from the 1990s as a natural development of macro-social demands that see it as necessary to change the position of women to not only transform their place in society but to transform society itself (Núñez, 2001: no page numbers). The basic motivation for promoting studies of gender has been the desire for social justice against the discrimination of which women and homosexuals were the main objects, at the same time as being a scientific imperative to understand more fully the objects of study. As Reynier Abreu argues, there has been confusion, prejudice, misunderstanding and resistance with respect to feminism and feminist theory and to the perspective of gender that has emanated from some of the most prominent of Cuban intellectuals who tackle the problem (Abreu, 2006: no page numbers). However, various events have gradually changed this environment for the better. According to Núñez, the development and presence of Cuban women in all aspects of society became much more evident from around 1985-6 (Núñez, 2001: no page numbers).

It was at this time (1986), that the Third Congress of the Communist Party put forward the need to promote management positions for women, the black population and young people as part of the Rectification Campaign. In this process, an economic, political and social restructuring took place within the socialist project and which, in the opinion of Jorge Luis Acanda, ‘marcaron nuevos espacios, prioridades, tácticas y estructuras, y que recibieron una nueva dirección tras la desaparición de la Unión Soviética’ (Acanda, 1996, no page numbers). He continues:

Todo ello provocó la existencia en Cuba, a partir de estos años, de una percepción generalizada, en todos los niveles y sectores sociales, sobre la necesidad de transformaciones. La discusión se estableció en torno a cómo entender las dimensiones, objetivos y dirección de las mismas.

(Ibid)

As Catherine Davies comments, during the period of rectification, it was recognised that Marxism had to be refocused to encompass feminism. Fidel Castro declared in the Third Party

Congress, 1986, that efforts to correct 'historical injustices' such as racial and gender inequalities had been inadequate (Davies, 1999: 199).

During these years the participation of Cuban men and women in international events was promoted, which allowed comparisons of the situation of women in Cuba with that of other countries, thus allowing for contact with other ideas on women. Forums on gender and women's issues were held between universities and from 1991 the Casas de la Mujer y de la Familia and the Centro de Estudios sobre la Mujer were set up by the FMC (Abreu, 2006, no page numbers).

As Carolee Bengelsdorf argues, the studies on women in Cuba in the majority of cases do not have the required level of theory. What is worse, they have been displaced by studies on the family where the women are shown only as part of a family situation. 'Los debates en la literatura sobre la mujer y el trabajo en Cuba han sido mucho menos complejos, y tal vez por eso menos interesantes, que los relativos a la familia. Casi siempre los investigadores emplean las mismas cifras para llegar a conclusiones diferentes' (Bengelsdorf, 1997: 122). An example of the above would be the study by Marta Lamas at the Centro de Estudios Demográficos de Cuba (CEDEM), entitled 'Usos, dificultades y posibilidades de la categoría de género'.

Reducir la complejidad de la problemática que viven los seres humanos a una interpretación parcial que habla solo de la 'opresión de las mujeres' no es únicamente reduccionista, sino que también conduce al 'victimismo' y al 'mujerismo', que con frecuencia tienen muchos de los análisis y discursos feministas. Requerimos utilizar la perspectiva de género para describir cómo opera la simbolización de la diferencia sexual en las prácticas, discursos y representaciones culturales sexistas y homófonas...

(Lamas, 1999: 175)

It seems evident that the gender debate in Cuba focused on the development of opportunities for women to enter into the workplace, in a very Marxist, and often reductionist, appraisal of a highly complex terrain. Cuban female cultural and social production would appear to begin

from a point of difference, that is to say that women's cultural production is seen as in some way inherently different from that of men. As writer and critic Mirta Yáñez states:

...igualdad no quería decir similitud. Un falso igualitarismo entre los sexos simplificaría hasta la caricatura el problema. Existen y existirán diferencias, mas ellas no pueden imponerse arbitrariamente ni porvenir de la primacía de un grupo social sobre otro. La mujer, dentro de un determinado conglomerado humano, tanto familiar, como productivo, como intelectual, en un contexto histórico dado, manifiesta rasgos particulares que provienen de un sedimento de su evolución, así como por su naturaleza concreta.

(1996: 13)

This starting point of difference does have its difficulties and this study aims to highlight some of these through the examination of the major films of the period.

When the FMC was established in 1961, one of the difficulties confronting it was in attempting to equate the egalitarian principles of the Revolution with the partisan principles of a movement seeking to promote the cause of one particular section of society (albeit half the population). The feminist movement throughout the (Western) world, since the end of the eighteenth century, has always operated within a wide political spectrum. But within it are inscribed the pioneers of socialism in Europe creating a feminist/socialist current that still exists and the FMC has, since its inception in 1961, been at the forefront of socialist feminism within Latin America. In the majority of the films in this thesis, socialist ideals are clearly very strongly advocated.

The balancing of these two ideologies (feminism and socialism) has thus been a prime concern of the FMC, it being sought through the notion of participation. Women can take their place in the Revolution through work. According to Espín, their purpose is to support the Revolution (Espín, 1990: 1). Through participation in all walks of life, women should be able to free themselves from the alleged drudgery of domestic labour. However, in some cases, the long arm of tradition dictates that women continue to perform domestic tasks and other revolutionary activities besides, as the film *Retrato de Teresa*, discussed in Chapter Four, clearly highlights. Part of the struggle for female equality lies directly in the ideological

standpoint of the FMC, which believes that the problems of the nation are more important than the search for female liberation:

...pesan más los problemas de nuestros pueblos y son más importantes estos que las reivindicaciones netamente femeninas: los problemas de supervivencia, de lucha por la liberación, los enfrentamientos a la explotación imperialista tienen un peso superior, porque son problemas más apurantes. Nuestra labor se dirige a hacer conciencia en las mujeres sobre sus problemas, y a hacérsela a toda la sociedad para propiciar la participación de la mujer junto con el hombre en la solución de esos problemas.

(Espín, 1990: 73)

For the FMC, the struggle in Cuba appears not to be so much an internal struggle between the sexes but a (Marxist) ideological confrontation that has more to do with class than sex. The radical feminists' point of view that man rather than class is at the root of women's oppression simply does not exist in Cuba:

Estas últimas ideas, antinaturales y absurdas, no tienen nada que ver con nuestra concepción científica y con la realidad de que la lucha que existe en el mundo es un problema de clases.

(Ibid: 63)

As Espín comments, women are different biologically: 'es el recinto del niño que va a nacer, el taller natural donde se forja la vida' (Ibid). Such a celebration of the biological miracle of women and motherhood is, as Germaine Greer points out, tantamount to heresy in today's modern Western feminist theory (2000: 43), although the contextual differences in which the two operate must be taken into account when these opinions are considered. Thus, Cuban feminism is fundamentally a Marxist feminism and the fundamental relationship between Marxism and feminism lies in the knowledge that Marxism does not consider women in relation to men but in relation to the prevailing economic system. Women's oppression, from a Marxist point of view, is seen as the oppression of one more of the downtrodden classes. Women are thus seen in terms of class rather than sex. Economic goals have always been put before female liberation or independence (Bunck, 1994: 93). As Heidi Hartmann points out

(1981: 3), Marxism sees women's oppression as being directly related to production (or a lack of it).

Thus, the more important relationship becomes that of man and woman's relationship to capital – which subsumes the relationship between men and women as different sexes. By destroying the sexual division of labour, it was assumed by Marxists that the oppression of women by men would disappear. From what we have seen of the work of the FMC, this is the basis of their argument also – following Marx, Engels and Lenin. For example, Engels recognised women's inferior position and attributed it to the institution of private property, believing that no oppression existed amongst the working classes (Sargent, 1981: 210). The problem with the ideas of Marx, Engels and Lenin is that they ignore socio-cultural changes, privileging the economic argument. Women's position in society changes regardless of the economic situation – changes that are bound up with a multitude of different factors but not least with the power of tradition. Simply to change the economic parameters of a nation cannot erase hundreds of years of socio-cultural politics. In the case of Cuba, the situation is made even more complex by the multiplicity of ethnic communities that inhabit the island, bringing with them their own cultural traditions. Yes, equality of economic production and opportunity are important, and it appears that Cuba has made important advances in this respect, but, as Lise Vogel points out, socialist feminists subordinate their feminism to their Marxism (Vogel, 1981: 195).

In Cuba, this Marxist, materialist-based approach to feminist issues fails to consider the unequal relationship between men and women at the private, domestic level where, as we have seen, cultural traditions, created by men, force women to work the 'double-shift'. So, does this failure of Marxism to consider the private sphere, i.e. the relationship between the sexes in the home, imply the ultimate failure of the alliance of Marxism and feminism in a Cuban context?

Lydia Sargent makes a valid point concerning women and revolution, arguing that revolutions are often led by white middle-class males (Cuba is no exception) and that the women are mobilised to 'keep the home fires burning' (1981: xiii), functioning as nurturers

and ‘occasionally even participating on the front line as quasi-revolutionary cheerleaders’ (Ibid). In this sense the work of the FMC becomes like the push-me, pull-me two-headed llama, at once giving women opportunities to pursue new objectives other than purely domestic ones, while at the same time perpetuating a particular social and political structure that derives part of its power from the subordination of women. So ‘the material conditions and legal rights [of women] improved considerably’ (Davies, 1997: 118), but ‘it was difficult to eradicate deep-seated masculinist attitudes, either in the family or the public domain... The universal socialist subject has always been implicitly male’ (Ibid: 119). The Revolution considered feminism a ‘white, middle-class phenomenon which had no role to play in Cuba’ and the Revolution was largely male-oriented (Ibid). The Revolution:

...implicitly condoned traditional attitudes towards women. Abstinence or sexual restraint was expected outside marriage, particularly of women. Sexual matters were a public embarrassment. Sexuality was not an issue; rape, domestic violence and sexual abuse were invisible topics; pornography, homosexuality, the expression of female sexual desire were taboo at least until the 1980s. The main aims of the Revolution, then, with respect to women, were profoundly contradictory.

(Ibid)

This thesis argues that Cuba, throughout the period in question (1974-90), was a patriarchal society, in the broadest sense that men make the most fundamental and important decisions and that they, not women, are the dominant force in society, following Simone de Beauvoir: ‘patriarchal ideology presents woman as immanence, man as transcendence’ (Moi, 1985: 92). But the condition of patriarchy for Cuban women is not only metaphysical or existential, but also material. Evidence of this will be provided throughout the thesis, in the general discussions of women’s roles in Cuban society in this introduction, and in the theoretical introductions (Chapters One, Three and Five) to the film analyses (Chapters Two, Four and Six).

Suffice it to say here, as Álvarez argues, with all the transformations in Cuban society and the undoubted benefits that women have obtained, patriarchy still exists in Cuban culture,

in values perpetuated in individual and social subjectivity and in the lack of a sufficient level of consciousness concerning issues of gender and gender discrimination. The inequalities between men and women are seen more in the area of the private sphere and in the access women have to decision-making positions (2000: 122). There appears to be a pyramid structure of power, feminised at the bottom and masculinised at the top, with 66.6 per cent of the professional-technical workforce being women (Arés, 2000: 23). In general, women and men are seen, in Cuba, as essentially different. In 1970, the Cuban Labour Minister Jorge Risquet said:

There are men and there are women. The problem isn't the same for both. Women have the job of reproducing as well as producing. That is they have to take care of the house, raise the children and do other tasks along these lines...from the political point of view our people wouldn't understand if we were to treat women and men alike.

(Bunck, 1994: 106)³⁷

And Fidel Castro's paternalism is evident in the following quote from 1974, when he called women 'nature's workshop where life is formed' (Ibid).

Men are obliged to give their seat to a pregnant woman on a bus, or to an elderly woman...you must always have special considerations for others. We have them for women because they are physically weaker, and because they have tasks and functions and human burdens which we do not have.

(Ibid)

However, in 1974, Castro acknowledged the failure of the Revolution to adequately deal with the problem of inequality between the sexes when, in a discussion about sexual equality he admitted: 'After more than 15 years of revolution...we are still politically and culturally behind' (Ibid: 107).

There exists a sexist division of domestic roles and a lack of material resources and support services sharpened by a general economic crisis that impacts unfavourably on the equitable functioning of the family (Álvarez, 2000: 124). Other symptoms of a patriarchal

³⁷ Bunck cites from *Granma*, 9 Sept. 1970 (her own translation).

society are subjective, such as the persistence of representations that undervalue women. For example in 1990, president of the FMC, Vilma Espín commented on the new role of peasant women immediately after the triumph of the Revolution:

El saber coser, el saber cortar una ropa bonita era siempre un anhelo de la mujer en nuestro país antes del triunfo de la Revolución, era de las cosas más atractivas para la mujer y que les hacía aprender con mucha facilidad. Se recibió con mucha naturalidad.

(1990: 112)

The magazine of the FMC, *Mujeres*, promotes women stereotypically as 'private', domestic beings while at the same time advocating their achievements in the public world of work. In *Mujeres* No.4, 1998, for example, the article entitled 'Estilo y originalidad' (pp 14-15) takes a look at women's clothes design with illustrations of slim, white, middle-class females dressed in typically feminine clothes. This contrasts with various other articles detailing the high profiles of certain women in positions of power and importance, such as Doctor Rosa Elena Simeón, Minister of Science, Technology and the Environment. Women are therefore seen somewhat in contradiction, in the context both of the private (domestic and feminine) individual, and the public (political) person. But, in this perpetuation of female stereotypes, there exists a masculine style of direction – a patriarchal design in the organisation and functioning of society, so women are seen almost entirely as responsible for domestic chores. More than 90per cent of women in salaried employment also do more household chores than men and the responsibility of the family and children continues to lie with them (Álvarez, 2000: 130). It is as if a type of superwoman was being created by the revolutionary process; a woman who has to some degree been liberated but who also carries a heavy load and with it comes a psychological risk, due to the extra stresses encountered, as the film *Retrato de Teresa* illustrates.

With the social advances of the Revolution the myth of 'woman = mother = wife = housewife' started to be eroded as women began to achieve economic, social and personal independence and to exercise their rights. The film *Lucía* illustrates this well. But this confrontation with old models has created contradictions between the previously assigned

images and the new challenges: ‘...el conflicto que ha tenido que enfrentar entre el legado cultural y el mandato social de cambio (Arés, 2000: 42). Although, as we have seen, state-sponsored socialism has tried to eradicate sexism by introducing women into the labour force, this has not combated sufficiently Cuba’s gender divisions. How much, then, does the elaboration of a ‘socialist feminism’ perpetuate patriarchy? As previously touched upon, the Cuban Marxist critique argues that gender inequality is inextricably linked to economics. The films *De cierta manera* and *Hasta cierto punto* in particular support this. But, for Adrienne Rich, the division of labour as a product of capitalism is only one symptom of a much deeper divide between the sexes (1986: 54). In her discussions on motherhood (discussed in more detail in Chapter Three) and the burden of work that mothers in socialist countries have to bear, Rich argues:

Under patriarchal socialism we find the institution of motherhood revised and reformed in certain ways which permit women to serve...both as producers and nurturers of children and as the full-time workers demanded by a developing economy. Child-care centres, youth camps, schools, facilitate but do not truly radicalize the familiar ‘double role’ of working women; in no socialist country does the breakdown of the division of labour extend to bringing large numbers of men into child-care. Under Marxist or Maoist socialism, both motherhood and heterosexuality are still institutionalised; heterosexual marriage and the family are still viewed as the ‘normal’ situation for human beings and the building blocks of the new society.

(Ibid: 55)

Of course, in claiming that Cuba is a patriarchal society, it is easy to get caught up in a universal and generalised view of what patriarchy might constitute. ‘The very notion of ‘patriarchy’ has threatened to become a universalising concept that overrides or reduces distinct articulations of gender asymmetry in different cultural contexts’ (Butler, 1999: 45/6). Judith Butler believes that gender and sexuality are cultural constructions, built out of patriarchy in different ways according to the cultures within which they are generated. For Butler, the very notion ‘Woman’ has to be considered as fluid and unstable. ‘The very subject of women is no longer understood in stable or abiding terms’ and ‘...the feminist subject

turns out to be discursively constituted by the very political system that is supposed to facilitate its emancipation' (Ibid: 4). Butler's arguments are dealt with in more detail in Chapters Three and Five, and this thesis will attempt to argue that where the female characters in the films are seen to be determined as fixed subjects within a particular socio-historical construction, then perhaps any supposed 'emancipation' of women (through work for example) is a false illusion. But where the films discussed in this thesis can in some way illustrate or create this notion of gender fluidity within a particular social construct, then they may well undermine any notion of the fixity of gender relations and hence go some way towards providing a critique of Cuban patriarchy.

Theoretical Approaches

Space does not permit a more detailed account of the gender debate in Cuba as a whole (this would form a thesis of its own), although the theoretical and contextual introductions in Chapters One, Three and Five, to the film analyses in Chapters Two, Four and Six, provide more detailed accounts of certain aspects of the gender debate in Cuba. From the evidence presented, it appears necessary to subject the debate on gender relations in Cuba, and in one area of Cuban cultural production (cinema), to theoretical approaches that might serve to provide a more nuanced account of aspects of male-female relations in film which in turn may help to illustrate how this debate fits into the overall development of Cuban cultural production in the period defined.

The theoretical approaches in this thesis are varied; all the theoretical ideas used emanate from the films themselves, or from a crossover or tension between them and the contexts in which they were produced and viewed. It is important to stress that in no way are these approaches intended to impose themselves on the films discussed; rather the reverse, that the films should dictate the theory. Theory is merely the tool with which to help us understand more fully that of which the films 'speak'. It is also important to point out that the films 'speak' in different ways according to how they are received by the spectator and, as such, will say different things at different times according to where, when and by whom they

are viewed. The analyses therefore are personal and, as such, are not intended in any way to be deemed 'correct'.

Chapter One takes as its focus point the recurring and highly problematic notion of *machismo*, as two of the most important films from ICAIC to deal with gender relations, *De cierta manera* and *Hasta cierto punto*, focus on the theme in different ways. The notion of *machismo* in the context of Cuban society is considered, before ideas from feminist film theorists Laura Mulvey, Julia Lesage, Elizabeth Cowie, Annette Khun and Claire Johnston are used to tease out how it might be possible to resist the *machismo* paradigm in film. Alongside this theoretical debate this chapter argues that the two films in question are developed within the context of a Marxist modernising revolutionary process, the theoretical approaches of Cuban film-makers and theorists Julio García Espinosa and Tomás Gutiérrez Alea supporting this idea. Detailed analyses of the two films in Chapter Two will determine to what extent the films either resist or support the *machismo* paradigm within this modernising context.

Chapter Three considers both female sexuality and the figure of the mother in cinema. The notion of female sexuality simply cannot be ignored in an examination of *Retrato de Teresa*, and theoretical approaches from Teresa de Lauretis, Judith Butler and, in particular, ideas on what Molly Haskell calls the 'Woman's Film' will be considered in a theoretical introduction to it, analysed in Chapter Four. A more general reflection on the mother-figure in cinema will also be considered in Chapter Three as an introduction to an examination of *Lejanía* and how this figure is presented here. In this respect, work by Mary Ann Doane, E. Ann Kaplan, Adrienne Rich, and Julia Kristeva is important as these theorists provide subtle approaches to the consideration of the figure of the mother in cinema and culture and can help in understanding, in the context of the Cuban revolutionary process, to what extent the two films resist or support traditional, patriarchal representations of the mother-figure.

Chapter Five argues that a shift occurs in Cuban cultural production away from the Marxist, modernising project (evident in Chapter One) towards a postmodern re-appraisal of this project at the end of the 1980s. To this end, ideas on the emergence of postmodernism in Cuban cultural production generally are considered as well as debates on how this concept is

represented and produced in cinema, via work by Frederic Jameson, Ann Friedberg, Tim Woods and Linda Hutcheon; as well as considerations on the relationship between postmodernism and feminism from theorists such as Nancy Fraser, Linda Nicholson, Raquel Olea and, again, Judith Butler. Using multiple theoretical approaches, then, this thesis will argue that the presentation of gender relations in Cuban cinema moves from a tacit acceptance and support of the Marxist modernising revolutionary project, to a postmodern critical questioning of that project, over a short period of only fifteen years.

Chapter One

Machismo, Masculinity and the Modern

El 'macho' hace...actos imprevistos y que producen la confusión, el horror, la destrucción. Abre el mundo; al abrirlo, lo desgarrar. El desgarramiento provoca una gran risa siniestra...reestablece el equilibrio, pone las cosas en su sitio, esto es, las reduce a polvo, miseria, nada.¹

Introduction

This chapter is intended as a theoretical introduction to the two films analysed in detail in Chapter Two; *De cierta manera* (1974, Sara Gómez)² and *Hasta cierto punto* (1983, Tomás Gutiérrez Alea).

Set during the early 1960s, *De cierta manera* tells the simple love story of Mario, a young, working class, bus-depot mechanic in a slum neighbourhood of Havana that is being rebuilt, and Yolanda, a schoolteacher from a wealthier background who has been sent to work at a school in the area. Mario's work colleague and friend, Humberto, asks Mario to lie for him so that he can take an illicit vacation with his girlfriend. During a workers' assembly, Humberto tells his colleagues that he had to take time off work to visit his dying mother, but Mario denounces his friend to the assembly. He consequently suffers a crisis of conscience for betraying his friend and separates from Yolanda. The film ends as Mario, trying to regain her trust and friendship, walks off in conversation with Yolanda, into the now modern and rebuilt neighbourhood.

Hasta cierto punto is set in a Havana dockyard in 1982. A scriptwriter, Oscar, and a film director, Arturo, set out to research a film they wish to make about *machismo* on the Havana docks. Although married, Oscar has an affair with Lina, a dockworker and single mother who is the model for the film they are researching. During his relationship with Lina and the researching of the film, Oscar develops a crisis of conscience both over the film and

¹ Octavio Paz, cited in Stavans, 1995: 50.

² Although the film was made in 1974 it was not released for a few years for various reasons discussed in Chapter Two.

over his personal life, as Lina, after being raped by her former boyfriend with no subsequent support from Oscar, leaves Havana to go and live in Santiago.

Both films have, as their central dilemma, issues of masculinity, and, specifically, *machismo*, and it is for this reason that the construction of *machismo* is discussed in detail here. I will also consider what I believe to be significant and highly relevant theoretical approaches from feminist film theorists Laura Mulvey, Julia Lesage, Elizabeth Cowie, Annette Kuhn, Claire Johnston and others, as a way of shedding light on issues of masculinity in film, to ask to what extent the two films in question are able to express and, perhaps, undermine traditional ideas of *machismo* in Cuban society.

Analysis of *De cierta manera* will look first at how, in very general terms, it approaches and attempts to subvert ideas of *machismo* in Cuba. For this reason it is necessary to understand the construction of *machismo* in Cuba and in cinema, in order to discuss to what extent the film subverts or supports this construction. The analysis then concentrates on the possibilities of male identification with the central male character. For this reason, issues of identification in cinema will be discussed to illustrate how these processes can affect viewing practices. It will be argued, using feminist film criticism that takes from psychoanalysis (specifically using Laura Mulvey's 1975 seminal essay 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema'), that the film draws in a young, black, marginalised, male Cuban audience to identify with a typically strong male character, before undermining that identification using various technical-aesthetic devices that stem from García Epinosa's revolutionary, modernising and progressive ideas, set out in his essay 'Por un cine imperfecto'. This essay is therefore discussed in detail here.

In order to better understand Gutiérrez Alea's film it is important to discuss the director's own theoretical writing on film-making, *Dialéctica del espectador*, to illustrate how the film adheres to Marxist-modernising film-making practice in a similar way to *De cierta manera*. It is also necessary to consider in detail how the film helps to construct and reflect issues of masculinity and *machismo* in Cuba and it is for this reason that these issues are

discussed in detail in this chapter, including an analysis of how the film deals with the rape of Lina at the end.

To fully understand both films, then, it is necessary to set them in a politico-aesthetic context. I will argue that both films adhere to Marxist-modernising filmmaking practices developed by García Espinosa and Gutiérrez Alea, but that *De cierta manera* is more effective in its use of these practices than *Hasta cierto punto*, in the elaboration of a Marxist discourse on gender relations. However, both are deemed to be modern in the sense that they attempt to construct radical new images of gender relations in Cuban cinema.³ It will be proposed in Chapters Five and Six that this modernising discourse is questioned in films made in the late 1980s that display, if viewed through the prism of gender relations, postmodern sensibilities that illustrate a broader questioning of Cuban revolutionary society.

Machismo and Masculinity

In order to ascertain whether or not the two films under discussion support or subvert notions of *machismo* in Cuban society, it is important to briefly discuss issues of *machismo* and masculinity, to examine how they have been constructed.

The nature of Cuban *machismo* is both complex and unclear. Studies in the area seem to agree that it is at least partially linked to the notion of warfare and the development of nationhood.⁴ In one of the best studies on the specificity of Cuban *machismo*, De La Torre comments that military struggles dominated nineteenth-century Cuba and so a *machista* outlook became dominant. Manhood and nationhood were then fused together. 'History is forged through ones *cojones* (balls). Women, non-whites and the poor fail to influence history because they lack *cojones*...*Machismo* became ingrained in the fabric of Cuban culture. [...] Women, gays and blacks are not *macho* enough to construct *patria*' (1999: 214). Others also argue that, in Cuba, wars have been the principal source to determine the levels of masculinity of men: 'el matar o morir ha sido un elemento importante en la reafirmación de la virilidad'

³ See the preface for definitions of modern, modernity, modernism etc as used in this thesis.

⁴ See González Pagés, 2002; De La Torre, 1999; Lancaster, 1992; Chant, 2003; Goldwert, 1983, Braham, 2000.

(González Pagés, 2002: 118).⁵ Some of the documentary insertions in *De cierta manera* studied in Chapter Two, discuss this link between warfare, aggression and *machismo* and provide a useful contextual backdrop to the fictional elements of the film.

‘[D]omination and protection for those under you’ (De la Torre, 1999: 214). These are essential components of the *machismo* paradigm, implying, for De La Torre a burden on the part of the dominator to educate those below his superior standards. De La Torre argues in Lacanian terms that the construction of the macho’s ego depends upon ‘an illusory self-representation through the negation of *cojones*... ‘I am what I am not’’ (Ibid). The ‘Other’ is therefore projected as non-macho in order that *I am* macho. González Pagés affirms that the national history of Cuba repeats a universal stereotype of ‘male’ to which it assigns patriarchal values that makes it a victim of a construct of gender, according to which, to be male is important because women are not (2002: 117). He continues: ‘Las investigaciones históricas en Cuba, desde la llegada de los españoles, muestran a las mujeres como diferentes de los hombres, pero en el sentido de seres incompletos o inferiores’ (Ibid: 118).⁶ In *De cierta manera* this gender relationship is subverted as the female protagonist, Yolanda, is in no way seen as inferior to her male counterpart, Mario. At times the opposite is true as Yolanda is depicted as holding the upper hand in their relationship in a number of scenes, discussed in Chapter Two.

According to González Pagés, masculine hegemony is for Cuba synonymous with *machismo*. ‘El machismo es el término con el que se acuña la hiperbolización de la masculinidad y pone al macho, entiéndase al hombre, como centro del universo’ (2002: 119). It is often used as a counter-position to feminism and is a way of preserving masculine hegemony as a centre of power. *Machismo* has been validated in Cuba as a form of the culture

⁵ González Pagés notes that even José Martí’s virility was questioned for his lack of ability in battle (2002: 118).

⁶ As Zlotchew affirms in his study on Hispanic machismo, there are historical precedents for this ‘Self/Other’ relationship. His argument concerning Mexican machismo is that a Mexican’s view of the US as effeminate (an acknowledged phenomenon according to Zlotchew) stems from a tradition in the Spanish court to see the French in this way (1979: 110).

and despite having been criticised in the last decades, seems to have deep roots within different social groups both on the island and in the Cuban diaspora.

The term appears to work as a cradle to accompany young boys and convert them into machos. And so they are condemned for the rest of their lives. The macho is constructed from infancy with the demand of constantly illustrating his virility reinforced with the phrase '*demuestra que eres un hombre*' and not doing so immediately converts him into someone weak and effeminate (Ibid). So we see how masculinity is constructed based on the exclusion of those that do not fulfil the essential requirements of strength, virility, domination, protection, courage, aggression, violence and patriotism. In *De cierta manera* Mario's masculinity is highlighted in this way, by illustrating and then questioning some of these traits. The opening scene in particular posits him as this assertive, dominant figure, literally at the centre of the men surrounding him. However, this masculinity is then consistently questioned throughout the film, as he is forced to doubt the *machismo* embedded in his own past.

Zlotchew refers to *machismo* as 'sexual-aggressive rationalizing' (1979: 120) and argues that its goal 'would seem to be the assuaging of a sense of national inferiority with regard to world position by means of a purely personal affirmation of superiority' (Ibid). The residue of a long history of *machismo* appears in Cuban male-female relations and there is a widespread 'assumption of the superiority (biological, intellectual and social) of the male' (Goldwert, 1983: 2). This is made evident in the ambivalent way that women are treated by traditionally *machista* males, in the 'division of females into 'good' and 'bad.' 'Good' women are the mother, wife, daughters, and sisters who are allegedly disinterested in sex, and 'bad' women are those less respectable females whom one can take as mistresses or otherwise enjoy sexually' (Ibid). The wife then becomes an asexual creature, as an extension of the mother.

Machismo, then, 'emphasises the sex role at the expense of humanity. It likens a man to a rooster or bull whose prime responsibilities lie in fighting real or potential rivals and inseminating every healthy female in his domain' (Ibid: 116). For Nencel, too, sexuality

forms a significant contribution to any definition of *machismo*. 'In Latin America, the symbolic representation of masculinity and male sexuality merge in the concept of *machismo*' (1996: 57). This perhaps arises from a sense of inferiority suffered by the indigenous population at the hands of the conquistadors; a humiliation suffered, 'not only at their own defeat, but at the rape of their women by the Spanish conquerors' (Chant, 2003: 15). Perhaps then, as Mirandé suggests, *machismo* 'is nothing more than a futile attempt to mask a profound sense of impotence, powerlessness and ineptitude, an expression of weakness and a sense of inferiority' (1997: 36).

In *Hasta cierto punto*, there is a focus on male sexuality at certain times in the film, as the protagonist, Oscar, does not make love with his wife, but does so with his mistress, and reference is made to the extra-marital affairs of another character, Arturo. However, the treatment of male sexuality in this film does little to subvert the traditional stereotypes discussed here, as the analysis of the film will demonstrate.

So power, control, and sexual aggression are some of the 'symptoms' of *machismo*; these traits forming part of the characteristics of the two main male protagonists in the films to be discussed in Chapter Two. Sexual aggression has not been sufficiently discussed in relation to Cuban cinema and a much deeper analysis of it is overdue. However, via work by Julia Lesage, I will attempt to highlight how, particularly in *Hasta cierto punto*, this aggression serves to position the male and female subjects as natural and, in so doing, keeps them in their 'rightful' and traditional place. In a patriarchal, traditionally *machista* culture, male (physical) dominance over women is part and parcel of the nation's psychosexual development. As De la Torre points out, the history of Cuba relies on the development of *machismo* as 'gender and cultural identity become integrated' (1999: 216), in a history of inferiority and subsequent neuroticism. The line between aggression and sexuality becomes blurred, and this sexual connotation of *machismo* is illustrated by way of a phallic signifier that, for Cubans, 'is located in the *cojones*' (Ibid: 215).⁷

⁷ In Cuba, the macho compliment 'Como Maceo', said while upwardly cupping one's hands, refers to the *machismo* of Antonio Maceo, Cuba's general during the Wars for Independence. 'Maceo embodied

According to Stavans, this male domination is revealed in a form of 'violent eroticism' and stems from the conquest. This eroticism:

...was a fundamental element in the colonization of the Hispanic world...The primal scene of the clash with the Spaniards is a still unhealed rape: the phallus, as well as gunpowder, was a crucial weapon used to subdue. *Machismo* as a cultural style endlessly rehearses this humiliating episode in the history of the Americas, imitating the violent swagger of the conquerors.

(1995: 49)

Machismo, then, as Octavio Paz argues, is violence, rupture, tearing; revolving around the symbol of the phallus, absolute and all-powerful.⁸ While men dominate, women 'are often accused of impurity and adulteration, sinfulness and infidelity...on one side flamboyant women, provocative and well-built, sensuous, lascivious, with indomitable, even bestial nerve and intensity; on the other, macho men' (Stavans, 1995: 51).

According to Morales-Díaz, Cuban *machismo* dominates Cuban society and is related directly to sexuality. At the outset of the Cuban Revolution, she argues, *machismo* was already deeply ingrained in the fabric of society. Gender roles were clearly identified and sharply differentiated. Men were expected to be strong, dominant, and sexually compulsive while women were expected to be vulnerable and chaste.⁹ Morales-Díaz quotes Mirta Mulhare who states: 'the dominant mode of behavior for el macho, the male, [was] the sexual imperative ... A man's supercharged sexual physiology [placed] him on the brink of sexual desire at all times and at all places'.¹⁰ During *Hasta cierto punto*, this sexual desire is highlighted as Oscar pursues Lina. This pursuit and desire is foregrounded in the film but rarely, if at all, questioned. It appears that the film naturalises rather than questions such behaviour and in so doing aids rather than subverts the myth of male sexuality.

the macho qualities of honor, bravery, patriotism and the best that Cubans can hope to be. His exploits on and off the battlefield served as testimony to his testosterone gall' (De La Torre, 1999: 216: footnote). Later we will see the importance of this with reference to the film *De cierta manera*.

⁸ Octavio Paz, cited in Stavans, 1995: 50.

⁹ Morales-Díaz, E. (2006). At:

www.postcolonial.org/index.php/pct/article/viewArticle/258/228 (accessed 13/06/08).

¹⁰ Ibid

The *machista* outlook appears ingrained in the fabric of a nation that places so-called 'male' values in high regard, even today, and regularly uses stereotypes of what are considered to be negative traits in males as insults and abuse.¹¹ 'Fidel Castro himself is the quintessential macho' (Braham, 2000: 55), and, as De La Torre suggests, Cubans felt they had lost their *machismo* with US dependency and the Platt Amendment;¹² such a sense of inferiority and emasculation leading to the oppression of one or more sectors of society (such as women) by the ruling, white elite.

The answer, as far as De La Torre is concerned, lies in the destruction of Cuba's patriarchal system (1999: 216). 'For Cubans, seriously dealing with patriarchal structures must be the first stage in the process of dismantling all forms of oppression, providing for the liberation and possible reconciliation of all, including women' (Ibid: 214). As a number of critics argue, one of Cuban cinema's main themes of the 1970s and 1980s was the rebuttal of *machismo*.¹³ The two films to be discussed in the following chapter run counter both to traditional cinematic (world) codes and (to a greater and lesser extent) to hegemonic codes of patriarchal discourse in a country imbued with sexism. 'Sexist values are inextricably woven into Cuban cultural identity and popular Cuban culture' (Davies, 1997: 356). Sara Gómez's film is more successful in this respect than Gutiérrez Alea's but both films deal with (amongst other things) the crisis of masculinity caused by a deconstruction of the terms of *machismo*; terms that are ingrained in a system and that cinema can either subvert or reinforce.

In the early 1970s, as Braham points out, there was a state-sponsored confirmation and affirmation of the values of *machismo* via the arrival in Cuba of the socialist detective novel explicitly launched to project:

¹¹ In a 2006 telephone exchange between two Miami DJs and Fidel Castro, duped into believing he was talking to the Venezuelan leader, Hugo Chávez, Castro used the common expletive *maricón* (queer) and *mariconzón* (big queer), as well as telling the hoaxers that they had no *cojones* (balls) <http://www.latinamericanstudies.org/fidel/transcript.htm> (accessed 23/01/07).

¹² The Platt Amendment formed part of the 1901 Army Appropriations Act, a United States federal law that detailed the conditions for the removal of U.S. troops from Cuba after the Spanish-American War. Such conditions included limited rights for Cuba to conduct its own foreign policy and the right for the U.S. to intervene in Cuban affairs. Part of the Amendment included the leasing of land to the U.S., including Guantánamo Bay. For more on the Platt Amendment see Pérez, L. A. (1986).

¹³ See D'Lugo, 1997; Benamou, 1999; Spinella, 2004; Davies, 1997; Pastor, 2005; Pick, 1993.

...an idealized image of socialist society, complete with instructions on acceptable behaviour, attitudes, and even sexuality...the socialist detective novel was sponsored by the government, a fact that has become a source of embarrassment to many Cuban writers who originally embraced it. The government saw mass-market fiction as a way to export ideology, and the new detective stories were shipped throughout Latin America, Spain, Angola and especially the Eastern bloc. What some now refer to as the 'gray decade' in Cuban letters was an era of popular literature at rock bottom prices.

(2000: 52)

This type of didacticism can also be seen in the first of the films to be discussed in this work, *De cierta manera*, except that, here, the film makes a critique of *machismo* rather than attempting to reinforce it as part of Cuba's cultural psyche.

Sexual aggressiveness, then, seems to form an important part of any definition of *machismo*; 'the virile metaphor of the Revolution' (Ibid: 58) being eroded in recent times, according to Braham, by Leonardo Padura's novels in the *Four Seasons* tetralogy.¹⁴ The question for us here is whether, in 1978 when *De cierta manera* was released, and in 1983 with the release of *Hasta cierto punto*, Cuban cinema had already begun this erosion of established codes.

According to Ramírez Berg, the macho is a man who 'puffs himself up with (mainly sexual) self-praise...*Machismo* is thus a pose of sexual potency made by one man before his fellow men, and in relation, not to women in general but to a woman in particular' (1989: 69).

In the Cuban case, the image of man has always been constructed as a singular image: strong, heterosexual, with the answer for, and in control of, everything. As Natividad Guerrero, researcher from the Centro de Estudios Sobre la Juventud, states: 'ser hombre es saber, poder, tener; y cuanto más, es más hombre' (1998: 37). And, as Lancaster shows, this assertion of one's 'activity' in a denial of 'passivity' is conducted as much for other men as it is for a female audience (1992: 235). Lancaster is one of the foremost authorities on the

¹⁴ Padura's novels are interesting to this study as they illustrate an emerging postmodernism in Cuban literature as a reaction to the type of didactic, socialist detective fiction of the 1970s; they are 'nostalgic, pessimistic and cynical' (Braham, 2000: 58). Later in this work we shall see how, at the end of the 1980s, this postmodern outlook reverberated in the cinema in the film *Mujer transparente*.

subject of men and masculinity in Latin America and argues that the formation of power relations structures Latin American *machismo*. '*Machismo*...is not exclusively or even primarily a means of structuring power relations between men and women. It is a means of structuring power between and among *men*' (Ibid). Chant would agree: '*Machismo* has long been recognised as encompassing the notion of competition between men' (2003: 15).

In an Althusserian sense, the macho is thus able to define himself as part of a state-sponsored ideology in a mutual exchange between state and individual which encompasses all forms of behaviour, and gives the subject a sense of identity and purpose.¹⁵ We have already seen (in the introduction to this work) how women in Cuban society have been portrayed, with a strong emphasis on the image of the Cuban woman as both mother and revolutionary; a sexist image transformed into an iconic status of nationhood. It is sexist in that the image occupies both spaces of male desire – woman as virgin mother and as whore; the phallic rifle of the revolutionary heroine as signifier of the latter and the baby as signifier of the former. The whole myth of woman as symbol of nation is built around a sexist, patriarchal viewpoint but this sexism 'disappears' as such when the image is used to symbolise unity of the Cuban nation as a whole; for criticising that image is equivalent to criticising the nation. Cuban state ideology (including cinema at times) has appropriated the image of the female and of gender relations in general for its own use – to support and even propagate patriarchy. 'Within a sexist ideology and a male-dominated cinema, woman is presented as what she represents for man' (Johnston, 2000: 24).

Clearly, cinema is both part and product of ideology. It developed as a product of a bourgeois ideology but is central to the development of a new, Cuban revolutionary philosophy. As García Espinosa's work on imperfect cinema shows (discussed below), this

¹⁵ In Louis Althusser's 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses' (1971), Althusser analyses the relationship between the state and the individual. He argues, amongst other things, that, through a process of 'interpellation', the individual is constituted as part of an ideological structure within a state system. 'I shall then suggest that ideology 'acts' or 'functions' in such a way that it 'recruits' subjects among the individuals (it recruits them all), or 'transforms' the individuals into subjects (it transforms them all) by that very precise operation which I have called interpellation or hailing, and which can be imagined along the lines of the most commonplace everyday police (or other) hailing: 'Hey, you there!' (1971: 174).

ideology contains the tools and techniques of cinema itself, which is bound up in it. If the prevailing ideology of a system is patriarchal, sexist, then feminist cinema, to be effective, must 'disrupt the fabric of the male bourgeois cinema' rather than simply display the 'natural' dominant ideology (Johnston, 2000: 29). In its examination of sexism at the level of the intellectual Cuban 'bourgeoisie', *Hasta cierto punto* makes a bold attempt at a disruption of this fabric but ultimately fails to deliver.

Machismo then is 'mutual agreement between the patriarchal state and the male individual'; there is 'an implicit, socially understood role – *el macho* – which is empowered and supported by the state' (Ramírez Berg, 1989: 68).

For Goldwert, this mutual exchange can cut across all social classes.

Regardless of social position, the macho is admired for his sexual prowess, action-orientation (both physical and verbal), and aggressiveness. Stridently masculine, the macho is allegedly sure of himself, conscious of his inner worth, and prone to gamble everything on his self-confidence. The macho may express his supposed inner confidence by overt action, as in the case of caudillos or revolutionaries, or he may do so verbally, as in the case of a leading intellectual, lawyer or politician...This phenomenon is rooted in underlying and haunting male insecurities.

(1983: vii)

One of the methods of assuaging these insecurities is to highlight one's superiority within male society; as Ramírez Berg states: 'in the male world, to be a hero, to be respected, you must be successful' (1989: 67). As we shall see, the films in the first part of this work elaborate this notion of *machismo* across the class divide, highlighting the nature of success and failure in a *machista* environment. While *De cierta manera* deals with the phenomenon amongst the working classes, *Hasta cierto punto* argues that it can also exist amongst the intellectual class within the Cuban Revolution. In both films, what is important to the male protagonists is not just their relationships with women but the way they feel they are viewed by other men, in Mario's case as he is seen by his workmates in the typical male environment

of the bus depot, and in Oscar's case as he is seen in the eyes of Arturo, the director of the film he is scripting.

In Miguel de la Torre's study of Cuban *machismo*, a strong case is made to argue that it is more than simply a system of power relations between the sexes and I would mostly agree. However, there is no denying that one of the most prominent and negative ways in which *machismo* is manifest is precisely in the gender power struggle. This places the male/female power struggle in a complex negotiation with aspects of race and class, an important point to make. But an analysis can, and should, be made of the various manifestations of *machismo*, be they concerned with race, class or gender, while at the same time realising that there are other socio-cultural considerations to consider. Yes, as De la Torre argues, *machismo* moves beyond the oppression of women, but, as Braham argues, *machismo* does involve the denigration of women (2000: 55), and this aspect of the phenomenon needs to be analysed.

As we have seen, power and control are central to the concept of masculinity and 'to patriarchal discourse of the masculine' (Kirkham and Thumim, 1993: 23). In cinema, the male is often shown as an action hero, strong both physically and morally (Ibid: 15).

Male power is central to any consideration of masculinity; patriarchal order continually attempts to define power and masculinity as practically synonymous. It is therefore no surprise to find that in filmic representations of masculinity, associated issues such as status, hierarchy, knowledge, skill, language and success inform our understanding of the operations of male empowerment and control...Social status is a significant indicator of power.

(Ibid: 19)

In *Hasta cierto punto*, it is made evident that Oscar's questioning, because of his relationship with Lina, of his own, previously fixed, beliefs regarding gender relations, puts him in a difficult position with his director, and friend, Arturo. This not only develops the role that *machismo* plays between men but also places Oscar in a difficult position regarding his status as a screen-writer, and the possible implications this will have on his career. The understanding of *machismo* in this way, then, is essential to develop a deeper understanding

of the mechanism of the film. Oscar's power as a screen writer is made evident as he uses it to effectively seduce Lina. When this power is removed, he no longer has any hold over her.

This notion of power is central to both films. In *De cierta manera* power is often denied Mario and delivered to Yolanda. It is also important to understand the way the rape of Lina is handled in the second film. As Julia Lesage asserts, power in the cinema is often illustrated by way of rape or the threat of rape. In her essay, 'The Rape Threat Scene in Narrative Cinema' (1993), she argues that a rape threat scene can run the gamut from a stalking episode to actual rape and violent murder, but the common characteristics are misogyny and:

a spectatorial frisson, in which the spectator feels the threat in an eroticised way. The scene has a play of force and consent. It depicts threat, forced sex, or murder to which the female character does not consent but to which the audience does consent. For any social group, violent threat is a way to establish its members' fixed identity (especially that of its less powerful members) and to impose a behavioural code. The warning is, 'Stay in your place'...For a woman, rape threat is an admonition. It warns her about the relation between gender roles, public and private space – especially in the city, dress codes, and safety. These aspects of daily life are all coded, and for a woman, in one way or another, these social codes are reinforced by the commonness of rape.¹⁶

As Lesage points out, in cinema generally 'male protagonists are the most common subjects of social acts, mobile and active, penetrating space, and in control of the glance'.¹⁷ It is the male who therefore poses the threat of, or actually performs the act of rape; the consequences of which are often ignored. 'After the threat occurs, as the narrative gains force moving toward its climax, the woman...seems miraculously to recover. Most significantly disavowed in the common use of the rape threat scene is the reality that a woman faces after sexual aggression, including the repetition of the traumatic moment over and over in her conscious mind and in her dreams and unconscious reactions to daily life'.¹⁸

¹⁶ Lesage, J., 'Rape Threat Scene in Narrative Cinema'. At: www.darkwing.uoregon.edu/~jlesage/Juliafolder/RAPETHREAT.HTML (accessed 02/04/08)

¹⁷ Ibid

¹⁸ Ibid

Thus, the rape threat scene, as Lesage argues, is not ironic, and is used to 'explain' the narrative conclusion. Such a naturalisation of violence towards women is common in cinema, providing a ritual of cultural importance that serves to maintain a psychosexual status quo that emanates from a history of *machismo* as described by Stavans, Paz and De la Torre. For Lesage, it is the confirmation of a nation's social and psychic rule of heterosexuality as an institution, where male and female viewers are complicit in their submission to such a naturalised cinematic image. 'The rape threat sequence is emblematic of heterosexuality because it enacts a violent dance of spectatorial viewing positions at the boundaries of the female body...The rape threat scene sexualizes the world of women, intruded upon by the world of men. It is about women's availability, stated to the extreme'.¹⁹

In Chapter Two, I will argue that Gutiérrez Alea's film does not offer the viewer a credible alternative to this spectatorial viewing position as it fails to be sufficiently critical of the rape of Lina, focusing instead on the crisis of conscience suffered by Oscar as Lina leaves him.

In both *De cierta manera* and *Hasta cierto punto*, notions of sexuality, power, hierarchy, success, honour and status all merge in their discussions on the themes of masculinity and *machismo*, as both films ask of their central male protagonists, 'What kind of man are you?'²⁰ In addition to this though, one might ask of the two films in question: 'What kind of film are you?' If Sara Gómez's film is a paradigm of feminist imperfect cinema as Davies believes (1997: 358), then I shall propose that Gutiérrez Alea's is not, even though it pays homage to the earlier work and copies many of its stylistic tendencies. As we shall see in the analysis of the films, one of the reasons why Gutiérrez Alea's film poorly compares to Gómez's work as a piece of feminist film-making is because of its stylistic confusion.

¹⁹ Ibid

²⁰ Leon Hunt considers the terms of masculinity in two epic films, *Spartacus* (1960, Stanley Kubrick.), and *El Cid* (1961, Anthony Mann); two films that 'derive much of their fascination from their inquiry into questions of honour, patriarchal law and heroism' (1993: 65). Although the films to be discussed here are not 'epics', they make a counterpoint to this dominant Hollywood genre by discussing similar themes but from very different viewpoints and in very different ways.

The Modern

As already stated, one of the Revolution's aims was the eradication of what were considered negative bourgeois tendencies, such as *machismo*. For Cuban film-makers, then, it was necessary to find a method of film-making that would produce a body of films to aid this 'cultural revolution'. Julio García Espinosa was at the forefront of the radical new approach to film-making in Cuba from 1959 and his essay 'Por un cine imperfecto' in 1969, played a large part in the formalisation of a modern revolutionary cinematographic aesthetic from the end of the 1960s.²¹

In the early years of the Revolution, this aesthetic initially took from a variety of sources, including Italian neo-realism, French *nouvelle vague* ('new wave') and Soviet socialist cinemas in a search for a paradigm from which to develop the specific, progressive and modernising Cuban national cinema project. 'Neo-realism they saw as the model for an appropriate cinema; a humanist and progressive aesthetic that offered a real alternative to the dominant modes of Hollywood and Latin American commercial production' (Chanan, 2003: 163). But none of these theories alone would serve Cuba's revolutionary requirements ideally, and so García Espinosa addressed the problem in his 1969 essay.

García Espinosa has long been considered one of the foremost theorists regarding the New Latin American Cinema alongside such notables as Glauber Rocha, Fernando Birri, Fernando Solanas, Octavio Getino and Jorge Sanjinés.²² In 1982, García Espinosa was made head of ICAIC, and then became director of the film school at San Antonio de los Baños, outside Havana. He has made a number of films, including *Aventuras de Juan Quin Quin* (1967), *Reina y rey* (1994), and the unreleased *Son o no son*, and has been scriptwriter on many films including *Lucía* (1968) and *De cierta manera* (1974).

²¹ Along with Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, García Espinosa had studied film-making at the *Centro Sperimentale* film school in Rome in the 1950s. From there they brought to Cuba many radical film-making ideas including the use of a neo-realist aesthetic that could, perhaps, provide a model for the new Cuban revolutionary cinema. '...neorealism was the cinema that discovered amid the clothing and rhetoric of development another Italy, the Italy of underdevelopment. It was a cinema of the humble and the offended that could be readily taken up by film-makers in the underdeveloped countries (Chanan, 2004: 35).

²² For complete versions of essays written by these theorists (including the complete translated version of 'Por un cine imperfecto') see Chanan, M. (ed.) (1983).

‘Por un cine imperfecto’ discusses a number of aesthetic and political points regarding cinematographic production. It is important to the discussion of the two films here, that both approach the issue of *machismo*, as they both adhere to greater or lesser extent to the practices mapped out in the essay. In so doing they develop the link between the modernising practices of Cuban cinema post-1959 and the modernisation of Cuban society with regards to gender relations. García Espinosa’s essay argues that one of the techniques revolutionary art can use is to expose the tricks of bourgeois artistic production by developing the position whereby the audience becomes the subject of artistic production rather than the object or merely the passive spectator, an idea taken from playwright Bertolt Brecht, whose work will be discussed briefly later in this chapter. In this way, the negative tendencies of a pre-revolutionary bourgeoisie can be cinematically brought in to the open, analysed and dissected by a critically conscious spectator.

García Espinosa criticises the Hollywood schema whereby the consumer becomes a passive spectator of monopolistic production, simply sharing in the artistic results of a few ‘chosen’ film-makers. He suggests that the Cuban Revolution in the late 1960s and early 1970s provides the perfect opportunity to reverse the division of society into sectors and classes and is the highest expression of culture, as it can abolish artistic culture as a fragmentary human activity, turning it into an activity for everyone.

The new poetics he describes for Cuban cinema in the 1970s is a cinema that would ‘commit suicide, to disappear as such’ as art and science should be integrated thereby creating a ‘partisan’, ‘committed’ poetics (1979: 26). This, he argues, is imperfect cinema, one for those who struggle. But, he asks, what should this imperfect cinema look like? It must show ‘the process that generates the problems’ (Ibid) and is therefore the opposite of films that simply ‘illustrate ideas or concepts that we already possess’ (Ibid). This is narcissism, he argues, that has no place in imperfect cinema.

Imperfect cinema can use any genre (documentary, fiction etc) and can be enjoyable (struggle does not have to be serious). It rejects exhibitionism (the narcissistic and the commercial – i.e. it should not seek to be shown in established cinemas, but in independent

locations). It also considers the function of critics and mediators as unnecessary and anachronistic. It is not interested in quality or technique – it can be created equally well in whatever format.

Undoubtedly, the concept of imperfect cinema was taken on board by many filmmakers during the late 1960s and early 1970s in Cuba, and García Espinosa's own film, *Aventuras de Juan Quin Quin* (made before the production of his essay) is a prime example. Other critics have argued that *Memorias del subdesarrollo* (1968, Tomás Gutiérrez Alea), *La primera carga al machete* (1969, Manuel Octavio Gómez), *Páginas del diario de José Martí* (1971, José Massip), *Una pelea cubana contra los demonios* (1971, Tomás Gutiérrez Alea), *De cierta manera* and *El otro Francisco* (1974, Sergio Giral), all carry the distinguishing marks of imperfect cinema.²³ Later, we will see how both the films to be discussed in this part of the work adhere, in many ways, to this Marxist-modernising film practice, and, in so doing, also make valid and important critiques of *machismo* in Cuban society.

In her 1997 article Davies writes to restate 'the ongoing revolutionary potential of imperfect cinema from a feminist viewpoint' (1997: 347). Via Habermas (*The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, 1987) and his definition of modernity, she explains how the social tensions in the films *De cierta manera* and *Hasta cierto punto* are a result of accelerated modernisation in their 'complex referencing of themes of masculinity and modernity' (Ibid: 348).²⁴ Thus, Davies locates both the films firmly within the reality of a modernising project. This is important, as later in this work I will argue how this project is questioned by postmodern and post-feminist interventions in Cuban cinema that posit a reworking and a re-formulation of Cuban feminist discourse through the medium of film.²⁵

²³ See Davies, 1996: 180 and 1997: 358; Chanan, 1985: 249, 258, 262; García Espinosa, 1986: 248.

²⁴ For Habermas, Davies confirms, modernisation represents the mobilisation of resources, increased productivity, centralised political power, national identities, urbanisation, participatory politics, schooling and secularisation. This Enlightenment thinking leads to differentiation between the spheres of economy, art and the polity which leads to increasing alienation for the individual. According to Davies, Habermas wants to re-link these spheres and liberate the individual. In art (including cinema) aesthetic experience has an explosive power to emancipate culture from the Polity and the Economy but only if it is vanguard art, less formally structured. 'Art is most potentially liberating and able to challenge political hegemony, therefore, when it is least formally structured' (Davies, 1997: 348).

²⁵ See Chapters five and six that introduce and discuss the films *¡Plaf! (o demasiado miedo a la vida)* and *Mujer transparente*.

As Quirós states, imperfect cinema was ‘creative, innovative and with a distinctive style’, and it adhered to orthodox Marxist aesthetics, ‘reinforcing the Polity’s values’ (1996: 293). He goes on to say that after the mid-1970s there was an aesthetic transition from imperfect to ‘perfect’ cinema; a cinema that is more inline with a classic Hollywood style of film-making where the distanciation²⁶ techniques of imperfect cinema are replaced by more coherent and simpler chronological narratives, without such aesthetic effects as the use of a variety of genres within the same film (newsreels, photo stills, documentary etc).²⁷ Quirós does not believe that there was any pure imitation of Hollywood, merely that the formal dogma of imperfect cinema was eschewed for a more easily accessible aesthetic. This aesthetic transition, he argues, reflects changes in Cuba itself during the process of ‘Insitutionalisation’ as, during the late 1970s, economic changes such as private farming and an increase in joint ventures with foreign companies occurred.

As we shall see later, if the vanguard film *De cierta manera* perfectly embodies the creativity of a modernising, Marxist aesthetic, allied to a revolutionary orthodoxy, the 1983 production *Hasta cierto punto*, in its attempt to pay homage to and rework the earlier film’s ideas, finds itself unable to recapture the innovation of Sara Gómez’s work while being subservient to some of the ‘fascinating blandishments’²⁸ of the Hollywood oeuvre. The imperfect cinema techniques used in *De cierta manera* and then later in *Hasta cierto punto* would be almost completely rejected in *Retrato de Teresa* (to be discussed in detail later), a film that, chronologically, sits between these two but, stylistically, is very different.

Both García Espinosa and Gutiérrez Alea were film-makers and film theorists. Gutiérrez Alea had already, in 1968, created perhaps the most widely revered of all Cuban

²⁶ ‘Distanciation’ is a term taken from playwright and theorist Bertolt Brecht. Called the *Verfremdungseffekt* in the original German, it is a rupture in the process of identification to prevent the spectators from simply surrendering themselves to the film but retaining their critical faculties. It is a theatrical and cinematic device ‘which prevents the audience from losing itself passively and completely in the character created by the actor, and which consequently leads the audience to be a consciously critical observer’ (Brecht, 1964: 26)..

²⁷ Director Humberto Solás has called the classic Hollywood style of film-making ‘formulaic and predictable’ and a type of ‘cultural imperialism’ (Martin and Paddington, 2001: 13).

²⁸ In an analysis of Gutiérrez Alea’s *Fresa y chocolate* (1993), Paul Julian Smith argues that the director does not oppose the Hollywood style of film-making but that he uses its ‘fascinating blandishments’ to force the spectator to surrender to the narrative and thereby to confront an image of themselves in order to provoke a crisis of consciousness (1996: 83).

films, *Memorias del subdesarrollo* that developed similar stylistic tendencies as later described by García Espinosa. Gutiérrez Alea's theoretical work is perhaps best brought together in his 1982 book, *Dialéctica del espectador*.

The work attempts to bring together many of the director's views on film-making in Cuba in much the same way as 'Por un cine imperfecto' does for García Espinosa: to search for a film-making process, technique or style that supports the aims of the Cuban Revolution. In this sense sentences such as: 'A partir de lo que entendemos debe ser la función social del cine en Cuba en estos momentos contribuir de la manera más eficaz de elevar el nivel de conciencia revolucionaria del espectador, armarlo para la lucha ideológica que estamos obligados a sostener contra las tendencias reaccionarias de todo tipo...' (Gutiérrez Alea, 1982: 9), come straight out of the Marxist, modernising handbook. As Trotter states of modernism, it represents 'a peculiar openness to modernity at its most enabling (sometimes a fearsome prospect)' (2007: 4).

In opposition to cinema from the capitalist world, Gutiérrez Alea tries to establish the premise of a cinema 'verdaderamente, integralmente revolucionario, activo, movilizador, estimulante y al mismo tiempo consecuentemente popular' (Gutiérrez Alea, 1988: 9). Popular in the sense that it was an expression of the people, not in the capitalist sense of attracting a heterogeneous public, the majority, 'ávido de ilusiones' (Ibid: 11). These illusions (of Hollywood cinema) are false, Gutiérrez Alea argues, and create nothing more than a passive consumer of popular culture rather than an active recipient/participant.

In his work, Gutiérrez Alea is very much concerned with the relationship between form and content. It is too simplistic, he argues, to merely say that cinema and art are for entertainment purposes and, in order to raise the cultural level of the spectator, the artist or film-maker simply has to deliver 'social' *content* in an attractive *form* (original italics), as the relationship between form and content is far more complicated than the simple mixing of two ingredients together in an ideal recipe (Ibid: 19). If film is to fulfil its function properly it must constitute a factor in a person's development. In order to stop spectators becoming passive observers of their own reality they need to understand their *true* reality. Film should

therefore appeal not just to emotion and feeling but also to reason and intellect. It is, 'la emoción ligada al *descubrimiento* de algo, a la comprensión racional de algún aspecto de la realidad' (Ibid: 21). The important point here is that the fiction of film is part of daily reality and so reality and fiction are not simply opposing spheres. Film, therefore, should be in the process of mediating this space between the two in order to help spectators come to a deepened sense of their own reality.²⁹ The spectator should not, therefore, identify unconditionally with characters on screen: 'cuando se absolutiza el recurso de identificación, se está cerrando el paso a la comunicación racional' (Ibid: 36).

Gutiérrez Alea draws on ideas by playwright and theorist Bertolt Brecht in his view that this Aristotelian dramaturgy, the cathartic identification by spectators, was an obstacle to creating the spectators' critical sense.³⁰ Brecht wanted to break with these traditions by keeping the spectators at a critical distance from the work in order to avoid being taken in by the fascination of the hero's personality, but at the same time sufficiently drawn in so that they would not lose interest. This, as Gutiérrez Alea admits, is not an easy process.

In a stylistic sense this can be achieved using a variety of sources, for example through montage and/or through sound/vision relationships that provide counterpoints to promote the 'emoción de descubrir algo' (Ibid: 39).³¹ Trotter refers to montage in cinema as 'the combination of two shots in such a way as to generate an effect or meaning not discernible in either shot alone, or to the sort of conceptual or rhythmical cutting associated in particular with Sergei Eisenstein' (2007: 3). This is important as Gutiérrez Alea's concerns regarding identification in cinema centre on a critical/aesthetic opposition between the ideas of Brecht and Eisenstein.

²⁹ Gutiérrez Alea uses the example of *Tarzan* films to illustrate his point arguing that viewers naturally identify with the supposed 'good guys' without thinking about what they actually represent. He wonders how a spectator's class-consciousness can be so dulled as to not see the realities at work as Tarzan kills lots of black men to rescue his female companion (Gutiérrez Alea, 1982: 35).

³⁰ Aristotle said the goal of tragedy was catharsis (the removal of fear and pity in the spectator by the presentation of fear and pity and the identification by the spectator in characters). So, when this identification is produced, Brecht calls it Aristotelian. Identification, therefore, is the basis of catharsis (Ibid: 37).

³¹ In an examination of modernism and film, the principle of montage is seen by Michael Wood as 'quintessentially modernist' and is one of the narrative techniques that can be exchanged between modernist literature and cinema (Wood, 1999: 28).

As Gutiérrez Alea points out, both were born in 1898,³² one year after the first Lumière films were shown in Cuba (1979: 28). The importance for both men was to promote a spectator armed with reason, to transform man and accelerate his development. But where Eisenstein wanted to put the spectator outside himself, captivated by the screen and by pathos, Brecht wanted the spectator separated and distanced from the screen and the characters on it, remaining critical and analytical. Eisenstein wanted a spectator compelled to jump from his seat and shout in a process of ecstasy (*ex-stasis* – being outside of oneself). This implies identification with a character or characters on screen, a separation from oneself and thus a transition to another state; an *enajenación* ('alteration'). Brecht desired that the spectator place him/herself apart from the content or characters, and not be drawn from his/her world to into a separate world of art.

Gutiérrez Alea examines the similarities and differences between the ideas of the two theorists, arguing that, although there are many stylistic variants between them, their ideas also interconnect. Eisenstein was known for developing the cinematic style of intellectual montage and Gutiérrez Alea argues that his cinema did not simply appeal to the emotions but had a deeply intellectual foundation (1979: 32).³³ Likewise, Brecht does not dismiss sentiment but argues that the emphasis must be on rational argument, in order to wake up the intellectual activity of the spectator through the sensations to develop a 'toma de conciencia' – consciousness raising (Gutiérrez Alea, 1979: 34). For Brecht, a 'new' spectator is created that questions his or her own behaviour and at no moment identifies with the characters being watched. The bridge between the two, for Gutiérrez Alea, is that each one tries to arrive at an emotional understanding of the spectacle and for this reason cannot be seen as direct opposites.

³² In her 1978 essay Julianne Burton discusses pre- and post-revolutionary Cuban cinema and the evolution of ICAIC. 'By 1898, Cuban audiences were already being treated to the cinema as a vehicle for historical falsification imposed upon them by their neighbors (sic) to the north. *Fighting With Our Boys in Cuba, Raising Old Glory Over Dro Castle, The Battle of San Juan Hill*, and the like alternated authentic footage with blatant simulations filmed not in Cuba but in the US.' (1978: 17).

³³ Eisenstein's most famous work is his film *Battleship Potemkin* (1925). Considered by many (as Taylor asserts) to be the best film ever made, it 'is regarded as a pioneering milestone in the development of world cinema – especially Eisenstein's bold camera-work and breathtaking editing' (2000: back cover). It will be discussed again later, with reference to the short film *Zoe* in chapter six.

This is important for the analysis of *Hasta cierto punto* (released only four years after the publication of Gutiérrez Alea's essay on Brecht and Eisenstein). In the 1983 film, an attempt at creating a Brechtian/Eisensteinian collaboration is evident.³⁴ This thesis argues that it is for this reason, this confusion of sensibilities, that the work fails to provide the intended message, as it draws too heavily on Eisensteinian pathos, while Sara Gómez's direct Marxist dialectical discourse is very clear in its aims, as we shall later see in the detailed analyses in Chapter Two.

Both Gutiérrez Alea and García Espinosa elaborated their ideas for a revolutionary, modernising and innovative film practice, one that could appeal to a mass audience but that could also be informative, educational, didactic and a challenge to old forms and ideas.³⁵ They both wanted to challenge the traditional opposition between 'high culture' and 'mass culture' as seen in North America and Europe, for example.

Both the films in Chapter Two develop the mechanics of a cinema that could appropriate both elements of high culture and mass culture in order to create cinema that was both revolutionary and entertaining, and truly modern in the Cuban sense of the term referring to post-1959 cinema when everything was new. Both films fit the modernising aesthetic, designed to promote a revolutionary consciousness on the part of the spectator, concerning aspects of male-female relations. The two films draw on the cinematic codes they wish to subvert in order to promote their message. As Jameson states: 'the modernist project...can be seen as a kind of homeopathic strategy whereby the scandalous and intolerable external irritant is drawn into the aesthetic process itself and thereby systematically worked over,

³⁴ In an article by Luciano Castillo, Gutiérrez Alea is quoted as describing his own feelings about using montage techniques similar to those of the Latvian film-maker. 'Estaba muy lejos de imaginar entonces que ese recurso – la mezcla del documento y la ficción – acabaría convirtiéndose en uno de los rasgos, no solo de mi estilo personal, sino de toda nuestra incipiente dramaturgia. Les confieso que ese recurso para mí, ofrece posibilidades inagotables. Lo utilicé al máximo en *Memorias del subdesarrollo*, donde las ficciones más elaboradas coexisten con todo tipo de estímulos – estímulos sonoros y visuales que provienen de fuentes documentales y bibliográficas, lo integré al tema mismo de la película en *Hasta cierto punto* y traté de analizarlo, desde una perspectiva teórica, en *Dialéctica del espectador*' [Castillo, L., 2006, 'Tomás Gutiérrez Alea: Dialéctica del documentalista II'. At: www.habananaradio.cu/singlefile/?secc=13&subsecc=35&id_art=2007010111122 (accessed 03/07/08)].

³⁵ As Frederic Jameson says, modernizing theory and practice has a 'strategic emphasis on innovation and novelty, the obligatory break with previous styles' (1992: 17).

‘acted out,’ and symbolically neutralized’ (Ibid: 18). In Chapter Two we shall see how, in both *De cierta manera* and *Hasta cierto punto*, the ‘irritant’ of a type of Hollywood dramaturgy is used and then ‘worked over’; only this working-over, as a tool to aid the subversion of masculinist codes of *machismo*, is less effective in Gutiérrez Alea’s film than in Gómez’s. As we shall see in subsequent chapters, this modernising aesthetic would itself be subverted with new ideas during the mid to late 1980s.

Identification and Ideology

As Davies argues, Cuban film-makers used techniques of identification and distancing in various measures to cajole the audience. She quotes film theorist Anne Friedberg: ‘identification ‘recuperates the separation between self and other and in this way replicates the very structure of patriarchy...it demands sameness...disallows difference’ and ‘is a process with its own ideology’’ (1996: 180). For Davies, identification comes from recognition (of the ‘object’ on screen), and ‘is an implicit confirmation of the status quo to the extent that the spectator’s perception of common qualities in a character is an important mechanism of the ‘herd instinct’. Distancing, on the other hand, counters this effect’ (Ibid). This is important to understand the processes at work in *De cierta manera* and *Hasta cierto punto*, films that use the two cinematic devices to force the (male) spectator to both ‘look at’, and ‘look outside’ of, himself (to identify with the central male character and then to be forced to become distanced from that character) in a consideration of gender relations.

Identification in the cinema is a hugely complex and often misunderstood field of study and it would be impossible and unnecessary to cover all aspects of it in this work. But identification is a psychological process, and psychoanalytic theory offers the most complex account of it, even though it is incomplete. For this reason, it is important to consider some important aspects of the process of identification in cinema in order to better understand the films in question

In *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, Laplanche and Pontalis summarise identification as ‘a psychological process whereby the subject assimilates an aspect, property or attribute of

the other and is transformed, wholly or partially, after the model the other provides. It is by means of a series of identifications that the personality is constituted and specified' (1967: 205). Suffice it to say that when it comes to the representation of gender relations it is important to consider identification processes involving both masculinity and femininity. In the first film to be considered, *De cierta manera*, I will argue that the film tricks the young, black, male, Cuban spectator into an identification with the male protagonist, Mario, and then later subverts that identification, causing a change of consciousness on the part of the subject-spectator regarding his view of *machismo* and of how a man should act within the Revolution.

According to Kuhn, there are four dominant codes or operations within a film that determine how spectators create identifications in cinema: '...the photographic image, *mis-en-scène*, mobile framing and editing. These operations are historically specific and construct modes of address that draw spectators into films by making the reading of the film seem effortless' (1982: 36).³⁶ She argues that, in dominant cinema (referring here to Hollywood), the production of the meaning of the images being watched is deliberately obfuscated so that the spectator does not know how the meaning behind those images is being produced. In order to find out 'how the tricks work – how the discourse is constructed – how meaning is produced, we must go below the surface of the discourse' (Ibid). Imperfect cinema, then, intends to do just this; to illustrate how meaning is produced and thereby to undermine and deconstruct it. Both films in Chapter two use the four elements described by Kuhn to subvert the passive consumption of dominant (Hollywood) cinema.

Within the four operations in the process of cinematic identification, there are, according to Kuhn, five issues to consider: the subject-spectator, cinematic address, suture, unconscious processes and scopophilia (1982: 46). Kuhn's work on the relationship between

³⁶ Kuhn argues that certain codes of photography such as close-up, long shot, medium shot etc serve to accentuate and identify detail. For example, close-ups are often used to accentuate the type of 'psychological realism' associated with dominant cinema. *Mis-en-scène* (the setting in the frame) can produce meaning as it can provide a context in the form of a location; but also movement within the scene ('mobile framing') can emphasise a certain psychological state. Editing has its own rules that are strictly adhered to in dominant cinema and rely, generally, on continuity and the provision of a coherent narrative; 'the effect of this is to make cinematic discourse – the process of meaning production – invisible' (Kuhn, 1982: 38).

the cinematic text and the spectator draws on work by French theorist Jacques Lacan (1901-1981) who argued: 'The unconscious is constituted by the effects of speech on the subject, it is the dimension in which the subject is determined in the development of the effects of speech, consequently the unconscious is structured like a language' (1977: 149). Thus, the unconscious subject is continuously being produced at the same time as the subject itself is being produced through language (Kuhn, 1982: 46). This language is external to the subject: 'The images within which the subject "finds" itself always come to it from outside' (Silverman, 1992: 6). However, this is problematic for any notion of subjectivity as: 'In acceding to language, the subject forfeits all existential reality, and forgoes any future possibility of "wholeness"' (Silverman, 1992: 4).

This is important to understand how the two films in question try to cajole the Cuban spectator in an attempt to change the population's attitudes towards *machismo* in revolutionary Cuba. The central characters go through transformations of consciousness regarding their *machista* behaviour, but the spectator is not simply asked to passively consume the images offered to them but to consciously question the nature of that *machismo* and how they, as subjects, might be able to change also. In this way the films generate the sense that they desire a unified male subject, the new subject of the Revolution, released from the chains of a historically constructed *machismo* into a new and modern revolutionary society. But as the final part of this work argues, Cuban cinema towards the end of the 1980s begins to question the very idea that such a 'proper' or 'constructed' subjectivity on the part of the individual is attainable.

So human subjectivity, language, and the unconscious are linked in a complex negotiation that consists of a series of formative stages, such as the mirror stage. The mirror stage, according to Lacan, is a primordial transformation (i.e. one that occurs before the subject enters into language itself) that occurs in the subject when it assumes an image. It occurs in a child from around six months old when it views itself in a mirror, and can last up until 18 months. Lacan describes it as the 'threshold of the visible world' (1977a: 3). For Kuhn, and useful here for an analysis of how a male spectator might identify with a character

on screen, the formation of the subject in cinema is partially based on the constant negotiation between language, the unconscious and the specular (relations of looking and seeing).

One of the important elements of cinematic identification in this play between language, the unconscious and the specular, described by Kuhn, is that of 'suture'. Suture refers to the part that the spectator plays, as a stand-in enunciator, where the lack of a source of enunciation enables the spectator to fill this gap. 'The spectator becomes a stand-in enunciator (the subject in the text)' (Kuhn, 1982: 56),³⁷ so becoming central in the process of signification, as there is an interaction between spectator and film that constructs meaning. This construction of meaning is mostly hidden by classic Hollywood narrative, but Cuban cinema looked to illustrate this process in order to create a very different relationship between film and spectator; as García Espinosa's essay illustrates.

Analysis of the two films in Chapter Two will develop Kuhn's ideas on cinematic identification as well as illustrate how, particularly in *De cierta manera*, the central process of identification in the film serves the modernising cause of Cuban revolutionary cinema via the use of the practices of imperfect cinema. This will be achieved using ideas from film theorist Laura Mulvey, whose seminal essay 'Visual Pleasure, Narrative Cinema' was published in 1975, a year after *De cierta manera* was finished but three years before its release. In it she argues that the spectator subject arrives at a film with pre-existing 'patterns of fascination' regarding sexual difference and that, in mainstream film, these patterns are often reinforced. For Mulvey: 'psychoanalytic theory... [can be used as]... a political weapon, demonstrating the way the unconscious of patriarchal society has structured film form' (1975: 6).

Woman, in the symbolic order of patriarchy, has two functions, Mulvey argues: she firstly symbolises the castration threat by her lack of a penis, and secondly thereby raises her child within this order. After this her meaning has ended other than in memory of 'maternal

³⁷ In a typical camera move called shot-reverse-shot for example (when the camera first is aimed at one speaker from the eye level of a presumed listener and then subsequently reversed and aimed at the former listener, now second speaker) the spectator's look seems to come from an identical place to the source of the 'absent character'. The spectator is standing-in for the character out of shot. When that character appears again in the reverse shot the gap between the spectator and his relation with the film is sewn up – sutured. Such moments of absence, presence, suture, are repeated throughout a film so the spectator is ensured an ongoing process of subject positioning (Kuhn, 1982: 57).

plenitude and memory of lack' (Ibid: 7). Woman becomes a bearer, not a maker, of meaning. The ultimate challenge, Mulvey believes, is how to fight the unconscious, which, as we have seen, is structured like a language. Use of psychoanalytic theory, then, combined with the study of cinema, can examine the *status quo* of the patriarchal order, and ask questions about the way the unconscious structures ways of seeing and the pleasure in looking.

In mainstream Hollywood cinema, the erotic, the pleasure in looking, is encoded into the dominant language of the patriarchal order. It is therefore incumbent upon an alternative cinema to destroy this codification, to deconstruct this pleasure, thereby eradicating it in order to create a new language of desire. This chapter argues that the possibilities arrived at via theoretical work from García Espinosa and Gutiérrez Alea, discussed above, have the potential to serve this purpose where the issue of gender relations is concerned, as they can break with the dominant codes of Hollywood dramaturgy to subvert pre-existing negative tendencies.

For Mulvey, a major source of spectatorial pleasure in cinema comes from the desire to look (scopophilia) and the fascination with the human form.³⁸ The spectator is driven to look by a voyeuristic fantasy; the extreme darkness of the cinema theatre separating individuals from others, promoting 'the illusion of voyeuristic separation'; the illusion of looking in on a private world (Ibid: 9). Cinematic conventions are all 'anthropomorphic', she states, they focus attention on the human form. There is a general fascination with recognition and likeness through faces, bodies and their relation to the surroundings shown in a film. Here she (like Kuhn) makes use of work by Lacan who has shown how a child's mirror image is

³⁸ Mulvey makes a brief analysis of Freud's 'Three essays on Sexuality' where he isolates scopophilia as a component instinct of sexuality. Freud associated scopophilia with the taking of people as objects – 'a controlling and curious gaze' (Mulvey, 1975: 9) and he uses the voyeuristic behaviour of children (their desire to see and to make sure of the private and forbidden, and the presence or absence of the penis) to illustrate this. For Freud scopophilia is essentially active and, after being initially attached to pre-genital, auto-eroticism, it becomes attached to others (who become objects of fascination) and continues to exist as an erotic basis for pleasure in looking at another person (Ibid). Mulvey suggests that the scopophilic look can be broken down into three different looks associated with the cinema: 1. the camera recording the event; 2. the audience; 3. the characters. Narrative film conventions deny the first two and subordinate them to the third. The first two must be absent in order for reality, obviousness and truth to be available. By making these first two evident (one of the goals of 'imperfect cinema'), the power of the third is reduced, thus deconstructing mainstream narrative cinema by unravelling its codes of pleasure regarding the scopophilic look (Ibid: 17). Later, in the film *De cierta manera*, we will see how this deconstruction works in film practice.

crucial to the formation of its ego³⁹ – this is a joyous moment for them as they imagine the mirror image to be more complete than their own limited capacity. Thus there occurs recognition and misrecognition at the same time – as the image received is at once conceived as a reflected image of the self but also misrecognised as superior. This image constitutes the first articulation of the ‘I’, of subjectivity, and of the relationship between image and self-image.

There are then two contradictory aspects of the pleasure of looking, according to Mulvey. One is the scopophilic aspect of using another as an object of sexual stimulation and the other is the formation of the narcissistic ego by identification with the image on screen. The first is a function of the sexual instinct, the second a function of ego libido. In cinema, Mulvey argues, this contradiction between libido and ego has found a fantasy world that complements it perfectly (1975: 11) as the desire to look can be satiated. For Mulvey (drawing on Freud), the world of looking is divided between active/male and passive/female.⁴⁰ The male gaze projects fantasy onto the female figure, which is styled accordingly. [The] ‘woman displayed as sexual object is the *leitmotif* of erotic spectacle’ (Ibid: 12). So there is a ‘lack of verisimilitude in the representation of the female in Hollywood cinema due to the primacy of the male, scopophilic gaze’ (Ibid).

The active/passive relationship illustrates that the male is the one who controls and dominates via the look; the man in the story is the one making things happen, he controls the

³⁹ When a baby sees itself in a mirror, it both recognizes itself and misrecognizes itself. *Méconnaissance* means to ‘misconstrue’ or ‘misrecognize’. Lacan argues that, during the mirror stage, the infant misrecognises the mirror image as an ‘imago’, an ‘ideal ego’ (1977a: 2), and that this misrecognition continues throughout the life of the individual; its existence depending on others and the Symbolic Order. ‘Adults still feel uncomfortable about themselves as integrated and whole individuals. Self-images continue through their lives to cause narcissistic fascination and/or discomfort in that the image somehow does not look like ‘me’’. At:

http://changingminds.org/disciplines/psychoanalysis/concepts/mirror_phase.htm. For Kaja Silverman also, Lacan’s work on the ego is important for the study of subjectivity and identification in cinema. Silverman states, in reference to the mirror phase of a child’s subjective development: ‘What the subject takes to be its ‘self’ is both other and fictive...a veritable ‘mirage’ or illusion, the result of a series of misrecognitions’ (1992: 3/4).

⁴⁰ Smelik also believes that dominant cinema operates on a binary opposition of activity/passivity which is gendered and signified through sexual difference. The male character is active and powerful and all action unfolds around him; his look is primary. ‘In this respect cinema has perfected the visual machinery suitable for male desire such as already canonized in the tradition of Western art and aesthetics’. The ‘ideal’ spectator is assumed to be male with the woman as his object (Smelik, 1999: 356).

film fantasy. A 'satisfying sense of omnipotence' (Ibid: 13) is created whereby the male spectator identifies with the male protagonist, which coincides with the active power of the male look. So the male movie star is the 'idealised, complete, powerful ego of the spectator conceived in the original moment of mirror recognition' (Ibid). The character in the story can control events better than the subject/spectator just as the mirror image was more perfect than the real one. The use of camera technology enhances the naturalistic process involved here as the active male figure must be seen in natural conditions; the film thus reproducing accurately the mirror image. The male protagonist is free to command the stage; 'a stage of spatial illusion in which he articulates the look and creates the action' (Ibid).

Mulvey's work is very useful for an analysis of *machismo* in the two films to be discussed later in Chapter Two, particularly for *De cierta manera*, where the interaction between García Espinosa's ideas on 'imperfect cinema' and Mulvey's use of psychoanalysis can help to uncover the dialectical reasoning behind Gómez's film; that breaks down classic cinematic codes, 'shifts the emphasis of the look' (Ibid: 16) and challenges the pleasure that mainstream cinema provides. As Davies comments with reference to 'imperfect cinema', the Cuban film industry was at the 'cutting edge of counter-cinema practice' (1997: 346).⁴¹ And, as Janet McCabe comments of Mulvey's 1975 essay, it was a founding moment in feminist film theory as it proposed a new feminist aesthetic, – to destroy the conventional relay of looks 'to free the look of the camera into its materiality in time and space and the look of the audience into dialectics and passionate detachment' (2004: 31). This chapter therefore proposes a strong link between the modernising aesthetic of imperfect cinema and its potential to develop a discourse counter to the hegemony of Hollywood, and the alternative film practices desired by Mulvey. Via an analysis of *De cierta manera* in Chapter Two, it will

⁴¹ Mulvey's essay was criticised for assuming the primacy of the male spectator, and for not considering female spectatorship, particularly in a film where there may be a central female character. Via Freud, she argued, in a follow-up to her 1975 essay, that, in a female spectator there occurs a 'trans-sex identification' whereby the female spectator temporarily accepts 'masculinisation' in memory of her active, masculine phase, that Freud had said was a period of development for both boys and girls (1981: 125-134).

be possible to see how this link can create a Marxist-modernising feminist discourse precisely through the subversion of the traditional cinematic gaze Mulvey criticises.

Important for an understanding of the two films here, within a revolutionary process that considers cinema as paramount to the dissemination of ideas, is the notion that any level of cinematic identification can be used on a national scale. For Silverman, Lacan's mirror stage is something that occurs 'on a mass as well as an individual level' (1992: 20). Using Althusser, she argues that ideology constitutes both the subject and the world. 'Since hegemony depends upon the maintenance of what is at least to some degree a shared universe, it necessarily implies not only a common identification, but a shared "reality," both subordinate to the principle of a recognition which is simultaneously a misrecognition' (Ibid: 24). When a new cinema is being created, to serve a revolution that seeks to change the consciousness of its people across many areas of culture and society, it is easy to see the potential that cinema can provide, if identification at such a mass, ideological level is indeed possible.

Claire Johnston, one of the foremost authorities on the study of gender and cinema, argues that cinema develops certain iconographies in order to enable spectators to decipher images on screen, and that these become entrenched within a system (2000: 23). Anneke Smelik agrees: 'Cinema is a cultural practice where myths about women and femininity, and men and masculinity, in short, myths about sexual difference are produced, reproduced and represented' (1998, 7). Through Roland Barthes, Johnston illustrates how cinema aids the propagation of myth, even if it is not a conscious effort on the part of the film-makers.⁴²

We have already seen (in the introduction to this work) how women in Cuban society have been portrayed, with a strong emphasis on the image of the Cuban woman as both mother and revolutionary; a sexist image transformed into an iconic status of nationhood. It is sexist in that the image occupies both spaces of male desire – woman as virgin mother and as whore; the phallic rifle of the revolutionary heroine as signifier of the latter and the baby as

⁴² Johnston refers to Roland Barthes' work *Mythologies* (1957) to illustrate how myth, as the signifier of ideology, operates to become natural. 'Myth therefore makes the ideology of sexism, for example, invisible' (Johnston, 2000: 23-24).

signifier of the former. The whole myth of woman as symbol of nation is built around a sexist, patriarchal viewpoint but this sexism 'disappears' as such when the image is used to symbolise unity of the Cuban nation as a whole; for criticising that image is equivalent to criticising the nation. Cuban state ideology has appropriated the image of the female for its own use – to support and even propagate patriarchy. 'Within a sexist ideology and a male-dominated cinema, woman is presented as what she represents for man' (Johnston, 2000: 24).

Elizabeth Cowie argues that there is no 'original essence' against which to measure cinematic images – no essence 'woman' but 'we are constructed as agents within the social by legal and economic discourses. Sexual difference may or may not be constituted as an aspect of that agency' (1997: 18). This is important in the Cuban context, as woman has been constructed ideologically in very specific ways, as we have already seen. It is important to remember that film is not a simple representation of already constituted meaning, so it must be involved as one of the agencies *producing* meaning and hence in producing definitions of women.

However, woman – in cinema – is assumed to have a meaning already existing outside of the representation of each film that the story then denies or denigrates. This meaning is produced (as critics such as Cowie and Mulvey would assert) by and for men so the filmic representation is inadequate. 'Patriarchy controls the image of woman, assigning it a function and a value determined by and for men' (Ibid).⁴³

Clearly, cinema is both part and product of ideology. It developed as a product of a bourgeois ideology but is central to the development of a new, Cuban revolutionary philosophy. As García Espinosa's work on imperfect cinema shows, this ideology contains

⁴³ In an examination of the film *Morocco* (Sternberg, 1930), Claire Johnston shows how the role of the central female character, Amy Jolly (played by Marlene Dietrich), is subverted by the male character even when the film revolves entirely around the woman. Man remains at the centre and woman is repressed – it is the 'image of woman' that we see and the woman becomes the 'pseudo-centre of the filmic discourse'; the real opposition being male/non-male. As Johnston comments, Jolly is even dressed in masculine clothing (2000: 25). In *Hasta cierto punto*, this oppositional attempt at promoting strong female characters can lead to an enhancement of the very thing being opposed by exaggerating its strengths and characteristics in a phallocentric, even fetishistic manner. It can, therefore reinforce rather than subvert existing myths. Johnston continues with an examination of *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (1953) and *Bringing Up Baby* (1938), both by Howard Hawks, arguing that women have positive qualities but enter a male universe in these films where the relationship is firmly posited as male/non-male; where the non-male has, finally, to be negated.

the tools and techniques of cinema itself, which is bound up in it. If the prevailing ideology of a system is patriarchal, sexist, then 'women's' cinema, to be effective, must 'disrupt the fabric of the male bourgeois cinema' rather than simply display the 'natural' dominant ideology (Johnston, 2000: 29). In its examination of sexism at the level of the intellectual Cuban 'bourgeoisie', *Hasta cierto punto* makes a bold attempt at a disruption of this fabric but ultimately fails to deliver.

Conclusion to Chapter One

This chapter illustrates a number of elements that are central to an understanding of the two films in Chapter Two. Both deal extensively with *machismo* and this chapter has shown how this notion is constructed and its relationship to war, sex, aggression, power, control and the division of the sexes. The chapter argues that there are a number of cinematic methods that can possibly subvert dominant depictions of the *macho*, methods that require a psychoanalytical approach to analyse them in detail. The chapter ties in discussions of *machismo* in general with discussions of how identification is created in cinema and how these identification processes can be used by film directors to persuade an audience. By understanding how these identification processes work it may be possible to deconstruct them. The two films in the next chapter use theoretical practices designed to expose the myths of the dominant codes of film-making, and both deal extensively with the problem of gender relations in Cuba. They both operate at the level of the modernising practices of the Revolution to try to develop new depictions of male/female, and question pre-revolutionary realities. Chapter Two will show how successful or otherwise they are.

Chapter Two: Machismo on Screen

Part One

De cierta manera (Sara Gómez, 1974)

Sara Gómez's highly experimental, bold and captivating film is one of the true landmarks of the New Latin American cinema, being the first full-length feature to be directed by a Cuban woman (Foster, 1995: 150). Gómez, born in 1943, tragically died of acute asthma in June of 1974 before the final edit of the film was finished, but Tomás Gutiérrez Alea and Julio García Espinosa were responsible for its completion in the edit suite (Ibid).¹

But, apart from some of the post-production, this is Gómez's work, her teeth having been cut on the 10 documentaries she had made previously at ICAIC, covering matters ranging from a portrait of her home city of Santiago de Cuba (*Iré a Santiago*, 1964) to a music documentary, (*Y...tenemos sabor*, 1968), to reflections on the lives of individuals living on the Isla de la Juventud (*En la otra isla*, 1967), where Castro was imprisoned by Batista.²

Set in the early years of the Revolution, the film deliberately uses imagery of destruction and reconstruction, overplayed by a didactic voice-over, to establish its modernising cause. Indeed, after the initial proleptic sequence, to be discussed later, the story 'begins' with the image of a wrecking ball destroying slum housing in a poor Havana neighbourhood. The film is both set in, and forms part of, Cuba's modernising project during the 1960s and 1970s, and reconstruction is an important element of this. 'A fundamental part of the project of modernity has involved the reconstruction of cities' (AlSayyad, 2006: 2).³ As AlSayyad also states: 'No medium has ever captured the city and the experience of urban

¹ According to Chanan, the editing was well advanced at the moment of her death. The majority of the scenes were already cut and the commentary had already been planned although it wasn't totally written. The ending of the film was therefore delayed and, due to technical problems in the laboratory, the negative had to be sent to Switzerland to be treated and blown up from 16mm to 35mm. He comments that the film did not make its debut until two years later, in 1976 (Chanan, 1989: 27). Its release date remains a mystery. While Pick comments that the film was not released until 1978 (Pick, 1993: 130), Lesage believes that it was released in 1977 [Lesage, J. (1979), 'One Way Or Another: Dialectical, Revolutionary, Feminist', in *Jump Cut*, no. 20, May. At: www.uoregon.edu/~jlesage/Juliafolder/OneWayOrAnother.html (accessed 16/07/08)].

² For more on the documentaries of Sara Gómez, see Chanan, 1985: 275-303.

³ Later in this work we shall see how the similar destruction of housing (in St Louis, Missouri, 1972) became a symbol of the collapse of modernity and the ushering in of postmodernity.

modernity better than film' (Ibid: 1). This analysis will argue that *De cierta manera*, in its use of the modernising techniques of imperfect cinema, and via its theme of reconstruction (both material and spiritual), both reflects and constructs a vision of modernity in post-revolutionary Cuba, through its discourse on *machismo* and male-female relations.

The film begins, pre-credits, with a flash-forward sequence (the significance of which is only made clear later in the film when it is repeated) of Humberto (Mario Limonta) at a worker's assembly apologising for taking time off work to go and visit his dying mother. Humberto's friend Mario (Mario Balmaseda), stands up to vociferously denounce his colleague and tells the assembly that Humberto had actually taken time off work illegally to go on holiday with his girlfriend. After the opening scene, the story of a developing love affair between Mario and Yolanda (Yolanda Cuéllar) unfolds. The narrative plot is interspersed with documentary sections, illustrating the destruction of neighbourhood slums and the building of new, more modern housing, as Mario and Yolanda both embark on a process of change and individual reformulation in the new Cuba.

Mario is struggling to come to terms with what is now expected of men in the Revolution as his old *machista* ways, displayed in typical fashion by his friend Humberto, no longer have a place, while Yolanda also needs to understand the needs of the Revolution and the use of education to help bring this particular poverty-stricken, working-class, largely black neighbourhood out of its previously marginalised existence.

Mario is himself a product of a marginalised, working-class Havana neighbourhood, who tells Yolanda that he regularly played truant from school and therefore never had a good formal education. He says that he was 'saved' by military service; if it hadn't been for that he would have become a *ñáñigo*, a member of the *Abakuá* secret society that has its roots in West Africa.⁴ Gómez makes strong criticism of this element of Cuban culture, showing, in

⁴ As this documentary part of the film describes, the *Abakuá* society is a religious practice 'de cultura patriarcal' that arrived with the large African slave communities of the 19th century to the ports of Havana and Matanzas with the dramatic increase in Cuban sugar production. An exclusively male society it epitomises the values of male chauvinism in Cuban society (Chanan, 1985: 287).

documentary form, the rituals of *Abakuá* taking place, including the sacrificial slaughter of a goat, while a voice-over states that:

De África occidental llegan hombres de diferentes culturas en diferentes etapas de desarrollo...

Por otra parte, la economía colonial, con una casa de contrataciones comerciales, con centro en Sevilla y Cádiz, hace posible que durante siglos, entren en nuestra floreciente capital españoles procedentes de estas ciudades andaluzas, recrutados como marinos precisamente dentro de las capas marginales; aventureros que llegan a la Habana con todo su código de violencia, machismo, el uso de la navaja y el culto a la hembra, y que van a encontrar un marco social propicio para integrarse a una población criolla de semejante naturaleza.

As the male goat is sacrificed on camera, the didactic voice-over continues: 'After the Billy is castrated it becomes a Nanny, representing the woman who tells the God's secret and causes war.' *Machismo*, war and the formulation of the Cuban nation are brought together with the voice-over asserting that this cultural manifestation epitomises the norms and values of *machismo* in the traditions of Cuban society.

Creemos que su carácter de sociedad secreta, tradicional y excluyente la sitúa al contrario al progreso, e incapaz de insertarse dentro de los valores de la vida moderna.

The film suggests that, without military service, Mario would never have been able to undertake the process of change and reformation that he is struggling through during the story, as he would have been caught up in the *Abakuá* religion of his neighbourhood. Although the film is highly critical of the *Abakuá* religious society and what it stands for, Gómez counteracts this contradiction with a positive portrayal of the inclusive and acceptable *Santería* religion when Mario and Yolanda visit a *Santería* ceremony. In contrast to the portrayal of the *Abakuá* ceremony, the *Santería* one includes women and does not involve the sacrifice of a goat. So Gómez is not critical of traditional Afro-Cuban religious ceremony *per se*, just those that have, as she clearly believes, negative and regressive tendencies, particularly pertaining to male chauvinism. This criticism creates a dialectical relationship between film and spectator, where criticism is seen as productive and progressive. As Lesage states: 'Rather than look at conflict as merely painful or disruptive, or seeing it as something

that can or should be contained, dialectical thought looks at all phenomena, natural and social, in terms of ongoing internal process and built-in change'.⁵

Thus, Gómez links the traits of *machismo* directly to the formation of the Cuban nation, with the blame firmly placed on the historical consequences of colonialism, as argued in Chapter One by Stavans and De La Torre.⁶ The criticism by the film of macho culture is not a criticism of the Revolution, as all the *machista* elements of the feature are shown to be a result of pre-revolutionary tendencies. Adhering to the mores of imperfect cinema, the film constructs the reasons behind contemporary social issues and tries to work through them. Such is the part that history plays within it, as another protagonist. History acts almost like a ghostly character, haunting the protagonists' every sentence and giving both reason and purpose to their present and future actions. It is the documentary sequences that situate, culturally and historically, the love-story narrative of Mario and Yolanda, adding an increasing weight and complexity to an otherwise simple plot.

The historical site is extremely important; Mario's personal history playing an integral part in his current progress. Mario tells Yolanda of his own, difficult past and she tells him of her more privileged upbringing, that was not luxurious but, she says, her family had '*recursos*'. The two characters combine throughout the film in a system of dialectical exchanges that lead, ultimately, to a search for a vision of a modernist utopia at the end. This contrast of history between these two characters plays a major part in the film as traditions, stereotypes and perceptions are played alongside each other in a kind of socio-historical experiment; reflected by the sociological experiment that has occurred all around them as the old, slum neighbourhood is being demolished to make way for new housing. The relationship between Mario and Yolanda is central to the film's narrative, the differences between them being made evident through the work that they do and through their respective histories.

⁵ Lesage, J. (1979). At: www.uoregon.edu/~jlesage/Juliafolder/OneWayOrAnother.html (accessed 16/07/08).

⁶ Stavans, 1995: 49; De La Torre, 1999: 214.

Mario is a bus depot mechanic, brought up in the slum district of the Las Yaguas area of Havana where African traditions still play a large role in the community.⁷ Yolanda is a schoolteacher working in the district, who comes from a wealthier background. It is evident that she is not used to the area in which she now finds herself, and the lack of education and anti-social behaviour of some of the community, including some of her pupils, appears anathema to her. As much as Mario, Yolanda is also on a steep learning curve.

What the film does examine is the difficulty of leaving history and tradition behind and moving into a new future where *machismo* should play no part. It is set some years after the triumph of the revolution in 1959 and yet still many of these stereotypes, traditions and practices remain. As Chanan states: 'Marginalism, underdevelopment, machismo, are forms of disruption inherited from the past (1985: 290). And, as De La Torre argues, the history of Cuba has been constructed by men (1999: 214). But, here, this history is heavily critiqued and the proposals for a new future clearly mapped out, as later we will see how Mario, upon denouncing his friend Humberto, feels less like a man for becoming a part of this revolutionary change in the masculine progression of history.

Stylistically, the film very much adheres to García Espinosa's ideas on imperfect cinema and also to Jameson's ideas concerning cinema and the theory of modernisation. Many of the 'characters' in the film are not actors but real workers of a bus depot and real people of the neighbourhood where the characters Yolanda and Mario live and work. As well as the combination of narrative plot, documentary sequences and didactic voice-over, the film encompasses stories of real people and their struggles to come to terms with the revolutionary process and the demands made on them; plus techniques used by Gómez to make the spectator wonder where the boundaries of fiction and fact are actually drawn.

As Chanan remarks, nearly all Gómez's films followed the mores of imperfect cinema, being socially and politically functional where 'style and idiom is subordinate to purpose'

⁷ In 1961, in order to tackle the enormous housing problem in Havana, five new neighbourhoods were built for and by the people of Las Yaguas. The area of Miraflores, which features in the film, was one of these neighbourhoods (Chanan, 1985: 286).

(1985: 284), and this is also true of *De cierta manera*.⁸ This sense of purpose combined with a political functionality, have driven a number of critics to see *De cierta manera* as demonstrating a real commitment to the ideas of imperfect cinema.⁹ Because real people are used alongside actors and different film genres are used, this gives many of her documentaries, and certainly *De cierta manera*, a fine sense of the potentially close relation between art and people's lives (Ibid). It breaks the barrier between the film and the spectator on numerous occasions and is a film that, as imperfect cinema requires, takes risks without fear of criticism, is 'partisan' and 'committed' (García Espinosa, 1979: 26).

Yolanda, for example, is introduced as she speaks directly to the camera, as if this part is a documentary sequence. It is only later do we realise that she is a fictional character. Later, she again addresses the camera but, when it pulls away, we realise she is speaking to her teaching colleagues and to the mother of Lázaro, one of the children she teaches (we presume the mother to be real and that she is telling the real story of her life). Here the traditional effect of suture (as discussed in Chapter One) is disturbed. By speaking to the camera, the audience is addressed directly, only to find that the addressees were Lázaro's mother and Yolanda's teaching colleagues. Thus, the spectator is centralised as part of the process of meaning construction, this process being made evident as part of the film's aesthetic. This interchange between documentary and fiction forms is one of the reasons why Michael Chanan posits the film as part of the imperfect cinema 'revolution' as it illustrates the syncretic character of the film, this syncretism being a reflection of a Cuban cultural and historical mix that was one of Gómez's primary concerns. The film is a 'veritable interpenetration of the two forms of address, a teasing synthesis which makes it a prime example of the process of syncretism' (Chanan, 1985: 285).

This mixture of address, by real people, by actors and by a mixture of the two, can, it is argued, divert the spectator from their regular viewing position and demand for a structured,

⁸ Sara Gómez once commented: '...el cine, para nosotros, será inevitablemente parcial, estará determinado por una toma de conciencia, será el resultado de una definida actitud frente a los problemas que se nos plantean, frente a la necesidad de descolonizarnos política e ideológicamente y de romper con los valores tradicionales ya sean económicos, éticos, o estéticos' (Lezcano, 1989: 11).

⁹ Chanan, 1985: 288; Benamou, 1999: 83; McGillivray, 1998: 9; Davies, 1997: 347.

narrative plot line. There has been much discussion about the relative merits of the combination of discourses in the film, but this author would tend to agree with Chanan who sees them as inextricably linked through the process of revolution. The lack of a 'single internally consistent discourse' (Kuhn, 1982: 162) is a technical device by Gómez and does not alter its constant, revolutionary, position. Kuhn, however, as Chanan observes, always wishes the film to return to the narrative of the love story between Mario and Yolanda. But this love story is historically and culturally situated within a revolutionary process, which puts it in the bracket of counter-cinema as Claire Johnston describes (Kaplan, 2000: 22-33), and provokes a dialectical exchange that allows for a feminist reading within the boundaries of a modernising revolutionary discourse. As we have seen, imperfect cinema was specifically proposed to counter classic Hollywood-style narrative, and this film stylistically allies itself to that practice.

This film is the paradigm of Marxist-modernist feminist cinema. The negative bourgeois tendency of *machismo* is heavily critiqued using a style that seems 'created' specifically for the Cuban revolutionary purpose, as García Espinosa desired. With its low budget, hand-held camera, use of real people and real locations, it contains many of the traits of Italian neo-realism that García Espinosa and Gutiérrez Alea picked up while studying in Rome; it 'borders on the amateurish and chaotic' (Davies, 1997: 348), in line with how García Espinosa envisaged revolutionary imperfect cinema for the Third World. But, with the didacticism of the voice-overs and the constant references to history, it places itself firmly within the specificity of the Cuban problematic. It promotes the idea of the active spectator in García Espinosa's 'Por un cine imperfecto' by developing both Brechtian distancing and Eisensteinian identification techniques, as we shall see shortly in a more detailed analysis of the most important scene of the film.

The basic premise of the film is that the material conditions of people's lives affect their ideas, beliefs and actions. By creating new material conditions, we can go some way towards erasing certain preconceptions, stereotypes and behaviour that are detrimental to creating a new, revolutionary society. But other factors, such as the weight of tradition, must

also be examined and dispensed with in order to move on in to the future. Part of this detrimental behaviour is the negative way women have been treated in Cuban society. Although the film concerns itself with other factors regarding community solidarity and the restructuring of the lives of previously marginalised sections of Cuban society, one of its primary interests is with the effects of that marginalisation on the relationship between men and women.

This rebuilding is not an easy process, as years of ingrained tradition have to be fought against in order to alter outmoded ways of thinking. The simple material rebuilding of people's lives needs to be achieved alongside their moral and philosophical restructuring – a far more difficult process when, as Chanan asserts, the previously marginalised community resists the change that is being imposed upon it (1985: 286). It is no coincidence that Yolanda is a teacher having to deal with many difficult and, for her, unusual, situations of delinquency and neglect. What is interesting, however, is Yolanda's own reaction to these with negative behaviour of her own that stems from her own, middle-class, preconceptions. At first she fails to see how the mother of one of her children is unable to cope with her life after being left to look after her children alone when her husband has gone. But, through a process of learning on her part, she finally realises that the pain the mother inflicts on her child, Lázaro, is a pain that the mother herself feels and deflects to someone she really loves.

Mario, unlike his friend Humberto, is attempting to undergo a rapid process of change – his love affair with Yolanda being his crutch and motivation for this change. But Mario is far from complete, as he remains confused by his conflict of loyalty – either to his friend or to the Revolution and his new self as partner to Yolanda. He operates within the process of change that is required by the new society being created, but he still retains macho attitudes towards Yolanda that illustrate how difficult is this process. When she is late for the cinema he acts like a child, becoming angry, aggressive and confrontational. On two occasions he grabs her by the arm and tries to prevent her from walking away; the violence of his *machista* background reappearing to demand absolute power and domination by the male of the female, an essential part of the *machismo* paradigm as De La Torre suggests in Chapter One (1999:

214). When they are alone together, Yolanda teases Mario about the differences in his behaviour when he is with her and when he is with his male friends. Together with his friends he walks differently, with a swagger, as she demonstrates humorously. In this swagger he displays one of the rituals of gender, this performance being ‘not a singular act but a repetition and a ritual, which achieves its effects through its naturalization in the context of a body’ (Butler, 1999: XV).

When he tells the workers’ committee the truth about Humberto’s absence, he says that he acted ‘like a woman’. The term ‘Woman’ is here being deconstructed for the Cuban audience that is made to reflect on its own preconceptions of gender difference. As we have seen via work by Gonzáles Páges, the importance of the male is established in relation to the inferiority of the female (2002: 117-119). Although Mario is attempting to change, his negative attitudes towards women are as deeply ingrained as those of Humberto. As Chanan argues, Mario wants to break his *machista* thought processes, but cannot see that to do this would be ‘revolutionary rather than womanish’ (1985: 289) – thus highlighting the need for more substantial and deep-rooted change that stems from the need to write a new history as well as a new future.

Chanan discusses male chauvinism at length, citing the episode recounting the departure of Lázaro’s father with the subsequent documentary narration telling the audience of the high incidence of single-parent families headed by a woman. Although he does not go so far as to say that this is a feminist film, he admits that other Western observers do say so, and goes on to point out the Cuban Revolution’s antagonism towards the term feminism, due to the apparent conflicts it throws up between men and women. He then pointedly remarks that this is ‘an indication, perhaps, of the degree to which Cuban society is still patriarchal’ (Ibid: 288).

Mario’s friend Humberto represents this stereotypical patriarchal, macho persona (and perhaps acts as Mario’s alter ego), and Chanan posits Humberto’s *machismo* as part of his individualistic nature that is yet to be reconstructed in the new socialism. It seems that, for Chanan, Humberto’s lack of respect for women is part of his general evasion of social

responsibility. Chanan here fails to address the fundamental nature of Humberto's and Mario's *machismo*, which does not stem from their lack of social responsibility but from far more complicated and deep-seated psychological factors, as discussed in Chapter One.¹⁰

Humberto does, indeed, lack commitment to his job and his fellow workmates, and this certainly highlights his individualism as contrasted with the desire for social cohesion and collectivism. But *machismo* does not merely equate with individualism. It is surely not possible for Chanan to criticise the Revolution for being patriarchal and refusing to admit to the existence or value of feminism, while at the same time insinuating that a dose of collective responsibility will cure hundreds of years of oppressive male practice. This film clearly shows that it takes a great deal more than a change in the material conditions of people's lives to cause a sea-change in their attitudes, perceptions and behaviour. In this respect, Gómez's film is highly complicated and works on a number of levels as many critics have asserted.

Chanan correctly points out the importance of location to the narrative structure of the film, and it is this element that gives a clue as to Gómez's desire to baulk at history and how it has served to create an extremely negative male/female binary in Cuba. When Mario says that he acted 'like a woman' he is illustrating the more negative side of his character – the part that refuses to change. At this point in the film he is standing beneath the statue of General Maceo on his horse, Maceo being one of the heroes of the wars of independence, a hugely venerated macho figure in Cuban history. As Chanan points out, to say that someone has 'the balls of Maceo's horse' is to describe them as being more macho than the next person. Thus, a definition of masculinity is developed here that takes account of Cuba's particular culture and history. It is the film's way of emphasising the Althusserian link between state-sponsored ideology that connects war and heroic deeds with *machismo*. By doing so through a character that is going through a consciousness-raising episode that is forcing him to question these

¹⁰ As Nencel argues, *machismo* puts the role of sex before that of humanity itself (Goldwert, 1983: 116). Humberto prefers to abandon his workmates and commitments to his job in order to spend time with a woman he has clearly sexually objectified in an earlier scene with Mario. It is not merely Humberto's individualism that drives him to let down his colleagues but the *machista* desire to sexually conquer.

beliefs, it is making a direct critique of this link. This is contrasted with the scenes where Yolanda and Mario go to be alone and make love. Here, in a room where history cannot enter, Mario loses his macho attitude and becomes the sensitive, caring man he is capable of being, the type of man, in Gómez's eyes, that the Revolution is trying to create.

What is important is that these locations carry a significant resonance in the distinction between public and private domains. The private domain of Mario's intimate encounters with Yolanda contrasts with the public domain of the park that contains the Maceo statue. Alone with Yolanda, Mario appears sensitive and caring. But, in the public domain, at work or playing dominoes with his friends, he performs his gender role as a typical Cuban macho; his dominance amongst other men being illustrated as he delights in winning the domino game. Thus, his dominance over his male friends is linked to his macho character, this scene coming before Humberto has revealed to him his desire to take a girl away for a holiday. This authority is later subverted as he starts to question his deep-rooted macho behaviour.

Julia Lesage illustrates this concern with the distinction between the public and the private in her essay in *Jump Cut*.¹¹ She describes the individual (private) 'me' and the collective (public) 'you', rightly pointing out that they are not posited in the film as contrasts or oppositions but as existing in a dialectical relationship, interacting with and interpenetrating each other to such an extent that they 'are transformed into each other'.¹²

In this way the film is able to confront certain aspects of Cuban life head-on, even through conflict; something that Lesage argues would be difficult to do in the liberal world. So it is that Mario is confronted by the knowledge of his own *machismo* – his personal life being encroached upon by public demands, although those public demands do carry with them a caring and nurturing quality that attempt to ease the abrupt nature of the necessary changes. The requirement of change is made evident by Gómez's use of the footage of the wrecking ball tearing down the old slum districts; but the support network is at hand as Mario receives advice and guidance from the character Guillermo, his father and also Yolanda, who

¹¹ Lesage, J. (1979). At: www.uoregon.edu/~jlesage/Juliafolder/OneWayOrAnother.html (accessed 16/07/08).

¹² Ibid

herself receives guidance and support from her fellow teachers for the changes she must make to her self. This emotional support of personal transformation attaches a level of emotional response to Mario that Lesage believes gives the film some of its feminist element – as Mario struggles internally in a way that a male protagonist in a regular depiction might not.

As mentioned, the dialectical struggle towards new identities in *De cierta manera* has been extensively explored by Julia Lesage, who uses the term dialectical in its original Marxist form to examine the relationship between human consciousness and historical and social process and change. She first makes a detailed examination of the process of dialectical thinking before applying its explanation of process and change to film criticism and Sara Gómez's film in particular, positing that it is this very struggle that enables the film to be labelled feminist. She argues that the film is also revolutionary in that it helps to preserve and nurture the social revolution due to the dialectical relationship it creates between audience, film-maker and film.¹³

The film also contains within it a system of dialectical relationships between the characters and the society they live in and are conditioned by, these relationships being conflicting and critical. But what is important is the productive nature of some of this criticism as characters learn from each other and from debate and discussion of the issues at hand. This relationship between the individuals and their society emphasises the importance of history as 'past history bears on the present and what individuals do in the present is, in turn, history making and historically important'.¹⁴ The evident contradictions of the characters' pasts and how these contradictions must be worked through in order to formulate a productive future are extremely important.

What is at stake here in this 'internal process' is Mario's very identity as a man in the Revolution, and it is shown how his changing identity reflects the ongoing revolutionary course. As Lesage points out, Mario is bound by a false conception of his own identity. He

¹³ Ibid. As Jameson states, an aesthetics of film should be 'social and historical through and through' (1992: 3).

¹⁴ Lesage, J. (1979). At: www.uoregon.edu/~jlesage/Juliafolder/OneWayOrAnother.html (accessed 16/07/08).

possesses what Marx would call a 'false consciousness', and is confused as to the right course of action. But Gómez makes a re-appropriation of Mario as an individual and in so doing rejects some of the pre-established norms of codification. Mario is trying to abandon the old, *machismo* behaviour in favour of an egalitarian love relationship and participation in the new society (as this old macho behaviour is essentially part of his old identity that he has to throw off). But he can only do this away from the public (male) gaze. Mario is as much affected by the male gaze in this respect as Humberto's girlfriend might be, were she to appear, and so it is interesting that Mario believes he acted 'like a woman', as that is how he believes he will be viewed.¹⁵

Benamou's examination of Cuban documentaries made by women is crucial here to understanding Gómez's film in terms of the relationship between individual subjectivity and the individual's historic position. She argues that an 'aura of intimacy' is created with a film subject in many cases with the camera accessing very private spaces (such as a dancer's dressing room) thus establishing an intimate subjectivity while at the same time reconstructing history with found materials (photos etc). So a double perspective is maintained; that of the protagonists' evolving sense of identity and subjectivity within a given spatio-temporal context (thus emphasising their historical connections to a 'national arena of struggle'), plus that of their own, developing inner consciousness (1999: 88). This is exactly what is happening here, except it is a male subject whose consciousness is being played against his historical reality in a dialectical struggle that Julia Lesage brilliantly illustrates.

Benamou also claims that a feminine line of communication is drawn up within many of the documentaries she discusses, avoiding the disempowerment of the female spectator. Within those documentaries about women that she examines, she believes there is a

¹⁵ This idea of the creation of individual identity is often ascribed to female characters in Cuban cinema, and personal discovery at the threshold of the private/public sphere is evident in two documentaries, as Benamou points out (*Mujer ante el espejo*: Marisol Trujillo, 1983, and *Yo Soy Juana Bacallao*: Miriam Talavera, 1989). Benamou argues that, like *De cierta manera*, these documentaries do not attempt to resolve the issues of struggle with society at large but they provide moments of individual reflection and discovery of subjective identities, these discoveries being hesitant and unsure (1999: 76).

corresponding idolisation of the protagonist, thus creating a dialogue between audience and spectator. One would not wish to claim that this idolisation occurs with respect to Mario, but the same lack of an imposing authoritative voice is evident in *De cierta manera*, and the spectator is left to ponder the protagonists' choices and arrive at their own conclusions. The spectator is left, according to Benamou, in a state of permanent 'contemplation' and 'distraction' (Ibid: 79).

So, as Benamou might argue, Gómez, perhaps unwittingly, prioritizes 'subjectification over ideology which leads to violation of certain boundaries concerning 'realism' as the chosen aesthetic for political narratives' (Ibid: 88). Mario, as a character, is neither real nor fictional. The boundaries of his aesthetic identity have been blurred due to Gómez's technique of situating the fiction amongst a reality; he represents both at the same time. This technique, then, disrupts the accepted aesthetic norm of realism, as imperfect cinema requires.

Mario's 'subjectification' is important when considering the relationship between the character (and his relationship with Yolanda) and the spectator. Julia Lesage has highlighted the deconstructive aspects of Gómez's film, and her examination of its Brechtian influences are backed up by Aspasia Kotsopoulos whose article in *Jump Cut*, 2001, highlights the deconstructive tendencies of the work of Bertolt Brecht. As already discussed in Chapter One, Brecht promoted the notion of the 'alienation' (*Verfremdungseffekt*) of the spectator using certain strategies that do not subordinate the artistic process to the creation of character as, according to Laura Mulvey, traditional Hollywood narrative does (Mulvey, 1975). As Aspasia Kotsopolous remarks:

The concept of distancing comes from Brecht's views on epic theatre...and had a significant influence on '70s film theory, specifically on the discussion of Hollywood spectatorship vs. the potential creation of an avant-garde, revolutionary counter-cinema. Distancing, according to Brecht, is achieved through strategies that insist on artifice in opposition to the dominant aesthetics of realism and melodrama. Distancing formal strategies may include direct audience-address or foregrounding the means of production (e.g., in film, displaying lighting equipment). The goal of distancing spectators from the fiction is to place them in a position of

detachment which would enable them to contemplate critically the drama's subject matter in order to decide their attitude towards the conflict portrayed and actively take a stand. Those politically committed theorists and media makers who follow in Brecht's line argue that only a self-reflexive, anti-illusionist cinema can free the spectator from a purely emotional and sensory experience, which usually leaves him or her open to ideological manipulation.¹⁶

Lesage rightly asserts that these influences are at work in *De cierta manera* via the use, as Kuhn asserts, of 'interruptions, fragmented narratives, non-linear structures so rendering traditional spectator identification impossible' (1982: 161). Similarly, in Laura Mulvey's terms, Gómez is deconstructing the developing relationship between Mario and Yolanda and, by implication, relations amongst all Cuban spectators. The socio-historical placement of the film makes it undeniably Cuban and post-Revolution. In Kuhn's terms, many of the photographic images and the *mise-en-scène* (settings within real and recognisable locations in Havana) give the film a specifically Cuban feel and create its own meaning. Its target audience must be considered as Cuban also due to the colloquial language used, the use of real people as semi-fictional characters, references to the revolutionary process, and documentary scenes of the restructuring of Cuban society. So this film, as Mulvey would assert, asks questions about the way the spectators' unconscious formulates ways of seeing and the pleasure in looking, as Mario and Yolanda develop their relationship. Although there is nothing directly erotic about the film, the relationship between Mario and Yolanda is posited in revolutionary new terms; the 'old' way being illustrated through Mario's friend, Humberto, who objectifies his girlfriend and sees her as nothing more than a plaything, a diversion from work and a chance to escape. Interestingly we do not ever see her, thus emphasising her 'absence'.

As we have seen in Chapter One, Laura Mulvey develops her theory on visual pleasure using Freud and Lacan and by relating the formal structures of traditional narrative cinema (particularly Hollywood) to viewing pleasure, arguing that cinema plays on the spectator's voyeuristic fantasy (1975: 37). She asserts, via Lacan, that a viewer both identifies with and

¹⁶ Kotsopoulos, A. (2001). At: www.ejumpcut.org/archive/jc44.2001/aspasia/againstgrain1.html (accessed 16/07/08).

‘misrecognises’ characters on screen (Lacan’s *méconnaissance*) in a process of narcissistic ego formation. So, for a male Cuban spectator, identifying with Mario causes a problem in that he does not fit neatly into the socio-cultural norms he is accustomed to, heightening the necessity for a dialectical relationship between character and spectator that Lesage discusses, and so breaking with the norms of character identification. Through Mario (but also through the portrayal of Yolanda), the primacy of the male, scopophilic gaze is disrupted as the usual male/active, female/passive relationship is disturbed. This evidently unsettles Mario but I would argue that a male, Cuban spectator would also find this relationship as acting outside of considered belief, the ‘regular’ male/female relationship being exposed by way of Humberto’s *machismo*.

The casting of the actor Mario Balmaseda (using his real first name) enhances this argument. Balmaseda was already well known, having appeared previously in a number of films, and he is characteristically good-looking – a typical male lead.¹⁷ A young male Cuban audience might, therefore, automatically ‘identify’ with him, particularly given the opening scene of the film where he appears as a forceful, opinionated character opposing Humberto who is seen as a man ‘on trial’. In this scene Mario is the universal stereotype of the active, forceful, gesticulatory, dominant male; Humberto the passive, humbled non-macho upon which the macho depends. The anthropomorphic nature of cinema is played on here as Mario, in close-up, vigorously rails against his friend in a very recognisable and natural situation for a Cuban spectator. Mario has *cojones*, Humberto has had them metaphorically removed by the ‘trial’ procedure of the workers’ assembly. We do not yet know why Humberto is facing the assembly, nor why Mario is railing against him, but this scene serves to locate the male spectator immediately on the side of Mario before we realise that he is the one who has been troubled by his identification crisis and the need to change. If this part of the film had not been shown first, spectators may have identified with Humberto, arguing that he was simply taking a few days off work to have a holiday with his girlfriend. But by showing this scene

¹⁷ Prior to the release of *De cierta manera*, Balmaseda had appeared in the following feature films from ICAIC: *Los días del agua* (1971), *Ustedes tienen la palabra* (1973), *El extraño caso de Rachel K.* (1973), *El hombre de Maisinicú* (1973) and *La última cena* (1976).

first, the audience is made aware of the gravity of Humberto's actions and anti-revolutionary behaviour, and is 'persuaded' to immediately connect with Mario. As Kuhn argues (in Chapter One), spectators can be drawn into films through effects such as editing; exactly what has happened here.

But if the male audience is expecting identification with an idealised, complete, powerful representation of himself (conceived, as Mulvey argues, in the original moment of mirror recognition) then he will later be deceived, as Lesage and Benamou say, being faced with what could be regarded as a 'double-misrecognition'. In Mulvey's terms, the male protagonist in traditional Hollywood narrative is supposed to 'control' the events of the film, and so the spectator sees an idealised version of himself (a version that is already a misrepresentation). But Mario in no way controls the narrative here. In fact, at times he is completely out of control of his situation, and, in particular of his relationship with Yolanda. At one point, when they are discussing their respective histories on a walk in the countryside, Yolanda stands in front of Mario and confronts him, leaving him shrugging his shoulders in confusion as she then turns and walks away, having completely controlled this particular episode. Mario is left in shot, ostensibly free to command the stage, a stage in which, in traditional Hollywood narrative, the male 'articulates the look and creates the action' (Mulvey, 1975: 41). But he has no idea what to do with the stage, shrugs his shoulders and, head bowed, meekly follows Yolanda. The male spectator, therefore, having at first 'identified' with Mario, then suffers another 'misrecognition' as the character fails to turn out to be what he might have desired.

Mulvey argues that character representation in traditional narrative is the key to promoting a cinematic illusion that supports the construction of patriarchy by creating a certain gaze that is developed through a complex process of relations between character and spectator, as we have already seen. In *De cierta manera* Gómez exposes both the audience and the camera through her use of documentary footage and the insertion of real people instead of actors into the course of the narrative, but only after her initial trick of exposing

Mario as the male spectator's 'surrogate' (Mulvey, 1975: 46).¹⁸ By making both the audience and the camera evident, via the aesthetic process desired by García Espinosa, the film ultimately reduces the power of the characters and therefore deconstructs mainstream narrative cinema, thus unravelling its codes of pleasure regarding the scopophilic look. Thus Mario, as a supposed 'surrogate', is *deconstructed* via the technical effects of the film, just as the society around him is being *reconstructed*. *De cierta manera* was made one year before the publication of Mulvey's seminal piece and adheres very well to the complex interaction of looks that she discusses. If, as Mulvey wrote, blows were being struck at that time by radical film-makers against the 'monolithic accumulation of film conventions' (Ibid: 47), then *De cierta manera* was certainly an active wrecking ball.

As stated earlier, the traditional male/active, female/passive relationship does not apply in Gómez's film, as she constructs a more complex relationship between her leading characters. Mario's character has been discussed in detail and is perhaps more complex than that of Yolanda. But Yolanda's portrayal is interesting in that she both provides a support mechanism for and a psycho-sexual challenge to Mario as he struggles to come to terms with the new role expected of him.

Yolanda is never sexually objectified in the film, being framed in much the same way as Mario, with similar amounts of close-up. Her dress is modest and her role as a responsible, intelligent, independent working woman is made evident throughout the film (although, intelligently, Gómez does not posit her as the 'perfect' Cuban woman, creating a character that also has a number of personal barriers to overcome regarding her place in the new society and her perceptions of the marginalised neighbourhood in which she now works). It is clear that Yolanda does not feel comfortable in her role as a teacher in such a difficult environment, this discomfort giving her an air of vulnerability that she shares with Mario.

¹⁸ In Jameson's terms the male spectator, caught up in the film's dialectical process, is left to examine himself and his own *machista* attitudes: '...the filmic images of the night before stain the morning and saturate it with half-conscious reminiscence, in a way calculated to reawaken moralizing alarm' (1992: 2). On the question of mass culture and manipulation Jameson quotes Brecht, who said that 'under the right circumstances you could remake anybody over into anything you liked' (Ibid: 24).

In many senses they are 'in it together', although Yolanda certainly has the emotional upperhand between the two, being far more in control of her emotions regarding their relationship than is Mario. When she turns up late for their date at the cinema, it appears that she initially does not even realise that Mario is upset. To her a small delay means nothing in their relationship, and one can imagine that, had the situation been reversed, she would not have reacted in the same, childish manner that Mario does. For Mario, having to wait for her is a huge dent to his ego; Gómez cleverly illustrating the central question of power relations between the sexes in this short episode.

Yolanda has the controlling hand at most times during the relationship and seems entirely comfortable with this role, choosing when and where to respond to Mario's pleadings. In the scene mentioned earlier in which she steps in front of him to confront him, only to turn and walk out of shot, she leaves Mario perfectly framed in his confusion as she steps boldly into a space the spectator cannot see – a space of her own that Mario has to follow.

In many ways Yolanda controls the film as she controls Mario's emotional development. When he is with her in private he appears as the sensitive new man required by the Revolution, even laughing at the way she pokes fun at his macho public swagger. When he is with her in public he often appears confused and angry and when he is without her in public he reverts to his old macho ways. Without Yolanda one feels that Mario would find this process of change an almost impossible one, and yet he too provides what for her is the necessary help to cope with her daily traumas at the school. She is not used to the type of child she has to deal with in the miscreant Lázaro, but Mario certainly is as he used to be one himself.

Through shared information the two support each other (with a certain amount of difficulty and emotional strife) in a dialectical exchange, the results of which are left to the viewer's imagination. The closing shot of the film sees the two vigorously discussing their relationship as they walk through an impoverished neighbourhood, being destroyed by the wrecking ball, towards an area of new, clean, comfortable housing. The utopian message is

clear – through support, exchange, dialogue, understanding, and not a small amount of will, can the Revolution succeed in creating both the material conditions of a new society and improved relations within it.¹⁹

Part Two

Hasta cierto punto (Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, 1983)

Hasta cierto punto pays homage to Sara Gómez's film *De cierta manera*, and uses many of the formal devices of the earlier work. Here, the master pays due respect to the pupil, but I will attempt to show that it is the pupil's film that is the more successful in its criticism of *machismo* and in its attempts to reconstruct images of male/female relations. It is certainly the more subtle and complex of the two films. Gutiérrez Alea's film aligns itself far more with classical cinema, although it does contain a number of documentary insertions that give it some of the complexity and Brechtian distancing of Gómez's film. But it is in the use of these insertions and in the film's insistence on using the central male protagonist as the dominant viewing position that weakens the film's impact as a critique of *machismo*.

The film focuses on two white, middle-class, male intellectuals, Oscar (Oscar Álvarez) and Arturo (Omar Valdés), who are researching a film they wish to make about the continuance and tenacity of *machismo* in the workplace. They conduct their research in a Havana dockyard where, they are convinced, the tendency for macho behaviour is greater than in any other work forum. The title of the film derives from a comment made by one of the dockworkers examining how his *machista* values have changed in the new society.

Me han cambiado, yo he cambiado un 80 por ciento pero no voy a llegar a cambiar hasta 100 por ciento en este sentido...puede ser que cambie un por ciento más, a lo 87 pero a cien por ciento no...la igualdad del hombre a la mujer es lo correcto pero hasta cierto punto.

The film we are watching is thus a narrative based both on the interviews the two men conduct with real dockworkers (i.e. non-actors), and the narrative of the fictional aspect of the

¹⁹ In his analysis of the film *Jaws* (1975, Steven Spielberg), Jameson states that it has a 'utopian dimension, that is, its ritual celebration of the renewal of the social order and its salvation' (Jameson, 1992: 25).

film as the two men research their ideas. There are five documentary sequences within the film and a number of plots and sub-plots within the fictional element.

The largest part of the fictional drama concerns a developing love story between married scriptwriter, Oscar, and a fictionalised dockworker, Lina (Mirta Ibarra),²⁰ who Oscar has chosen to be the 'model' for the film he is supposed to be writing. Immediately after the initial pre-credit interview with the male dockworker, who gives his views on how the Revolution has changed his attitude to *machismo*, the credits give way to a quotation on-screen citing the words of a Basque song, accompanied by classic, romantic music. 'Si yo quisiera, podría cortarle las alas, y entonces sería mía...Pero no podría volar, y lo que amo es el pájaro.' The questioning of *machismo* is immediately, therefore, undermined by a love song that exposes, in its classic imagery and dubious relations of power between the sexes, the heart of the film's dilemma; that of creating the right balance, as achieved in *De cierta manera*, between the devices of distancing provided by the documentary insertions, and the attempt to provoke consciousness-raising through identification with the central male character.

As the story develops we are witness to Oscar's infidelity as he falls for the working-class single mother, Lina. He both lies and refuses to make love to his wife Marian (Coralía Velóz), who is due to play the part of the female dockworker in the drama he is constructing, as he becomes more involved with Lina, at one point suggesting he may leave his wife to live with her and her young son. But Oscar cannot, finally, leave his wife, frequently asking Lina to 'give him time', and so Lina, angry and upset at the way she feels she has been used by Oscar, continues with her original plan to go and live in Santiago and start afresh.

The other main trajectory for the fictional element concerns Oscar's relationship as scriptwriter with his friend and director of the film they are researching, Arturo. Arturo's ideas on the film are clear: to make a film about the vestiges of pre-revolutionary *machista* behaviour that continue amongst the working classes (according to him, the dockyard being the environment in which it is most evident).

²⁰ Mirta Ibarra was married to director Tomás Gutiérrez Alea.

But, as Oscar becomes more and more involved with Lina, who educates him regarding real life on the docks, and as the two men interview various dockworkers in the non-fictional elements of the film, the scriptwriter begins to develop a conscience regarding the content of the film, and wishes to change the trajectory of the drama he and Arturo are putting together, much to the chagrin of the director. Oscar realises that *machismo* is not simply a working-class issue, as both he and Arturo are caught up in its tenacious grasp, and he cannot now write the original script. The film ends as Oscar, apparently suffering a crisis of conscience, looks despairingly and longingly to the sky over the docks as Lina (in a simultaneous but separate scene) flies off to her new life. Oscar is thus left with both a lost love and a crisis of conscience with which he must now cope.

The film, then, opens up one of the greatest polemics of Cuba's 'cultural revolution' – that of the role of the intellectual in the new Cuba. This was a topic that Gutiérrez Alea had previously tackled brilliantly in *Memorias del subdesarrollo* (1968), although this later film is less effective than his earlier masterpiece.

Michael Chanan believes that *Hasta cierto punto* gives centre stage to the identity crisis of Cuban cinema itself as two worlds are juxtaposed: that of the film-makers and that of the dockworkers. The film, he argues, points towards the production problems within ICAIC as film-makers trained in documentary-making, were then let loose within the genre of fiction with inadequate scripts, which later had to be rewritten. He praises the film for its apparent openness and incompleteness, and for not falling into the trap of didacticism as he believes is the case in *De cierta manera*.

In the earlier film the documentary sequences serve broadly to locate the protagonists within a certain cultural history elaborated by an ideologically orthodox commentary; here, without commentary, they locate them within a messy present. Where Gómez proposes a historicist analysis of social contradictions, within a classic Marxist teleology which leads to a utopian future, Alea offers a synchronic analysis, a cognitive mapping of the same territory but one which is necessarily much more open and incomplete.

(2004: 402-3)

Chanan believes that the balance between the creation of a love story and an enquiry into *machismo* is a difficult one, but supports Zuzana Pick's argument that, in the character of Lina, there is 'a subtle, yet powerful, resistance to *machismo*' (1995: 54). Pick is far more generous about the film than critic Catherine Davies (1997a), and feels that Lina's character represents a re-authorising of 'subjectivity' via the dissent (however restricted) she aims at Oscar. Chanan then asks an important question: is this a feminist film or only a film about the crisis of masculinity? But perhaps the question should be; is this *both* a feminist film *and* a film about the crisis of masculinity? Citing incidences of Lina's dissent, he supports Pick's viewpoint that the strength of her character creates a strong resistance to *machismo*, although he does not answer his own question directly. He does, however, admit that Gutiérrez Alea's sympathies lie with the fictional scriptwriter, Oscar, a man whose *machista* behaviour is evident in more than one scene (2004: 406).²¹ This chapter will demonstrate that the film does attempt to develop the theme of the crisis of masculinity but is not a feminist film.

As Chanan and D'Lugo observe, the film opens up avenues of debate concerning a number of issues and cleverly develops a three-way discussion between the film, the on-screen audience of the dockworkers themselves, and the off-screen audience: the spectator. It derives its subtlety from the staging of an on-screen audience within the film, an audience that represents the 'essential paradigm' to which the film is directed (D'Lugo, 1997: 156).

This does produce a powerful mixture leading, the film-makers would hope, toward a dialectical argument between the three elements on the subject of *machismo*. But the emphasis on the on-screen romance, the dominance of Oscar's viewpoint and the lack of a critical attitude towards him, I believe, deny the film the power of *De cierta manera*. The film thus becomes somewhat lost in the complex negotiation between maintaining an orthodox Marxist stance towards the role of the community and the intellectual in revolution (as

²¹ Chanan pays high regard to the method of creating this film, shot without a script, the fictional elements being derived from the documentary sequences made first. This is high-risk film-making and, as Chanan points out, this is alluded to in the film we watch as Oscar remarks to his wife how difficult it will be to put the documentary sequences they have filmed into a 'simple love story' (2004: 403).

depicted by the various documentary sections and the arguments between Oscar and Arturo), and the development of a feminist aesthetic demanded by the critique of *machismo*.

This analysis seems to be entrenched in the character of Lina; a strong female character with a degree of complexity. Lina is a single mother of a twelve-year-old boy whom she had out of wedlock, confounding her parents' wishes, and she lives alone with her son in a small house. She has never been married, thus breaking with one of the traditional mores of Cuban women. She also works in a traditionally male environment, at the docks (Cuba in the 1980s had seen a certain amount of economic growth and women were working in various industrial sectors).²²

She has a boyfriend, Diego (Rogelio Blain), whom she sees from time to time, although she has never been in love with him. It is made obvious that her work is important to her, as it offers her independence and professional development. She participates in meetings and is a vociferous campaigner for better workers' conditions (one of the reasons she comes to Oscar's attention is because she is seen voicing her opinions at a workers' assembly about dangerous working conditions).

At times Lina is presented as a complex character, variously illustrating certain traits associated with traditional Cuban femininity, but also creating some kind of resistance to these models. She is independent, having left Santiago to come to live in Havana with her son. She questions Oscar and Arturo's motives as they research their film, asking why, in the making of a film about *machismo*, there are no women as part of the crew? A spark of recognition lights up Oscar's face as if, somewhat unbelievably given the contemporary debates in Cuba generally and certainly within the world of film, he had never considered this before. This is one of a number of awkward, affected and highly artificial moments in the film that reduce its subtlety and effectiveness as a piece of contemporary social analysis.

²² It was the Cuban government's policy to incorporate women into all sectors of the workforce from the very start of the Revolution. As Fidel Castro said in 1974: '...the whole question of women's liberation, of full equality of rights for women and the integration of women into society is to a great extent determined by their incorporation into production. This is because the more women are incorporated into work...so will the way to their liberation become easier and more clearly defined' (*Granma Weekly Review*, December 15, 1974: 3).

However, there is no denying the strength of Lina's character that sometimes controls the stage, at one point telling Oscar that she cannot see him later as she has another engagement. From the outset, it appears as if Lina is being constructed, as Catherine Davies argues, as the perfect revolutionary woman, working within the revolutionary process, alongside men, not typically feminised in any traditional way (1997a: 357).²³

In one exchange, Oscar assumes Lina is divorced; when she says she is not, he assumes she is still married. Lina does not respond in the most obvious way by saying 'I'm not divorced', but by saying '¿quién le dijo que estaba divorciada?' (Who told you that I was divorced?), thus emphasising the importance of the word – her word – and forcing through a sense of her dominance of the conversation and of the situation. Here, she is in control due to Oscar's lack of understanding and his entrenched, but for the moment unconscious, traditional beliefs. It is her unusual, non-traditional situation (an unmarried, attractive, eloquent, independent, single mother living with her son with no partner, working as a checker on the docks) that throws him into a state of confusion. His traditional beliefs are so firmly set that he does not even contemplate the idea that Lina might be a single mother who was never married. His silence is clear testimony to his ignorance.

Language here is all-important in developing not only the consciousness of the speaker but in illustrating the (false) consciousness of the listener, and on this occasion it is the woman who controls the language. The film at times, then, gestures to the fissures and spaces where women in Cuban cinema can, and have, found a voice to elucidate their own desires.²⁴ To some extent Lina achieves her desires by going to Santiago, as she tells Oscar early in the film she will probably do; and she voices her negative attitudes towards Oscar's film. However, she is portrayed as more complicated than simply a forceful, independent woman as

²³ In this sense, there is a similar focus on Lina here as there is on Teresa in Pastor Vega's 1979 film, *Retrato de Teresa* (discussed in Chapter Four) as a woman working within the revolutionary process, being seen essentially not as an individual in her own right, but as part of a continuous and unifying national project; part of the modernising project of the Revolution.

²⁴ In Chapter Six we will see how women's desires are elucidated more clearly in the film *Mujer transparente*.

she herself also bears the scars of *machismo*, as evidenced by scenes in which she illustrates some of the more traditional aspects of her Cuban femininity, as we shall see.

So, the representation of Lina is, at times, a complex one, as it also is of Yolanda in *De cierta manera*. Although Oscar and Arturo assume that the more reactionary values exist on the docks, Lina's barbed comments about the making of their film expose this as false, as hers are the more progressive values. In fact, in terms of the development of anti-*machista* revolutionary ideas, the most developed characters in the film are Lina and one interviewee, Sonia. Sonia is a 'real' female dockworker that is asked for her views on *machismo* in one documentary segment. She says that her husband did not want her to work at the dock, and that if she did work there, he would leave her. As she is there we must assume that she is a strong and independent-minded woman. She continues by saying that she wants to work so that she can support herself in case he does leave her, in which case she would be left with nothing. Again woman is linked, via the revolutionary process, to work but in a way that promotes her strength and independence from men. However, Sonia also comments that women in love do not look around for other men but that men are different, thus exposing a traditional male/female binary that, at that time, still formed part of the Cuban psychosexual mind-set.

It appears then that, through the female characters in the film, Gutiérrez Alea pushes the boundaries of revolutionary consciousness as he uses them to question certain traditional values that may be vestiges of pre-revolutionary thinking, but that the Revolution has failed to dismantle. Oscar says to Lina that there is more *machismo* in the port than anywhere else, but Lina says knowingly that it is everywhere. Thus, in one throwaway sentence she makes perhaps the most intelligent comment of the whole film as she gets to the heart of the matter – that *machismo* exists across the class divide.

It would have been too easy to portray Lina as simply a strong woman, the ideal revolutionary, and Gutiérrez Alea knows this, giving Lina a certain degree of intricacy. After being critical of Oscar and his ideas for the film, she is then apologetic to him in a traditionally feminine 'what-do-I-know?' kind of way. This type of behaviour gives Lina a

complexity of character – a woman that carries real contradictions that she must live with on a daily basis. She appears both burdened by the expectations of what it (still) is to be a woman in Cuba and holds many of the idealised traits (as Davies rightly points out) of the new revolutionary. All this seems to suggest a strong feminist agenda and the intent is there. But Gutiérrez Alea's own views on *machismo*, to be discussed later in this chapter, illustrate a naivety and lack of understanding of what is fundamentally a problem of power relations between the sexes; a problem that the film mostly ignores.²⁵

The *machismo* that the two film-makers are looking for on the docks evidently constitutes part of their own psyche. Arturo has had several affairs, as his wife Flora (Ana Vina) confesses to Oscar's wife, Marian. Flora does not appear upset by this but defends her husband saying that he has become more sensitive about himself and his masculinity as he has become older. Here Arturo's *machismo* is displayed as natural (and accepted by his wife) and directly linked to his sexuality: the ability to be sexually active proving (to himself) his manhood, as Nencel argues is one of the traits of Latin American *machismo* (1996: 57).

Sexuality and *machismo* are conflated in this film on a number of occasions. In the sequence immediately preceding the interview with the dockworker, Sonia, Oscar has fallen asleep on the bed while his wife is trying to persuade him to make love. The immediate cut to Sonia, talking about *machismo*, thus equates Oscar's supposed lack of sexual prowess with issues of masculinity. This is meant ironically, and is designed to reflect to the spectator his own considered beliefs regarding the nature of the relationship between sex and masculinity. However, the irony fails as the scene simply plays on this supposedly popular belief in order to get a cheap laugh, rather than being critical of the belief itself. The joke appears to suggest that here is a man criticising *machismo* but that he cannot even make love to his wife, a message that remains firmly entrenched within the parameters of patriarchal law that, as discussed in Chapter One, equates sexual prowess with masculinity, but that does not equate

²⁵ As mentioned in Chapter One, Cuban studies on gender relations were few and far between in the early 1980s.

female sexual prowess with femininity.²⁶ The division of females into ‘good’ and ‘bad’ that Goldwert refers to (1983: 2) is made evident. Oscar refuses to make love with his wife (the ‘good’ and asexual creature; an extension of the mother-figure), but appears willing and able to make love with Lina; by implication the ‘bad’ or less respectable woman who is taken as a mistress and later punished or discarded.

The film attempts to strike a delicate balance between the creation of a love story and a humorous debate on *machismo*. But, although it has many radical and intelligent arguments, the film loses itself in the romanticism of the classical narrative love story element, as Catherine Davies rightly asserts (1997a: 357) and, at times, merely panders to some of the traditional negative sexual stereotypes it is supposedly criticising.

The documentary sequences are, as D’Lugo states, staged as ‘ironic counterpoints’ (1997: 157) to the figure of Oscar and do, to some extent, pull the fictional narrative along as Oscar begins to see his own *machismo* reflected to him in the interviews with the real dockworkers. Work and art are, indeed, merged as Julio García Espinosa called for in his essay ‘Por un cine imperfecto’. But in this film, unlike in *De cierta manera*, there is too much of a disjunction between the fictional and documentary sequences.

Gutiérrez Alea’s own theoretical work is useful here. *Dialéctica del espectador* is discussed at length in Chapter One and represents Gutiérrez Alea’s concern with the production of ‘revolutionary’ and ‘popular’ cinema, via a relationship between form and content (1982: 18). But this disjunction between the documentary and fictional sections of the film, where, at times, the documentary sections appear to have been inserted gratuitously, or for comic effect, plus the attempt to develop a genuine love story amidst the dialectical reasoning, merely enhances the emotional aspect of the film at the expense of the intellectual. There is a genuine attempt to mediate the space between reality and fiction but the balance is simply not right. Gutiérrez Alea himself admitted to some of the film’s failings in an interview with Michael Chanan. When asked about the possible conflicts between individual directors and the producers at ICAIC, Gutiérrez Alea replies:

²⁶ The term ‘patriarchal law’ refers, in a very general sense to domination by the male of the female.

I can tell you that in my case, I have had conflicts of this type only once. This was with my film *Hasta cierto punto*...and I believe the conflict was justifiable in this case. I wanted to discuss the paternalism of the State in this film and create a stimulus to provoke discussion of this problem. But the truth is that I hadn't done it in a sufficiently solid and consistent manner so that the discussion could develop in what I thought was the best way. So I realized that I couldn't insist on my approach, in spite of the fact that, theoretically, my position was right, because in the film itself I had not expressed it in a convincing and correct manner...In *Hasta Cierta Punto*, I didn't say what I wanted to say in an effective way, in a convincing way. Some things didn't come out well; they were not effective dramatically, and, at the same time, they were politically polemical.²⁷

The film seems to suffer from the desire within ICAIC after 1982 (when Julio García Espinosa became president), to make more popular films that would appeal to the spectators' emotions rather than to their intellect. It therefore does not strike the balance well between Eisensteinian pathos and Brechtian distancing.

Just as in *De cierta manera*, the setting is important in *Hasta cierto punto*. In Gómez's film Mario works in a bus-station garage as a mechanic, while here the interviews are set in a similarly working-class environment, the docks. Two of the documentary insertions are interviews in which the male workers talk of pride and commitment to their work, illustrating, as D'Lugo states, 'part of a larger national effort to define social and personal identity in terms of work' (1997: 159). In this sense, the woman here, Lina, is also defined using these criteria. Her importance, her identity, is largely classified through the work that the Revolution has enabled her to do.²⁸ She says to Oscar that she may go to Santiago as there are more work opportunities there for her. In contrast, the wives of Oscar and Arturo are both derided as petit-bourgeois. For example, Oscar's wife (an actor) looks forward to the first-

²⁷ Chanan, M. (2002). At:

www.muse.jhu.edu/journals/boundary/v029/29.3chanan.html (accessed 21/02/06).

²⁸ Women's participation in the labour force increased from 13 percent in 1960 to 39 per cent in 1990 (Eckstein, 1994: 221. Cited in McCaughan, 1998 McCaughan, E. J. (1998) 'Social Justice in Cuba: Promises and Pitfalls', Prepared for delivery at the 1998 meeting of the Latin American Studies Association, The Palmer House Hilton Hotel, Chicago, Illinois, September 24-26. At: www.168.96.200.17/ar/libros/lasa98/McCaughan2.pdf (accessed 18/03/06).

night party and the attention she will receive, after the film he is writing has been made. The contrast is at times clumsy, the stereotypes created lacking the necessary subtlety.

As Davies comments, Lina is an idealised revolutionary, bringing up a son on her own and working full time (and, as Davies points out, still with time to go to the theatre and enjoy herself; 1997: 357). The situation presented seems too simplistic and unreal to be believable, and makes a blunt collision with the documentary insertions.

In *De cierta manera*, the mixing of documentary and fictional sequences is aided by various other diegetic insertions that soften the impact that the simple clash between documentary and fiction creates, and provides for a far more subtle and complex picture that reflects the necessary difficulties of the staged dilemma. Both films present an analysis of *machismo* in the workplace, but the later film offers a far too simplistic and ill thought-out examination. Whereas in the earlier film there is a complex negotiation of both Mario's and Yolanda's personalities, here the personalities are already presented as formed stereotypes with little room for manoeuvre. There is an element of consciousness-raising for Oscar's character, but this is extremely limited, particularly by the ending of the film, which shall be discussed later.

The film also lacks subtlety in more than just the stereotypical character portraits painted. The insertion of the Basque song that Oscar plays to Lina, about the difficulty of loving someone but also allowing them to be an independent spirit, is trite and heavy-handed. This scene, coupled with the imagery of doves flying as Lina finally leaves, merely enhances the clichéd love-story romance that suffocates and overwhelms any dialectical reasoning on the subject of *machismo*.

From the early 1980s, Cuban cinema began to take a different direction as the 1970s had seen a series of historical films during a sustained period of economic difficulty. *Hasta cierto punto* is, as Barbara Reiss points out, the 'representative cinematic production of the Eighties' on the topic of women in the Revolution that she calls a 'meta questioning of the Cuban *machismo* controversy' (1999: 106). So a difficult balance is being struck here between the development of a more popular cinema and the need to engage the spectator in a

complex negotiation of ideas. The film is sometimes, but not always, successful in maintaining this balance and often falls into a populist trap in order to seduce the spectator to identify with the unfolding love story.

Although the portrayal of Lina is occasionally complex and contradictory, some scenes do nothing to reduce the power of the male gaze (a gaze that is mostly Oscar's), and she is often depicted as a curious object of attraction for the male. After inviting Oscar up for coffee only a short while after meeting him, she then takes a shower and returns to him wearing just a towel and combing her hair erotically.²⁹ Romantic music is then layered over the top of the scene to enhance a traditional romantic image that plays on the male viewer's voyeuristic fantasy (as Laura Mulvey would say) as Lina flirts with him. They smile affectionately at each other and there is an immediate attraction that is 'Hollywoodesque' in its crassness. It is done with no hint of irony and is clumsy and affected. Later, as Oscar goes to kiss Lina for the first time and they head for the bedroom, the camera cuts to a steaming pot (to which Lina briefly returns to remove from the flame before returning to Oscar), using another tired and old-fashioned cinematic metaphor, but without the irony that would have served this scene much better. If we are supposed to look upon Oscar as a representative of Cuban film-makers (even of Gutiérrez Alea himself), as he confronts his own bourgeois, macho consciousness, then the use of traditional (bourgeois) Hollywood-type imagery should have been used in ironic reflection, with a wink of an eye or a nod of the head; and yet the romantic imagery developed is done without any hint of the self-reflection that is evident in other parts of the film and in many other Cuban films, such as *Plaf! (o demasiado miedo a la vida)* to be discussed in Chapter Six.

Here, as Gutiérrez Alea admits, the main protagonist of the film is Oscar, the intellectual script-writer, 'que a través de su relación amorosa con la obrera profundiza en su realidad' (Gutiérrez Alea quoted in Colina: 1984: 75), with Lina playing second fiddle as another voice; one that ostensibly picks at his conscience and serves to affect the beginnings of

²⁹ Interestingly, In Pastor Vega's film *Retrato de Teresa* (1979), Teresa's hair can also be seen as a sexual signifier, as discussed in Chapter Four.

a possible change in his *machista* behaviour. In Gómez's film the characters of the 'love story' element belong to the working environment, they are part of the working process and are developed on a roughly equal basis. Yolanda does not merely pick at Mario's conscience, she is a fundamental part of his reason for change.

In Gutiérrez Alea's film, Oscar has come to the docks from outside, as a writer and film-maker (an intellectual) already established as the one controlling the look, controlling the story. From this position it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to subvert this situation simply by inserting him as a character in his own narrative. On many occasions, it is Oscar's look that dominates as he and Arturo conduct the interviews that will direct their story. When Oscar first sets eyes on Lina at the workers' assembly, he is immediately attracted to her and asks his colleague to take a photograph of her that he later gives her. In a later scene, as he conducts interviews at the dock, he watches her walk by and follows her, first with his gaze and then as he walks after her. His power and domination over her is made evident as he asks her to become the model subject of the film he is researching. She tells him her full name is Laudelina, to which he says that with that name she will never become a famous actress. The established viewpoint is always Oscar's. Apart from the five documentary insertions (of which Oscar is watching or filming three), there are approximately 50 separate scenes in the film and only eight of them do not at least feature Oscar, although he is the central character in most. He follows or pursues Lina either with his gaze or by physically walking after her on seven occasions, climaxing in an angry and violent encounter. Such domination, as we have seen in Chapter One, is an integral part of Cuba's *machismo*.

The revolutionary transformation, then, is guided partly through the female perspective but not, it appears, too greatly affected by it.³⁰ The mixture of class and gender discourses illustrates the fact that gender issues do not stand alone, as other concerns such as class and race must also be considered. However, in this case, the gender issue is somewhat submerged

³⁰ It is also guided through a working-class perspective as Lina not only represents Cuban women, but Cuban working-class women, in direct opposition to Flora (Ana Vina) and Marian, the wives of Arturo and Oscar.

by the Marxist class discourse in the same way that the question of gender differences is also submerged within classical Marxist philosophy.³¹

On a number of occasions Gutiérrez Alea refers directly to this class discourse as Oscar and Arturo's views on *machismo* conflict with those of the dockworkers. This has a tendency to undermine the gender debate. Oscar's change in consciousness is not, therefore, primarily influenced by the female, but by his newly discovered knowledge of class differences. Oscar rallies with Arturo over the changes he wishes to make to the film script, arguing that Arturo's version – showing a working-class man as *machista* because he hits his wife and does not let her work – is too simplistic, as many of the workers they have met already have more advanced ideas of what *machismo* entails. 'La gente es mucho más compleja', Oscar says. '¿Cómo son los obreros que tienen un alto nivel de conciencia? Dime, ¿cómo son?' Arturo does not have the answer; for him the passage of the film was already established. Only later do we see Arturo re-watching some of the interviews they have made with the dockworkers and, apparently, reconsidering his ideas.

Gutiérrez Alea's own views on *machismo* are enlightening and seem to fit well the classic Marxist tendency to ignore sex differences. In an interview with Enrique Colina, Gutiérrez Alea comments that he wanted the film to transcend the basic problem of *machismo* as a male/female dilemma, stating that *machismo* is really a form of 'paternalism'. Although he does not evacuate the problem, he does generalize it.

El machismo es una actitud ante la vida que yo calificaría de una forma más general como paternalismo...el paternalismo no se da solamente dentro de esa relación entre el hombre y la mujer, sino que se da en las relaciones cotidianas de mucha gente. Siempre hay la tendencia de muchas personas...a pensar por los demás; a tomar decisiones por otras personas y a proteger a otras personas.

³¹ As Heidi Hartmann points out, Marxism sees women's oppression as being directly related to production (or a lack of it). Thus, the more important relationship becomes that of man and woman's relationship to capital – which subsumes the relationship between men and women as different sexes. By destroying the sexual division of labour, it was assumed by Marxists that the oppression of women by men would disappear (Hartmann, 1981: 32). An historical analysis would illustrate that, in public, many sexual inequalities have, indeed, been eradicated and the Revolution has been pro-active in campaigning for this. However, many critics would argue that, in the private sphere, traditional *machista* behaviour is still very much in evidence (for more on this see Smith and Padula, 1996).

In the same interview, Gutiérrez Alea defends his character, Oscar, as a positive example that illustrates certain transformations evident in Cuban society: 'a mí me parece un personaje positivo que está desarrollando dentro de la Revolución a pesar de que al final cae en una actitud machista' (Ibid). It appears, then, that a certain amount of *machista* behaviour is accepted as long as you are a good revolutionary. Here, as opposed to the character, Mario, in Gómez's film, *machismo* is left mostly intact, the problem being swept away as Lina (who throughout the film has been the only person to challenge Oscar's macho viewpoint) is 'sent off' to Santiago. We must remember that the film Oscar is in the process of writing is the very film we are watching. Oscar has already discussed this new ending with Arturo as his ideas for the film change, and so, as scriptwriter, it is Oscar who controls the narrative (and features as the main character in most of it). Just as in the film *Retrato de Teresa* (discussed in Chapter Four) the problem that faces the central male character is removed from the scene and is a problem no more. We are supposed to feel some sympathy for Oscar as he has lost his new-found love and he now has to face an apparent crisis of conscience, but his infidelity is never questioned and neither are his *machista* values sufficiently.

Gutiérrez Alea, taking a traditional Marxist standpoint, is trying to deny (or, more probably, never fully understood) the direct power relations between male and female that *machismo* infers in order to remove it from the male/female power struggle, when that is precisely what a part of *machismo* represents – a system of power relations that serves one of the sexes, as pointed out in Chapter One (Stavans, 1995: 49). In his defence of Oscar, Gutiérrez Alea takes a line that to some extent upholds these ingrained values. In creating such a character, he develops a subject-spectator position that plays on the male/active, female/passive binary while failing to be critical enough of this opposition.

As Laura Mulvey would assert, this film is reliant upon the notion of fixation and eroticisation of a female object for its narrative progress (1975: 39). Without the fixation that Oscar has for Lina we have no love story and no love-triangle complications involving Oscar's wife that create the consciousness-raising (limited though this may be) in him.

Speaking about *Hasta cierto punto*, Gutiérrez Alea admits that the love story element became more important in the film than was originally planned. 'La historia amorosa está más desarrollada que en el proyecto original, me fui enamorando de ella durante la filmación y me sirvió para hacer descansar en ella el filme. Pero no era lo que yo quería' (García Borrero, 2001: 164).

However, he found that this was complicated by their research into making a film about *machismo*: 'Fuimos a una asamblea de eficiencia y salieron cosas muy interesantes. Ahora no sé como meter todas estos problemas en una simple historia de amor' (Colina, 1984: 186). Unfortunately, the balance is not well struck. Oscar's is the primary gaze, and access to Lina is deflected through it, whether it be filming the interviews with the dockworkers or chasing somewhat pathetically after her. If it is not his then it is Arturo's (also by implication, as he is the director of the film they are researching). The roving eye, the masculine gaze; the 'patterns of fascination', (Mulvey, 1975: 34) are male, white and middle-class even if some of the voices, the asides, the insertions (more intelligent and uncompromising than the master's voice, though some of them are) are not middle-class, are not 'intellectual', are not male. This 'prolonged eroticized gaze'³² is not treated with a sufficiently critical eye.

It is the unconscious here that spills over into the film and it is disturbing. What is it that fascinates Oscar about Lina? As Davies states, both the films *De cierta manera* and *Hasta cierto punto* 'deal with the psychosexual effects of social and economic change on men and women' (1997a: 349), and I agree in large part with Davies' summing up of *Hasta cierto punto* that it does nothing to move the feminist debate along in Cuba (Ibid). Davies rightly argues that, while *De cierta manera* contains a strong sense of dialogue, interpersonal relations and communication, the psychosexual dilemma faced by Oscar in Gutiérrez Alea's film overshadows the dialectical struggle at work.

The objectification of Lina has already been mentioned, as she 'poses' for Oscar in a pink negligee, minutes after their first meeting; her posture, clothes and loosened-hair

³² In her essay 'Masculinity in Crisis' (1982), Pam Cook examines the theme of tragedy and the process of identification in the film *Raging Bull* (1980, Martin Scorsese), arguing that the character Vickie is seen through Jake La Motta's eyes with what she calls a 'prolonged eroticized gaze' (1982: 42).

signifying sexual openness and possibility with no hint of criticism or irony, place, as Mulvey argues of classic Hollywood cinema, 'the erotic into the language of the dominant patriarchal order' (1975: 36). And this does nothing to develop a dialectical argument that might serve the notion of breaking with the traditional mores of a pre-revolutionary *machista* past. When Lina asks Oscar if he would leave his wife and come and live with her and her son in her tiny house, Benny Moré sings 'te quedarás porque te doy cariño, te quedarás porque te doy amor.' Gutiérrez Alea is trying very hard to write a love story as he truly desired, but this comes at the expense of developing something more complex and critical.

Barbara Reiss sums it up well:

Here, the obvious focalization of the narrative structure of the film through the male perspective, although illustrating a consciousness towards gender issues, continues to frame the revolutionary female subject through the institutional looking glass...the critical implications in the production's metadiscursive failure and the (female) protagonist's symbolic flight, represent a gap in the institutional discourse's capacity, not only to represent women, but in its complicity in containing an alternative discourse.

(1999: 106-107)

Reiss demonstrates that there is an inconsistency between the existing Socialist agenda and the feminist agenda that begins to emerge in the late 1980s. The earlier films, including *Hasta cierto punto*, she argues, construct a limiting role for women as acting agents by and for the Revolution and are also read as breaking with the classic image of the Cuban woman of the tropics; 'la mujer caliente del trópico' (Ibid: 107). The idea of the Revolution was to shift what she calls the 'masculine system of the gaze' and replace this image with a 'revolutionary gender construct' (Ibid). However, here, as in other films, there is no escape from what Teresa de Lauretis calls 'the oedipal tale of pursuit and capture, distance and desire, memory and loss' (Ibid: 108).³³

³³ Freud's Oedipus complex is described as the childhood desire to sleep with the mother and kill the father. The child transfers his love object from that of the breast to the mother, at the same time resenting (or even wishing to kill) the father. Resolution of the Oedipus complex occurs through identification with the parent of the same sex and renunciation of sexual interest in the parent of the opposite sex. In other words, resolution involves the symbolic destruction of the parents as libidinal

Thus, as Laura Mulvey would assert, multiple identifications are constantly being made in a complex system of looks that defines cinema and governs its representation of woman.

The [traditional, Hollywood] film opens with the woman as object of the combined gaze of spectator and all the male protagonists in the film. She is isolated, glamorous, on display, sexualised. But as the narrative progresses she falls in love with the main male protagonist and becomes his property, losing her outward glamorous characteristics, her generalised sexuality, her show-girl connotations; her eroticism is subjected to the male star alone.

(Mulvey, 1975: 13)

The male star is therefore the 'hero' and the female waits for him to cross her space; the woman being reduced to function as a sign (a representation) and a value object that eventually fulfils the promise of the story. For De Lauretis, such traditional narrative development produces a female position she regards as a 'figure of narrative closure' (2003: 87).

In *Hasta cierto punto*, the ending of the film carries the implication that no closure is sought, or achieved. Oscar loses Lina and apparently suffers a crisis of conscience over his macho behaviour. But, just as in *Retrato de Teresa*, the ending grossly oversimplifies and glosses over the crux of the problem; the discussion of the power relations between the sexes. As Lina leaves for Santiago, power is left firmly supported by its patriarchal roots as the camera sympathetically focuses on Oscar. Lina is removed from the narrative and closure is achieved, although perhaps not in the classic Hollywood model. But certainly the established (patriarchal) order is retained via the reduction of Lina to the sign/representation of the 'hero's' psychosexual torment.

objects – the only way to take full responsibility for one's own life. For Freud, this complex was the cornerstone of all human relationships (Freud, 1991: 356-9 and 362-7. See also: Thwaites, 2007: 97-99). In her essay 'Oedipus Interruptus', De Lauretis is concerned with how women are both represented and viewed in cinema, arguing that the 'ancient narratives' (she cites the Sphinx and Medusa) survive today as markers, 'places and topoi' where the hero is clearly evident (2003: 83). But how, she asks, do women identify with this type of characterisation in contemporary cinema? After all, women do buy cinema tickets and are 'seduced' into doing so by the construction of characters in cinema that are firmly fixed within the terms of the Oedipus. Thus, she considers the nature of identification for women spectators and how female subjectivity is engaged in narrative cinema, cinema that establishes terms of identification with the spectator, who completes the projected image in an intersection between the profilmic event (the look of the camera), the look of the spectator and the intradiegetic look(s) of each of the characters within the film.

While in this film, therefore, Oscar's psychosexual dilemma takes centre stage; for Mario in *De cierta manera*, the 'hero's' engagement with Yolanda is not just about sex. Oscar's attraction for Lina is made obvious as he follows her, first with his eyes and then physically. The potential threat to Lina is made evident here. Indeed, nothing has been written about the constant threat that the male poses to Lina in this film, a threat that turns into a dreadful reality at the end of the narrative.

But this threat, this insidious weapon of dominance that men can hold over women, is so naturalised that it is painted as a socio-cultural certainty, expected and even desirable in a patriarchal, traditionally *machista* culture where male (physical) dominance over women is part and parcel of the nation's psychosexual development, in a history of inferiority and subsequent neuroticism, as De la Torre points out in Chapter One (1999: 216).

As Oscar and Arturo argue about the path the film-script is taking, Lina's casual boyfriend, Diego, gives her a lift home in the rain. These two scenes are cut simultaneously provoking an interesting reading. Lina reluctantly invites Diego up for coffee and he forces himself on her as she asks him to leave her alone. He pins her violently to the bed and tries to kiss her as she shouts '¡Suéltame, no quiero, no quiero!' Arturo and Oscar continue to argue about the film-script and the merits or otherwise of imposing intellectual visions of *machismo* on the working classes, and we are left with a fundamental question. Is *machismo* a gender issue or a class issue? The film seems to imply that it is as much to do with class as gender. We then cut to Oscar on his way to Lina's apartment, spying Diego leaving as he enters. Lina is evidently distraught, but, instead of consoling her, Oscar becomes angry and shouts at her to tell him what happened. '¿Qué hace este tipo aquí? ¡Coño, dime, dime dime!' He then violently throws her on the bed, leaving Lina in tears but mute with shock.

As Lesage points out in Chapter One, in cinema generally (and this film is no exception) male protagonists guide the action.³⁴ What is more, in *Hasta cierto punto*, as the

³⁴ Lesage, J., 'Rape Threat Scene in Narrative Cinema'.
At: <http://darkwing.uoregon.edu/~jlesage/Juliafolder/RAPETHREAT.HTML>
(accessed 02/04/08).

narrative moves swiftly from this scene to its conclusion, Lina's rape by Diego and the subsequent violence suffered at the hands of Oscar, are forgotten about and Lina seems to 'miraculously' recover.

Up to this point Lina's world is sexualised from the moment we see her, as Oscar's fascination begins, and the film then teases the viewer as to her availability. When she refuses the advances of her former lover he forces himself upon her. Gutiérrez Alea himself has spoken about the 'availability' of Lina's character. The fact that she is an unmarried mother, he argues, makes her, if judged through 'petty bourgeois prejudice' (Colina, 1984: 77), more sexually 'available' than otherwise. This is made evident by the recriminatory look given to her by her neighbour as she enters her apartment with Oscar the first time. Gutiérrez Alea makes it clear that it is the petty bourgeois spectator who may hold this prejudice and thus, he argues, this spectator is merely having his or her negative stereotypes reflected back to them. However, such a naturalised portrayal merely serves to enhance the very stereotype the film is attempting to criticise, as it presents no real alternative, no absolute critique of this negative stereotyping.

Gutiérrez Alea is sympathetic towards Oscar, and argues that he is: 'un tipo bien integrado y bien vivo dentro de la Revolución' (Ibid). Oscar does appear lost at the end of the film and is beginning a process of consciousness-raising that may continue, as he questions his own *machista* values. This is the film's strongest message; that moral compromises are necessary in order for the Revolution to survive and prosper. As Gutiérrez Alea states:

Vivir dentro de una realidad tan compleja y crítica como la nuestra, en el sentido de ser una realidad que se está transformando incesantemente, exige un compromiso moral a cada minuto y una toma de decisión constante frente a los conflictos que le impone al hombre a su existencia social.

(Ibid)

But perhaps the director is not asking enough of the scriptwriter as he is not criticised sufficiently for his sexism and violent, unsympathetic attitude towards Lina, while the

problem that confronts him (Lina) is comfortably removed from the narrative, thus alleviating him of any guilt or moral opposition.

Conclusion to Chapter Two

Although the wrecking ball in *De cierta manera* is a very obvious metaphor of the personal reconstruction that Yolanda and Mario are undertaking in the new Revolution, it is a very strong one and, effectively, tears down history in order to make way for the new material and ‘spiritual’ conditions of people’s lives. This is a film that, in Jameson’s terms, posits the ‘historical coming in to being’ of the visual (1992: 1); that unites ‘high culture’ and ‘mass culture’ in a process of dialectical reasoning. It both draws on and subverts traditional cinematic codes, using them so effectively that the documentary and fictional sequences are almost interchangeable. As Lezcano states:

El documental y la ficción no aparecen yuxtapuestos, no avanzan en direcciones autónomas, no se despliegan en ese viejo juego escénico que reserva la estilización y la brillantez para los entes de ficción y relega los seres ‘de carne y hueso’ a la tonalidad gris de las escenas de trámite. Ambas dimensiones se complementan, se enriquecen mutuamente, se integran desde las primeras escenas a la idea rectora del filme.

(1989: 5)

Gómez uses both Brechtian and Eisensteinian film practices in a balance that both draws the spectator in and then prevents any real identification with the characters on screen. It promotes critical viewing that attempts to create a ‘new spectator’, who can then question his or her behaviour. Its approach is historical and ‘dialectic, modern and Marxist and, as most Cuban cinema had already done since 1960, eschews traditional film narrative for a progressive and revolutionary discourse that posits male/female relations in radically new ways.

Hasta cierto punto is a film about *machismo* that gives valuable insights into the nature of the problem in Cuba and, rightly, argues that *machismo* is a complex issue that involves gender, race and class dimensions. But the film places class and sexuality as more important

in the *machismo* debate than relations of gender. In its desire to create a love story across the class divide it does not deal sufficiently with relations of sexual power and dominance that, as we have seen, are central to the *machismo* paradigm. Although Oscar is made to reflect on his film script (ultimately refusing to write what Arturo had in mind), and has marital problems with his wife after the affair with Lina, he is still a scriptwriter, and he is still married. As Paz argues, a patriarchal equilibrium is achieved and everything is put in its place, including Lina, whose life has been reduced to dust and the misery of being raped, while for Oscar, what has *really* been changed is, practically, nothing.

Ultimately, while *De cierta manera* uses its sense of the modern within a Marxist-socialist frame of reference to brilliantly elaborate on the possibilities of new modes of thinking concerning gender relations, *Hasta cierto punto* falls into the trap of paying homage to a far better piece of work while saying nothing new. 'The result is a sentimental romance, which goes nowhere, couched in an overview of Cuban society as experiencing stasis at the levels of production, morality and art' (Davies, 1997: 349).

Chapter Three

Sexuality and Motherhood

As her sons have seen her: the mother in patriarchy: controlling, erotic, castrating, heart-suffering, guilt-ridden, and guilt-provoking; a marble brow, a huge breast, an avid cave; between her legs snakes, swamp grass, or teeth; on her lap a helpless infant or a martyred son. She exists for one purpose; to bear and nourish the son.¹

Introduction

This chapter is intended as a theoretical and contextual introduction to the two films analysed in detail in Chapter Four; *Retrato de Teresa* (1979, Pastor Vega) and *Lejanía* (1985, Jesús Díaz). It is hoped that the reader can carry the ideas developed in this chapter forward into the film analyses in Chapter Four.

Retrato de Teresa is set in 1970s Havana. Teresa, wife to Ramón and mother of their three children, struggles to balance her work, family and revolutionary responsibilities. With a full-time job plus out-of-work union duties as dressmaker to a successful dance troupe, and cultural leader of her workplace, Teresa at first refuses to take on any more union responsibilities. But she is persuaded to carry on, and her and Ramón's relationship finally breaks down as he feels she has little time for him and the family. Ramón leaves home and starts a new relationship, while Teresa becomes ill with stress and has to take time off work. Offered a new job in Santiago, Ramón tries to win his wife back so that she will go with him but she cannot forgive his infidelity. After she refuses to tell him whether or not she has also had an affair, she walks away from him into a crowded street as he follows.

Set in contemporary Havana, *Lejanía* is the story of Reinaldo and his wife, Aleida, who receive an unexpected visit from Reinaldo's mother, Susana, who had left Havana for Miami some ten years earlier, when Reinaldo was unable to leave with her due to his impending military service. Susana arrives with her son's cousin Ana, and tries to persuade Reinaldo to

¹ Rich, 1986: 186.

return with her to the USA. But he eventually rejects his mother and remains in Cuba to serve the Revolution.

As argued in Chapter One, *machismo* has been central to Cuba's psychosexual development as a nation formed out of a Hispanic colonial and Black African past. Male domination over women in all areas is a historical phenomenon that the Revolution has partially attempted to ameliorate, using certain legislative measures such as the Family Code (discussed in the Introduction to this thesis). In Chapter Two, the analysis of the film *Hasta cierto punto* touched on notions of sex and sexuality, particularly in relation to the central character, Oscar, who will not make love with his wife, but has an affair with female dockworker and single mother, Lina. In this film, at the end, Lina leaves to go and start a new life in Santiago de Cuba. It is argued that this 'eliminates' her from the scene, thus evacuating the 'problem' for the central male character; equilibrium of patriarchal power being restored. After Lina is raped by her ex-boyfriend towards the end of *Hasta cierto punto* and, in the terms of the *machismo* paradigm, becomes a 'bad' woman (Goldwert, 1983: 2), she is then 'expelled'.²

This present chapter theoretically and contextually introduces two films that both have a mother as a central character. In *Retrato de Tersea*, a similar ending to *Hasta cierto punto* (the lead female character seemingly exiting the dominant discourse) spawns much of the analysis and controversy. Issues of sex are important here as the film deals with a marital crisis, the ending of which depends on the fidelity of the mother. The first part of this chapter will look at aspects of sexuality in Cuba and in cinema and will use the debate on female sexuality in film studies as a theoretical introduction to this film. It will argue that, although *Retrato de Teresa* opens up a wealth of issues concerning male-female relations, by refusing to deal with the issue of female sexual relations in a dialectical manner (in the way that *De cierta manera* approaches the issue of *machismo* for example) it evacuates the 'problem'. In so doing it supports (perhaps unwittingly) the universalism of traditional male-female sexual

² Chapter One examined in more detail the relationship between *machismo* and sexuality via work by Zlotchew (1979) and Goldwert (1983).

relations. This will be illustrated by showing how female sexual relations have been represented in Latin America and in Cuban culture generally and with reference to film theory on female sexuality that demonstrates how cinema can approach issues of female sexuality and, possibly, subvert patriarchal notions of woman as sexual object rather than sexual subject.

For the second film, *Lejanía*, issues concerning representations of the mother-figure will provide the focus for the theoretical insight. The chapter will illustrate how Cuba has represented culturally the figure of the mother and how this figure has been conceived in cinema and society generally. This is important to understand the film in question as it is argued in Chapter Four that it posits a contradictory representation of the figure of the Cuban mother that questions traditional (Oedipal) representations and can therefore go some way towards subverting those norms.

Female Sexuality in Cuba and Latin America

The introduction to this thesis illustrates how difficult it has been for women to, as Davies states, make ‘inroads into traditional Hispanic *‘machismo’*’ (1997: 199). The 1975 *Código de Familia*, she comments, was an attempt to bring this debate into the private sphere of the home, but this was resisted by men in a society organised using ‘patriarchal formations and a masculine economy’ (Ibid).³

In Cuba the collective (sectorial) experience of women was assimilated into the wider collective experience of the developing nation. Despite the redrawing of the map of social relationships *vis-à-vis* gender and race (but not sexuality), feminine subjectivity is still largely hidden and unspoken. This has partly to do with the idealisation of motherhood which results in ‘woman’s desexualisation and lack of agency’ and the preservation of a gender system in which ‘man expresses desire and woman is the object of it’ (Ibid: 200).⁴ Discussions of female sexuality, Davies suggests, have formed part of Cuba’s literary development for many

³ Article 25 of the *Código de Familia* states: ‘Spouses must live together, be loyal, considerate, respectful and mutually helpful to each other’ (‘Family Code, 1975’, English version, p. 19).

⁴ Here Davies is partly quoting Benjamin, J. (1990), *The Bonds of Love*, Virago, London, p. 86.

years, but in cinema there have been very few films to deal with this almost taboo subject.⁵ *Retrato de Teresa* was the first to approach the topic but, as we shall see in Chapter Four, skirted very much around the edges of the debate in order to avoid too much controversy, even though sex and sexuality were topics regularly being discussed in the public domain.⁶ As the 'Thesis: On the Full Exercise of Women's Equality', presented by the Communist Party of Cuba at the First Congress in December, 1975 said: 'Men and women have to be equally free and responsible in determining their relations in the area of their sexual lives...This freedom does not imply licentiousness, which degrades beauty and the relations between men and women' (Stone, 1981: 101). Davies quotes Ian Lumsden: 'Since 1959 young Cubans have become much more open and liberal about sex. They have probably become more sexually active as well [...] premarital sex is commonplace [...] Young women seem very much at ease with their sexuality' (1997: 212).⁷

But debates on sexuality have mostly taken a subordinate role in the literature on women in Cuba, as Carollee Bengelsdorf points out. She discusses the lack of debates on sexuality in Cuba and blames this on the fact that most of the investigations on gender in Cuba concentrate on the incorporation of women into the workplace (1997: 127). She argues that notions of female sexuality have historically had a racial interpretation. White women and their honour, she argues, were the objects with which men would trade in their attempts

⁵ Davies then discusses a number of poets (e.g. Reina María Rodríguez, Soleida Ríos, Chely Lima, Soledad Cruz Guerra) and the inscription of female subjectivity in their poems using various ideas such as female sexuality (both heterosexual and homosexual), denial of family roots, denial of traditional roles of motherhood, the construction of the body, and collective and individual experience. She comments that eroticism in woman's poetry was commonplace throughout the twentieth century and that Cuban writers, born after 1959, 'experienced a sexual revolution in Cuba' (1997: 211-2). In addition, in Nina Menéndez's article on lesbianism in Cuban women's writing, Menéndez highlights the 'audacious subtext that presents lesbianism as a liberating identity for some women' in the 1929 novel *La vida manda* by Ofelia Rodríguez Acosta (Menéndez, 1997: 177).

⁶ With the *Código de Familia* of 1975 came the introduction of sex education to Cuba as the FMC worked with the Ministry of Health to prepare people for responsible parenting. See: <http://www.scienceblog.com/community/older/archives/L/2000/A/un000969.html> (accessed 29/07/08).

⁷ It is also worth noting at this stage that amongst the many foreign films being shown in Havana in 1979 when *Retrato de Teresa* was released, was Hitchcock's *Marnie* (1964), a bold psychological thriller and sex mystery that centres on a woman habitual thief, and Peter Bogdanovich's *Daisy Miller* (1974), based on the short novel by Henry James about a nineteenth-century US. woman touring Europe who illustrates very progressive, modern behaviour that surprises those around her (*Granma*, 8/11/79: 6).

to construct their own virility, while black women did not have an honour to defend. White society defined and established the terms of sexual discourse; and the value of the pure, white, virginal bride, alongside the conflicting masculine sexual imperative, had little in common with the actuality of male-female sexual relations. The honour of the white male then depended on the sexual purity of his female relations (wife, mother, sister, daughters, etc), illustrated by the nineteenth-century saying: 'La mujer honrada, la pierna quebrada, y en casa' (Ibid: 128).⁸ Women could not therefore openly explore or discuss their sexuality and the most obvious way for a man to harm the honour of another man was to have sexual relations with a female member of his family.

In the case of *mulatas*, Bengelsdorf argues, their sexuality has a different narrative. In the sexual ideology of the island, the *mulata* inhabits, at one and the same time, 'el centro ausente y la peligrosa frontera entre las razas' (Ibid: 129). The *mulata* has always been seen as possessing a dangerous sexuality that at the same time defies and supports the sexual structures of society. In short, the *mulata* represents everything that, traditionally, the white woman was not: sexually aggressive, immoral and threatening.

In cinema, although ICAIC had produced *Lucía*, the first part of which hints at the possibility of female sexual desire, and Part Three of which deals with *machismo* and restrictions placed on women's freedom, female sexuality remained taboo.⁹

Chant and Craske define sexuality as 'a spectrum of behaviour that extends from the procreative to the erotic and encompasses ideals, desires, practices and identities' (2003: 128). They argue that social constructionism has 'exploded the myth that female sexuality is 'inherently dangerous' and in need of restraint by patriarchal institutions to effect transition from a 'primitive' to a 'modern', regulated social order' (Ibid). They use Foucault and others

⁸ As Bengelsdorf points out, the idea that only *mad* white women were seen out on the streets was underlined in the film *Lucía*, in which, in the first part, a mad woman (Fernandina), who had once been a nun but had been raped by Spanish soldiers, runs around the streets of Trinidad (1997: 130).

⁹ Aufderheide comments that, after 1975, documentaries from ICAIC would begin to deal with sexual equality, citing the films *Controversia* (1981, Rolando Díaz), which deals with the debate among rural husbands and wives about their respective roles that reveals long-standing and unresolved problems; and *El piropo* (1978, Luis Bernaza), which suggests that macho ideals are not so easily banished, although argues Aufderheide, the film seems to celebrate them in its 'leery, cheesy way' (1989: 500). Later, female sexuality would play a larger role in Cuban cinema in films such as *Mujer transparente* (1990), *María Antonia* (1990, Sergio Giral,) and *Adorables Mentiras* (1991, Gerardo Chijona).

to assert that the notion of sex itself is an outcome of specific discursive practices and not an origin. Bodies have no sex outside discourses, so the discursive construction of binary sexes is part of discourse and not 'natural' or inherent. Foucault's work led to Judith Butler's, which argues that no distinction should be made between sex and gender. The body is 'a site of multiple, contested meanings and in constant, mutual and simultaneous motion with configurations of sex and gender' (Ibid: 130).¹⁰ Gender, as Butler asserts, is performative, and what is important is to consider cultural variations of sex and gender as corrective to universalist tendencies (Ibid: 130). In the examination of *Retrato de Teresa* in Chapter Four, it is argued that the film's refusal to debate the issue of female sexuality denies its power as a feminist text by supporting traditional views of male and female sexuality as discussed here.

According to Chant and Craske there have generally been two extremes to representations of sexuality in Latin America – sexual repression associated with Roman Catholicism, and exoticism and sensuality. In their examination of pre-Hispanic cultures, they argue that these, plus the Catholic legacy, have produced fixed notions of female sexuality, where motherhood is seen as a woman's destiny and sex should only occur in marriage.¹¹ At the same time, the dichotomy produced of 'virgin/Madonna' and 'whore' led to the belief that a man's wife should be a conservative sexual partner while his mistress or a prostitute would be the recreational object (Ibid: 135-138).

'Preponderant stereotypical constructions of male and female sexuality in Latin America have long been characterised in a binary fashion, mapped unproblematically onto male and female bodies so as to confer on men a sexuality which is active and dominant, and on women a sexuality which is passive and submissive' (Ibid: 138). The sexual double standard is fuelled by the belief that men cannot be blamed for having many sexual partners even when married, if they are seduced by 'bad' women. Constructions of sexuality are based

¹⁰ In Chapter Five, the theoretical introduction to the films *Plaf! (o demasiado miedo a la vida)* and *Mujer transparente* concerns itself partly with the way Butler configures notions of gender and sexuality.

¹¹ They claim that the Mayans were monogamous, and that the Aztecs avoided sexual excess, believed that a woman should be virginal before marriage, and deplored lesbianism (Chant and Craske, 2003: 134).

on the belief that men's sexual desire 'is based on strong biological impulses which require immediate relief' (Ibid: 141).¹² This is confirmed by Goldwert in his book on *machismo* in Latin America.

The 'cardinal cultural prescription' pertinent to male-female relations is the double standard. The sexual aggressiveness of the macho reflects the widely held belief that sex is necessary to a man. Whereas a woman can live without sexual intercourse, a man cannot. In accordance with this belief, a man is expected to be sexually aggressive, and to create and capitalize upon sexual opportunities.

(1983: 2-3)

Easthope asks why male heterosexual desire is presented as absolute and undifferentiating, 'as though it were always the same, no matter what the time, the place, or for that matter the person' (1990: 135). Masculinity is constructed as an insatiable sexual appetite, 'something that seeks satisfaction everywhere – in posters, magazines, advertising, soft and hard-core pornography – in images of women or bits of women' (Ibid). He goes further to controversially state: 'Sexuality cannot be separated from the symbolic forms in which it takes on representation...the idea that male heterosexual desire is a natural force has to be rejected' (Ibid). Throughout *Retrato de Teresa*, Ramón's sexuality is foregrounded (he dates other women and seduces Teresa after their separation), while Teresa's is deliberately ignored.

According to Suárez-Orozco, there has been a tendency for Latin American men to articulate 'a collectively held male fantasy on the nature of women' (1987: 121). Suárez discusses the *piropo* (flattery addressed to women in the street about their physical appearance) and remarks that it illustrates a dual image of women on the part of Latin males. The *piropo* is 'an expressive manifestation of a collectively held male attitude toward women, which has as its central feature fantasies about the angelic, virginal purity of the ideal woman...This coexists with aggressive, hostile feelings and the frequent reduction of women to sexual objects...many *piropos* worship women, yet many others are clearly hostile and

¹² Here Chant and Craske are quoting Ivonne Szasz, from her 1998 article on men and sexuality in Mexico.

denigrate them' (Ibid: 131).¹³ Suárez suggests that women are socialised to expect a *piropo*, and the failure to elicit them creates a sense of anxiety as if they are getting old or losing their attractiveness. 'Latin women may be victimized by the Latin male image of women. They are caught between the idealized demands for sexual repression...and the urges for sexuality which, if indulged, carry the stigma of harlotry' (Ibid: 143). Any powerful manifestation of the contrary therefore; any direct and oppositional exposure of female sexuality (particularly from a mother and wife whose sexuality should, normally, be repressed), would be extremely threatening to this traditional binary.

Feminists, Ferguson argues, need to look for alternative sexual moralities to this dualism (1989: 209). But treatment of Cuba's double standard concerning sexual morality in *Retrato de Teresa* relies on a dualistic approach to sexuality and this will be discussed at length in Chapter Four.¹⁴

Female Sexuality and Desire in Cinema

In order to understand how cinema can approach issues of female sexuality and, possibly, subvert patriarchal notions of woman as sexual object rather than sexual subject, recourse is often made to aspects of feminist film theory that rely on psychoanalysis. As well as seeing the phallus as the primary signifier, psychoanalysis also tries to deconstruct patriarchy from the perspective of sex and so is very ambivalent. It gives a very compelling description and theory of women's sexuality but encloses it in 'normative definitions of woman as other' (Cowie, 1997: 10). We must acknowledge, then, the limitations of this approach while taking advantage of its benefits, for, as Jacqueline Rose argues: 'The history of psychoanalysis can in many ways be seen entirely in terms of its engagement with this

¹³ In this last category Suárez uses an example from Cuba directed at older women, with reference to Castro's beard and the woman's pubic hair. 'Vieja, móstrame la de Fidel' (1987: 131).

¹⁴ According to Ursula Vogel, the double-standard derives from the 1804 French *Code civil* – the model of the modern legal system– that 'affirmed the unquestionable authority of the husband and father' in the domestic sphere (1992: 150). The husband could demand a divorce on the grounds of his wife's adultery but the wife could only demand divorce on the grounds of her husband's adultery if he had lived with his mistress in his marital home (Ibid: 150-1). '[T]he meaning of what may appear a timeless code of sexual morality is intimately bound up with the historically specific and changing pattern of a society's legal and political institutions, with its religious traditions, and with the interests and values of particular groups' (Ibid: 149).

question of feminine sexuality' (1989: 51). Close analysis of *Retrato de Teresa* in Chapter Four will argue that, although it raises many important and valid concerns for women in Cuba, in its treatment of sexuality it encloses the female figure in Cowie's 'normative definitions', and presents images of both male and female sexuality that fall within traditional paradigms in Cuba, thus reducing its power as a 'feminist' film.

Female desire and fantasy play an integral part in both films to be discussed in Chapter Four, particularly because the desires are either unseen or not achieved. In her discussion of fantasy as a concept, Cowie elaborates two feminist positions. One is moralistic and charges that sexual fantasy is dehumanising, as it uses another person as an object; the second position is the contrary in that it 'accepts that fantasy is intrinsic to human nature and indeed bound up in some way with sexuality but argues that its implications remain to be explored' (1984: 72). Seeing fantasy as the fundamental object of psychoanalysis and linking sexuality directly to how it is shaped by society, Cowie defines the term, using the *Chambers* dictionary as 'an imagined scene' (Ibid: 78), being derived from the Greek 'to make visible'. 'Fantasy involves, is characterised by, not the achievement of desired objects, but the arranging of, a setting out of, desire; a veritable *mise-en-scène* of desire' (Ibid: 79). A repressed wish, the specularisation of fantasy is aided by the realism of the cinematic experience, particularly in the case of a film like *Retrato de Teresa*, which relies on the conventions of cinematic realism for its verisimilitude.

In her analysis of the film *Now Voyager* (1943, Irving Rapper), part of the 'woman's film' genre, Cowie examines how fantasy is created for the lead female character. 'The scenario, the *mise-en-scène* of desire thus emerges for us not just in the story, but rather in its narrating: that series of images bound into the narrative structures, in the devices, delays, coincidences, etc that make up the narration of the story. The pleasure then not in *what* wishes [a character] obtains but *how*' (Ibid: 92). As we shall see later, this is all important in *Retrato de Teresa* as the film limits the narration of Teresa's fantasy to such an extent that it is all but negated, and the question left behind is: whose desire, whose fantasy is figured in the film, Teresa's or that of her husband?

As Judith Butler remarks, some feminist theorists argue that 'sexuality is always constructed within the terms of discourse and power, where power is partially understood in terms of heterosexual and phallic cultural conventions' (1999: 40). From this point of view, desire is established as a heterosexual, male prerogative. 'The naturalization of both heterosexuality and masculine sexual agency are discursive constructions nowhere accounted for but everywhere assumed within this founding structuralist frame' (Ibid: 54-5). As such, any transgression of these codes is denied or negated and traditional cinematic representations of women deliver: 'objectification of the female image in relation to the controlling male gaze; highly coded and fetishised images of the female face and form; cyclical narrative processes which restore a conservative status quo; destruction of female characters who threaten the patriarchal order; denial of aberrant forms of desire...' (*Screen*, 1992: 5). As Swanson remarks, in the forms of cinema that privilege masculine spectator-relations, 'the image of woman is held within a voyeuristically and fetishistically distanced looking, while narrativity is prioritised over image, closure over disequilibrium. For to de-sexualise the female body is ultimately to deny its very existence'.¹⁵ Drawing on Doane, Swanson argues that the woman is cast as object and can only signify the position of lack that structures male desire. 'Desire may be insatiable, it may entail the constantly renewed pursuit for a perpetually lost object, but at least the male has desire' (Ibid).

In Teresa de Lauretis's examination of the construction of sexuality in cinema, she points to the classic myths of the Sphinx and Medusa to show that these ancient narratives survive today in cinema as markers 'places and topoi' where the hero is clearly signalled (2003: 83). Referring to Freud's 1922 paper 'Medusa's Head', she argues that the fear of the threat of castration is linked to the sight of the female genitals but also to the sight of Medusa's head. Quoting Cixous from her article 'The Laugh of the Medusa', she argues that the threat of female sexuality, and the associated 'death' of woman, forms a significant part of all cinematic depiction. '[Men] need women to be associated with death; it's the jitters that

¹⁵ Swanson, G. (1991). At: www.mcc.murdoch.edu.au/ReadingRoom/4.2/Swanson.html (accessed 07/08/08).

gives them a hard on! For themselves!’ (Ibid: 84). Women’s desire, suggests de Lauretis, has been constructed within the terms of the Oedipus complex. No film image is neutral as editing, lighting, staging, script and so on, all play their part. But the spectator completes the picture via the ‘terms of identification’ that are established between subject and object (Ibid: 85). In narrative film, the movement of the spectator is subject to teleology (the movement of the narrative), which is largely based on the ‘two zones of sexual difference, from which they take their culturally pre-constructed meaning’ (Ibid: 86).

When this meaning is established in the largely dualistic terms of gender, then it is easy to see how looks can converge on the female figure in cinema based on mythical mechanisms, exactly what happens in *Retrato de Teresa*. As we have seen in Chapter One, in Laura Mulvey’s terms, woman is framed by the camera as icon or object of the gaze, the male character who looks is the ‘bearer’ of the look, which in turn is relayed to the spectator through the camera.

So there is already a pre-constructed look at the female as icon, and traditional cinematic narrative often simply adheres to that construct. Narrative is therefore governed by an Oedipal logic that is based on the system of exchange due to incest prohibition, and woman functions as a sign (representation) and a value (object) for exchange.¹⁶ So in cinema ‘woman’ represents the fulfilment of narrative promise and this supports the male status of the mythical subject. De Lauretis claims that the female position is produced as the end result of narrativisation, as ‘the figure of narrative closure’ (Ibid: 86).¹⁷ As we shall see in Chapter Four, this idea of narrative closure is extremely important to the film *Retrato de Teresa*.

Important in the debate on female sexuality and desire in cinema is the work of Molly Haskell, who has considered a number of Hollywood films from the 1930s and 1940s as making up the heyday of the ‘woman’s film’ in mainstream cinema (1999: 20-30). Her

¹⁶ See footnote 33, Chapter Two for a brief explanation of the Oedipus complex.

¹⁷ De Lauretis argues that in certain narratives (eg the Western) the female character simply waits for the hero to cross her space; or she may wish to disturb that space by seeking to exceed the boundary (film noir for example); or, as in the case of a film based on a melodrama (a ‘woman’s film’) there is a journey (inward or outward) whose possible outcomes are those outlined by Freud’s mythical story of femininity, ‘Medusa’s Head’, 1922 (2003: 84).

analysis is useful here as her definitions of these films very much describe the nature of *Retrato de Teresa* (even though the films were produced at different times and in different socio-political contexts). Haskell describes the ‘woman’s film’ as being centred on a female character in opposition to the classic ‘man’s film’ in which a hero battles against the odds with a woman acting as an aside.¹⁸ She suggests that the world of the housewife corresponds to the state of woman in general with limited options – and dependent for her well being on institutions such as marriage and motherhood (Ibid: 22). In the classic ‘woman’s film’ there is a central moral code, according to Haskell, where the housewife is forced to adhere to a morality in which she stifles her own desires while the man is free to express his. In these films the path of love is drudgery as the domestic and romantic are entwined in a theme of self-sacrifice that recognises that the ‘essence of her [the woman’s] salvation’ lies in her day-to-day struggle to keep ‘the best of (herself) afloat’ (Ibid).

Haskell is extremely critical of the worst of this genre of films, calling them ‘soft-core emotional porn for the frustrated housewife’ (Ibid: 21), and suggests that the fact that there is a need for such a genre of film suggests ‘a heap of misery in the first place’ (Ibid). ‘What more damning comment on the relations between men and women in America than the very notion of something called the ‘woman’s film’?’ (Ibid: 20).

She divides the ‘woman’s film’ into three general categories. First there are films about ‘extraordinary women’, who ‘call the shots’ with a singular viewpoint and ‘transcend the limitations of their sexual identities... But their status as emancipated women, based as it is on the very quality of being exceptional, weakens their political value as demonstration-model victims...’ (Ibid). Second there are films about ‘ordinary’ women – ‘women whose options have been foreclosed by marriage or income, by children or age, who are, properly speaking the subject of women’s films at their lowest and largest common denominator’. Women in

¹⁸ There have been a number of examples, in Cuban cinema, of films that have, as the central character, a male revolutionary hero, battling against the odds to emerge, triumphant, at the end. *El brigadista* (1977, Octavio Cortazar) is described by Michael Chanan as ‘naïve’ and ‘macho’ (1985: 18). It tells the story of a young, educated, male teacher who, as part of the literacy campaign in the 1960s, goes to rural Cuba to live with and teach the peasant population. *El hombre de Maisinicú* (1973, Manuel Pérez) was criticised for its black and white morals, and for being one of several ‘macho adventure stories, where the good guys are revolutionary and the bad guys are counter-revolutionary’ (King, 2000: 160).

these films stand as 'audience surrogates...defined negatively...by their mutual limitations rather than by their talents or aspirations'. Such films preserve the status quo by not encouraging women to rebel or question (Ibid). Finally, there are the better women's films, Haskell asserts. These are the fictions of the:

...ordinary woman who becomes extraordinary, the woman who begins as a victim of discriminatory circumstances and rises, through pain, obsession or defiance, to become a mistress of her fate...Her ascent is given stature and conviction not through a discreet contempt for the female sensibility, but through an all-out belief in it, through the faith, expressed in directorial sympathy and style, that the swirling river of a woman's emotions is as important as anything on earth.

(Ibid)¹⁹

In *Jump Cut* 44, Autumn, 2001, Aspasia Kotsopoulos discusses *Stella Dallas* (1937, King Vidor) as an example which she calls a sub-genre of melodrama specifically addressed to female audiences. She makes the point that the 'woman's film' often includes fantasy scenarios of resistance in which the female protagonist, usually played by a well-known star, enacts a wish, one socially prohibited to her because of her gender. For Kotsopoulos, this type of film often incorporates a wish on the part of the female protagonist to resist patriarchy's mechanisms and the idea that 'the very possession of desire (for knowledge, for sex, for 'something else') is forbidden her, regardless of whether she acts on it or not. Merely to be desiring goes against patriarchal constructions of a self-abnegating femininity'.²⁰

For Haskell, the good 'woman's film' places woman 'into the singular and out of the plural', by portraying her public and private dilemmas (1999: 27). As she remarks, movies have a narrower context than literature with the protagonist being seen in detailed close-up, the visualisation being done for the spectator via the camera. This singular experience here is a signifier of the attempt to move 'out of the contrivances of puritanical thinking into

¹⁹ Haskell cites two films as examples of great women's films: *Angel* (1937, Ernst Lubitsch) and *Letter From an Unknown Woman* (1948, Max Ophüls). In both these films, the leading protagonists are married women who fall in love with other men.

²⁰ Kotsopoulos, A. (2001). At: www.ejumpcut.org/archive/jc44.2001/aspasia/againstgrain1.html (accessed 16/07/08).

enlightened self-interest' (Ibid), from the reactionary to the radical in an examination of woman's negative experience and her 'solitary soul' (Ibid). However, in many of these films of the 1930s, the underlying assumption was to preserve the status quo by reconciling women to their role and not encouraging them to rebel against it.

This definition of the mainstream 'woman's film' precisely describes the nature of *Retrato de Teresa* and the position that the central character (a Havana housewife and mother) finds herself in when we meet her. As we shall see, the lead character *does* rebel against her domestic drudgery but, I will argue, any alternative desires or fantasies she may have are not elucidated sufficiently and, as such, the film ultimately naturalises her position as Other from a patriarchal viewpoint. As such, *Teresa* goes some way to subverting the masculinist economy, but not far enough, and so lands somewhere between Haskell's second and third categories of the 'woman's film', as we shall see later.

Discussion of this kind of film is very useful for the analysis of female subjectivity, 'precisely because its address to a female viewer is particularly strong marked' (Doane, 1987: 3). Mary Ann Doane analyses 'woman's films' of the 1940s from Hollywood, describing them as dealing with 'problems defined as 'female' (problems revolving around domestic life, the family, children, self-sacrifice, and the relationship between women and production versus that between women and reproduction' (Ibid). Like the films Doane discusses, *Retrato de Teresa*, as we shall see, appears like a historical memory, 'no longer completely culturally negotiable since they are, in an era which believes itself to be post-feminist, so strongly marked as belonging to the recent past' (Ibid).²¹

There has been the temptation to use the 'woman's film' as a possible alternative to the objectification of women in traditional narrative – to 'shift the terms of an analysis of fantasy and history in favour of the woman and away from a paternal reference point' (Ibid: 4). In its attempt to elaborate on a grand debate in Cuban society, i.e. the inequalities between men and

²¹ In the final chapter of this thesis, it will become apparent how Cuban cinema at the end of the 1980s decides to leave behind this cultural memory in favour of a postmodern aesthetic that is strongly marked by its desire to question female subjectivity rather than to try and insert it neatly into the grand master narrative of the Marxist modernising project.

women, it is tempting to see *Retrato de Teresa* very much in this light. 'Yet such films that focus on the female subject do not provide us with an access to a pure and authentic female subjectivity, much as we may like them to do so. They provide us instead with an image repertoire of poses – classical feminine poses and assumptions about the female appropriation of the gaze' (Ibid).

The production of women's stories is very problematic; following Mulvey, we now know that 'the figure of the woman is aligned with spectacle, space, or the image, often in opposition to the linear flow of the plot. From this point of view there is something about the representation of the woman which is resistant to narrative or narrativisation' (Doane, 1987: 5). In Chapter One we saw, using the work of Mulvey, that the male inhabits the screen and controls the space in traditional cinematic narrative and 'the female's association with space or matter deprives her of subjectivity' (Ibid: 6). As such it is very difficult to conceptualise female identification outside of such masculine parameters. When a film operates with the gritty realism of *Retrato de Teresa*, using some of the traditional cinematic terms reminiscent of the 1930s and 1940s Hollywood 'woman's film', it is extremely difficult to work outside of these established codes.

For Doane, two of the most evident tropes of the 'maternal melodrama' as she calls the 'woman's films' (Ibid: 73) are: the 'sense of disproportion between desire and fulfilment' (Ibid: 85); and the representation of misdirected desire – a 'fault' or 'flaw' in female sexuality – 'her insistence in striving after the 'wrong' object' (Ibid: 92).²² This, she argues, is based on one of the maternal functions of patriarchal society; that is to hide or repress the body – 'the repression of desire' and the regulation of sex (Ibid).²³ The absence of female desire is then made present by its substitution – that of filial devotion, where 'pathos is generated by a

²² Doane adds that one of the aspects of melodrama (and applicable here to the film *Retrato de Teresa*) is the 'externalization of internal emotions and their embodiment within the *mise-en-scène* or *décor*; the claustrophobia of the settings, which are most frequently domestic...a strategy linked to the 'foreshortening of lived time in favour of intensity' (1987: 72). In the last part of this quotation she is citing Thomas Elsaesser's 'Tales of Sound and Fury: Observations on the Family Melodrama', from 1972. Doane describes the melodramatic mode as a 'feminine' form, linking it intimately with the 'woman's film' in its address to a female audience' (Ibid: 72-3).

²³ Here Doane analyses the film *The Reckless Moment* (1949, Max Ophüls) and the mother's potential relationship with an underworld gangster.

situation in which maternal love becomes a sign of the impossibility of female desire, which must remain unfulfilled precisely because it is 'out of synch' with the proper order of generations' (Ibid: 94). Ultimately Doane criticises the maternal melodrama for this pathetic affect. Such 'woman's films' feminise the spectator through pathos and are 'complicit with an ideological notion of sexually differentiated forms of spectatorship' (Ibid).

In Doane's analysis of the 'woman's films' *Caught* (1949, Max Ophüls) and *Rebecca* (1940, Alfred Hitchcock), she shows how these films anticipate a female audience through their concern with traditionally female spheres (2003: 70).²⁴ However, this is problematic, Doane asserts, in the light of Mulvey's assertion that the gaze is male and there exists the assumption of a male spectator with the psychological mechanisms of voyeurism and fetishism at play. But Doane argues around this restrictive notion of female spectatorship by maintaining that it is not only the film that constructs the spectator but that the spectator herself contributes to any notion of identity construction. As the 'woman's film' is based on a female fantasy, the spectator is able to help construct that fantasy herself and 'the problematic of female fantasy is most frequently compatible with that of persecution – by husband, family, or lover' (Ibid). In *Retrato de Teresa* the notion that fantasy and persecution are linked is significantly brought together in the final scene of the film.

Doane argues that the 1940s 'woman's films' try to trace female subjectivity and desire, as does *Retrato de Teresa*, but because they are done using traditional modes of Hollywood narrative that cannot sustain such an exploration, certain contradictions within patriarchal ideology become apparent. Does this mean that the only cinematic mode of address compatible with feminism is to break with traditional narrative, as Mulvey would argue? The 'woman's film', then, can be seen as opposite to the type that Mulvey would desire as being appropriate to a feminist cinema, as they are designed to 'ensure the ego fortification of the male spectator' (Ibid: 71). However, given their obsession to 'centre and re-centre the female protagonist' they may offer an alternative to the 'to-be-looked-at-ness'

²⁴ First published in 1981.

of traditional cinema (objectification of woman as spectacle according to the masculine structure of the gaze)' (Ibid).

Analysis of the Hollywood 'woman's film' as described by Haskell, Kotsopolous and Doane provides an insight into how a spectator might become what Kaplan describes as an 'effect' of the text, unable to escape patriarchy's mechanisms (1983: 83). Kotsopolous draws on Kaplan's work on the film *Stella Dallas* to show how the main (female) character's perspective is delegitimised in order to place the audience in line with the central male character's patriarchal point of view. This, however, implies that the spectator is being structured by the mechanisms of the film, when multiple readings are possible. But any film has the ability to construct meaning, and this is the point of the film *Retrato de Teresa*, and why it became such a polemic. On the one hand it can be read as a film that engages women's desires and pleasures and, on the other hand, it can be read as a film that excludes Teresa (and thus all women) from the dominant discourse as, ultimately, it refuses to grant her (and all women) sexual agency. Such films then have 'a contradictory relationship to the image 'Woman' – contradictory because the image causes both pleasure and displeasure'.²⁵

Perhaps, then, films with central female characters, prejudicing domestic and traditionally women's concerns, do have a place in feminist cinema in order to try and counteract the way much contemporary cinema portrays women's sexuality. 'Despite the vociferousness of the Women's Liberation Movement and its campaign to awaken in the media, particularly in advertising and television, a sense of the sexual identity and dignity of the independent woman, the contemporary cinema persists in spitefully portraying the sexuality of its women as infantile and dependent' (Mellen, 1973: 55). Because of this, feminist cinema has often strived to stand as oppositional to traditional, mainstream cinema, in an attempt to 'deconstruct the patriarchal images and representations of 'Woman'' (Smelik, 1999: 356).

²⁵ Kotsopoulos, A. (2001). At: www.ejumpcut.org/archive/jc44.2001/aspasia/againstgrain1.html (accessed 16/07/08).

Motherhood in Cuba

The concepts of mother and mothering vary between cultures and even across generations but, as one study reveals, the image of the good or bad mother has been determined by economic, social and political interests over the centuries.²⁶

As the 'Thesis: On the Full Exercise of Women's Equality', from 1975 shows, aspects of mothering and Motherhood were apparently central to the concerns of the Communist Party in Cuba.²⁷ 'Cuban housewives are no longer the women who traditionally lived only to take care of individual or family matters. Today they contribute their labour, their initiative, and their enthusiasm to the work of the revolution' (Stone, 1981: 77). Maternity leave was granted for all mothers and the equality of men and women in the private sphere of the home was enshrined in law in the *Código de Familia*.

The Family Code enshrines the equality of women in marriage, eliminates the difference between legitimate and illegitimate children, and justly defines the rights and duties of the spouses as well as the equal obligations in regard to the children...Both partners must care for the family they have created and each must cooperate with the other in the education, upbringing, and guidance of the children according to the principles of socialist morality. They must participate, to the extent of their capacity or possibilities, in the running of the home, and cooperate so that it will develop in the best possible way.

(Ibid: 79)

The exploitation of wives and mothers by preventing them from having access to the public arena was seen as an historical (and capitalist) fact as in Cuban history 'women were relegated to the narrow framework of the household. They were discriminated against and had limited possibilities for participating in social production, or were mercilessly exploited. These ideas, which prevailed in our country until the overthrow of the capitalist system, have no place in the stage of building the new society' (Ibid: 80-1). Thus, the material conditions

²⁶ 'Mother Images in Latin American Literature' At:

www.hope.edu/latinamerican/motherimages.html (accessed 27/07/08). This study argues that there has seemingly been an 'open matrophobia in literature. As a general rule, women who are mothers are not portrayed as individuals'.

²⁷ The Introduction to this thesis highlights the importance, generally, of women's equality in the Revolution.

for working families improved markedly during the first years of the Revolution as, at the same time as incorporating women into the social sphere of work, the state was trying to ease the burden of housework. For example, day-care centres, semi-boardings and boarding schools, and workers' canteens were set up. As Stone comments, in 1974 there were 654 child-care centres catering for 55,000 children (1981: 77).

However, the Party admitted the difficulties in changing the consciousness of a population with traditional, ingrained beliefs regarding the duties of a mother and father. The 'double-shift' or 'double-function', where mothers would not only go to work but also do the majority of the household chores, was seen as a major problem to overcome, and the Party tried to tackle this at the level of consciousness, not simply by developing new material conditions. 'The view that child rearing is the exclusive responsibility of mothers must be rejected' (Ibid: 86). This is one of the matters addressed in *Retrato de Teresa*.

However, traces of these traditional attitudes to the working woman remained in the Ministry of Labour Resolutions 47 and 48 that were enacted in 1968 to rationalise the workforce so that all jobs were adequately filled. 'These resolutions guarantee a better integration of women; they keep women from those types of jobs whose characteristics might damage their biological function of mothers, or which could prove dangerous for the development of pregnancy and the growth of the baby' (Ibid: 85).

In terms of the representation of the mother in Cuban culture, in her examination of Cuban women writers, Davies talks of the identification of the mother with the Motherland where Cuba is represented as 'the Great Mother, or more precisely, maternal practice: protection and nurturance...The Mother is nature, growth, shelter, and natural origins' (1997: 48).³²

Davies states that the figure of the mother 'admits ambivalent interpretations' either as a 'symbol of biological determinism and woman's traditional role in society' whereby it is 'associated with gender conservatism, anti-feminism and right-wing politics', or it is used by

³² In this regard, Davies makes specific references to poems by Dulce María Borrero and Emilia Bernal.

radical feminists to represent ‘nurturance, moral superiority, and resistance to androcentric values and patriarchal social structures’ (Ibid: 196). Socialist and Marxist feminist writers such as Ofelia Rodríguez Acosta and Mariblanca Sabás Alomá venerated the mother-figure as sacred, representing ‘family unity, probity, abnegation and virtue. Motherhood as myth...stood for the nation’s progress’ (Ibid: 197). During the early years of the Revolution this symbolic value of motherhood persisted and the ‘veneration of motherhood [became] a cornerstone of national culture’ (Ibid).³³

Davies goes on to debate the role of the mother-figure in Cuban culture and to show how this has been represented, often in a radical way in Cuban women’s literature of the Revolution, pointing out that Cuban women writers focused on sexual desire; the eroticised mother thus becoming a subversive image (1997: 204). She argues that although the pre-revolutionary poets portrayed the mother-figure in terms of harmony, light, love, protection and the ‘nostalgic reconstruction of a childhood paradise’ (Ibid), the younger poets (born in the 1950s and 1960s, including black and mulatto women) have a less idealised perception of the mother. These poets ‘debunk the myth of the protective home’, describe mother as ‘lack’ and write about their feelings of neglect at home rather than protection. In some poetry the mother is not disparaged but neither idealised – rather she is seen as a real and imperfect person, hard-working but unfulfilled (Ibid: 208-9).³⁴ In general, Davies argues, the stability and reliability of mother and home are questioned. But this ‘demythification of the mother and the home allows the mother to acquire subjectivity in her own right, as a person separate from the daughter who may or may not identify with her’ (Ibid: 211).

Teresa Díaz Canals, in her book on life as a woman in 1990s Cuba, argues that myths have been created of the Cuban mother-figure through culture and she cites Lezama Lima’s description of a mother:

Una madre es una bahía en el naufragio. Es la mano que acaricia nuestra frente y nos refresca como el agua del más sumergido manantial. La única cosa eterna en la vida es la madre. Cuando

³³ This last quotation is taken from Smith and Padula, 1996: 122.

³⁴ Davies gives the example of the poet Soleida Ríos (b. 1950) and her collection entitled *Entre mundo y juguete* (1987).

decimos la madre de un río aludimos a su soporte, su secreto, lo que aumenta su caudal. Siempre en la vida nos acompaña nuestra madre.³⁵

(Díaz Canals, 2006: 76)

She highlights the words ‘refugio’, ‘bahía’, ‘acaricia’, ‘eterno’ and ‘soporte’, arguing that this is typical of a concept of maternity in modernity; a unilateral vision of Motherhood that derives from a biological essentialism. Patriarchal ideology, she argues, ‘define a las mujeres, esencialmente, como madres’ (Ibid: 79).

The Mother in Cinema

Discussions of female sexuality and desire in cinema often centre on the figure of the mother represented on film; important to both films discussed in Chapter Four. What is clear is that the maternal melodrama demonstrates that motherhood, ‘far from being the simple locus of comfort and nostalgic pleasure – a position to which patriarchal culture ceaselessly and somewhat desperately attempts to confine it – is a site of multiple contradictions’ (Doane, 1987: 81-2). These films foreground the ‘sacrifice and suffering’ that mothers endure and ‘bring into play the contradictory position of the mother within a patriarchal society’ (Ibid: 74). This is certainly the case in the two films in question here. Both have a mother as a central character, although in *Retrato de Teresa*, Teresa’s condition as a mother is not foregrounded as it is in *Lejanía*. In the first film Teresa’s role as a mother provides a backdrop to her role as a wife, but it is nonetheless extremely important, particularly in a number of specific scenes, as we shall later see. In *Lejanía*, however, the central character, Susana, is configured primarily as a mother, and it is this configuration that will be our concern in Chapter Four.

The concept of motherhood has been studied in detail by a number of eminent critics and philosophers. Luce Irigaray, for example, configures the space of the mother as ‘the realm of pure need...mothering is obsessively linked to nurturing, feeding, the provision of an

³⁵ From Berenguer Hernández, Carmen y Víctor Fowler Calzada (2000), *José Lezama Lima. Diccionario de citas*, Casa Ediora Abril, La Habana, p. 88.

object for the oral drives' (1981: 60). But, as such, motherhood becomes almost an invisible arena, invisible in that its associations and functions are seen as given, expected and natural. Doane's study of the 'woman's films' of the 1940s in Hollywood illustrates some of the ways in which motherhood is seen in this light. 'Everyone has a mother and, furthermore, all mothers are essentially the same, each possessing the undeniable quality of motherliness' (1987: 70). To have a mother, she comments, is natural, to have a father is not.²⁸ There is 'something *obvious* about the maternal, which has no counterpart in the paternal' (Ibid). And it is the logic of biological essentialism that regulates the control of the mother-figure.

Maternity is self-regulating; it has its own internal guarantees. The logic of the sexual division of labour in relation to the upbringing of children derives its force, more than any other aspect of sexual difference, from a purported fidelity to the dictates of the biological. Although the connotations of the maternal as social position far surpass its biological aspects, the biological nevertheless infuses it with meaning and is activated as an anchor to prevent any slippage of the concept. The biological fact of motherhood is utilized to reduce all argumentation to the level of the 'obvious'.

(Ibid: 71)

In cinema, Doane links maternal melodramas and naturalised conceptions of motherhood, arguing that the mothers in these films are limited by a 'constricting domestic sphere' (1987: 73), and she compares these melodramas to the Western where the man has wide, open spaces suggesting freedom and a wide range of options.

Motherhood is marginalised, situated on the cusp of culture (it is more compatible with nature) – looking in from the outside as it were – because it is always the source of potential resistance to the child's entry into the social arena...The price to be paid for the child's social success is the mother's descent into anonymity, the negation of her identity...She must be relegated to the status of silent, unseen and suffering support.

(Ibid)

²⁸ In 1998 in Cuba one quarter of all families was headed by a single female; in Latin America the number was about one third (Ferrer, 1998: 11).

These ideas can be plainly witnessed in *Retrato de Teresa* and *Lejanía*, as we shall see in Chapter Four, as these texts ‘bring into play the contradictory position of the mother within a patriarchal society’ (Ibid: 73), to illustrate how ‘motherhood, far from being the simple locus of comfort and nostalgic pleasure – a position to which a patriarchal culture ceaselessly and somewhat desperately attempts to confine it – is a site of multiple contradictions’ (Ibid: 81-2).

In cinema and film criticism there has been a ‘patriarchal omission of the mother... Since patriarchy is constructed according to the male unconscious, feminists grew up in a society that repressed the mother’ (Kaplan, 1990: 126). But, argues Kaplan, feminists have been reacting to the construction of the mother-figure since the mid-1970s, beginning with Adrienne Rich who showed the reasons for the repression of the mother. In her highly acclaimed work (originally published in 1977), Rich talks of motherhood and marriage as institutionalised. ‘Institutionalised motherhood demands of women maternal ‘instinct’ rather than intelligence, selflessness rather than self-realisation, relation to others rather than the creation of self’ (1986: 42). Patriarchy, she argues, would seem to require that women assume the major burden of pain for furthering the species and that they remain unenlightened. ‘On this underemployment of female consciousness depends the morality and emotional life of the human family... Patriarchy could not survive without motherhood and heterosexuality in their institutional forms; therefore they have to be treated as axioms, as ‘nature’ itself...’ (Ibid). Patriarchal culture is not inevitable or natural according to Rich, but female biology has become ‘a root of powerlessness’ (Ibid: 85). Rich makes a critique of Engels’ view of gender conflicts, arguing that the end of private property has not led to female emancipation as ‘the overwhelming bias of socialist and revolutionary movements is male, and reflects a wish to have a social revolution which would leave male leadership and control essentially untouched’ (Ibid: 112). She quotes Eli Zaretsky from ‘Capitalism, the Family and Personal Life’ (1973) who states of the Bolshevik Revolution:

Revolution through economic development left intact a major part of women’s oppression. The psychological heritage of male supremacy was scarcely challenged by the entry of women into

industry, while the strengthening of the family encouraged a resurgence of traditional patriarchal ideals, such as the exaltation of motherhood...

(Ibid: 126)

For Rich the more important relationships to consider in establishing the sexual politics of male supremacy are those of mother-son and mother-daughter. Rich considers mother-son incest as the greatest of all taboos and argues that there is a common cultural belief that mothers should sacrifice all for their sons; the anxiety that sons feel towards the mother being a reminder of when the boy/man was nothing. 'He may fear – and long for – being...pulled back into a pre-conscious state' (1986: 188). In patriarchal society as a whole, women's status is seen as lacking, as *castrated*, as this construction benefits patriarchy.

A Freudian analysis would argue that one of the prerequisites of moving into manhood is the rejection of the mother. Thus, mothers are seen as getting in the way of masculinity and are regarded as inevitably emasculating boys. The male yearning for the mother combines with feelings both of entrapment and the possibility of abandonment. But because dependency on others, particularly women, is seen as a sign of weakness, it is perhaps difficult for some men to develop genuinely interdependent relationships with women. In the film *Lejanía*, the mother-son relationship provokes such a psychoanalytic reading as we shall see in Chapter Four.

Kaplan argues that the mother has always been an 'absent presence' in culture (she refers specifically to literature and cinema). The mother has always been studied from the point of view of the 'Other' or 'represented as an (unquestioned) patriarchally constructed social function' (1992: 3). Using work by Julia Kristeva ('Stabat Mater', 1985) she asks if a woman can know whether the desires she feels have been imposed on her by society (e.g. to want children) or whether these are truly subjective desires? Kaplan considers three representational spheres of motherhood – the mother as socially constructed and institutional (the mothers that girls are socialised to become); second, the mother in the unconscious ('the mother through whom the subject is constituted'); and third, the mother in fictional representations who combines the first and second realms (Ibid: 4). Thus, what she posits is a

fictional level lying at the crossover between the historical and the psychoanalytical. Sometimes the represented mother character is closer to the institutionally constructed mother and sometimes closer to the unconscious, imaginary mother – the analysis will tease this out in showing ‘how fictional mother-representations are produced through the tensions between historical and psychoanalytic spheres, and then to organize (and analyze) the contradictory mother-discourses and ideologies within specific texts’ (Ibid: 9).

In feminist film criticism generally, then, the mother-figure was initially seen as negative and as an ‘agent of the patriarchal establishment. We were unable then to see that the mother was as much a victim of patriarchy as ourselves, constructed as she is by a whole series of discourses – psychoanalytic, political and economic’ (Kaplan, 1990: 126). But in cinema, the mother has been either idealised or disparaged. ‘The mother as a complex person in her own right, with multiple roles to fill and conflicting needs and desires, is absent from patriarchal representations. Silenced by patriarchal structures that have no room for her, the mother-figure, despite her actual psychological importance, has been allotted to the symbolic margins, put in a position limited to that of spectator’ (Kaplan, 1990: 126). Kaplan divides the dominant paradigms of the mother-figure in cinema into four categories:

1. **The Good mother** who is all-nurturing and self-abnegating – the ‘Angel in the House’. She is marginal to the narrative.
2. **The Bad mother or Witch** – the underside to the first myth. Sadistic, hurtful and jealous, she refuses the self-abnegating role, demanding her own life. Because of her ‘evil’ behaviour, this mother often takes control of the narrative, but she is punished for her violation of the desired patriarchal ideal, the Good mother.
3. **The Heroic mother** who suffers and endures for the sake of her husband and children. A development of the first mother she shares her saintly qualities, but is more central to the action. Yet, unlike the second mother, she acts not to satisfy herself but for the good of the family.
4. **The Silly, Weak or Vain mother**. Found most often in comedies, she is ridiculed by husband and children alike, and generally scorned and disparaged.

(Ibid: 128)

'Each paradigm is assigned a moral position in a hierarchy that facilitates the smooth functioning of the system...If the mother reveals her desire, she is characterised as the Bad mother (sadistic, monstrous), much as the single woman who expresses sexual desire is seen as destructive' (Ibid).

Kaplan then examines *Stella Dallas* as an example of a film that teaches the mother her correct position in life, taking her from resistance to 'conformity with the dominant, desired myth' (Ibid). In this film Stella resists mothering at certain times. 'It is both Stella's (brief) resistance to mothering and her resistance to adapting to upper-class mores that for a moment expose the construction of mothering in patriarchy' (Ibid: 131). Just as in *Retrato de Teresa*, the spectator is forced to look through the husband's eyes as the mother 'is made into a 'spectacle' (in a negative sense) both within the film story and for the cinema spectator' (Ibid: 132). The bond that Stella has with her daughter in *Stella Dallas* (and that Teresa has with one of her sons) is seen as violating the 'patriarchal myth of the self-abnegating mother' (Ibid: 133) as she says she doesn't need anyone else. 'This kind of bonding threatens patriarchy' (Ibid: 133).

As Stella relinquishes her daughter, she then occupies the place of absence that the mother, traditionally, is supposed to inhabit. She is brought 'from resistance to passive observer' (Ibid: 129). To be a mother in patriarchy 'is to renounce, to be on the outside, and to take pleasure in this positioning' (Ibid: 134).

Given the prevalence of the mother-as-spectator myth, it is not surprising that feminists have had trouble dealing with the mother as subject. An analysis of the psychoanalytic barriers to 'seeing' the mother needs to be accompanied by an analysis of cultural myths that define the Good mother as absent and the Bad mother as present but resisting...the patriarchal construction of the mother has made her position an untenable one.

(Ibid: 135)³⁶

³⁶ Lucy Fischer's 1996 book *Cinematernity: Film, Motherhood, Genre*, examines the relationship between cinema and the figure of the mother in fiction, experimental and documentary film. She argues that there is a rigid view of gender and genre in film criticism that is often polarised between the

Kaplan argues that 'cinema is the closest analog in the realm of the Symbolic to access the maternal body: it allows subjects to re-experience the pleasures of fusion with the maternal body in fact impossible after the pre-oedipal period' (1990: 28). Using Freud and Lacan, she demonstrates how psychoanalysis can be useful for feminist film theory, arguing that Freud's analysis of the Oedipus complex revolutionised motherhood discourses by ushering in the concept of subjectivity in his analysis of how the baby comes to know itself as separate from the mother.³⁷

Freudian psychoanalytic theory has heavily influenced theories of motherhood, and the importance of the pre-oedipal mother-child relationship has been influential in feminist scholarship. Julia Kristeva has been especially attractive to those who focus on motherhood and discourse since she presents the maternal as the source of poetic language and subversive power. In 'Stabat Mater'³⁸, Kristeva criticises what she calls 'some avant-garde feminism' for rejecting motherhood or for accepting its traditional representations (1987: 234), arguing that, in Christianity, there has been a reduction of femininity to the maternal. In her discussion of the history of the Virgin Mary she argues that an imaginary construct of motherhood has been formed over hundreds of years ('one of the most powerful imaginary constructs known in the history of civilizations': Ibid: 237), and that this has been converted into 'the fruit of apocryphal literature' (Ibid: 238) in the function of patriarchy. In general, Kristeva argues, the mother-figure in art is reflected as covered except for the breast and face (representing milk and tears) and these milk and tears stand in for the nonverbal: 'a 'semiotics' that linguistic

masculine and the feminine. Motherhood as a topic in film criticism is often ignored she argues and, in general terms this book 'confirms feminist perceptions that motherhood in the cinema has been a site of 'crisis'' (1996: 30).

³⁷ Freud talked of the difference between the pre-Oedipal mother-figure (and fusion with her) and the post-Oedipal figure (and levels of self-hood achieved by the child). Lacan went on to give the term the name 'subjectivity'. The Oedipal stage is when the female child accepts castration and the male child accepts the threat of castration and thus fears it (Kaplan, 1992: 28). 'Resolution of the Oedipus complex is believed to occur by identification with the parent of the same sex and by the renunciation of sexual interest in the parent of the opposite sex. Freud considered this complex the cornerstone of the superego and the nucleus of all human relationships...It is no exaggeration to say that the assumption of responsibility for one's own life and its conduct is in psychic reality tantamount to the murder of the parents, to the crime of parricide, and involves dealing with the guilt incurred thereby' [Loewald, H. M.D., 'The Waning of the Oedipus Complex: Introduction'. At: www.jpapr.psychiatryonline.org/cgi/content/full/9/4/238 (accessed 17/09/08)].

³⁸ Written in 1976.

communication does not account for. The mother and her attributes, evoking sorrowful humanity, thus become representatives of a 'return of the repressed' (Ibid).³⁹

In 'Motherhood According to Giovanni Bellini', Kristeva gives an account of the state of motherhood as either science (which denies the subject itself as it is an objective account) or theology (which describes maternity as 'an impossible elsewhere, a sacred beyond, a vessel of divinity, a spiritual tie with the ineffable godhead...necessarily virginal and committed to assumption') (1997: 301), while lay humanism views the cult of the mother as 'tenderness, love and seat of social conservation' (Ibid). Kristeva venerates motherhood as a subjective experience, taking the mother as the subject of the birth process, and talks of the two sexes operating each with its own subconscious and dream language (she calls this division between the sexes 'archaic and fundamental' (Ibid: 305)).

For Sugiyama, a maternal discourse (a narrative about a mother written from a mother's point of view):

makes it possible to present a variety of maternal realities, including such acts as abuse and desertion, without falling back on the monolithic condemnation of less-than-ideal mothers as morally 'bad' or psychologically 'sick'. Since maternal behaviours may be overdetermined by cultural, historical, and political specificities, along with the subject's psychological inclinations and personal traits, presenting various mothers' stories in itself may powerfully portray the fragmentation and decenteredness of today's society.⁴⁰

³⁹ Cynthia Schmidt-Cruz posits the possibility of writing subversive texts centred on the mother-figure in her analysis of the short stories of Julio Cortázar, highlighting the 'seemingly unnatural or 'perverse' instinctual urges' contained within them, particularly the 'incestuous desire to seduce or be seduced by the mother, which may be considered the anti-civilized urge par excellence' (Schmidt-Cruz, C. At: www.lanl.utexas.edu/project/lasa95/schmidt.html. Accessed 20/07/08). 'The Freudian theory of human civilization rests on the incest taboo or successful resolution of the Oedipus complex, the function of which is to deny the child his (or her) primordial love object – the mother. Thus Freud maintains that civilization itself depends on the male subject's detachment from and transcendence of the mother' (Ibid). In this article Schmidt-Cruz argues that these short stories illustrate the difficulty in reconciling Freud's theory of patriarchal authority (the eventual rejection of the mother) with an ongoing attachment to the pre-oedipal mother developed in the first few years of a child's life. It is suggested that perhaps the earlier relation can subvert the Oedipal structure of patriarchal power, 'by exposing the undertow of regressive urges focused on the desire to return to the maternal body' (Ibid). The contradictory relationship developed between mother and son in *Lejanía* seems to agree with this point of view.

⁴⁰ Sugiyama, N. (2000). At: www.soc.nii.ac.jp/jaas/periodicals/JJAS/PDF/2000/No.11-071.pdf 8(accessed 14/01/05).

Kaplan argues that, if nothing else, Freud's theory of the Oedipus complex provides an explanation for the mother being first installed as symbolic mother, 'then relegated to the margins of patriarchal culture. The Oedipus theory suggests psychic origins for the polarized paradigms of the 'virgin' and the 'whore' 'that have a long representational history' (1992: 45). But Freud's theories were constructed within this very patriarchal discourse of the nineteenth century, thus reflecting the difficulty that feminist theorists have in developing theories that are able to 'speak' outside of this discourse. Psychoanalytic theory is only capable of 'thinking the mother' in terms of her relation to the phallus. So the 'good' mother became the one who perceives of the child as representing the longed-for penis and the end of her envy and now enters the subordinate phase to the father – she is happily passive, receptive to the child and with no desire of her own. Hence the institution of the family unit that is so supported in capitalist countries (Ibid). The 'bad' mother, then, is the one who, instead of placing herself in abjection towards the child as representation of the desired phallus, tries to 'take it into herself' in a jealous, aggressive way in competition with the male. This negative image punishes women who are not angelic and do not serve patriarchal unconscious needs (Ibid).

Importantly, Kaplan engages with the idea of the impossibility of subverting patriarchy simply by writing a mother's discourse.

Honouring the mother's subjectivity, the mother's voice, may be important in a culture where that subjectivity and voice have been silenced; but the question is: what precisely is it possible for the mother to *speak as* in a patriarchal culture? If the mother's position is patriarchally constructed, can she only speak within the confines of the construction? How could she speak *otherwise*?

(Ibid: 40)

As Kaplan states, representation is 'the terrain at the intersection of...the 'historical' and the 'psychoanalytic' discourses...The level of representation (whether fiction or film) always bears traces of both the historical and the psychoanalytic' (Ibid: 49). Using the genre of

melodrama (that she argues can be readily linked to psychoanalytic discourse),⁴¹ she argues that such films involve a re-affirmation of the Oedipus complex as man learns how to become a man, which involves the rejection of the mother, and the mother's position as a patriarchal function. In her discussion of the female character (often a mother-figure) as victim, she suggests there are two schools of thought within feminist theory of cinema – those such as Mulvey and Doane who see the feminine as being accessed via the masculine, making any specific and separate female desire impossible, or those such as Tania Modleski and Linda Williams who argue that there is such a thing as the independently 'feminine', where women are complete and capable of achieving their own desire. There are texts that follow both lines. Those that follow the first Kaplan calls 'complicit' (where the mother character serves as a paternal function) and they address a *male* spectator.⁴² The other category she calls the 'maternal woman's film' and is the 'resisting' type as it speaks from the mother's position about her pleasures and oppressions.

The first paradigm, then, is a male fantasy about the boy-child's loss of the idealised mother, while in the second, although the basic Oedipal melodrama structure remains, the enunciative position is altered so that the story is fully positioned within the mother's perspective and subjectivity. Narratives in the first, complicit, type may appear to be spoken from the woman's position, but this is soon revealed to be that of an uncritical patriarchal function. In the second type of text, the position is still articulated within patriarchy (this type does not found a new order of language or of the 'feminine'), but it assumes a feminine desire, even if its expression is constantly repressed or thwarted.

(Ibid: 69)

Each of the positions mentioned is socially constructed 'within specific historical, national, intellectual/cultural contexts' (Ibid: 70). 'Complicit' texts are those 'whose melodramatic elements are uppermost' and they 'permit full expression to the patriarchal unconscious in which we are immersed and which we need to know about, but also allow issues around

⁴¹ Kaplan argues that melodrama and psychoanalysis are linked as characters in melodrama symbolize the id, ego and superego. Both are 'sense-making systems which man has elaborated to recuperate meanings in the world' (1992: 65).

⁴² These films usually feature an intense mother-son relationship. The example she gives is *The Mothering Heart* (1913, D.W. Griffith).

female desire to be addressed' (Ibid: 75). The 'resisting' texts are the ones whose 'realistic elements predominate' and 'are important in permitting address to the oppressive social institutions that confine women and in allowing expression of alternative social structures' (Ibid).⁴³ It will be the task of Chapter Four to determine to what extent the films *Lejanía* and *Retrato de Teresa* can be described as 'complicit' or 'resisting' texts.

Conclusion to Chapter Three

This chapter has illustrated how female sexuality has traditionally been constructed in Cuba and Cuban culture, and how difficult it has been for Cuban women to resist such traditional constructions. It has shown how female sexuality remained an almost taboo subject even though, after 1959, Cubans themselves became more open about sex. It has shown how female sexuality is regarded in Latin America generally and how the dualistic approach to male/female sexuality, where men are permitted sexual freedom while women are not, is still largely upheld in Cuba.

The chapter has studied how, in cinema generally, female sexuality has been represented and constructed often ignoring, or at least failing to develop sufficiently, female desire and sexual agency, via a naturalisation of masculine sexual agency. The male-female sexual binary witnessed in Latin American society is also reproduced in cinema, with few exceptions; female sexuality is often represented as a threat to the male and his dominance. Analysis of the 1940s 'Woman's Film' makes this clear, as this type of film illustrates the possibilities for women to resist those mechanisms that perpetuate the dualistic approach to male-female sexuality. However, they were not always able to achieve such a goal. In the analysis of *Retrato de Teresa* in the next chapter, it will be made apparent that, in a similar vein, the film ultimately fails to posit female sexual desire in any radical way.

⁴³ Kaplan then states that there is a third type of text (the 'postmodern') that 'may provide the historical female reader/spectator with the possibility for experiencing herself otherwise' (1992: 75). As we shall see in Chapters Five and Six, such postmodern cinematic texts allows for female expressions of 'otherness' at the end of the 1980s in Cuba.

This chapter has also discussed the mother figure in Cuba and how that figure has been constructed as myth. Throughout history (and not only in Cuba) this myth has created a mother-figure primarily, and often obsessively, associated with nurturing and feeding and, as such, the figure of the mother has been presented as one-dimensional. In the cinema, the figure of the mother has often been confined by such traditional, patriarchal representations. But some theorists (eg. Kristeva, Doane, Kaplan and Rich) have seen the mother figure as a site of multiple contradictions that can go some way towards subverting these traditions. It is the intention of Part Two of the next chapter to illustrate how the film *Lejanía* presents a mother-figure that goes some way towards subverting both traditional Cuban and cinematic representations of this figure.

Chapter Four: The Mother on Screen

Part One

Retrato de Teresa (1979, Pastor Vega)

Retrato de Teresa was made in 1979 and dealt very directly with domestic male-female relations, coming only four years after the introduction of the 1975 *Código de Familia*, discussed in the Introduction to this work. The film was set in Havana and, as Julianne Burton comments, it was seen by half the adult population of the city within the first six weeks of its release (1991: 82).¹

Critic Michael Chanan comments that the film was made for parents and that it is about the breakdown of a marriage (2004: 372-77), and this is partly true. But I would like to propose that, more in line with Julianne Burton's take on the film (Burton-Carvajal, 1994), although its radical content focuses attention on a subject in need of much discussion - and therefore struck a major blow for the 'feminist' struggle within Cuba - it exposes itself, through a simplicity of narrative form, as being caught up in a male/female oppositional binary that restricts its possibilities as a piece of empowering female narrative by polarising sexual difference, thus illustrating one of the fundamental flaws of ICAIC's film production - that the films made about women have a 'masculine' perspective that needs to be exposed.

As Burton argues, the film certainly does advance the 'scope of gender debate' (1994, 306) and can be seen in some ways as a sequel to Part Three of Solás' *Lucía*.² In both films the husband is a typical macho who demands certain behaviour from his wife. Whereas in *Lucía* Tomás literally locks his wife in their house by nailing up the windows and locking the doors while he is at work, in *Retrato de Teresa* the efforts of the Revolution have meant that

¹ It is important to bear in mind the large economic and social differences between Havana and much of the rest of Cuba (particularly rural Cuba) at this time and in no way can the film be said to be a representation of Cuban domestic affairs throughout the country.

² The polemic embraced the broadest sectors of society. The equalities of the Cuban woman became a theme of public discussion, outside the home. Teresa, as a worker, found a very important interlocutor, a fundamental element of our society, the working-class woman. From one day to the next, Teresa became the *image* of the Cuban woman, typifying her conflicts. Part Three of *Lucía* deals with newly-weds in rural Cuba in the early 1960s and the problems they encounter due to the husband's *machista* behaviour, when a young, male teacher is sent to live with them in order to educate them as part of the nationwide literacy campaign.

Teresa is free both to go to work and take part in out-of work-cultural activities. However, it is this 'triple-shift' of work, revolutionary activity and family life that presents the difficulties for Ramón, who complains that his wife never has any time for her family. These arguments build to breaking point and the couple separates, Ramón leaving to go and live with his mother. Throughout the film we are witness to Ramón's extra-marital affairs and a certain level of physical and verbal abuse towards his wife, but any possibility of intimacy outside of the marriage for Teresa is only hinted at and the audience is left to judge for itself the result of any possible liaison with her colleague Tomás. It is this aspect that is of greatest concern here and I will attempt to show how, although the film opens up a wealth of issues regarding gender politics in 1970s Cuba and presents a radical diversion from much of ICAIC's previous production, in terms of its stereotypical and formulaic presentation of sex and sexuality, it exposes itself as party to the very mechanisms it appears to wish to deconstruct.

The film started a huge national debate on radio, television and in the press and, as Chanan suggests, it further developed the notion of the woman as centre of the national debate (2004: 373). John King quotes the film-maker Mayra Vilasís:

The polemic embraced the broadest sectors of society. The equalities of the Cuban woman became a theme of public discussion, outside the home. Teresa, as a worker, found a very important interlocutor, a fundamental element of our society, the working-class woman. From one day to the next, Teresa became the *image* of the Cuban woman, typifying her conflicts.

(1990: 159)

I would like, therefore, to propose *Retrato de Teresa* not so much as a film for the parents, as Chanan suggests, but as more in the genre of a 'woman's film', as described by Haskell, Doane and Kotsopoulos, detailed in Chapter Three. Their definition of the mainstream 'woman's film' precisely describes the nature of *Retrato de Teresa* and the position in which the central character finds herself, when we meet her.

The central argument of *Retrato de Teresa* appears to be that, whereas Ramón would like to preserve the status quo, the Revolution has allowed for Teresa to break free from this domestic drudgery. However, I will argue that once Teresa has been 'expelled' from the scene

at the very end of the film, as we shall see later, the status quo has indeed been preserved as she is still held back from her search of personal freedom by certain regressive attitudes that still exist in revolutionary society. Although Teresa rebels to alter the status quo at the expense of preserving the traditional heterosexual, family unit, the possibilities for her personal freedom and the development of her subjectivity remain limited.

In many ways the film does stand as oppositional to traditional, mainstream cinema – something that feminist cinema has often strived to do – in an attempt to ‘deconstruct the patriarchal images and representations of ‘Woman’’ (Smelik, 1999: 356). Via a simple process of role-reversal the film points towards the possibility of change as it is the male half of the binary that complains of the female working too hard and not dedicating enough time to him.

Teresa’s life, both inside and outside the home, is restricted by certain patriarchal mechanisms. She is structured socially and defined by her social presence as a housewife/mother/revolutionary. Her life consists of a series of laborious tasks, whether it is as housewife, mother or union cultural secretary. For example, as we witness, almost in real time, her preparation of the children’s milk, making breakfast, waking the children and Ramón, and washing the sheets, we sit as voyeurs on her daily drudgery, the camera maintaining an objective distance from the subject in order to enhance the laborious nature of the tasks. There are few sensuous close-ups, oblique camera angles, and little fast-cut editing or extraneous music that you might find in a modern-day drama or commercial. This is popular cinema but certainly not populist – as an audience we are made to struggle with her, in a dialectic that hints at her possible self-realisation.

At home, her personal freedom appears restricted by her marriage and the role assigned to her by her part in a traditional family unit. The film suggests that her involvement in revolutionary activities can perhaps give her a sense of self by moving her away from the domestic sphere into a more public arena through her work and cultural activities. But even here, the restrictions are evident as she is persuaded by her colleague Bernal to continue working with the dance troupe at the expense of her family and personal life. Ramón,

however, is allowed free rein as a roving TV repair man, moving from house to house with a degree of mobility not permitted to Teresa. The direct opposition between Ramón's freedom and Teresa's highly restricted existence is a strong one and does much to create a sense of claustrophobia around her; many of his scenes are filmed outside, as we witness him flirting with some of his female clients and, with a pending job offer further afield, in Santiago, this serves to compound the distinction between them.

Just as Molly Haskell describes the central female protagonist in the 1940s 'woman's film' in mainstream cinema (1999: 22), Teresa has limited options open to her and she is defined as wife, mother and, in this case, revolutionary, dependent for her well-being on the Revolution and motherhood. In this film, Teresa is perhaps representative of many contemporary Cuban women, but the film suggests a way out of her domestic drudgery provided for her by the Revolution - a path to independence that is extremely difficult and not guaranteed to succeed, but at least hints at a possible alternative.

Throughout the film, for Teresa, the 'path of love' (Ibid) is drudgery as the domestic and romantic are entwined in a theme of self-sacrifice. In this sense Teresa represents a certain 'type' of Cuban woman, her life being one dictated by work, revolutionary participation and few selfish pleasures. The title of the film and the opening sequence both hint at the fact that this film does attempt to present Teresa as a 'typical' Cuban woman in a way that is a radical departure from previous representations. As Ramón takes a photograph of her, we see her as her husband does, as the camera does, as we look directly into her eyes. This opening scene establishes the audience's initial response to the title and to the character of Teresa by freeze-framing her staring directly into the camera, being photographed by her husband as he calls her name, commanding her to turn round and look at him, at us. We are he and we are made to instantly contemplate who this character Teresa might be, her hair being blown over half her face so that her eyes are dominant, staring back at us. When we first see her it is as a sexualised object, her hair becoming a signifier of her sexuality, as Julianne Burton has remarked, and as we shall examine more fully later. The point of view of the camera is our own, as it is Ramón's (as it is all men?), this point of view being enhanced

by the presence of the lighthouse in the background, 'a phallic marker that permeates cultural thought and oppresses female subjectivity' (Álvarez, 1998: 91).

The modern European music of this initial scene adds to the sense that we are being presented with a very traditional narrative; there is no sense of a film specifically made to construct a potential new vision of woman's place in Cuban society. As the camera pans across a Havana skyline Teresa is caught in a 'moment of erotic contemplation' (Mulvey, 1975: 40) in a world of looking that is divided between active/male and passive/female. The gaze of the male (in this case Ramón, her husband) projects a fantasy onto this female figure that has been styled accordingly for our particular delight, displayed as a sexual object. It is this close-up, this freezing of the image that creates the erotic spectacle as Teresa plays with her hair as it blows in the wind. As we shall see later, it is not for nothing that the same frozen image is repeated at the end of the film, this time as she walks away from her husband and with her hair tied firmly under the asexual barrier of a white headscarf.

And yet this 'portrait' (classic, traditional, positioned, static, passive, controlled, and centred) is then reversed as the turmoil in Teresa's life becomes the centre – her very activity rather than her passivity upsets this classic framework – the 'essence of her salvation' (Haskell, 1999: 22) as she keeps herself (barely) afloat. This film deals with women's concerns in contemporary Cuba, the opening sequence lulling the audience into a contemplation of a traditional male/female binary in order to attempt to radically disrupt it as the dramatic cut after the freeze-frame illustrates. In this second scene, the camera pans slowly over various textile machinery in a large factory, the deafening noise adding to the contrast between this and the previous harmonious music and sunshine of the opening scene. This is where we enter the story 'proper', in an industrial, hard-working, modern Havana, the sudden jump from the opening picture highlighting one of the dominant themes of this film (and many others concerning male/female relations produced by ICAIC): the clash between traditional and revolutionary values.

As Haskell asserts, in the classic woman's film there is a central moral code where the housewife must adhere to a strict morality, foregoing her own desires, while the male half of

the binary is free to express his. We witness this constantly in this film as Ramón literally roams around town as a TV repair man, his freedom accentuated by the use of a van, while Teresa is always seen stuck indoors; at home, in the factory, during cultural activities or at her mother's house. Throughout the whole film, as Burton remarks, Teresa is rarely seen outside while many of Ramón's episodes are in the open air; flirting with women from his van, visiting various parts of the city in the course of his work, relaxing on the beach with his girlfriend (1994: 312).

The two halves of this marital/sexual binary are constantly opposed throughout the film, scene after scene juxtaposing their spatial and social conditions. Michael Chanan raises this point saying that the 'gritty' linear narrative of the drama of daily life moves between observations of Teresa and Ramón in an objective and realist fashion, evoking the 'perfect cinema' of Hollywood rather than the imperfect cinema style of radical ICAIC film-making. Chanan quotes director Pastor Vega's ideological take on the film:

The enemy of Teresa and Ramón is the assembly of traditions engendered by the family structure of the bourgeoisie and the petty bourgeoisie which still survives in the depths of consciousness and which holds back the emergence and development of emotions and feelings of greater depth, richness and value. Teresa struggles to stop being a wife and become a *compañera*.

(2004: 375)

The problem for Teresa is that the two are incompatible as the demands made on her by her status as *compañera* conflict with the traditional values of all those around her – her husband, her mother and her mother's maid, Charo. The film raises the issue of this conflict at every turn: when Teresa and Ramón argue as he feels she spends too much time on cultural activities; when her mother blatantly tells her to buckle down and put up with Ramón's behaviour as she had to do with Teresa's father; when Charo tries to convince Teresa to take Ramón back after she has thrown him out. Teresa's mother's comments on male-female relations are much quoted in studies of this film but are worth repeating as they illustrate the central argument of the conflict between traditional values and revolutionary demands. 'El

hombre es hombre, y si alguien tiene que ceder eres tú...la mujer se debe a su marido y a sus hijos...que digan lo que digan la mujer siempre será mujer y el hombre, siempre será hombre...eso no puede cambiarlo, ni Fidel.'

Retrato de Teresa is a radical film in that it takes a contemporary social dilemma and turns it into a personal profile of struggle at the very private level of the domestic and the marital, attacking along the way both the social practices of a society steeped in a bourgeois family tradition and the attempts by the Revolution to rapidly alter that society. In 1979, the year it was released, Cuba was experiencing one of the high points of its economic progress and the film illustrates this subtly by entering the comfortable homes of some of the characters. But it also hints at various social problems still in existence, as Julianne Burton remarks, such as the black man with a broken arm living in no more than a shack, the lack of childcare facilities for women at work, the problems of local transport and poor telecommunications (1994: 313). All these give the film a sense of the real without a preaching attitude reminiscent of some of the earlier ICAIC productions.

Also, in 1979, Cuba was moving out of a period of cultural repression, the '*quinquenio gris*' of the early to mid-1970s coming to an end. In terms of cinema, therefore, this meant a movement away from the socialist-realism of the 1960s and early 1970s and *Retrato de Teresa* reflects this change well, aligning itself closer to the traditional linear narrative of mainstream North American cinema in order to create a popular aesthetic, while at the same time delivering an important social message. This change in style worked and the film became one of ICAIC's most popular and certainly its most polemic up to this point.

The film's radical content combined with a less radical aesthetic approach, then, serve well the film's feminist argument: that women in Cuba are often burdened by both the weight of tradition and the demands made on them by the revolutionary process, at the expense of their self-realisation.³ For Caballero and Del Río, Teresa represents a victim of bias and

³ Chanan makes a comparison with the feminist films of Chantal Akerman of the 1970s (2004: 375). One of her films, *Jeanne Dielman 23, quai du commerce, 1080 Bruxelles* (1976), deals with a woman's isolation due to her domestic chores and her eventual path into prostitution. The protagonist's daily routine is shown in minute detail. Akerman stated in an interview with *Camera Obscura*: 'I do think it's

prejudice trapped in social and work mechanisms that obstruct personal realisation (1995: 102).

Marvin D'Lugo sees this film as one of the many films from ICAIC that present female characters (in Solas' terms) as 'transparent referents of national identity' (1997: 155). However, here he fails to point out how *Retrato de Teresa* makes barbed attacks on certain aspects of revolutionary society thus creating a doubling effect both of identification (with oneself through the prism of revolutionary society, as reflected in the character of Teresa) and criticism inherent in such an identification – criticism indeed both of that society and of oneself. But it is true, as D'Lugo asserts, that the character of Teresa can, at one level, be read as a transparent cinematic representation of an aspect of the Cuban nation. The 'textual motivation of the audience to read the discourse of nation through female characters' (Ibid: 156), evident in previous films, remains to some extent here, except that it is personalised and brought to the level of the private and domestic. For Teresa, the personal is truly political.

One of the striking features of the film is its representation of a female protagonist as rarely before seen in Cuban cinema – in the workplace as often as at home, existing in both the public and the private. It appears at first that 'Woman' now has a place in which she can function outside of the home, and the scenes filmed inside the women's cloakroom at the textile plant where Teresa works make a marked contrast to her domesticity and life with Ramón and their three children.

There is an obvious enthusiasm on display in the factory where Teresa works, and it is evident how the women try to achieve their planned targets and how they become involved in out-of-work activities such as the *Festival de Aficionados* for which Teresa makes dresses for the dance troupe. There is also great interest and a concern that the workers should have the right conditions in which to perform their jobs and there is a search for solutions to the problems that the female workers have. This illustrates the idea of mass participation, with

a feminist film because I give space to things which were never, almost never, shown in that way, like the daily gestures of a woman. They are the lowest in the hierarchy of film images. A kiss or a car crash comes higher, and I don't think that's accidental. It's because these are women's gestures that they count for so little' See: Bergstrom, J., Akerman, C. At: www.bfi.org.uk/sightandsound/archive/innovators/akerman.html (accessed 13/9/2006).

women being fully incorporated into this project. But it is obvious that Teresa has acquired a 'double-shift', as when she returns home she also has to do the vast majority of the housework.

Teresa is thus portrayed as a hard-working, devoted revolutionary who also cares deeply about her children, worrying whether or not they have gone to bed on time or have done their homework. She also rails passionately and furiously against Ramón when he threatens to take them away. Teresa takes care of the household, becoming angry when Ramón accuses her of not doing the housework and caring enough for him. It is obvious that she does far more than her fair share of the household chores whereas Ramón is seen occasionally removing his plates from the table but hardly lifting a finger otherwise, expecting to be waited on and certainly not adhering to the laws of the recently promulgated *Código de Familia*.

But, as much as family life is extremely important for Teresa, she believes that it should not be a place of subordination for women. She shows herself to be opposed to the traditionally assigned roles for women in the family, she doesn't simply want to wash, iron and cook. She demands her rights to develop herself as a subject. She searches for new ways to look after the kids, looking for someone else to help care for them at night to be able to maintain her out-of work-activities. She struggles continuously to make this different dynamic work, while Ramón simply maintains the traits of pre-revolutionary chauvinist thinking.

Teresa is worried about the problems of her female colleagues and struggles to improve their rights, complaining at the union assembly about the inefficiency of the childcare system (*Círculos Infantiles*) that operates through work. She transmits her enthusiasm to her workmates so that they also involve themselves in these debates and she applies herself with diligence and responsibility to the preparation of the dance troupe. When she returns to the preparations for the dance festival, after separating from Ramón, one can see her new enthusiasm for the work when she realises that they have won the first part and must then attend the national competition.

She believes the relationship with her husband should be entirely equal with their work split in half – both domestic and public. They both work a full week and yet, as we have seen, he expects her to also maintain the household while doing very little to help, other than make the appearance of being a good husband outside the home. Teresa believes women have the right to be more than just housewives and mothers and she defends her rights to participate in the out-of-work cultural activities against Ramón who has little interest in such things. She is also critical of some of the women at work who don't participate in the extra activities or who complain that they don't have time.

But the conflict between her public and private existence is made evident publicly when asked to take charge of the group for the national competition. At first she says no although she feels anxious and disappointed at the trouble she causes, and her workmates make it obvious that she is disappointing them. She appears trapped by this conflict that is maintained throughout the film, bearing in mind that she also doesn't want to lose her husband. The tension mounts to the point where her husband says she has to choose between him and her other work. This struggle becomes unsustainable due to Ramón's impossible position, to the point that his behaviour and the conflict it provokes becomes unbearable for Teresa and she has to take time off work with stress and take tranquillisers.

Her role is that of the assumed revolutionary mother – the 'super-mother' with a 'double-shift'. In the morning she is the first to get up, prepare the breakfast for everyone, prepare the kids for school, sort the lunch, clean the clothes; then say goodbye to the children before starting her job in the afternoon. She also has a conciliatory tone towards Ramón as she calls him to say she'll be late and worries about him when she gets home.

The contrast between her more modern (revolutionary) values and the traditional mores of her mother's pre-revolutionary society are made evident in the exchanges she has with her mother and with Charo, her mother's maid. Teresa believes that women were previously made slaves in their own homes, with no individual rights, simply occupying their time with the house, the children and the husband. This, it is argued, was the reality of the *machista* society existing in Cuba before the triumph of the Revolution.

One can visibly see Teresa's anxiety and discomfort with the weight of her routine, becoming upset at Ramón and throwing the plates in the bin telling him she refuses to wash up any more. Her relationship with her husband is, therefore, fraught with difficulty and there are few moments of affection between them, save for the sequence in Lenin Park when the whole family goes out for a day trip. This is filmed with the idealistic wash of soft focus, like a dream sequence with a chocolate-box romanticism accompanied by clichéd music to enhance the unreal effect. One might even think this *were* a dream sequence, such is the contrast in style from the rest of the stark neo-realist aesthetic. The only other tender moment between them occurs as they lie in bed after making love during a period of their 'separation' when Ramón unexpectedly calls at the house. But as they laugh together about a dream one of the children has had, this moment is shattered when Ramón gets up to leave in order to visit his girlfriend, Miriam, and we realise he has only been 'passing time' with his wife.

Their relationship, therefore, is portrayed in a very negative light, the obvious restriction on Teresa's individual subjectivity being her domestic life with her husband. This is brilliantly illustrated in what Burton describes as an 'oedipal moment' (1999, 88), as Teresa and son Tony dance at home to modern North American music on the television. Teresa's joy and sense of freedom are evident as she literally lets her hair down; until Ramón enters and the child is sent to bed before her husband eventually persuades Teresa to make love. In this scene one can sense a certain ironic attitude Teresa has towards her husband as she makes a poor attempt to try and stop him kissing her by repeating some of the phrases he has used against her: 'yo soy mala madre, yo no limpio mi casa, yo no atiende a mi familia, yo soy Teresita la hormiguita, la que se quiere ganar el carne a cuenta tuya.' Later, when Teresa realises that Ramón has simply been using her to pass the time and satisfy his sexual urges, she changes the locks on the house so that he cannot enter unexpectedly. Perhaps it is here when Teresa's moment of self-realisation occurs as she then becomes decisive and strong – determined to be herself and confront life alone (or, at least, without her husband), and she refuses to go to Santiago with him.

Ramón appears similar in age to Teresa (around 30-35). He is a good worker and gets promoted to become manager of a new television repair workshop in Santiago de Cuba. This makes him rethink his life as he must decide whether to go alone or whether, if he rekindles his marriage with Teresa, they should go as a family. He obviously cares for his children and has a good relationship with them, worrying about how they get on at school and promising to treat them if they do well. The contrast with Teresa is made starkly evident in an early scene, where Teresa's morning routine of getting up before everyone else to prepare the children's (and Ramon's) breakfast, is first introduced, and we see her constantly commanding the children harshly to get ready for school and abruptly waking Ramón by throwing a bed sheet at him to wake him up. Ramón, however, is seen at the breakfast table, calmly asking son Tony in hushed tones about his schoolwork and promising him a reward should he do well. This follows a previous contrast in which we witness Teresa's hostility towards a female work colleague, scolding her for not attending the after-work cultural activities, followed immediately by a scene with Ramón bringing the children home from school and socialising amiably with the neighbours. Such disparities between Teresa's negative public character portrayal and Ramón's positive portrayal will be discussed in more detail later but play an important part in valorising Teresa as the negative part of a traditional male/female binary, from which she may never be able to escape.

Ramón does help do some of the chores, but such incidences are rare, particularly within the home. He studies a course in television electronics in order to try and better himself but feels satisfied with the job that he does. He does not, however, seem interested in contributing to the wider aspects of society, unlike Teresa, even though he does have a good attitude at work. It is obvious that he wishes to subordinate his wife and feels jealous of her work for the *Festival de Aficionados* and believes she wants to earn her Communist Party membership card at his expense. He does not believe in equality of the sexes in the realm of sexual practice, believing that a man is permitted to be unfaithful to his wife but that the reverse should not be allowed.

He never thinks about what Teresa really wants and tries to subjugate her more and more, denying her any sympathy when she tries to communicate her desires to him. When he does not get his own way he at first shouts and then becomes physically violent, often grabbing Teresa roughly by the arm and on occasion slapping her. When offered a new job in Santiago his solution is to try and take Teresa and the family with him rather than to think of the possibility of not taking the job in order to stay with his family. This is one example of his selfishness in a relationship always marked by inequality based on supposed inferiority.

This film, then, develops a polarisation between the sexes and, in so doing, with an intimate portrayal of a woman's public and private dilemmas, places Teresa 'into the singular and out of the plural' (Haskell, 1999: 27). As Haskell remarks, films have a narrower context than literature with the protagonist being seen in detailed close-up, the visualisation being done for the spectator via the camera. This singular experience here is a signifier of the attempt to move 'out of the contrivances of puritanical thinking into enlightened self-interest' (Ibid), from the reactionary to the radical in an examination of Teresa's negative experience and her 'solitary soul' (Ibid).

For José Álvarez, the film illustrates a phallocentric order and Teresa represents an easily identifiable figure for many Cuban women: hard-working, marginalised and exploited by the demands of work and domestic chores – the 'transparent' incarnation of the typical Cuban (even Latin American) wife/mother image allowing an understanding and identification by a large number of spectators (not just female). Álvarez suggests that Teresa typifies the conflicts of many Cuban women particularly in Havana. Via a 'thematic displacement' (1995: 117), the film makes a leap from a criticism of the notion of the 'double-shift' for women to a criticism of the 'double-standard', thereby challenging the patriarchy still prevalent in 1970s Cuban society. He makes the point that the evident clash of the film is between the sexes and not between different races or different classes. He argues that this division of the sexes places the film as firmly within the parameters of a Marxist-Leninist discourse, presenting a criticism of a society that prevents Teresa from becoming an 'individual' (Ibid). The society presented in this film is uniform, carrying both a Marxist and

a historical agenda as Teresa has to fight hard to overcome the vestiges of a pre-revolutionary, bourgeois moral code that have continued in revolutionary society. Teresa says to her husband at one point: 'Todo no puede ser lavar, cocinar, planchar; yo quiero ser yo, no una esclava como mi mamá, mi suegra'.

Perhaps, then, the film makes a critique of certain aspects of a society in the process of flux, but is not critical enough of the Revolution's failure to alter negative attitudes. This is highlighted by the only possibility for Teresa at the end of the film – to leave Ramón (perhaps for good) and walk into her new future, leaving the weight of tradition and history behind her. Teresa's struggle for independence is Cuba's struggle to re-write its own history by developing a new future, however difficult that might be. The problem, however, is that Teresa is walking away from that society in flux, one that seems unlikely to alter its negative attitudes in the near future.

Many contrasting and complementary scenes illustrate well how Teresa is caught up within old-world values apparently with very little hope of escape. When she has to listen to her mother telling her to simply put up with Ramón's behaviour, we see them performing historically women's work, peeling potatoes and stringing runner beans (Ibid: 118). The following scene, however, is even more telling when played alongside this one as we see Ramón flirting with women in the street. Teresa is thus caught in this world of the 'double-shift' and the 'double-standard' and the possibilities for her salvation seem very limited indeed.

Álvarez argues that the film denounces the *machismo* that exists in Cuban society – to a certain extent this is true. But, by presenting a female character in such a polarised and negative fashion, the film has the effect of naturalising sexual difference to such an extent that it often overrides the criticisms it attempts to make.

As mentioned, sexual difference is essential to the construction of this film, as it is to the construction of the human subject. For this reason I believe it is impossible to ignore a psychoanalytical examination of the development of Teresa as a subject within the film, such are the many instances presented to the spectator of a distinct male/female dichotomous

relationship. The sexes are juxtaposed so many times – usually in confrontation rather than as complementary – that an appraisal of the power relations between them is unavoidable, and the relations are certainly not equitable, the primary signifier being the phallus, as suggested in the opening scene.

But, as argued in Chapter Three, any psychoanalytical examination is bound to steer a path of ambivalence, such is the nature of psychoanalysis, and *Retrato de Teresa* follows that same path. Both tend towards a deconstruction of patriarchy but both also enclose women's sexuality in Cowie's 'normative definitions' (1997: 11). One of the problems with the film resides in this idea of a normative definition. As Catherine Benamou has suggested there perhaps needs to be more 'autonomous spaces within which diverse subjectivities and identities need to be represented' (1999: 67) in Cuban cinema as a whole; and the presentation of Teresa here as representative of a typical Cuban 'super-mother' does nothing to alleviate this problem.

Women's issues were at the forefront in 1979 as Benamou points out, the undesirability of *machismo* being one of the major themes of the day. Many Cuban films have 'promoted women as labouring subjects at the expense of personal attributes with national collectivity as referent' (1999: 68), but, as in this film, women are usually shown as the inferior part of a male/female binary, taking advice from men and very rarely shown in public office making decisions.

But there are no absolutes, no such thing as 'real' or 'true' images in cinema as some feminists might desire. As Cowie points out, in cinema, images are not already truthful, they are socially constructed and become true only when the spectator finds them true (1997: 4). But when such representations are created in a neo-realist style, in the understanding that realism is important in constructing identity, the assumption of a 'truthful' image is being made, whereby a female protagonist, in this case Teresa, seeks an achieved, finished identity.

By placing Teresa within such a structure of sexual difference, her familial and historical legacy playing such an obviously large part in her formation as a (sexualised) subject and the possibility of her extra-marital affair being presented to us almost as a taboo

subject, we are witness to a process of the exchange of woman between family structures. This exchange is delivered in the film as a combination of expulsion and possibility, but all leading to a satisfactory solution – or, as Cowie argues, a resolution of opposition. Just like the rules of kinship, like language itself, the film is a process of oppositional structures that relies on a resolution.

As Teresa decides to leave Ramón, walking away from him into the very public space of a crowded street, we are led to believe in an open ending, the *lack* of a resolution. But the opposition that the film has constructed demands (and gets) a resolution, and Teresa is removed from the scene, being left without (social or sexual) intercourse as she walks away from Ramón towards another possibility: another lover? Perhaps towards her colleague Tomás, a relationship with whom has been hinted at during the film? Or moving on to a life of independence and chastity? The fact that she is banished from the scene excludes her from ‘intercourse’ in this particular society, and it appears that there is little hope for her sexual freedom in the next one. In the opening scene we see Teresa as sexualised object, her hair blowing in the wind, as her husband frames her in his camera. But here, at the end of the film, as she leaves her husband behind, her sexuality is denied her, as the signifier of her sexuality is tied tightly under a pure white bandana. This undermines the attempt by the film-makers to liberate her, as she is merely exchanged, as Ramón will no doubt happily exchange her for a younger model as we have already seen he is capable of doing. Whereas Ramón is permitted sexual freedom, Teresa is not. She is only permitted the value of a sign of exchange of women between groups, in a social contract with the Cuban spectator, still immersed in the *machismo* of pre-revolutionary society.

We do not know if Teresa has had an affair or not and Michael Chanan asserts that this ambiguity ‘brilliantly and deliberately plays on the susceptibilities of the audience’ (2004: 376). He quotes director Pastor Vega: ‘If we’d made it definite that she’d had an affair, Cuban viewers would simply have said that she deserved what she got... And we wanted people to

hear *all* of what Teresa says, not just what she says about sex' (Ibid).⁴ Thus we witness a denial (a fear?) of Teresa's sexuality and she is therefore desexualised and exchanged by being expelled from the scene, thus retaining the symbolic function of the name-of-the-father. In this sense her very existence, as a desexualised woman, is being denied. Female sexuality remains a taboo. Where it raises its ugly head it must be opposed and then eliminated for fear of a breakdown in culture itself. Teresa has been expelled from the scene, from language itself, stripped of her subjectivity and delivered into a linguistic void of uncertainty, with no voice, in order that she may be judged by the omnipotent eye of the camera (of the spectator) with no possibility to answer back. Her symbolic 'death', as Cixous would argue, has been constructed within the terms of the Oedipus, those 'terms of identification' (de Lauretis, 2003: 85) that have been established between Cuban film-makers and their audience.

Teresa's expulsion from the narrative is posited in the film as her voluntary abandonment of the abusive and unequal relationship she has suffered at the hands of her husband. She walks away and leaves him; a strong and independent act that, according to scriptwriter Fornet, in the interview with him, was seen as provocative at the time. But this act thereby removes Teresa from any possible discourse and the potential for real change is lost in her defiant gesture. Yolanda, in the film *De cierta manera*, discussed in Chapter Two, also walks away at the end of the film. However, in the case of the latter film, Yolanda walks away in conversation with her former boyfriend, who is trying to win her back, her voice still being heard by the film's dominant male character, the potential for real change remaining.

One of the problems with the constant positioning of Teresa as the inferior half of a male/female binary (whether it is with her husband, with Tomás or with the manager of the textile factory, Bernal) is in the potential to naturalise such negativity. Teresa's femininity, her supposed innate femaleness in her role as mother/wife, is a construction (within both the film and the society captured by the film in such a realist fashion). The film certainly highlights this negative construction of femininity and by so doing makes an attempt to

⁴ The film's script writer, Ambrosio Fornet, gave the same point of view in an interview with the author in Havana, January, 2005.

deconstruct it. But, by refusing to deal with one of the most fundamental of all aspects of human subjectivity, sex, it goes a long way to undermining this deconstruction.

As already discussed, negativity follows Teresa's every move in the film, as she is usually seen (in both public and private situations) as demanding, surly and even aggressive, often contrasted with Ramón's cheerful and friendly nature. This obviously has the effect of exposing Teresa's life as difficult, tough and without pleasure. There are a number of what Haskell might call 'external co-relatives'⁵ that add to her despair and misery. Such an example might include the ringing of a chicken's neck when she is at her mother's house, after a hostile argument with Ramón. Or the scene where she sits, sewing, and is viewed from behind the exterior bars of the patio, or the immediate cut to a hospital after Ramón and Teresa's most violent clash, even when the scenes are entirely disconnected. All of this adds to the constant portrayal of Teresa as a negative part of a binary, one from which she cannot escape, she can only be expelled or exchanged.

In Aspasia Kotsopoulos's terms, Teresa wishes to resist patriarchy by possessing desire, but possession of that desire is forbidden her.⁶ As discussed in Chapter Three, the idealisation of motherhood leads to the desexualisation of woman while man's sexual desires are readily expressed. Throughout the film we are witness, however, not only to just the *possibility* of desire for Teresa (we are actually denied the knowledge of her actual desires as she is always seen as struggling *against* rather than struggling *for*), but to the actuality of desire for her husband Ramón. He is the one pursuing other women, relaxing on the beach and with the freedom to roam freely around Havana. In Judith Butler's terms, the multiplicity of sex-gender relations is ignored while the universalism of traditional male-female sexual relations is supported. The film's viewpoint is as much Ramón's as it is Teresa's, if not more so. Due to this centralised viewpoint of Ramón, therefore, the spectator is forced to look

⁵ In an examination of Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*, Molly Haskell argues that the female characters become increasingly complex and take fate into their own hands, their inner state being suggested via a series of 'external co-relatives', elements within a *mis-en-scène* that provide an illustration of their state of mind (1999: 24).

⁶ Kotsopoulos, A. (2001). At: www.ejumpcut.org/archive/jc44.2001/aspasia/againstgrain1.html (accessed 16/07/08).

through his eyes and is implicated in the process of rejection of Teresa as a bad wife and mother who simply wants to have her independence at the expense of family life. This then delegitimises Teresa's perspective in order to place the spectator more in line with Ramón's patriarchal point of view. Although we feel for Teresa and the sacrifices she makes, we 'accede to the necessity of this sacrifice' as the film structures the spectator to do so.⁷

The whole area of spectator identification is a complex one and not all spectators will be affected in the same way. But a discussion of the representation of Teresa in this film does highlight a major contradiction. On the one hand, Teresa is represented as forceful and dominant, choosing to escape a violent and unproductive relationship but on the other she is prevented from even expressing, let alone achieving, her true desires. She is both included in and then excluded from this dominant discourse 'constructed as the ground for the exercise of patriarchal power' but 'denied agency and subjectivity'.⁸

Julianne Burton-Carvajal emphasises the contrast between the presentation of Ramón's and Teresa's lives, criticising the ellipsis the film makes by not referring directly to anything but the possibility of Teresa's desire outside of marriage as 'bowing to the sexual mores that the film purports to criticise ie that it's ok for male infidelity but not for female' (1994: 310). The attempts at a critique of *machismo* in Cuban society, she argues, often backfire as Teresa is always seen as 'despondent, being criticised, unhappy, derided, laughed at' (Ibid: 311). She is often portrayed as nothing but a sexual object – from the opening scene through to the scene where she appears on television being offered nothing but *piropos* by the presenter who does not take her seriously. This constant representation of Teresa as a passive object is in direct contrast to the attempt to present her as a strong character, fighting against the mores of a traditionally sexist society.

The problem with this film is not just in the presentation of the central characters, but in its denouement and the negative attitude it conveys towards the potential for woman's liberation in such a society. When Teresa walks away at the end she escapes one overbearing,

⁷ Ibid

⁸ Ibid

unequal relationship, but there is nothing to suggest that she will not simply walk straight into another very similar one. As she disappears into the crowd, desexualised, staring harshly into her future, a street group plays a song that warns her of the difficulties of trying to escape such a male-dominated world.

¡Él que siembra su maíz, que se coma su pilón!

La mujer en el amor, se parece a la gallina.

Y cuando se muere el gallo, a cualquier otro se arrima

The song continues in this vein, calling out to Teresa to ‘Polish the floor!’ A stereotypical portrayal of Teresa was never a conscious strategy on the part of the film-makers but, in its creation of a type of iconography (a ‘typical’ Cuban woman with certain characteristics and behaviour), this film, and cinema in general, creates the conditions for the spectator to decipher images that are entrenched within a system. Thus, the film adds to the creation of the myth of a type of ‘super-woman’ before, admittedly, attempting to deconstruct that myth by exposing the harsh realities of it. But, by expelling Teresa from the scene at the end, her desires never fully realised, and in direct and obvious contrast to her husband, the iconography created ‘places man as inside history and therefore changing and woman as outside of it...and eternal’ (Johnston, 2000: 23). The myth created is using Teresa (a ‘super-mother’) as an icon that has the effect of naturalising the meaning she signifies. If, as a sign, she is emptied of her original meaning by breaking with her husband and destroying her iconic status as ‘super-mother’, she is never invested with new meaning, as this would be too painful to bear for a society caught up in old traditions. The sexism inherent in society is now made invisible by this lack of meaning, this expulsion. This film, then, aids the propagation of a myth and: ‘Within a sexist ideology and a male-dominated cinema, woman is presented as what she represents for man’ (Ibid). When she no longer represents his desires, she is destroyed.

There is a real opposition in this film between male and female but the attempt at opposition as resistance merely enhances the power of the thing being opposed by exaggerating its strengths and characteristics – as Johnston argues it is fetishistic and

phallogentric (2000: 26). She uses the image of Mae West in Hollywood cinema to explain this, but in Cuban cinema there are many examples of this fetishisation, including the use of Teresa's hair as a sexual signifier. For Johnston, the only way out of this oppositional cul-de-sac is through the development of a cinema of fantasy, Cowie's 'imagined scenes', her *mis-en-scène* of desire' (1984: 79). However, when woman is constantly being presented (and *Retrato de Teresa* is no exception) as a negative part of a male/female binary (i.e. non-male), within the ideological product of cinema (particularly in such a realist fashion), there is no break between ideology and text, no real disruption of the ideology of patriarchy. In essence, there is no fantasy. Teresa's sexuality is, as Butler would assert, constructed within the terms of heterosexual and phallic discourse and power (1999: 40) via a naturalisation of 'heterosexuality and masculine sexual agency' (Ibid: 54-5).

The ending is particularly important as Chanan comments, the film's denouement depends on it and, although the director has stated that sex is not the only factor to consider in this film, the level of importance attached to whether or not Teresa has had an affair, suggests that sex (and ultimately whether or not Teresa has had it with someone else) is one of its most important aspects. The whole film has been set up, via a series of male/female conflicts and contradictions, for this climactic, teleological moment. And yet what we are given is no apparent resolution. Is this, therefore, the lack of 'closure' often called for by feminist critics of cinema? As Annette Kuhn has said, 'feminine language works against that closure which is a feature of dominant masculine language' (1982: 17), and this film would appear to allow the spectator to make up his or her own mind. But the film produces a huge imbalance, both in its portrayal of the characters already discussed and in its insistence upon showing blatantly Ramón's affair and macho behaviour. This imbalance belies the attempt at offering a feminist discourse and the closure is real, as Teresa is expelled – the threat of her sex being too much for both audience and film-maker. This illustrates the film's masculinist tendency towards the fixed beliefs regarding male and female sexuality, and it suffers in part from the importance attached to the possibility of Teresa's affair.

I would even like to go further to examine in more detail the threat that Teresa (as liberated, possibly adulterous and sexually active female) poses to the society depicted in the film, this threat being made obvious by Ramón's abusive attempts to keep her in check. Ramón's physical violence (albeit restricted) towards Teresa could perhaps be seen as evoking a threat of something more sinister. The way he grabs her arm on a couple of occasions signifies his desire to hold her within his field of domination. It is this muted violence that warns her to keep herself within certain physical boundaries, i.e. belonging to him, physically, sexually. It tells her to stay in her place and develops the power relationship between them. It tells her that his power is all around her, she cannot escape it, and this is the power that forbids her sex with another. Ramón's domination acts as a signifier to patriarchal power serving to prohibit Teresa from sexual relations with another; the attitudes of Teresa's mother, Charo and others acting as the 'multiplicity of force relations' (Foucault, 1978: 92) upon her. For Teresa, though, the film does not allow for her to break out of these power relations without being expelled from the scene. The film traps itself within its own 'juridico-political system' (Ibid) of power relations by acceding to the norms of the society it purports to criticise.

Violent threat is a powerful way to establish and maintain the identity of any social organisation or group, and here Ramón uses his physical superiority to admonish Teresa. When they fight on the bed, this violence is even eroticised, the link between power, violence and sex made evident by the location of the bedroom. Later, after Ramón has left to go and live with his mother, he returns, uninvited, to his former home, sends his son to bed and persuades Teresa to have sex with him, killing time before going to see his girlfriend. The power he asserts over her thus takes on a threatening sexual element as Teresa gives in to his demands all too easily, in the vain hope that their marriage can be saved.

In short, the film does nothing to deconstruct the relationship between power and sex in such a traditionally *machista* society or to delegitimise the threat of violence Ramón poses. These scenes remind the viewer of this threat (possibly of rape, perhaps?) without criticising sufficiently these power relations. As Teresa walks away from him at the end of the film, one

wonders if she feels like looking over her shoulder, expecting his hand at any moment to grab her again and pull her back to him as he follows (stalks?) her through the crowd, in a scene that, put together with the scenes of Ramón leering at girls from the safety of his van, and with those of his violence towards Teresa, heightens the possibility of his potential threat.

Part Two

Lejanía (1985, Jesús Díaz).

This part of Chapter Four argues that the film *Lejanía* presents a complex and subtle character study of the mother-figure (one of its central characters) and in so doing subverts one of the myths of Cuban cultural production by presenting a mother-figure who sits outside the accepted parameters of Cuban cultural discourse. The film does not obviously set itself up as maternal melodrama and it is as much about familial relations and the pain that exile (and revolution) can create for families. It concentrates as much on the figure of the son as it does on the figure of the mother, but there are some very important issues to be raised by a close examination of this text that evinces contradictory and surprising attitudes concerning the mother-figure.

After relating some of the context within which the film was made, this analysis attempts to discuss the film *Lejanía* from two different, but not necessarily entirely oppositional, points of view. First, I would like to examine the figure of the mother, Susana, and her relationship with her son, Reinaldo, arguing that these representations illustrate one of the many difficulties faced by ICAIC in its portrayal of female characters. Since Humberto Solás' comments concerning his film *Lucía* about the female figure in Cuban cinema as transparent referent of Cuban society, it has become very difficult to read any such representation in Cuban cinema without this idea in mind. Many critics still adhere to this traditional criticism where any strong or prominent female character comes to represent aspects of the Cuban nation. The first half of this commentary explores this idea and highlights some of the recent work in this area concerning this film, at the same time as illustrating some of the difficulties with this line of argument.

However, the second part of this study attempts to see the figure of Susana from a different point of view and illustrates how this film disturbs to some extent this traditional idea of viewing the female character purely as symbolic national referent. This part of Chapter Four points towards finding some common ground between these two points of view (as surely the national and the individual must exist in tandem, harbouring at least some dialectical exchange that can serve the interests of both), but also endeavours to engage the reader in something other than a simplistic and reductionist reading of the female character that serves neither the individual nor the national interest.

Lejanía was made in 1985 and perhaps (as Enrique Fernández has remarked) had more resonance in the USA than in Cuba at the time, due to its politically sensitive and emotive subject (exile) that struck a chord with a large exiled community constantly searching for some kind of representation (1987: 23) and still smarting from the pain and confusion of the Mariel exodus of 1980.⁹

In the period 1950-59, according to an interview with the film's director Jesús Díaz (1941-2002) in the magazine *Cine Cubano*, approximately 30,000 people emigrated from Cuba to the USA every year (Díaz, 1985: 44). From 1959 until October, 1962, 120,000 emigrated until the USA suspended all flights. However, the Cuban government then set up ways for people to leave. For example on the 28 September 1965, from the port of Camarioca, all who wanted to could leave the island. Washington was forced to concede and reopened flights from Varadero. The one exception was that Cuban males aged 17-26 were not allowed to leave as they were of military age and therefore required for self-defence purposes. It was not until 1979 that the Cuban government allowed those who had left years earlier to revisit their families. Political provocation from the USA incited some to search for exits via embassies. In April, 1980, Fidel Castro removed the guards from the gates of the Peruvian embassy allowing 10,000 Cubans to enter in search of asylum, leading to the mass exodus at

⁹ During a period of growing dissent amidst housing problems and a failing economy, approximately 125,000 Cubans were allowed to leave the island for the USA between 15 April and 31 October 1980 from the port of Mariel. 27 migrants died in their attempts to leave; the incident worsening the already difficult immigration relations between the two countries (Fernández, 1987: 23).

Mariel. Finally, in 1984 an agreement was reached between the USA and Cuba which helped to stabilise migratory relations.

The theme of exile, then, has always been a painful and difficult one to tackle, although writer and director Díaz never shied away from it. Díaz was known as a committed revolutionary and faithful supporter of Castro. He taught Marxism at the University of Havana and wrote the short story collection *Los años duros* (1966), which won the Casa de las Américas prize.¹⁰

He joined ICAIC in 1971 and made a number of documentaries and shorts including *55 Hermanos* (1978) about a group of descendants of Cuban exiles visiting Cuba for the first time. Having made the film *Polvo rojo* in 1981 (a film that illustrates some of the human costs of revolution), he then went on to make *Lejanía* four years later. He went into exile first to Germany in 1991 and then to Spain, where he died in 2002.

Founder of the magazine *El Caimán Barbudo* and one of the editors of *Pensamiento Crítico*, Díaz was unhappy when Castro closed down the latter in 1971 and so drifted towards ICAIC where his artistic merits could be best utilised. Díaz was a firm believer in Cuba's 'militant culture' as described by Pedro de la Hoz who quotes Díaz's humanistic views on the role of culture in revolution.

El centro de la problemática intelectual en Cuba – si de creadores se trata – es traducir la crisis del mundo que todavía estamos destruyendo, el parto doloroso del que comenzamos a construir, al lenguaje del arte hallando los medios expresivos adecuados. Traducir la experiencia de la Revolución cubana, vanguardia del mundo subdesarrollado, en términos de vanguardia artística. No podemos entender por vanguardia en este caso la imitación, la copia servil de ningún experimento artístico foráneo; la vanguardia, para serlo, tiene que estar delante de nosotros, no a nuestras espaldas. No puede ser, por tanto, repetición. Pero tampoco podemos desarrollar esa vanguardia sin conocer, y asimilar críticamente, todo lo que la humanidad ha creado y crea. No es posible, en nombre de un localismo falso, despreciar lo que provenga de Londres, París, Nueva York... o de Moscú, Praga, Berlín. Nuestro pueblo no ignoró la décima que también provenía de Europa. Lenin en su proyecto de resolución para el Congreso del Proletkult,

¹⁰ <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/860193/Jesus-Diaz> (accessed 19/02/09).

escribió: “El marxismo ha conquistado su significación histórica-universal como ideología del proletariado revolucionario porque no ha rechazado en modo alguno las más valiosas conquistas de la época burguesa sino, por el contrario, ha asimilado y reelaborado todo lo que hubo de valioso en más de mil años del pensamiento y la cultura humanos.”¹¹

Díaz’s humanism is evident from this quotation and is supported by the films *Polvo rojo* and *55 Hermanos* that deal with human emotion in times of personal difficulty. Díaz was a committed revolutionary but this quotation shows that he was open to artistic ideas from all ideologies and had a disliking for ‘false localism’ as he puts it, or, in other words, for the irrelevances of artistic isolation.

But Díaz’s support of the Revolution waned after the making of *Lejanía* and he became disillusioned with many aspects of the revolutionary process after the film *Alicia en el pueblo de maravillas* (1991), that he co-directed with Daniel Díaz Torres and for which he wrote the script, was banned four days after release (Paranaguá, 1997: 167). An obituary in the Miami Herald of 3 May 2002 by Fabiola Santiago, quotes Díaz’s change of heart concerning his allegiance to the Cuban Revolution. ‘I harbor no rancor, but I don’t forget... I believe that Cuba should not forget; that reconstruction must take place. But the memory of the atrocities must be preserved, not for vengeance, but to not repeat them’ (2002: 23).

The film *Lejanía* has been seen very much as one of the films that both represents and constructs the idea of a specific national consciousness in Cuba, dealing poignantly and directly with the politically sensitive and difficult theme of exile, a subject not considered in such depth in Cuban cinema as it is here. However, in the film’s ambivalent portrayal of character and in the highly personalised and intimate nature of its construction, I would argue that there are at work in this film various intense and deeply personal conflicts that allow us to steer away from an examination at the level of national consciousness towards an analysis at the level of individual subject formation (although, admittedly, the film allows for both possibilities).

¹¹ Hoz de la, Pedro (2001). At: www.lajiribilla.cu/2001/n8_junio/202_8.html (accessed 20/08/06).

The film is set in one apartment over 24 hours in Havana in the 1980s where, initially, a party is in full swing. The phone rings and Reinaldo is informed that his mother, whom he has not seen for ten years, is to return the next day to visit him. He wants to see her but is obviously distressed by the prospect of seeing again the mother who had left him to live in Florida when he was 17. Reinaldo's wife, Aleida, is also concerned at the prospect of the visit but agrees to put up Reinaldo's mother, Susana, in their apartment for the week-long visit. When Susana arrives with her niece, Ana, it becomes evident that she hopes Reinaldo will return with her to Florida. But the reception she receives from her son is nothing like she expected and he and Aleida ultimately reject her pre-revolutionary bourgeois ways and the many gifts she brings from the USA. But this is not before she and Reinaldo have shared some intimate mother-and-son moments that belie Reinaldo's impending rejection of her.

As Gillian McGillivray argues, the film is full of indirect comments on gender and there are three central female characters playing major roles in the elaboration of the plot, these characters serving to reflect aspects of Cuban nationhood (1998: 8). Aleida is a young *mulata* who embodies the ideal of the good revolutionary in a somewhat stereotypical portrayal of the 'perfect' Cuban revolutionary woman. She possesses the dignity often associated with a portrayal of national revolutionary consciousness, echoing the feelings of a nation suffering from an embargo and the lack of material possessions. She instinctively rejects Susana's dollars and appears to represent revolutionary strength and decency, directly opposing Susana's amoral, materialistic, US-influenced character. The contrasts between Aleida and Susana are obvious to the point of being deliberately coarse and heavy-handed. Susana is white and bourgeois, Aleida is *mulata* and revolutionary. One represents old values and the other represents the new values as proposed by the Revolution.¹² But this binary, obvious as it may be and evidently proposed to illustrate problems of national consciousness, can also be read at the level of the personal and individual rather than merely the symbolic, as

¹² To oppose two women in such a way is common in Cuban cinema. For example, in the film *¡Plaf! o demasiado miedo a la vida* (1989, Juan Carlos Tabío), discussed in Chapter Six, Part One, middle-aged Concha represents the Revolution's early values while her 'opponent', the youthful Clarita, represents the modern values of the Revolution in the 1980s.

both have an intimate relationship with the same man, Reinaldo, and Susana is evidently concerned about her son's new partner.

Catherine Benamou asserts that this is another film about women made by men, where women are proposed as symbolic referents of the nation and any critique of patriarchy is sorely lacking (1999: 69). However, Gillian McGillivray argues that films such as *Lejanía*, *Lucía*, *Retrato de Teresa*, *De cierta manera*, *Hasta cierto punto*, *Una novia para David* (1985) and *Papeles secundarios* (1989), (these last two both by Orlando Rojas), do indeed 'portray sympathetic and 'real' female characters while at the same time offering a powerful critique of the manifestations of sexism in Cuban society, from rape and abuse to jealousy and the double standard' (1998: 13). McGillivray cites the conversation between Susana and Reinaldo near the beginning of the film as evidence that a slightly more progressive take on *machismo* in the home is being expressed by this film than, for example, that found in *Retrato de Teresa* and that 'this impression is reinforced by the fact Reinaldo resists adultery with his cousin Ana, despite the fact they were evidently very intimate and both he and Ana are visibly tempted to relive the past' (1998: 14).

McGillivray's view is interesting to note as she pays particular attention to the questions that Susana poses to her son when they meet. She asks Reinaldo why he has married a divorcee and if his new wife is a *mulata*, adding that there has never been one of those in the family before. These questions are typical of the type a mother would ask, concerned as she is both with her son's welfare and with the image of her family. Here, Susana must be taken in the context of who she is; a white, Catholic, middle-class Cuban woman brought up in a pre-revolutionary society with all the cultural baggage that that implies. Besides, although the answers from Reinaldo reveal how times have changed (he does not care that Aleida is both a divorcee and a *mulata* and does not see it as relevant), the catalyst for this critical exchange is Susana herself, just as she is the one who has arranged the visit. Susana, then, in the context of who she is and as catalyst of critical discourse, if nothing else, is portrayed sympathetically.

Marvin D'Lugo argues that the film problematises 'issues of national identity' (1997: 160), by placing several distinct characters within a restricted space thus enhancing the differences between them in what he describes as a 'symbolic *mis-en-scène*' that helps the spectator see the film as an allegory of national concerns (Ibid: 161). It is impossible to read this film completely outside of the sphere of national consciousness – the simple fact of the theme of exile dictates that. But it can also be viewed at the level of the personal (the psychoanalytical) in a way that *Retrato de Teresa* cannot, and this is aided by the very mechanism that D'Lugo feels places the film at the level of national allegory – the restriction of space. D'Lugo himself states that the film is an example of how 'the female figure is used not merely to embody a static concept of patriotism but rather to problematize issues of national identity' (Ibid: 160). So again, a critique of this film is structured around the central theme of woman as national referent. There is no doubt that the film can be read in this way and a close examination of the figure of the mother, Susana, illustrates how certain issues of national identity concerning the mother-figure are disturbed by this film.

The figure of Susana, therefore, is linked to this notion of national identity and D'Lugo and others choose to read the film in this way. For D'Lugo the characters serve to express national concerns that supersede their representations as individual human subjects. But such is the intimacy and personal involvement the spectator has with the characters that there is another level at which the character of Susana must be considered, and that is the level of the individual, the subject, both as part of and separate from this idea of national identity. This will be discussed in more detail later with particular reference to Susana but one of the technical aspects of the film that D'Lugo argues places it at the level of national allegory, the restriction of space, also provokes this more individualistic, more personal, reading.

As the camera moves around Reinaldo and Aleida's apartment, closely following the characters through rooms and down corridors, the effect is that of intimate personal involvement in their everyday lives, how they interact, even what they watch on television. The reduction of space and time (the film is entirely set within one apartment during only 24 hours), gives the film what Paulo Antonio Paranagua calls '(m)aximal dramatic condensation'

(1988: 93) and establishes a claustrophobic sense of intimacy that enables us to experience, and examine very closely, the characters' interactions; and perhaps in so doing understand better their individual desires that might add to but also disturb D'Lugo's assertion that the characters are representative of aspects of national identity. The individual and the national are interwoven in a dialectical exchange and an examination of the figure of the mother in this film can elaborate this idea.

As Michael Chanan observes, the diegetic sound adds to the feeling of personal intimacy. Here we get no sweeping soundtrack that might lull the spectator into a sense of the grandiose (as in, for example, the soundtrack at the beginning of *Retrato de Teresa*), but we hear the television and the radio as they are turned on in the apartment and street sounds wafting in from outside (Chanan, 2004: 420).¹³ This does a number of things, one of which is to accurately locate the film in a particular socio-historical place. However, the songs we hear are not all contemporary, thus leading the spectator (particularly a Cuban one familiar with the cultural references) to consider the passing of time both at a national, historical level and very much at a personal one as the film's protagonists react instinctively to these diegetic insertions. The importance of such emotional concepts as memory, loss and nostalgia are here astutely observed. As Chanan points out, the theme song of the film is Omara Portuondo's bolero *Veinte años*, 'about the separation of two lovers and the impossibility of rekindling their love' (2004: 421), and another classic song of nostalgia is played, Carlos Gardel's *Volver*.

The programmes on the television in the apartment also hark back to former times with the screening of Gutiérrez Alea's film about slavery in Cuba, *La última cena* (1976). Interestingly, the *mulata* Aleida asks white, bourgeois Susana if she would like to watch it but she says no as it looks 'horrible'. This moment encapsulates the relationship between the two, and of how a part of Cuba's national dilemma (that of race and the history of slavery) is viewed through the eyes of these two women – the audience is seeing part of Cuba's national history through Aleida and Susana who have become the transparent prisms through which

¹³ This technique would be used again in *Mujer transparente*, discussed in Chapter Six, Part Two.

issues of national identity are viewed. However, it is probably fairer to say that the two women act more as translucent prisms rather than transparent ones, as at the same time as seeing through them we are seeing them in all their intimate glory enhanced by the claustrophobic atmosphere created by the restrictive *mis-en-scène* of the apartment.

D'Lugo believes that the apartment they inhabit 'becomes the nation' (1997: 161), but if this is so then a sense of reduction is achieved whereby we become locked into this allegory, and lose any notion of the characters' individual subjectivity. It is the purpose of this part of Chapter Four (and more importantly, one of the purposes of the film) to recover Susana's individual subjective identity, in order to rescue it from its position solely as representative of an aspect of Cuban national consciousness.

The problems that the inhabitants face are personal and individual, as well as national. The film, then, should be viewed as more than just an allegory of national dilemmas as the very personal problems, of loss, memory, love, familial relations, abandonment and desire combine to produce dramatic conflict that drives to the heart of the individual. Unlike *Retrato de Teresa*, this film does not naturalise gender differences in such a way as to offer a reductionist reading. Most critics have read the film as a form of national allegory, and to ignore the context within which these problems occur would be foolish, but that is not to say that we should reduce any analysis to one where the individual is seen as an idealistic national portrait that probably does not exist. As Chanan states the film has an 'intensely naturalistic feel achieved by the use of available light' which 'is intensified by the direct location sound' (2004: 421). This naturalism serves to individualise the story while, at the same time, certain cultural references help us to place it also within the genre of national allegory.

D'Lugo believes that the film uses the three central female characters of Susana, Aleida and Ana as markers of certain social and historical positions that 'transcend their positions as women' (1997: 161). He goes on to assert that their positions as women are superseded by their roles as members of a nation. The difficulty here arises when one considers in detail the figure of the exiled Susana. As D'Lugo agrees, the film develops an ambivalent attitude towards Susana, who is ultimately rejected by her son Reinaldo. I would argue, therefore, that

this places their relationship within a sphere of personal intimacy that supersedes, or at least is equivalent to, its force as marker of a national dilemma.

Susana is not overtly criticised in the film for abandoning Reinaldo ten years earlier (he was unable to leave at the time as he was due for military service), and a degree of sympathy is aimed at her when she is finally rejected by her unforgiving son. As D'Lugo states, 'her [Susana's] status is seen as contradictory' (Ibid). This contradiction validates an appraisal of the film from the level of the acutely personal and partly female in that it deals with a mother-son relationship. It may illustrate some of the problems Cuba had to face at the time, but this part of the story is distinctly personal, touching and, from Susana's point of view, as a mother, female.

Chanan's take on this relationship is that a metaphor is created whereby emotional deprivation is linked to Western consumerism.

The perversion of motherly love in the service of the dehumanising culture of consumerism becomes, in Cuba, a mark of perverse complicity with an ideology that places wasteful materialism above natural human feeling. The effect is to place at the centre of the film a metaphor of the double-sided condition which divides the first world and the third, the two faces of deprivation, emotional in one, material in the other.

(2004: 423)

But such a binary is too simplistic and relies on the assumption that first-world consumerism is devoid of emotion and full of perverted motherly love. Besides, the film simply does not tell us this. If any one person is devoid of emotion in the film it is Aleida, the paradigm of revolutionary woman, completely rejecting any of the gifts Susana brings from 'the North' (the only way Susana believes she can win back the affections of her son and his family).

It is evident that Susana is overflowing with motherly love as her actions towards her son demonstrate in the film. It is true that Reinaldo *is* diffident towards his mother towards the end of the film but when she arrives they share some intimate moments that belie the simplistic division Chanan observes. These moments in the film are full of human feeling, emotion and a surprising tenderness by both Reinaldo and Susana. If anything, it is surprising

that Reinaldo is as accepting of her as he is given that she ‘abandoned’ him ten years earlier.

However, as the director Jesús Díaz himself states, the situation is a complex one.

La película aborda la relación madre-hijo en una situación límite. Hemos sido testigos, durante el proceso revolucionario, de un hecho insólito: muchas madres abandonaron a sus hijos varones cuando éstos arribaron a la edad militar y, por obvias razones de autodefensa, no se les permitía salir del país. No obstante ellas se fueron, dejaron solos a muchachos de dieciséis, diecisiete años. ¿Qué fuerza motivó esa decisión?, ¿quiénes eran esas personas capaces de preferir su autosatisfacción al deber de proteger a sus hijos?, y sobre todo, ¿qué ocurre diez años después – en el presente único de la película – cuando se produce el reencuentro?

(García Borrero, 2001: 185)

The director, then, realises that it is a far more complex matter than simply portraying two sides of a coin, the revolutionary and the materialist, and Chanan himself asserts that this film is indeed a character study, the theme being ‘the trauma of families divided by the revolution’ (2004: 420). So, to reduce Susana to a type (Chanan quotes *Variety*’s take on her as ‘a middle-aged woman of deep-rooted bourgeois tastes’) (Ibid) does little justice to the valid attempt by Díaz to illustrate some of the more difficult personal situations attributed to the side-effect of the revolutionary process – the division of families. If Susana is partly this bourgeois materialist, it is not at the expense of her role as mother, even if she did abandon her son years earlier. In many ways the film is trying to deal with the pain of reconciliation at the level of the very private and personal. *Variety* claimed that, ‘by extension’, this implied a bleak picture of reconciliation ‘between the two countries’ (Ibid: 423). However, this is too simplistic a take on what is a far more complex set of interactions at work. If it were true that some kind of allegory at this level of national politics were intended, then it is a harsh criticism of the Cuban side of the binary for it is Reinaldo who ultimately rejects any reconciliation, not Susana.

The director’s intention was to try and expose Susana in an attempt to tear away the mask that she had created for herself ten years earlier when she abandoned her son, to try and reveal her true (human) face: ‘...la gente como Susana se había puesto una máscara que con

el tiempo se hizo inseparable de su propio rostro. Ése fue nuestro punto de vista al dirigir un problema estético-político de primera magnitud' (Díaz, quoted in García Borrero, 2001: 185).

Such a statement provokes a postmodern reading of the text, where notions such as identity and individual subjectivity are foregrounded.¹⁴ Díaz's intention, however, is impossible as what can ultimately be revealed by removing such a 'mask'? Surely another mask lies underneath; the 'truth' being impossible to find. As Stuart Hall states there is 'no fixed, essential or permanent identity' (1992: 277); subjects assume different identities at different times. But the use of such terms as 'masks', 'faces' and 'aesthetics' surely compels us to discuss the representation of cinematic identities and subjectivities as well as reading the film as a national allegory. The two are dialectically engaged; the personal is enveloped in the national and vice-versa.

The presentation of Susana is a very brave one by Díaz, the mother-figure in Cuba being such an important and revered one, as discussed in Chapter Three, and yet the film tackles this problem extremely well, portraying Susana as something other than the typical mother-figure found in so much art, literature and cinema. As Catherine Davies has said, from the early years of the Republic, representations of Cuban women have been linked to the very philosophy of nationalist discourse which 'is a gendered and an eroticised discourse in which the family, kinship and affection are symbols of the nation as a natural division of human society' (1997: 38).

Chapter Three argued that the construct of motherhood is built on constantly moving foundations, depending on social, political and economic circumstances, with the influence of psychoanalysis playing a large part in the construction of images of motherhood since the beginning of the twentieth century. Much work has been done on the image of mother-daughter relations but much less on the mother-son relationship. Writers such as Julia

¹⁴ Postmodern analyses of cinema, often deriving from Lacanian psychoanalysis, argue that films visually construct subjectivity (see Anne Friedberg, 1993. *Window Shopping. Cinema and the Postmodern*, University of California Press, Berkeley, pp. 1-18). Chapters Five and Six discuss both the emergence of the postmodern in Cuban cultural production and how two films illustrate this break with traditional notions of Cuban modernity.

Kristeva, Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray from the so-called 'French Feminists' school of thought have deliberated much on the figure of motherhood from a Freudian/Lacanian psychoanalytic perspective and others such as Adrienne Rich and Nancy Chodorow draw on motherhood as site of female creativity. But can there ever be such a thing as a 'maternal discourse' or a 'maternal voice', if no two mothers are the same? Mothers are often posited as a unified entity when a postmodern perspective would tell us that such a *mono-glossia* is not possible.

Although the film *Lejanía* is ultimately about Reinaldo, the son, the importance of the mother-figure is made obvious in the first few moments when Reinaldo receives the phone call telling him that his mother is coming to see him. I would like to present here two arguments revolving around the figure of Susana. The first will interpret her representation in more or less traditional terms – as site of patriarchal discourse and emblem of Freudian psychoanalysis. However, an alternative, also psychoanalytic, reading provides a counterpoint to this argument and attempts a reading of Susana as a far more subversive character representation, one that ultimately disturbs one of the foundations of Cuban culture and national identity.

On hearing of his mother's imminent arrival, Reinaldo immediately retrieves a gilt-framed portrait of her from a cupboard; evidence itself that he has not completely forgotten or discarded her, the frame alluding both to her iconic status as mother-figure and to the fact of her historical presence (and absence). In such a way history, nostalgia and memory are wrapped up in one singular moment that encapsulates the difficulties that mother and son are about to face in the near future. However, the inherent difficulty lies in the immediate framing of Susana not as woman but as mother, the trick for Díaz being to intelligently analyse the relationship she has with her son without resorting to negative stereotypical portrayals. The fact that he begins the film with the representation of a mother-figure in such a traditional, iconic and unitary manner but then subverts this by telling the spectator that this mother had 'abandoned' her son years earlier, does much to humanise Susana outside of the typical

framework of the traditional mother-figure who would not normally be portrayed this way. This goes some way towards subverting traditional myths of motherhood.

So it is entirely possible to assess the figure of the mother from the point of view of various aspects of feminist theory; the poststructuralist feminists' engagement with the figure of the mother being a kind of revalorisation, away from the existentialism of *The Second Sex*, wherein Simone de Beauvoir stressed the oppressiveness of motherhood. In so-called 'French feminist' theory for example, motherhood is seen as an affirmative position and the mother is an important figure, but one that should be removed from the patriarchal structure of the family.

As we have seen in Chapter Three, Julia Kristeva's work is interesting here as she believes that the site of motherhood can be a source of subversive power but that an imaginary construct of motherhood has been formed over hundreds of years (1987: 234). In *Lejanía* the figure of the mother is certainly not rejected but neither is it venerated in the traditional way. The portrait of her retrieved by Reinaldo from a cupboard is still in his possession (unlike many other things that Reinaldo admits to having sold or discarded as unnecessary vestiges of his past). This placing of the figure of the mother (for we know her as nothing else at this moment other than Reinaldo's mother) within a gilt frame represents Kristeva's non-verbal, monotheistic, primary, iconic status. Immediately, therefore, we are drawn in to a very traditional representation of a Cuban mother before this is later subverted.

In 'Stabat Mater', Julia Kristeva argues that conception and the maternal are very important in the feminist debate. Christianity, she argues, has appropriated the figure of the mother for its own ends and has consistently portrayed the mother as not entirely human but as virginal and untouched by sin in a phallogentric projection fantasy. This imaginary construct has been perpetuated in literature and other art forms for centuries, she argues, with the figure of the mother being raised to an iconic 'dogma status' (1987: 238). She argues that the relationship between mother and son is like no other in humanity but that the Marian cult has created a mother-figure either of '*hyperabstraction*' in order to live in tandem with the symbolic order, or as repressed 'other,' unable to produce its own complexity, confined to

singular, iconic status. In *Lejanía* we first gain knowledge of the figure of Susana, the mother, as a confined (framed) iconic representation – a phallogentric, patriarchal fantasy, or, as Kristeva would say, ‘a masculine appropriation of the Maternal’ (1987: 236). This sets up the relationship between mother and son in a very traditional manner, portraying this ‘imaginary construct’ of motherhood as if natural, as a diegetic element of the film’s narrative.

As we have discussed E. Ann Kaplan believes a psychoanalytic analysis of the mother-figure in culture can be very useful in an examination of female subjectivity (1990: 28) and Freud talked of the difference between the pre-Oedipal mother-figure and the post-Oedipal figure. *Lejanía* is a film about the separation of mother and son and there exists in the film a fusion of the pre-Oedipal type when Reinaldo first hears of his mother’s return. As he looks at her portrait and sits at the kitchen table with his wife, Aleida, it is as if he has been extracted from the symbolic world of the party continuing in the room next door and delivered back into a pre-symbolic state as he views the portrait and says: ‘tengo ganas de verla.’ When Susana appears it is as if Reinaldo is born again with no knowledge of her (he insists on using the formal ‘usted’ form of address that one would use with an unfamiliar person).

She has knowledge of him, their separation being like a contracted pregnancy as Susana has waited for this moment for ten years. She says to and of Reinaldo: ‘tan lindo pero si eras un niño,’ and, turning to Reinaldo’s wife says of her: ‘la que me robó,’ emphasising the Oedipal nature of the discourse. This Oedipal discourse continues throughout the film as Susana and Reinaldo engage in a series of intimate moments that represent the pre-symbolic unity between mother and son. They are extremely affectionate with each other (as mother and son often are in Cuba), caressing each other’s faces, looking into each other’s eyes and poring over old family photographs, that helps to create the sense of nostalgia the film so expertly portrays.

This intimacy serves to emphasise the Oedipal nature of the discourse, resolution of which, for Freud, was the basis of all human civilisation. For Freud this resolution rested on the rejection by the child of the primordial love object (the mother). So civilisation depends on the detachment from this object. Intertwined with the Oedipus complex is Freud’s

Castration complex where the child fears castration by the father for desiring the mother. This leads to the desire by the child to kill the father. Interestingly in *Lejanía*, Reinaldo's father is already dead, his silent image being seen on a cine film brought from the USA, a message to Reinaldo from him before his death, played later on a cassette.

So perhaps what the film is doing is addressing this Oedipal mother-son relationship at the level of the patriarchal, by presenting a very obvious scenario. Reinaldo's relationship with his mother is still the barrier that prevents him from moving into the world of the symbolic – a world now represented not by his father but by an altogether different 'father-figure', the Cuban Revolution and, ultimately, Fidel Castro himself. Reinaldo at first tells his wife Aleida that he will postpone his trip to Moa (a trip that signifies his commitment to the Revolution as it is to work as a volunteer). But, after he has spent time with his mother and cathartically removed the attachments he had with her, he can now break free from her control and move easily into the symbolic 'Law-of-the-Father', now represented by the Revolution itself. At the end of the film he finally rejects his mother for good and takes the volunteer mission in Moa. Importantly, this final part of the drama is the only scene filmed in the street, outside of the realms of the apartment, Reinaldo now free of his mother's yoke.

In this way the film traces the very traditional steps of patriarchal representation, the mother-figure acting merely as a hindrance to the development of the child, holding it back from its true position in the world. Here, representation of the mother is tied closely to aspects of nationhood and patriarchy; the two concepts being intertwined as if natural. To be a good revolutionary means rejecting anything that contradicts revolutionary ideals (as Susana does) even if it means rejection of the person that created that revolutionary in the first place.

Thus, in some ways, Susana is being painted in a very traditional light, linked to aspects of nationhood and patriarchy – a woman obviously transparently affected by social change as first, she was 'forced' to leave the island when the Revolution took hold and then, second, when she returns, times have changed so much that the effect is most strongly seen on her as she loses her son for good (Reinaldo tells her that they will never see each other again).

Reinaldo has finally gained his wife's revolutionary spirit but only at the expense of his mother.

However, this traditional, Freudian interpretation has a counterpoint that also emanates from psychoanalytic theory. In Chapter Three we discussed how Kristeva describes the state of motherhood as being represented either through the scientific denial of the subject or through a religious tie, also denying subjectivity (1997: 301). If the guilt-framed portrait of Susana seems almost religious in aspect; an ineffable representation of the Kristevan 'impossible elsewhere' for Reinaldo (so impossible, in fact, that he ultimately rejects her), then the other half of her representation (abandonment, exile, selfishness, the search for a better material life), via the dialectical engagement she has with her son, perhaps disturbs this virginal divinity.

Susana is represented as very human, with all the contradictions and Kristevan complexities that that implies. She did leave her son for a better life abroad (although it is explained twice in the film that this so-called 'abandonment' was made out of some necessity and was only meant to be a temporary arrangement for the eventual benefit of the whole family), and she carries many of the negative character traits associated with the pre-revolutionary bourgeoisie (she illustrates both racist and class-bias tendencies that the Revolution attempted to eliminate), and yet her humanity is never completely denied as sympathetic close-ups and intimate moments of affection shared with Reinaldo illustrate. Catherine Davies quotes Jessica Benjamin: 'the mother's subjectivity (in contrast to the maternal ideal) must include imperfection to be real [...] real subjectivity does not require her to be self-sufficient, perfect, omni-competent' (1997: 200).

Through an examination of Susana, we can see how Díaz cleverly and bravely attempts a reworking of the classic mother-figure by presenting some of these imperfections that serve to subvert the traditional role of the mother within a patriarchal family unit, in a similar way to how Davies describes the 'ambivalent interpretations' of the mother-figure in poets born in the early years of the Revolution, as seen in Chapter Three (1997: 208-9). Susana attempts to win back her son's affections but, ultimately, fails to persuade him to return with her to the

USA. She is initially seen in a portrait as what appears to be a unitary formed subject – a typical Cuban mother – with all that entails for her son, Reinaldo. But this unitary subject is distorted by the film which constructs the mother-figure as lying outside of this accepted norm. She has abandoned her son and now feels the guilt that comes with that decision years earlier. In this sense the film accepts that any one subject position (and here we refer to the mother-figure), is not static and unitary but constantly in flux and highly complex. The film deconstructs the figure of the mother by placing her initially outside of the accepted parameters of motherhood in Cuban revolutionary society (abandonment of her son for a ‘better life’ for her self) but then allowing her back in to tell her side of the tale in what may be regarded as a non-critical standpoint. In other words, there is no absolute acceptance or rejection of motherhood here, something that adds to the subtlety of this particular character portrayal.

Reinaldo’s disquiet at the news of his mother’s arrival also helps to disrupt the status quo as such news would generally be accepted as positive in Cuban society; exiles are nearly always welcomed back with open arms, particularly by family members. But here, the importance of the pre-Oedipal relationship between mother and son is hinted at and exacerbated when we learn that Reinaldo’s father has recently died, thus emphasising the importance of maternal regulation (what Kristeva called the ‘law before the Law’) (1987: 248). Here, then, the importance of the maternal function to language and culture is both acknowledged and disrupted, as the figure of Susana is not simply posited as woman, mother, or feminine, but as a complex interaction of all these things and more. Here Susana both loves (her son) and desires (material goods and a ‘better life’ for her) and as such she is created as a social and speaking being, between nature and culture and never entirely reduced to either. Thus, the stereotype that often reduces maternity to nature is disrupted in this film, which neither entirely accepts nor rejects Susana as mother-figure. The national dimension should never be ignored and the theme of exile and the break-up of families is prominent and important, but there is another, subtle and complex, personal dilemma here that revolves around Susana’s subjectivity as mother, woman and human.

It is true that Susana is ultimately rejected by her son and some of her negative character traits are observed but she is not rejected entirely by the film. This fictional portrayal of the conflict between mother and son therefore allows for the two sides of the coin (acceptance or rejection) to be eloquently observed without, as Díaz himself comments, the use of tired political clichés.

Es una de las pocas en el cine cubano contemporáneo que se atreve con un asunto realmente complejo, controvertido y que además lo hace sin 'teques', sin un abuso externo de lo ideológico, sin mostrar siquiera explícitamente la obra material de la Revolución.

(García Borrero, 2001: 185)

As Catherine Davies remarks in her study of Rosalía de Castro through Julia Kristeva, Kristeva's work on the semiotic is associated with the bliss and oneness of the infant-mother relationship, a relationship that the split subject will always experience as a loss or lack and that can threaten to undermine the symbolic by 'disrupting norms of identity and meaning' (1995: 64). The same thing is happening here as Díaz bravely attempts a reworking to some degree of the figure of the mother by de-fetishising the mythical mother-figure that will sacrifice all for her children. Here, Susana is posited as woman and human (as well as mother), with all the frailties and contradictions that that entails. Her voice is not over-determined by her relationship to her son but also by her race, class, individual desire and guilt, and her position as mother adds to that complexity rather than overwhelms and dominates it.

One of the reasons for the complex pattern of behaviour which emerges from this film is the fact that it is centred on family drama and relationships. Laura Mulvey has looked at the family drama as site of female address that acts as a counterbalance to male dominant forms (1977-8: 54). She argues that melodrama provides the site for the possibility of representing the female as victim within a representational system that often involves a reaffirmation of the Oedipus complex (Kaplan, 1997: 67). Susana, perhaps, is represented as one of these victims. Yes, she shows many negative tendencies but the sympathy for her is evident as she says of the situation she finds herself in: '¿Qué nos han hecho?'

As discussed in Chapter Three Kaplan argues that maternal melodramas address the female spectator in a way other genres do not. *Lejanía* perhaps sits somewhere between her 'complicit' and 'resisting' texts as it contain a mixture of melodramatic and realistic elements. The patriarchal unconscious is fully expressed through the position of Reinaldo while there is an acceptance of the alternative and the realistic in the portrayal of Susana. In this way the film makes some steps towards reclaiming the feminine potential as Hélène Cixous would say. In 'Sorties', Cixous argues that thinking has become dependent on a differentiating process between male and female in opposition. This becomes 'natural' or 'eternal' as woman becomes the passive half of the active/passive binary (1986: 63). Thus, myths of man and woman existing in a binary system are created and 'woman is always associated with passivity' (Ibid: 64). 'Either woman is passive or she does not exist' (Ibid). She talks of the lack or absence of the mother as the father 'acts the part' and becomes the mother-figure – a mother is not needed as long as there is some 'motherliness.' So the mother is not thought, she 'does not make a couple with the father' (Ibid) as he makes a couple with the son. However, here Susana is posited as active; it is she who is the catalyst for and agent of the dialectical exchange between her and her son and it is she who 'makes a couple' with her son in the absence of the now-dead father.

As Adrienne Rich has said, in societies where motherhood has been institutionalised, women are demanded to be maternal, to have maternal drives (1986: 42). Although she is referring to motherhood as a US institution, her observations are useful in this context. In Cuba, similar ideas of motherhood have been evoked by literature and cinema. In *Retrato de Teresa* for example, Teresa's mother tells her that she suffered as a mother at the hands of Teresa's father; and that Teresa should just put up with the demands of motherhood expected of her by her husband and by society in general, rather than struggle against these demands in her search for self-realisation.

As Rich remarks, patriarchy demands that women should assume the major burden of pain for furthering the species (part of that pain being domestic duty in the case of Teresa). For Susana, the pain is somewhat different as she struggles to justify her attempt at self-

realisation under the critical eye of the Revolution as embodied by Aleida and Reinaldo. Susana's pain, however, is presented as very real by the film and she is often seen as the victim in a causal process. Why, for example, would the director choose to repeat a speech she has prepared for Reinaldo, asking him to understand why she left, if it were not to extract some sympathy for her? This part of the film is extremely important in illustrating the director's balanced viewpoint. Susana first practises the speech directly to camera in close-up, the exaggerated (deliberately affected) emotion serving to enhance the pain and anguish she feels; a scene that clashes harshly with what follows. The spectator is, at first, unaware that she is practising the speech, believing her to be talking directly to Reinaldo. But then Reinaldo enters the room and she makes the speech again. This time, however, Reinaldo interrupts Susana in macho style and does not want to hear her side of the story (his aggressive, macho behaviour will be seen again, later in the film as he throws a glass at the wall in an argument with Aleida). But the spectator has already heard Susana's side of the story without interruptions and so the weight of the argument lies with her. The director could simply have shown Susana talking to Reinaldo, without first presenting the speech to the spectator. But the spectator would then never have heard her point of view due to Reinaldo's multiple interruptions, and the weight of the argument would have been altogether different. It is creative decisions such as these that infuse the film with sympathy for Susana's personal agony.

For Reinaldo, his mother's pain is too much to bear. She has acted outside of the accepted norms of motherhood and he refuses to listen to her point of view. Susana has broken with the institutional ties of motherhood in Cuban society. In the terms of patriarchal law, according to Rich, she has broken with nature itself.

In *Cinematernity. Film, Motherhood, Genre* (1996) Lucy Fischer examines the relationship between cinema and the figure of the mother. She argues that there is a rigid view of gender and genre in film criticism, often polarised between masculine and feminine. Commenting on work carried out on the film *Persona* (1966, Ingmar Bergman) she comments that the film implies that the central character has gone mad because she is a 'cold and

rejecting parent.’ ‘Female derangement is tied to the refusal of motherhood – an ‘unnatural’ position for woman’ (1996: 22). She goes on to argue that this representation of the deranged mother is a common one when the mother-figure in a film is seen as one who refuses the trials of motherhood. Clearly, this ‘refusal’ of motherhood has a part to play in the character of Susana, but the point is that Susana is not represented as deranged or ‘unnatural’. There is a positive affirmation of the possibility of understanding her subject position with the attempt by the director to at least try and understand her point of view.

In ‘Postmodern Motherhood and Ethnicity: Maternal Discourse in Late Twentieth-Century American Literature’, Naoko Sugiyama discusses literary representations of motherhood by women of ethnic minority groups and concludes:

Such texts, at their most insightful, may represent the world and people’s subjectivity as fragmented, de-centred, and saturated in post-industrial consumer capitalism, not in order to reflect it passively but to organize it in a politically meaningful way.

(Sugiyama, 2000: 87)

Here we see how Susana is presented as this fragmented voice, steeped in the emerging postmodern society she now inhabits. But the film does not reject her for this. In many ways it tries to understand her; as Díaz argues, he wanted to uncover the mask of such mothers who had abandoned their children in such a way. This is a bold assertion that hints at the possibility of discovering some simple truth behind the mask that probably does not exist, but, at the very least it is an attempt to find some aspects of individual subjectivity (however impossible that might be) in a figure that is more usually represented in terms of national consciousness.

The film is fuelled by an Oedipal trajectory common to all Hollywood production according to Raymond Bellour (Modleski, 1988: 2), and this dulls the possibility of describing *Lejanía* as a ‘feminist’ film. But it is a narrative partly about a mother written partly from a mother’s point of view. This makes it possible to present a variety of Susana’s maternal realities, including the act of desertion, without, as Sugiyama states, ‘falling back on the monolithic condemnation of less-than-ideal mothers as morally ‘bad’ or psychologically

‘sick’ (Sugiyama: 2000: 75). In such terms then, the film could be placed in Kaplan’s ‘resisting’ category of films as its representation of the mother-figure fails to comply with the traditional notion of this figure in Cuban culture.

Conclusion to Chapter Four

Lejanía was decried by Paranagua as ‘courageous...stimulating and exciting’ (1988: 94), but was received by the Cuban critics at the time with an embarrassed silence (Fernández, 1987: 23), perhaps due to the sensitive subject of exile so soon after Mariel, but perhaps also because of the sympathetic way it portrayed the mother who had ‘abandoned’ her son. It is a brave and, at times, nuanced piece of work that deliberately contrasts opposing views of exile. In so doing it throws up contradictory representations of a Cuban mother. On the one hand she can be seen as the domineering matriarch who abandoned her son to search for a better life for herself in the USA; her return stimulating the necessary Oedipal trajectory that enables Reinaldo, her son, to finally break free from her yoke to enter the Symbolic Law of the Father (the Revolution). On the other hand, the film deliberately engages with the character of the mother, allowing her a degree of sympathy and strength of characterisation that belies that simplistic portrayal of a wicked mother who has abandoned her son.

In the film’s engagement with the character of the mother, it provokes a reading of her subjectivity that falls outside of the realms of a simplistic discourse on national identity, and guides the spectator towards an interpretation at the level of individual subjectivity, something that *Retrato de Teresa* fails to do. Whereas the earlier film posits Teresa as a typical revolutionary wife and mother, struggling to find her place within the new society, *Lejanía* presents us with an outsider, an émigré, a *gusano*, who abandoned not only her son but her country, for selfish, materialist purposes. If the concept of maternity in modernity, as expounded by Díaz Canals in Chapter Three, is derived from biological essentialism, stemming from patriarchal ideology, that posits the mother as ‘refugio’, ‘bahía’, ‘acaricia’, ‘eterno’ and ‘soporte’, then this film attempts a reworking of the maternal from a postmodern perspective; highlighting contradiction and a multi-lateral image of the mother-figure that is

also desiring woman and individual subject, Doane's 'site of multiple contradictions' (1987: 73). In its sympathetic portrayal of Susana, the film highlights the importance of the individual within a national frame of reference, and ushers in a postmodern evaluation of individual identity and subjectivity that then continues in Cuban cinema into the late 1980s.

Chapter Five

Cuba and the Postmodern

Postmodernism in Cuba is like Cuba itself. Cuba is an *ajiaco*, it always has been since the island's first incursions into art; it has been nourished by artistic echoes from other parts of the world...Postmodernism in Cuba is an idea, and Cuba's modernity is all its own.¹

Power is not an institution, and not a structure; neither is it a certain strength we are endowed with; it is the name one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society.

(Foucault, 1978: 93)

If *Lejanía* was a film that dealt with one of Cuba's most difficult and intractable dilemmas, that of the ideological differences between those who stayed and those who left, then it was all the more welcome for doing so. In its depiction of a woman who suffered due to this ideological crisis, it raised many important issues, and the silence from the critics was deafening.

This was only one among many ideological crises that Cuba suffered in recent times, and, with the imminent collapse of the Soviet Union in the late 1980s, things were only likely to get worse. But the fall of Communism did not happen overnight, even if the break-up of the Berlin Wall did, and, by the mid-1980s, Cuba was already preparing itself for difficulty. If Cuba had become, as Kapcia suggests, an 'Island of Dreams' (Kapcia, 2000), rescuing a lost identity and history, via a process of 'politico-historical myth-making' (Ibid: 24), then perhaps the myth was being severely disrupted by foreign events.

As Kapcia comments, the 1989 crisis had been building for a number of years and many of the 'certainties' of the past were being fundamentally questioned.² This questioning produced a kind of 'collective postmodernism' (Ibid: 215). Thus, in a way not dissimilar to

¹ Cuban artist Reinaldo Pagán Ávila in an interview with Reinaldo Cedeño Pineda (translated by Ellen Rosenzweig). At: www.cubanart.org.english/pagan_interview.htm (accessed 23/01/08).

² In July 1989 Arnaldo Ochoa, General in Angola and a hero of the Revolution, was executed for corruption and drug trafficking. But Kapcia asks if he could have possibly mounted a challenge to Castro and, as such, a warning signal was sent to the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias (FAR) that they were not a separate group. In addition to this, COMECON imports fell by 90% (and they already made up 84% of the total). Oil imports fell from 13.2m tonnes to 6m and import prices rose while sugar prices fell (Kapcia, 2000: 202).

how Jameson has described the postmodern condition of late capitalism in the 'West' (1991: ix), a certain rejection of the linear trajectory of history was being articulated in a country with a still-developing sense of its past but with a current crisis that would undoubtedly alter that perception: '...if postmodernism can be defined as reflective of, and reacting to, crisis, then it is logical to suggest that crisis can in turn produce a collective postmodernism, leading to a rejection of history as linear and purposeful' (Kapcia, 2000: 215).

This chapter intends to tease out this ideological break with the past as world Communism collapses around Cuba. It will illustrate how Cuba's postmodernism involved a re-thinking of the whole process of modernity and the desire to construct a unified socialist revolutionary subject. Chapter Six will argue, via analyses of the films *Plaf! (o demasiado miedo a la vida)* and *Mujer transparente*, that this re-formulation also created a divergence in the way images of gender were both reflected and constructed. Whether this divergence was for better or worse is a matter of conjecture and will be discussed at length, but first it is worth considering the possibility that a specifically Cuban postmodernism was beginning to emerge towards the end of the 1980s.

According to Jameson, a part of the postmodern condition involves a search for 'breaks' or 'events', the 'telltale instant after which it is no longer the same', or 'for shifts and irrevocable changes in the *representation* of things and of the way they change' (Jameson, 1991: ix).³ Jameson discusses postmodernism in the context of late 'post-industrial' capitalism of the 'West'.⁴ Given such a definition, then, it would be understandable that cultural critics within Cuba would be cautious in admitting that Cuba had entered a 'postmodern' period.

Nothing is so simple, and it is not a question of stating that Cuba had simply entered into a postmodern era and that all aspects of the modern revolutionary project were dead and

³ Any clear definition is impossible here, but for a better understanding of postmodernism see Jameson (1991), Lyotard (1984), Kellner (1989), Woods (1999) and Harvey (1990).

⁴ This new society, Jameson argues, is defined by an emphasis on electronic media, information and consumerism that demonstrates the collapse of the old industrial society that 'no longer obeys the laws of classical capitalism, namely, the primacy of industrial production and the omnipresence of the class struggle' (Jameson, 1991: 3).

buried. As Kellner argues, Jameson defends Marxism in his analysis of postmodernism, suggesting that contemporary (postmodern) society is a result of a specific historical trajectory – a transition from a discrete national system of state/monopoly capitalism to a system of multi-national corporate capitalism (Kellner, 1989: 28). That is not to say that the exact same thing was happening in Cuba at the end of the 1980s, but, with the collapse of its former foreign markets, new ones had to be created, and certainly a *type* of multi-national corporate capitalism began to appear on the island, particularly with respect to tourism; new investment from abroad helped construct the industry that would provide Cuba with ‘pink gold’ as Castro called it, with reference to sun-worshipping white tourists on Cuban beaches.

As Sujatha Fernandes remarks:

Since the onset of the so-called ‘Special Period’ in the early 1990s, the Cuban government has been forced to make concessions to the international market, allowing some degree of foreign investment and privatisation...Cuba has been undergoing a process of controlled transition that is undermining the socialist project of centralized planning and gradually reintegrating Cuba into global markets.

(2006: 5)

Within the arts, and in particular in cinema, this change was beginning to happen in the late 1980s. Co-productions with foreign film producers became necessary due to a lack of funds brought about by economic austerity. The two films in this chapter reflect this austerity and the difficulties that ICAIC sustained from the late 1980s onwards. Both films seem to hang on the threshold of change, in very different ways. The two films both reflect and predict the difficulties Cuba had, and would have to face, both economically and sociologically. In their depiction of issues of gender they both adhere to and break with certain traditions of the past, and are complex and contradictory as a result.

Complexity and contradiction are nothing new in Cuban cinema, as a film such as *Memorias del subdesarrollo* shows. But any analysis of postmodernism in cinema must take into account the social context within which the film was made, and *Memorias* was made

under very different conditions and with an entirely different social background from either *¡Plaf!* or *Mujer transparente*.

So what makes Cuba in the late 1980s postmodern? It is probably true, as Catherine Davies asserts, that postmodernism had been 'largely resisted and contested' in Cuba from both sociological and epistemological perspectives (2000: 103), but there is no doubt that a number of artists and critics claim a postmodern aesthetic has existed in all aspects of Cuban culture even since the early twentieth century.⁵ However, simply throwing together a mix of various cultural expressions does not a postmodernism make, but more complex discussions of postmodernism have been part of the Cuban academe for some years. As Paul Ravelo Cabrera argues, although Cuba has not developed a postmodern society as described by Jameson and others, he does believe that a type of postmodernism has developed in Cuba since the 1960s.

Algo, sin duda, está aconteciendo en la realidad social contemporánea y, particularmente, en el campo de las ideas, la política, las ciencias, las artes, la literatura, y en la cultura contemporánea de los últimos tres decenios de este siglo...y que como ola expansiva tiende a replantear y reformular una historia cultural larga y compleja: la modernidad.

(1995: 61)

The 'schizophrenic postmodern space' (Ravelo Cabrera, 1995: 60, author's translation) that Ravelo Cabrera talks about is oppositional to the totalising narrative of Marxism, and some hardliners continue to resist such theoretical positioning. This 'transgression' may be something specific to a Cuban reality as all social or cultural change must be specific to the society to which it pertains. But this does not mean that it is not similar, in some ways, to the type of cultural change witnessed in the developed world. Where Ravelo Cabrera speaks of a 'crisis of optimism' (1995: 60) amongst the Cuban intellect, so Lyotard speaks of disillusionment with master narratives (Lyotard, 1979). Where Ravelo Cabrera talks of a

⁵At:

<http://encarta.msn.com/encnet/refpages/RefArticle.aspx?refid=761569844&pn=4> (accessed 14/03/08), it is argued that postmodernism emerged as early as 1909, with U.S. military occupation, where a dependence upon the United States undermined the ability of any government to control state matters peacefully. Renovation of past ideas was called for, including, in the cultural sphere, the search for authentic cultural expression in a blend of African and Spanish language and visual design.

crisis of conscience and subjectivity, so Hopenhayn speaks of a crisis of meta-narratives that are ‘understood as the transcendental categories that modernity has invented in order to interpret and normalise reality’ (1995: 94).

Ravelo Cabrera goes on to say that the resistance to the totalising narrative of Marxism in Cuban academia does not mean that the struggle for national identity should be abandoned, nor should other foreign ideals replace Marxist ones. But, around the end of the 1980s, a theoretical change was taking place within Cuban intellectual circles.

Como nos toca también buena dosis de esa crisis de pensamiento o de conciencia: de valores absolutos y fines últimos, de verdades ideologizadas y utopías cargadas de futuro, aunque tensionadas con lo plural-heterogéneo, con las que nuestro proyecto político-cultural se ha saturado en demasía y ha producido una razón totalizante de la cultura y la praxis social, cuyos excesos se vuelven contra ella misma.

(1995: 61)

Critics of Latin American modernity such as Jesús Martín-Barbero and Néstor García Canclini also consider postmodern culture to represent a critique of Marxism. As a direct descendant of Enlightenment philosophy, Marxism has at its heart the doctrine of universalisation and the liberation of all from the yoke of capitalism. García Canclini’s study of popular cultures in Latin America develops a schematic that is useful here. In 1980s cinema, after the disaster of the film *Cecilia* (described in Chapter Two), a move was made towards the production of more popular films. It is perhaps here that we can see the beginnings of a shift from the didacticism of many of ICAIC’s films of the 1970s, to films that, as García Canclini observes, represent the ‘Staging of the Popular’ (1989: 145). From this moment on the culture of cinema in Cuba would not be the same again and would never revert to the dogmatic and didactic historicism of the 1970s.

For Martín-Barbero a new sensibility and way of thinking about Latin American mass society occurred in the late 1980s that fits very well with the period we are dealing with and the two films to be discussed. He is also critical of the modernist universalising idea of ‘progress’:

Once we take as the starting point of observation and analysis not the linear process of upward social progress but *mestizaje*, that is, *mestizaje* in the sense of continuities in discontinuity and reconciliations between rhythms of life that are mutually exclusive, then we can begin to understand the complex cultural forms and meanings that are coming into existence in Latin America.

(1993: 188)

If Cuban postmodernism is an *ajiaco* according to Cuban artist Reinaldo Pagán Ávila, then for Martín-Barbero this is displayed in the notion of *mestizaje*.

He goes on to argue that the nationalist project of some Latin American countries was derived from populism:

...and found its best expression and means of diffusion in film, especially in the cinema of Mexico and Argentina. If to create a nation is, in a certain sense, to dramatize its existence in theatre, then the role of film was to put at the centre of the stage – a form of mythologizing symbolisation – the gestures and patterns of life of national reality. Film gave national identity a face and a voice. The popular masses did not go to the movies simply to be entertained. They went to ‘experiment with their daily life’, to ‘see their codes and customs represented on the screen’. Film created nationalism through the genre of melodrama, a genre capable of giving to any theme or situation a strong expression while, at the same time, it evokes myths and transforms all behaviour into mass culture.

(Ibid: 195)

There is little doubt that ICAIC was created in order to formulate and propagate the development of a Cuban national revolutionary consciousness, many of the films from the 1970s bearing witness to this idea as we have already seen. However, after the institutionalisation of the Revolution in 1976 and the disaster of *Cecilia* in 1981, the onset of new cinematic ideas relating to the representation of the nation can be witnessed. Now, instead of making films to reflect and produce the new national consciousness, films were made that were critical of aspects of this idealism. When García Espinosa took over and production increased, many films would be critical of certain aspects of contemporary Cuban

society, paving the way for those such as *¡Plaf!*, *Mujer transparente* and *Alicia en el pueblo de maravillas*.

So, if a cultural shift was being witnessed across Latin America in the 1980s, it appears that, unique and politically isolated as it may be, Cuba was not by-passed. Critic Margarita Mateo Palmer asserts that Cuba has developed a particular postmodern culture. She believes that postmodernism can be traced back to Borges, Cortázar and Carpentier and, indeed, that it was the first literary code that originated in America to influence European literature (Mateo Palmer, 1995). In particular, she discusses the subversive intent and diverse creativity of the *novísimos*; those writers born in Cuba in the 1960s and 1970s, and the audacious way they transgress and renew expressive codes. It is, as Ravelo Cabrera argues, a re-thinking of the whole project of Cuban modernity, a new 'spirit of the epoch', but one that does not lose touch with itself. It is a type of self-reflexive, knowing modernity, very similar to the definition Tim Woods gives of postmodernism.

Postmodernism is a *knowing* modernism, a *self-reflexive* modernism, a modernism that does not agonise about itself...instead of lamenting the loss of the past, the fragmentation of existence and the collapse of selfhood, postmodernism embraces these characteristics as a new form of social existence and behaviour.

(1999: 9)

As we shall see, the representation of gender issues in both the films in this chapter does not agonise about the past, but reformulates it for a new generation of thinkers. This reformulation takes place in all aspects of Cuban culture, from the evasion of ideological domination of Lezama Lima (Hassan, 2002: 8), to magazine cartoons depicting Castro (Davies, 2000: 112). At the base of it all, argues Davies, is the 'progressive autonomy of the cultural and political spheres', and a loss of faith in the state and the Revolution, leading to 'a deregulation of national-revolutionary discourse and the emergence of heterodoxy, self-reflection and dispersion' (Ibid).⁶

⁶ A further example Davies gives of the emergence of a postmodern practice in Cuban culture is Benítez Rojo's deconstruction of the syncretic-nationalist version of the cult of the Virgen de la

If, as Tim Woods argues, postmodernism 'seeks local rather than universal forms of legitimation' (1999: 11), in a politics of demystification of structures like patriarchy, then the progressive loss of faith and increasing autonomy of cultural institutions that Davies discusses, reflects this localised postmodernism. Its protean nature makes any strict definition both impossible and undesirable and, as Hans Bertens remarks, it can have no fixity in time or space (1997: 3). But, although Davies rightly argues that any acceptance of the existence of a 'postmodern condition' in Cuba has been difficult, postmodernism has been frequently discussed in a variety of Cuban literary journals.⁷ And, although Mateo Palmer admits that there was a general rejection of postmodernism (whether it refers to a condition, style, ideology, vision of the world or sensibility), in Latin America, from the political left at first, the subject has in recent years, become a fashionable area of discussion. She argues that there has been, 'una tendencia cada vez más en boga a descubrir que nuestros escritores y artistas están, desde hace ya tiempo, produciendo obras que son un dechado de actualidad posmoderna' (1995: 124). She describes Latin American postmodernism as perhaps a less ambitious project than the model offered by modernism's grand utopia, but she believes it is closer to a Latin American and Cuban contemporary reality.

...el posmodernismo cubano se expresa a través de una amplísima gama de posiciones y matices ideológicos que...mantiene en general un empeño de subvertir y proyectarse en su contexto social, de promover el diálogo y la confrontación con la historia, de búsqueda de una nueva ética y de un proyecto de emancipación que se adecue a los nuevos tiempos.

(Ibid: 133)

Caridad del Cobre in which 'Cuban readers are asked to 'abandon their [national] ego' and venture 'along the roads of limitless chaos' in pursuit of difference' (Davies, 2000: 109).

⁷ Articles on postmodernism by Paul Ravelo Cabrera, Amín Sánchez Rodríguez, Margarita Mateo Palmer, Juan Antonio García Borrero and others, appear in the journal *Temas* between 1995 and 2004, and as early as 1986 postmodernism was being discussed in Cuban academic circles as Jameson's article 'Postmodernism or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism' was printed in Spanish translation in *Casa de Las Américas*, March-June.

Any acceptance of a 'postmodern condition' implies a break (or at least some form of transformation or transgression) from a prior, 'modern' condition. Cuba's great socialist project sits well within this notion of the 'modern'.⁸

As John Beverley argues, historic projects like Marxism and social democracy both have modernisation as the prime goal. The interesting aspect for him, though, and very useful here, is the Foucaultian idea of the possibility of a 'postmodern form of communism' (1999: 50), where a movement occurs from central state power to a dissemination of power across all social spaces, not unlike Davies' idea of the progressive autonomy of the cultural and political spheres. Thus, perhaps what is in evidence in Cuba is this emergence of a postmodern form of communism – a communism that is not tied to a search for a *telos* of modernisation/modernity. As Beverley comments, Jameson believes that a postmodern capitalism will necessarily bring to life a postmodern Marxism that will defeat it (1999: 51).

Thus, the increasing emergence, in Cuba, of exterior influences upon society and culture has led to a malaise with modernity and a 'cultural heterogeneity' (Brunner, 1995: 34) that sweeps across the whole of Latin America. External influences are nothing new to Cuba. As Calderón points out, modernity, Marxism and industrialisation were all imported from the West, and populism was *the* true Latin American cultural creation in the twentieth century (1995: 57). But, toward the end of the 1980s, there began a resistance in Cuba to the totalising narrative of Marxism as Cuban society began to organise itself in a more fragmented and localised way. As Ravelo Cabrera asks, what better term is there to use for this alteration of Marxist principles than 'postmodernism'? The difficulty, he argues, lies in theorising these new '*emocionalidades*' due to the lack of important texts in Cuban libraries, the dispersal of material despite the abundance of information in foreign journals, and the financial difficulties faced by Cuba that make it impossible to buy and circulate up-to-date material

⁸ Modernity has been described as a product of eighteenth-century Enlightenment thought. It involves the notion of progress and a break with history. It celebrates scientific discovery and the pursuit of individual excellence in the name of human progress, 'a secular movement that sought the demystification and desecration of knowledge and social organization in order to liberate human beings from their chains' (Harvey, 1990: 13).

from abroad (1995: 62). For Ravelo Cabrera, then, the Cuban postmodern condition is ‘una condición o momento en que estaríamos repensando el (nuestro) proyecto de modernidad’ (Ibid: 66), and this crisis of modernity needs a theory in accord with this new spirit.

Necesita de una teoría crítica que capte y problematice la tensionada modernidad social cubana de hoy: introducción y legitimación de prácticas del capitalismo, apertura de la economía al capital extranjero, erosión de la noción de “sujeto socialista” con el aparecer de nuevos “sujetos” asociadas a la apertura económica...Pero una teoría crítica que no se despida de los supuestos básicos del proyecto sometido a crítica, sino que recupere refundada y renovadamente esos valores “clásicos” de nuestra modernidad, que nos han constituido y conformado. Transgresión...no sería compatible con conspiración pactada ni incompatible con redefinición. Es una dialéctica algo extraña para los tradicionalistas y bien juguetona para los transgresores, pero a favor de la preservación y la reconstrucción.

(Ibid)

So there exists a preservation and reconstruction at the same time; the re- or de-construction of absolute canons, the questioning of teleologies and the recognition of differences and pluralities.

Postmodernism, then, is not simply a cultural imposition from the most advanced capitalist countries, as it can account for a cross-cultural dialogue between the developed world and Latin America. Indeed, John Beverley sees postmodernism as ‘múltiples respuestas/propuestas estético-ideológicas locales ante, frente y dentro de la transnacionalización’ and continues by saying that ‘la condición de las nuevas formas de producción políticas y culturales en América Latina, incluso las de la izquierda, es coincidente con el posmodernismo, más que su contrario’ (1993: 46).

The postmodernist/Marxist relationship is certainly not a simple one. While Jameson believes that Marxism can best incorporate and mediate postmodernism’s competing perspectives, major postmodern thinkers such as Lyotard (*The Postmodern Condition*, 1979), Baudrillard (*The Mirror of Production*, 1975) and Foucault (*The Order of Things*, 1970) all challenge Marxism as reductive, totalitarian and oppressive, suppressing difference and

heterogeneity (Kellner, 1989: 3-4). Others, such as Ravelo Cabrera, Beverley, Hassan and Davies all believe that a type of Cuban postmodernism can be witnessed in Cuban society and culture.⁹ When speaking of Cuban cinema, then, it is necessary to establish the aesthetic effects that make a film 'postmodern' and whether these can be applied to the two films in this chapter. In addition to this, I will examine the relationship between postmodernism and feminism to establish to what extent the two are compatible, and how this relationship can be used to interpret the representation of gender in the two films here.

It is extremely difficult to say whether or not a film is 'postmodern' as many of the aesthetic traits associated with cultural 'modernism' are also witnessed in a so-called 'postmodern' film. The very term 'postmodernism' has been overused with reference to cinema (Friedberg, 1993: 11). Indeed, the kind of spectatorship that the cinema creates, Friedberg asserts, relates directly to postmodernism's idea of the fluidity of the subject, whether or not the film itself can be described as postmodern: '...cinematic and televisual spectatorship produces a subject fluidity that bears remarkable similarity to descriptions of postmodern subjectivity. This subjectivity is produced by spectatorship itself – whether or not the style per se is postmodern' (Ibid: 7).¹⁰

Friedberg is sceptical about attaching the label 'postmodern' to cinematic effects and is critical of Frederic Jameson's accounts of postmodernism in cinema. She argues against the use of the term 'postmodern' to describe certain cinematic styles as film theorists have yet to agree as to what is 'modern' in cinema. Definitions of what is modern or postmodern are just too difficult, she argues. If it is easy to demonstrate, as Friedberg suggests, how, in

⁹ Davies argues that Cuba did not experience the same paradigmatic shift from modern to postmodern as the developed world has done because of the Revolution and the Missile Crisis, but that it experienced a re-run of the realism-modernism-avant-garde sequence. She cites the film *Memorias del subdesarrollo* as being an aesthetic example of this sense of being caught between two worlds. She believes that in order for a text to be considered postmodern in Cuba, it has to both challenge Marxist modernity and parody the forms that critiques of Marxism have taken (Davies, 2000).

¹⁰ Friedberg argues in Lacanian terms that the subject is constructed visually but only sees itself as whole elsewhere. For more on Lacan and his notion of the 'male gaze' and the creation of subjectivity, see Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: W.W. Norton, 1978).

architecture modernism gave way to postmodernism through a destruction of the kind of functionalism of the Pruitt-Igoe housing project, it is not so easy for cinema.¹¹

She asks, for example, if Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dalí's *Un chien andalou* (1928) is modern or postmodern; or *Citizen Kane*? Both films are normally highlighted as examples of high modernism but both have certain technical and aesthetic effects that could be labeled 'postmodern'.

In Cuban cinema, García Espinosa's 1967 production *Aventuras de Juan Quin Quin* (perhaps Cuba's first experimental feature film) was the film that led to the director creating his seminal essay 'Por un cine imperfecto' (Burton, 1986: 245). The film sets out to aggrandise a popular icon, the Latin American *guerrilla* fighter, by parodying the Hollywood Western. For the director, it was a way of communicating with his audience and critiquing Hollywood at the same time, although some people felt the film was actually mocking the 'hero'. This demonstrates that Cuban cinema used these experimental, intertextual techniques, often considered central to the postmodern aesthetic, from the very beginning, and how difficult it can be to illustrate the difference between a film regarded as modernist and one seen as having postmodern characteristics.

Cinema has always been thought of as 'modern' as it emerged with modernism but, stylistically, many of the categories central to postmodernism exist in films regarded as modern and, 'the very apparatus of cinema makes the stylistic categories of modernism and postmodernism inappropriate' (Friedberg, 1993: 167). A highly experimental and perhaps subversive film such as *Un chien andalou*, then, or *Aventuras de Juan Quin Quin*, may well be avant-garde and an extension of modernism, but are they, in fact, postmodern?

Jameson, as one of the foremost writers on cinema and the postmodern, locates his analysis of the postmodern film in terms of nostalgia and the restructuring of pastiche in a desperate attempt to appropriate a missing past, in a world where the sense of history has been

¹¹ According to Charles Jencks, the end of architectural modernism came with the destruction of the Pruitt-Igoe housing project in St Louis, Missouri on July 15, 1972 at 3.32pm (Friedberg, 1993: 158). This then began a period in which architectural postmodernism began to distinguish itself from the previous modernism by way of its populist priorities (Jameson, 1991: 62).

destroyed. In his analysis of *American Graffiti* (1973, George Lucas), he describes the 'nostalgia' film as one where the spectator's sense of temporality is confused by the film's narrative or art direction. However, as Friedberg insists, 'every film has the jumbled relation to the historical referent that Jameson finds exclusively in the 'nostalgia' film' and that: 'all films...provide a temporal mobility for the spectator as 'time tourist'' (1993: 169).

David Lynch's 1986 film *Blue Velvet* is often cited by critics as an example of postmodern cinema¹², as are some of the films of Woody Allen (for example, *Hannah and Her Sisters*, 1986, and *Stardust Memories*, 1980).¹³ Interestingly, all these films (and others often discussed as having postmodern characteristics)¹⁴ were made around the same period (1980s) as the two films to be discussed in this chapter; but what is it about these films that make them 'postmodern'?

In terms of aesthetic debate, postmodernism was applied originally to architecture by Charles Jencks, in his analysis of how modernist projects, such as the Pruitt-Igoue development, failed to provide adequate housing due largely to the lack of a connection that the functionalism of modernism had to the occupants (Hill and Gibson, 1998: 99). This, in turn, led to a debate across artistic boundaries whereby a search for a connection to a participating spectator became of prime concern to artistic creation. This meant a move away from modernism's desire to shock and challenge (Buñuel's *Un chien andalou*, for example) towards the effacing of so-called 'high' and 'low' culture as Lyotard suggested (Lyotard, 1984).

Most critics admit that it is difficult to define a postmodern film-making practice but most then attempt to do so. Or, at least, they try and tease out some of the aesthetic effects common to what is considered as postmodern cinema. Such effects include the use of pastiche and intertextuality as Jameson argues, thus illustrating, for him, a lack of historical depth,

¹² Pearson (1997), Denzin (1991).

¹³ Denzin (1991), Hutcheon (1989).

¹⁴ *The Elephant Man* (1980, David Lynch), *Wild At Heart* (1990, David Lynch), both discussed in Pearson (1997). *Kiss of the Spider Woman* (1985, Hector Babenco), *Blade Runner* (1982, Ridley Scott), *Sex, Lies and Videotape* (1989, Steven Soderbergh), and *Brazil* (1985, Terry Gilliam), in Denzin (1991). *Wings of Desire* (1987, Wim Wenders), in Harvey (1990/1996). *Body Heat* (1981, Lawrence Kasdan) in Jameson (1991). *Zelig* (1983, Woody Allen), in Hill and Gibson (eds) (1998).

mere simulation of the past.¹⁵ Pastiche, he argues, is not the same as parody, as parody has ulterior motives and pastiche is neutral. Jameson sees postmodern culture as depthless and points to the films *Chinatown* (1974, Roman Polanski) and *Body Heat* (1981) as films which use pastiche and intertextuality, illustrating a loss of historical depth. They cannot create a 'real' past but only a simulation of the past. As Hill remarks, then, the 1980s saw a number of postmodern US films erasing the traces of Sixties and Seventies experimentation (1998: 101). As we know from the discussion of Cuban cinema, the very same thing happened in ICAIC when, in 1982, after the disaster of *Cecilia*, Julio García Espinosa took over as head of the institute and inaugurated a period of recovery by attempting to make cheaper and more popular films that would appeal to a wider audience than some of the experimental work of the 1960s, and the more politically dogmatic work of the 1970s.

Parody and pastiche are both associated with postmodernism but Jameson believes that in postmodern culture, pastiche is dominant. For Jameson, parody involves a sense of mockery and criticism while pastiche is a neutral mimicry without parody's ulterior motives (1991: 16). And, as Kellner observes, pastiche was part and parcel of cinema's break with high modernism during the mid-1980s, when 'a mix of forms and styles from different periods' was much in evidence and which 'cited, repeated and pastiched previous styles, works, and authors' (1989: 1).

In Susan Hayward's *Key Concepts in Cinema Studies*, one of her four sets of concepts for defining postmodern cinema is that of 'parody and pastiche' (Hayward, 1996). Her other concepts are 'prefabrication', 'intertextuality', and 'bricolage' (Hayward, 1996: 262). Matt Pearson argues that all of these can be generally grouped under the heading 'intertextuality' as 'they all refer to the recycling of images from the past, assembled together in the form of bricolage'.¹⁶

¹⁵ This is in line with Baudrillard's fatalistic analysis of a postmodern world of *simulations* or 'hyperreality' and the impossibility of isolating or proving the 'real'. Baudrillard's *Simulacrum* stands for an image that conceals the truth as images and signs have come to stand for the objects and commodities that make up everyday life (Baudrillard, 1983: 41).

¹⁶ See: http://www.britishfilm.org.uk/lynch/blue_velvet.html (accessed 14/02/08).

The purpose of this recycling, he argues, can be a subversive one as the images can bring with them the conventions or meanings of their source in order to be quoted in pastiche, reducing them to nothing more than clichés. This subversive intent is extremely important here as old values can be deconstructed while new ones created. Both the films *¡Plaf!* and *Mujer transparente* make bold attempts at this kind of subversion by revisiting and reworking old conventions in order to promote the possibility of new interpretations. Postmodern cinema, then, can be subversive cinema in the way that Hal Foster discusses the possibilities of the effectiveness of a postmodern aesthetic. He describes two types of postmodernism: that of resistance and that of reaction. He makes a call for the former as it has the ability to deconstruct tradition not simply through parody or pastiche but through a process of the questioning of established cultural codes (Foster, 1985: x).

As shall be discussed later, feminism can benefit from postmodernism's use of pastiche as a subversive tool as, by using 'pastiche, irony, quotation and juxtaposition' (Wolff, 1990: 88), feminist cultural practice may engage directly with 'current images, forms and ideas, subverting their intent and (re)appropriating their meanings' (Ibid).

According to Tim Woods, pastiche forms one of the principle characteristics of postmodernism, and it stands in place of personal style and a 'sense of history'. He describes pastiche as 'a rewriting of modernist idioms into jargon, badges, decorative codes' (Woods, 1999: 36). So, in Jean-Luc Godard's modernist classic *Une femme est une femme* (1961), a woman flips an egg then catches it minutes later after taking a phone call. This type of avant-garde, surreal, modernist cinema exposes 'the formal concerns of the medium by placing them at the forefront of consciousness' (Ibid).

Modernist cinema questioned and made visible the meaning-production practices of film: it interrogated the technology it used, the power of its gaze and the power to represent; and through and exploration of the plasticity of its spatial and temporal qualities, it turned the gaze of the camera back on itself as a critical tool, questioning *how* and *what* it represented.

(Ibid: 210)

This is not too far removed from aspects of Julio García Espinosa's essay 'Por un cine imperfecto' from 1969, in which he argued that cinema should expose the process that generated the problems, rather than simply the problem itself. In terms of aesthetic effects, he said, cinema should expose itself and the techniques it uses. But a postmodern film might question some of the aesthetic authority of the type of modernist film-making practice seen in films such as *Une femme est une femme*, or discussed in theory by García Espinosa. As we shall see, this is exactly what *¡Plaf!* does.

Perhaps, as Friedberg states, cinema has always been 'proto-postmodern' (1993: 6), as the nature of its construction (the production of surface images, the editing process as montage, the use of the latest technology, the impossibility of avoiding elements of nostalgia in the recreation of images, and an inevitable self-reflexivity inherent in the medium) almost defines itself in terms of a postmodern sensibility. Perhaps the difference, though, between modernist and postmodernist cinema is encapsulated by Tony Wilson, quoted by Tim Woods: 'to investigate the transparency of the image is modernist but to undermine its reference to reality is to engage with the aesthetics of postmodernism' (1999: 210).

If, as Jameson argues, modernist cinema was based on the production of a unique style,¹⁷ then postmodern film departs from this by uncoupling style from the director and unleashing a multiplicity of styles and voices.¹⁸ According to Woods, then, postmodern films have certain key characteristics:

A pastiche of other genres and styles, not just imitating their look but alluding to famous scenes or cinematic styles. Eg *Blazing Saddles* (1974), *Thelma and Louise* (1991). A 'flattening' of history, a style which presents the past in the present; or a 'retro' cinema, or nostalgia film, eg *Batman* or the *Back to the Future* series. Self-reflexivity of technique, eg Tilda Swanson's *Orlando* (1993), has the actress break the frame by turning directly to the audience. A celebration of the distinction between high and low cultural styles and techniques (*Pulp Fiction*). The cartoon images presented in *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?* (1988).

¹⁷ Woods refers to the auteur theory of the 1960s and the films of Hitchcock, Renoir, Godard, and Wenders (Woods, 1999: 210).

¹⁸ Eg, *Pulp Fiction* (1994, Quentin Tarantino), that borrows from a mixture of styles (Woods, 1999: 210).

Whether this postmodern 'style' represents an attack on elite forms of modernism or is mere superficial kitsch, and detrimental to modernism's grand emancipatory project, is debatable and depends on one's point of view.

For E. Ann Kaplan, postmodernism is not simply about a new style but also a new period; the: 'postindustrial or consumer society, the society of the media or the spectacle, or multinational capitalism' (1988: 15). Pastiche, she argues, is one of the key features of postmodernism and, in line with Jameson, regards it as different from parody as parody is 'an imitation which mocks the original' (Ibid). Parody, she argues, ridicules stylistic mannerisms, excessiveness or eccentricity. It assumes that there is a linguistic norm to adhere to and if you stray from it then you can be parodied. But, she asks, what if one did not believe in the notion of a linguistic norm and all that we had was stylistic diversity and heterogeneity?

That is the moment at which pastiche appears and parody has become impossible...Pastiche is, like parody, the imitation of a peculiar or unique style, the wearing of a stylistic mask, speech in a dead language: but it is a neutral practice of such mimicry, without parody's ulterior motive, without the satirical impulse, without laughter, without that still latent feeling that there exists something *normal* compared to which what is being imitated is rather comic. Pastiche is blank parody, parody that has lost its sense of humour...

(Ibid: 16)

In her analysis of films about the past and about specific generational moments in the past, she argues that such films create a necessary reinvention of the characteristics of older periods, and of the art associated with these periods.¹⁹

One of the foremost writers on postmodernism and the cinema, Linda Hutcheon, makes a useful distinction between modernist and postmodernist cinema. Whereas modernist cinema, she comments, challenged traditional Hollywood, orthodox realism,²⁰ and thus ruptures the 'chain of causation upon which character and plot motivation depend'

¹⁹ In particular, she looks at the films *American Graffiti* (1973) and *Star Wars* (1977), both by George Lucas and *Body Heat* (Lawrence Kasdan, 1981).

²⁰ She refers here to traditional narrative and character representations.

(1989/1995: 107), a postmodern film might challenge such a modernist political aesthetic. The modernist film may use techniques such as spatial and temporal fragmentation, and the introduction of 'alien forms' (other genres, for example documentary footage, newsreel archives etc), techniques that are typical of a supposed postmodern aesthetic. In many ways, this adheres to many of the values of the New Latin American Cinema of the 1960s and, specifically, to ICAIC's politico-aesthetic practices in its challenge to the domination of Hollywood film-making techniques. A film such as *De cierta manera* would fit this modernist aesthetic well. But the postmodern film would be one that challenges or questions this aesthetic, and in so doing creates a rupture in any supposed aesthetic 'authority'. It is, she states, 'both a respectful – if problematized – awareness of cultural continuity and a need to adapt to changing formal demands and social conditions through an ironic contesting of the authority of that same continuity' (Ibid).

In this sense the postmodern film is less radical than the modernist one. 'It is more ideologically ambivalent or contradictory. It at once exploits and subverts that which went before, that is, both the modernist and the traditionally realist' (Ibid). Parody, she argues, although omnipresent in contemporary film, is not always challenging as it can work to signify continuity with an aesthetic authority, a way of film-making. Parody, then, can both destabilise and inscribe the dominant ideology through its interpellation of the spectator as subject. This, therefore, can represent a challenge to the modernist/humanist principle of the autonomous, coherent individual. If modernism represents the search for the self, seeking integration as an autonomous subject, then postmodernism seeks to disturb this search and challenge the very notion of subjectivity, its condition and construction.

So, a postmodern film might be one that represents, amongst other things: 'The story of a self that changes constantly, that is unstable, decentred, and discontinuous, is a parody both of the traditional filmic subject of realist cinema and also of the modernist searching for integration and wholeness of personality' (Ibid). The emphasis, therefore, is not on the final construct but on the act of construction that questions the values upon which any supposed 'wholeness' of the subject is built.

The question here, then, is whether the two films in this chapter offer a positive questioning of modernist principles via the parody they use, or whether, as Jameson comments of the parody used in films such as *Body Heat* and *Star Wars*, it is 'a pathological symptom of a society that has become incapable of dealing with time and history' (Ibid: 113). If history is a referent, postmodernism suggests that it is one constructed, rather than 'real', as Kapcia suggests has been the case in Cuba, where an ideological code (the rescuing of a 'lost' identity and history), is a code expressed as metaphor, 'the elevation of a symbol into a narrative' (2000: 24).

Postmodern film, according to Hutcheon, is 'obsessed with history' and her definition of a postmodern film is 'that which paradoxically wants to challenge the outer borders of cinema and wants to ask questions (though rarely offer answers) about ideology's role in subject formation and in historical knowledge' (1989/1995: 114).

A list of the stylistic effects that a postmodern film might contain could read thus: Parody, pastiche, heterogeneity, montage, intertextuality, fragmentation, discordance/discontinuity/misunderstanding, nostalgia, a lack or confused sense of history, the lack of a moral or class commentary, a commentary on language, self-reflexivity, time and space compression/disjunction, alienation, an open ending, distancing, a fragile sense of identity and a sense of the powerlessness of the individual/alienation/detachment from society. All of these will not be present in all films considered to be postmodern, and many are considered to be common to films often associated with modernism. To call a film 'postmodern' is almost a contradiction in terms, as to try and define something using a term that disavows the very notion of definitions, is a dangerous thing to do. But, if a film contains some of these elements, and is made within the context of what some may consider to be the emergence of a 'postmodern' cultural period, the term 'postmodern' may be a useful one to consider.

If modernism was about production and consumption (and the New Latin American Cinema movement adheres to this very well indeed), then postmodernism is more about re-production and re-consumption.²¹

Cuban film may have dived headlong into modernism, but, as Chanan remarks, 'not in a singular sense' (Chanan, 2006: 38). There has always been diversity in Cuban cinema and periodisation is dangerous: 'this makes the link in cinema between globalisation and postmodernism, and the question of when it began, a slippery one' (Ibid: 41).

But, as Chanan admits, 1987 was a watershed year for Latin American cinema after a number of years of declining audiences. The major seminar at the Havana film festival of that year called for a key rethink. Julio García Espinosa appealed for a new cinematic language, and an 'early reading of the characteristics of the globalised market place in cinema' was detected around this time (Ibid: 46).²² As a consequence, in 1988, ICAIC was fundamentally renewed with a huge reorganisation and decentralisation, leading to the formation of the three creative groups, discussed earlier, each headed by a distinguished director. The late 1980s, then, can be justifiably seen as a time of renovation and renewal in Cuban cinema and would produce a number of films that reflected this change (Paranagua, 1988: 99).

If heterogeneity is one of the many stylistic effects of a postmodern aesthetic then a trace of this aesthetic has always existed within Latin American (and Cuban) cinema as there has always been a 'heterogeneity below the surface of underdevelopment' (Chanan, 2006: 50) in cinematic representations in Latin America, and a constant development of cinematic language. Chanan considers postmodernism in Latin America and in the North as, 'the same, but also different. The same because it is a constitutive part of the contemporary world; different because this world remains asymmetrical, both in economics and in cultural positioning, and this asymmetry is an integral part of the same postmodernism' (Ibid).

The question for Cuban cinema is whether this localised postmodernism can provide the necessary social criticism in order to maintain its adherence to a committed political

²¹ Pearson, M. (1997). At: www.britishfilm.org.uk/lynch/blue_velvet.html (accessed 14/02/08).

²² In 1988 about half of all features made by ICAIC were co-productions with other countries (Paranagua, 1988: 89).

project that is fundamentally different from that of the dominant capitalist world. Critics such as Jameson and Harvey feel that it cannot.²³ But, according to Chilean Nelly Richard, it can, as Latin America exists on the margins of European postmodernism and so can be subversive to the conventional hierarchical relationship between centre and periphery (Page, 2001: 386).

Joanna Page rightly criticises Fernando Birri's statement from his article 'Cinema and Underdevelopment' (1983) when he states that 'the underdeveloped people of Latin America need a cinema which clarifies matters'. Page calls this 'paternalistic' and goes on to say that certain postmodern aesthetics have served Argentine cinema since the *guerra sucia* of 1976-7 (Page, 2001: 386 and 394).

Postmodernist cinematic techniques can, Nelly Richard asserts, redefine Latin American roles and identities, and the postmodern 'themes of discontinuity, fragmentation and ephemerality' can be used as tools, both to disturb the 'authority of the centre' and to subvert the postmodern debate itself. This would then re-establish 'the relationship of postmodern aesthetics to lively and sensitive social critique of the most contemporary nature' (Page, 2001: 396).

Social critique has always been at the forefront of post-1959 Cuban cinema's challenge to both reflect and construct a new, revolutionary society. The films discussed at length so far in this study (*De cierta manera*, *Retrato de Teresa*, *Hasta cierto punto*, and *Lejanía*, all make powerful and valid comments on aspects of Cuban society with regard to the relationship between men and women. They all question and challenge traditional viewpoints and none of them offers a simplistic, passive viewing experience for the spectator. In this sense they are all oppositional or counter to traditional Hollywood narrative. They work within the aesthetic and political parameters of an artistic and a revolutionary process rooted firmly in a modernist tradition.

It is the purpose of this chapter to argue that, in some ways, this tradition was, towards the end of the 1980s, being deconstructed within Cuba, and that this is reflected in some of the films produced at this time. This does not mean that there is some definitive aesthetic or

²³ Jameson (1991), Harvey (1990/1996).

cultural break that could be easily defined; such a proposition would be implausible. Modernity and postmodernity must exist together. As Carl Boggs and Tom Pollard say, elements of modernity and postmodernity 'coexist within a tense and uneasy equilibrium' (Boggs, C and Pollard, T., 2003: vii). But there are certain aesthetic, stylistic and political differences between so-called 'modern' and 'postmodern' films. To quote Boggs and Pollard again:

What postmodern films share in common is an irreverence for authority or convention – a rebellious spirit, dystopic views of the future, cynical attitudes toward the family and romance, images of alienated sexuality, narrative structures deprecating the role of old-fashioned heroes, and, above all, perhaps a sense of a world filled with chaos. These features are often combined with a romantic turn toward nostalgia, a longing for the past that encapsulates so much postmodern culture, along with a harshly critical, even nihilistic attitude toward politics.

(Ibid: viii)

Of all the films previously discussed in this study, perhaps *Lejanía* comes closest to representing this chaos, through the eyes of Susana, as she struggles to come to terms with a politics that she cannot possibly - nor wants to - comprehend. The films to be discussed here, *¡Plaf!* and *Mujer transparente*, also reflect this difficult period of transition in Cuban history, but in two very different ways.

One of the problems, though, for postmodern cinema, as Harvey argues, is the difficulty of expressing complexity via a series of images on a 'depthless screen...The idea of revolutionary cinema has always run aground on the rocks of exactly this difficulty' (1990, 323). He continues by saying that the self-reflexive nature of postmodern cinema hinders any possibility of the art form being able to see outside itself and thus be of any political use to revolutionary society. 'Postmodern art forms and cultural artefacts by their very nature must self-consciously embrace the problem of image creation, and necessarily turn inwards on themselves as a result. It then becomes difficult to escape being what is being imaged within the art form itself' (Ibid). The modernist principles encapsulated in *De cierta manera*, then, may be better suited to the political desires of the revolutionary project.

This is an important point, not least when considering aspects of male-female relations in film; feminism, like the Cuban revolutionary project, being grounded in the principle of the unified emancipation of the subject. The relationship between postmodernism and feminism is a complex one. Many critics believe that the two have many links and that postmodernism can be very useful to feminism. But there are many who believe that any incursion into postmodernism, for feminism, can be detrimental to a fundamentally modernist principle.

According to Andreas Huyssen, 'feminist criticism has so far largely stayed away from the postmodernism debate which is considered not to be pertinent to feminist concerns' (1990: 250). Indeed, until the 1980s, postmodernism and feminism were generally seen in antipathy, and Craig Owens (one of the first and few postmodern critics to engage in the postmodernism/feminism debate), argued that postmodernism was 'scandalously indifferent' to feminism (Friedberg, 1993: 194).

For many feminists, in accordance with Habermas, the project of modernity is incomplete and it is questionable whether the ushering in of postmodernity is helpful to this struggle. The grand project of modernity has involved the search for 'liberation' or human 'emancipation' via technology and commerce. For Marx, this would eventually lead to the seizure of power by the proletariat through revolution. One of the most persistent practices throughout this period of world history has been that of the dominance of men over women (Lovibond, 1989: 7). According to Sabina Lovibond, the 'traditions' of marriage, the family and home ownership still hold throughout the majority of societies and she calls this 'the class system constructed on the basis of biological sexual difference' (Ibid: 8). Lovibond asks whether we really should say goodbye to 'emancipatory metanarratives' when women's emancipation is patchy at best.

For Lovibond, postmodernism is best represented in terms of 'pluralism' that is opposed to the enlightened universalism of the modernist project. But this pluralism, she argues, fails to explain how it is possible to achieve 'a thoroughgoing revision of the *range* of social scripts, narrative archetypes, ways of life, ways of earning a living, etc. available to individual women and men' (Ibid: 13). What postmodernism fails to do, she argues, is apply a

‘systematic political approach to questions of wealth, power and labour’, otherwise ‘how can there be any effective challenge to a social order which distributes its benefits and burdens in a systematically uneven way between the sexes?’ She describes postmodern criticism as ‘meek’ and ‘non-interventionist’ (Ibid).

So postmodernism seems to face a dilemma: either it can concede the necessity, in terms of the aims of feminism, of turning the world upside down...thereby opening a door once again to the Enlightenment idea of a total reconstruction of our society on rational lines; or it can dogmatically reaffirm the arguments already marshalled against that idea – thereby licensing the cynical thought that, here as elsewhere, who will do what to whom under the new pluralism is depressingly predictable.

(Ibid)²⁴

Nancy Hartsock agrees with Lovibond in her criticism of the possibilities of a postmodern critique for feminists. She argues that postmodern theorists such as Foucault and others fail to provide a theory of power for women, and that some universalistic assumptions creep into the works of Derrida, Lyotard, Foucault and Rorty. Postmodernism, she argues, adds very little of use to modernist feminism and can even be dangerous for marginalised groups.

Seyla Benhabib sees both sides of the postmodernism/feminism argument, but ultimately believes that postmodernism is not enough for feminism as it cannot provide the social critique necessary, although it can ‘teach us the theoretical and political traps of why utopias and foundational thinking can go wrong’ (1995: 30). But ultimately for her, postmodernism ‘undermines the feminist commitment to women’s agency and sense of selfhood, to the re-appropriation of women’s own history in the name of an emancipated future, and to the exercise of radical social criticism which uncovers gender ‘in all its endless variety and monotonous similarity’ (Ibid: 29).²⁵

²⁴ For Lovibond, much of her criticism of postmodernism as an ally of feminism comes from her belief that, within postmodernism, there lies a celebration of pleasure as something subversive in itself. She does not believe that it is possible to harness this insight for the good of feminism and that this pursuit of pleasure is the ‘sign of a terrible pessimism’. She feels it would be more politically effective for feminism to persist in seeing itself as a component or offshoot of Enlightenment modernism (Lovibond, 1989: 18).

²⁵ Other critics, such as Bonnie Mann, are convinced that postmodernism and feminism are not compatible. Mann firmly states that you cannot be both a postmodernist and a feminist as any

For Nancy Fraser and Linda Nicholson, the distinction between postmodernism and feminism seems clear and lies in the political effectiveness of both. While feminism concentrates on social criticism, they say, postmodernism deals in 'metaphilosophical perspectives' (1990: 19). If feminism develops good social critique then social critique within postmodernism is 'anaemic', and if postmodernism provides a good critique of foundationalism and essentialism, feminism has a tendency to lapse into essentialist and foundationalist arguments. For this reason, they criticise the work of Lyotard as of very little use to feminism as his arguments are too restrictive to help explain male dominance. If, as Lyotard suggests, there is a 'crisis of legitimation' whereby the grand narratives are no longer credible, making way for a 'weave of criss-crossing threads of discursive practices' (Ibid: 24), then this may rule out certain areas of social criticism based on overarching structures such as race, class and gender. Ultimately for Fraser and Nicholson postmodernism is not adequate for feminism. 'For a phenomenon as persuasive and multi-faceted as male dominance simply cannot be adequately grasped with the meagre critical resources to which they would limit us. On the contrary, effective criticism of this phenomenon requires an array of different methods and genres' (Ibid: 25).

They are, however, critical of the essentialism of some aspects of liberal and radical feminism,²⁶ and say that it is necessary to be culturally and historically specific, without losing sight of the greater issues. 'Postmodern feminists need not abandon the large theoretical tools to address large political problems' (Ibid: 34).²⁷

subversion of the subject and history may amount to a subversion of patriarchal conceits 'but also of the very possibility of feminism as well' (Mann, 2006), cited from online article at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/0195187458.001.0001> (accessed 01/02/08).

²⁶ In particular, they criticise Shulamith Firestone's theories of the 1960s attempting to explain sexism as a product of the biological differences between men and women (Fraser, N. and Nicholson, J., 1990: 27).

²⁷ In discussions of postcolonialism and postmodernism, this cultural specificity has taken on much importance, being central to the work of postcolonial theorists Edward Said and Gayatri Spivak, for example, in her focus on cultural representations of India under British Imperialism. Allied to postmodernism, postcolonial theory attempts to dismantle the traditional binary opposition of 'centre' and 'margin', giving a voice to what Spivak calls the 'subaltern' (non-elite or subordinate groups). The idea of the subaltern voice problematises the idea of the humanist autonomous subject as it argues that it is actually the product of many different, contradictory identities. Pertinent to the relationship discussed here between postmodernism and feminism, Spivak asks the question, 'Who is the other woman?' rather than the question 'Who am I?' and as such 'offers a heterogeneity and discontinuity

Postmodernism and feminism, then, are two terms that do not immediately sit comfortably together, but perhaps both can benefit from the insights that the other provides. As Anne Friedberg points out, in a configuration of terms, Toril Moi joins together postmodern feminism and feminist postmodernism, calling it 'postfeminism'. She argues that it lacks social critique as it avoids taking sides and makes no real challenge to patriarchy. Friedberg believes that one of the symptoms of this post-feminist culture is that the male/female power structure has not been greatly altered and so she is critical of postmodernism's usefulness to feminism (Friedberg, 1993: 196).

Some critics believe that postmodernism is damaging to feminism as it is suspicious of any notion of identity/subjectivity/agency at a time when feminism is striving to claim such goals as its own. According to Christine di Stefano, the feminist case against postmodernism hinges largely on the premise that postmodernism expresses the claims and needs of a constituency (white, privileged men of the industrial west) that has already had Enlightenment for itself and that is now ready and willing to subject that legacy to critical scrutiny. Also, she feels that mainstream postmodernist theory (from such as Derrida, Lyotard, Rorty, Foucault) has been remarkably blind and insensitive to questions of gender. She believes that the postmodernist project, if seriously adopted by feminists, would make any semblance of a feminist politics impossible 'due to the postmodernist prohibition against subject-centred inquiry and theory' that 'undermines the legitimacy of a broad-based organised movement dedicated to articulating and implementing the goals of [women]' (1990: 75).

Modernist feminisms (liberal, radical or socialist) might be disenchanted with postmodern feminist practice for the latter's failure to be practical, in an age where, as we have seen, the emancipatory work of the modernist feminist project has not been completed. But postmodern feminists may not accept modernist feminists for boxing women into categories, thus denying difference. Undoubtedly, liberal feminism has had a practical

which demonstrate the extent to which, although they share a common situation, each instance of being a woman is historically and culturally specific' (Woods, 1999: 44).

strategy in a world built upon the same liberal foundations of rights and justice, and radical feminism has opened new doors to ways of seeing woman.

It is clear that feminist critics are themselves very much divided in the debate. Seyla Benhabib, ultimately sceptical of any positive relationship between feminism and postmodernism, *can* see how postmodern thought can be beneficial to feminism. Feminism and postmodernism have discovered, she states: 'their affinities in the struggle against the grand narratives of Western Enlightenment and modernity' (1995: 17). If postmodernism represents, amongst other things, the death of Man (i.e the death of the transcendental being), as Man is forever caught in the 'web of fictive meaning, in chains of signification, in which the subject is merely another position in language' (Ibid: 32), then for feminists this can only be a positive step towards the deconstruction of the male-centred subject.²⁸

If a validation of otherness and difference form part of the postmodern philosophy, then a critique of any attempt to unify or totalise must surely be welcomed by feminist critics searching for new ways to interpret the world. 'Western reason posits itself as the discourse of the one self-identical subject, thereby blinding us to and in fact delegitimizing the presence of otherness and difference which do not fit into its categories' (Ibid: 19). Although Cuba is not considered 'Western' in the sense that it does not form part of the developed 'Western' world, it has taken on some of the terms of Western philosophical discourse in Marxism and socialism, albeit with particular Cuban twists.

If the history of the developed world has generally been considered from the point of view of a white, Christian, male-dominated majority, then any methods intended to undermine that authority must surely be of use to feminism. The importance for feminists, as Judith Butler suggests, is to think outside the enclosed space of dual gender categories. If, as Butler argues, gender is performative, merely an expression, then any attempt to validate the dualism of gender categories makes no sense (Butler, 1990: 323).

²⁸ Benhabib goes on to say that postmodernism also represents the 'Death of History' in as much as postmodernism is a critique of the modernist notion of linear progress through time, and the 'Death of Metaphysics' in that it represents a critique of the modernist (male dominant) desire to master the world, 'to enclose the world within an illusory but stable system' (Benhabib, 1995: 32).

For some feminist critics, then, including Raquel Olea, postmodernism and feminism have much in common and can be treated as happy bedfellows. For Olea, feminism was only ever an ambiguous partner of modernism, as all subjects were supposedly included in the modernist space of universality. If postmodernism presents us with a criticism of 'utopias' and all forms of universality, then this does at first imply a direct criticism of the feminist project (1995: 194). But the social contract always excluded women, and a division was created between the masculine public sphere and the feminine private sphere, none more so than in strict Catholic, Hispanic society. The masculine, therefore, became the agents of history, cultural production and power while women became the pillar of the family (the basic unit of bourgeois society). Feminism and socialism thus came together within this modernist project as women were to some extent emancipated via their access into the public sphere of work, Cuba being a prime example of this partnership. However, as we have seen, this alliance failed to emancipate women from some of the more insidious practices of male dominance such as domestic violence.²⁹

The socialist/modernist project was supposed to emancipate women from the 'mother function' within the private sphere and enter into the public sphere of work. However, as Olea comments, 'this proposal can entail a reinforcement rather than a transformation of the traditional woman's role' (1995: 195). What was lacking, then, was a questioning of the power relations between men and women, something absent from the modernist project of Enlightenment discourse. In this sense, modernity was 'elaborated from the perspective of a masculine subject' (Ibid: 196). This is the essence of patriarchal culture. But this egalitarian and rights-oriented feminism has given way recently to 'a more all-embracing, theoretical-political questioning of the structures of power' (Ibid: 198); the male subject, formed by the

²⁹ The 1979 film *Retrato de Teresa*, discussed in Chapter Four, is a forthright illustration of the complexities of the relationship between feminism and socialism.

modernist project, is now in crisis, and this is the central theme of the modernism/postmodernism debate.³⁰

Some have called this 'postfeminism', in line with the term 'postmodernism', but Olea prefers to call it 'a feminism of difference which is marked by its engagement with poststructuralist thought' (Ibid). What is at stake is the very notion of difference and how the new debates problematise this notion. Perhaps, therefore, the modernist form of feminism struggles 'for the full incorporation of women in a civilisation and culture designed essentially by and from a masculine subject' (Ibid: 199). But postmodern feminism, Olea argues, transcends this and elaborates woman 'as a subject of representation' (Ibid).

For Marysia Zalaweski, postmodern feminism comes directly out of the criticisms of modernist-feminist thought through a destabilisation of the category 'Woman'. For her, postmodern feminism is centred on discussions of the subject, on issues of power, truth and knowledge and on the deconstruction of previously used terms. If Cartesian logic ('I think therefore I am') provides the basis for an examination of the subject from the point of modernism, in a move away from believing in God as the supreme authority, then postmodernism would argue that the existence of such a subject (be it God or Man) is an illusion. This does not mean that human subjects do not exist, merely that what constitutes them needs to be questioned (Zalaweski, 2000: 23). If modernists tried to fix an identity of 'Woman', postmodern feminists see this as problematic, and any attempt to try and identify a person as, for example, a female worker, or as 'Earth Mother', is seen as authoritarian. So, *any* definition of what woman 'is', no matter how valuable that definition, is viewed as authoritarian. Language is central to this postmodern idea of feminism and, as such, postmodern feminism is often linked to poststructuralism.

'Thought and meaning are constructed through language and there can be no meaning outside language. It is the place where a sense of ourselves and where our subjectivity is constructed' (Zalaweski, 2000: 23). For this reason, such terms as 'masculinity' and

³⁰ In her 1996 article, 'Recent Cuban Fiction Films: Identification, Interpretation, Disorder', Catherine Davies discusses the 'crisis in male subjectivity' in her discussion of the films *Adorables mentiras* (1991, Gerardo Chijona) and *Papeles secundarios* (1989, Orlando Rojas). See Davies, 1996: 182-187.

‘femininity’ are not fixed nor given, but will change between languages, cultures and historical periods. Language is important in constructing meaning and power as it creates a system of difference. This system is traditionally one of dualistic hierarchies, man/woman, good/bad etc. and modernism states that one term is more valued than the other, which is then oppressed. Postmodernists would say that they are interdependent. For example, without the term woman, man means nothing. Heterosexuality depends on homosexuality for its meaning and hence existence. This postmodern deconstruction is a way of denaturalising things that have become naturalised.

‘A postmodern feminist task is not then to find out what woman is, but to expose the power/truth/knowledge game that goes on in defining what woman is’ (Ibid: 26). If with postmodernism comes the end of the unified subject, as has been suggested, (Jameson, 1991: 16/17; Woods, 1999: 9),³¹ then, at least for Judith Butler, this can lead to a positive affirmation of contemporary feminist principles that can reveal the foundational essentialism of previous Western feminist theory. Butler asserts that women have been written out of culture and literature by men as ‘a group of embodied beings socially positioned as ‘women’’ (1990: 324). Their subjective identity, she argues, has been socially conditioned. Indeed, she even questions whether there should exist at all the singular category ‘women’. This category has been presupposed, thus affecting what she calls a ‘political closure’ on certain female experiences (Ibid: 325). This ‘false ontology’ of women has been necessary in order to enact and advance a feminist political programme but has now, perhaps, become redundant. Butler believes that psychoanalysis can be very useful in describing shared gender identification, as it can give an account of patriarchal culture ‘as a trans-historical and cross-cultural force. It therefore conforms to the feminist demand for a theory which can explain women’s subordination across specific cultures and different historical moments’ (Ibid). For feminists such as Luce Irigaray, the very idea of an autonomous subject is a ‘masculine cultural

³¹ As Woods comments, if modernism dealt with the ‘I’, the ‘subject’, as having a sense of identity, selfhood, coherence, being stable and unified, then postmodernism is suspicious of this unified subject that possesses ‘agency’ (Woods, 1999: 9).

prerogative from which women have been excluded' (Ibid: 326). For Irigaray the subject is already always masculine so it makes no sense to refer to the 'female subject'.

The criticism of Cartesian logic by those such as Jacques Lacan, has presented feminist theorists with a way of destabilising the idea of the masculine subject thus offering them a tactic for feminist criticism as it exposes masculine power. The death of the subject, then, spells the release or emancipation of the suppressed feminine sphere, 'the specific libidinal economy of women, the condition of *écriture féminine*' (Ibid: 327). But, as Butler comments, here lies a political problem, for if there is no female subject then where is the normative model for feminist emancipation?

Such factionalisation inherent in creating a universal category of 'women' can be detrimental to the feminist project due to the implications of 'closure' that Butler discusses. Therefore, if the term 'women' becomes a (postmodern?) site of plurality, of constant departure, of ever-changing signifiability, of a lack of fixity, then this must serve to question the authority of male/female power relations. Via this route it then becomes possible, perhaps paradoxically, for the development of multiple and endless sites of agency. Without fixed referents (especially those developed within traditional masculine boundaries), the site 'women' becomes free from categorisation, thus opening up new possibilities for the constitution of the term.

This critique of the subject is clearly against the emancipatory discourses of Marx, as it deals with the unconscious: 'an open, libidinal/linguistic field of discontinuities which contest the rigid and hierarchizing codes of sexual difference encoded in language, regulating cultural life' (Butler, 1990: 329). Postmodern feminism is 'amorphous, critical, fluid and deconstructive' (Zalaweski, 2000: 27). It is, perhaps, in the destabilising power of postmodernism, where feminism could benefit most as it could form part of the postmodern process of the destabilisation of the absolutely centred, unitary, masculine subject. In this context perhaps the Foucaultian (postmodern) principles of power relations could prove useful to establishing a constructive interface between postmodernism and feminism. If patriarchal hegemony exerts the greater power in sex/gender relations, with *machismo* as its

foot soldier, then a critical analysis of this power structure must be welcomed by feminists, at least on a theoretical level. If any 'universal truth' posited by Marxism is really just a mask of power then any disturbance of that structure would represent a postmodern insight that could be of use to contemporary feminism's desire to disturb the very notion of 'subjectivity'. Where the distribution of power is concerned, within what appears to be a patriarchal, authoritarian society such as Cuba, it is not simply a question of a discourse of power being faced by a counter discourse. As Foucault states: 'Discourses are not once and for all subservient to power or raised up against it, any more than silences are' (1978: 100-101). In Cuban cinema of the late 1980s and early 1990s, as we shall see, discourse appears multiple and is distributed multiply, similar to Foucault's rule of the tactical polyvalence of discourses.

Perhaps the most important insight that postmodernism can give to feminism is, as Butler expresses, that gender itself is constructed through language, and that it is not always constructed in the same way. The fact that it is language that shapes the way things 'are' can also help feminist theorists who wish to reinterpret that same language to ask why they are that way. Hence, a certain resistance can be offered to the way language shapes reality, thus delivering the possibilities for effective political action that anti-postmodern feminists desire. If, via postmodern theoretical methods, it is possible to denaturalise the way language shapes notions of gender and sexuality, then surely as an effective tool it can be of useful service to the feminist project. But, as di Stefano asks, can women have their cake and eat it, i.e. harness the 'critical deconstructive insights' of postmodernism to a 'progressive and substantive feminist politics' and is it worth the risk? (1990: 77).

We have seen in this discussion how Cuba, at the end of the 1980s, was affected by and open to discussions of the theories of postmodernism, and how many Cuban critics have argued that a certain postmodern cultural aesthetic existed there at that time, or, at least, was beginning to emerge. Cuban postmodernism may well be represented by the *ajiao* as Reinaldo Pagán Ávila suggests but he is wrong in stating that Cuba's modernity is all its own. How can it be when its principal ideological components were imported from Europe? Postmodernism, then, is nothing if not a diverse and protean set of ideas and philosophies,

always avoiding definition and resisting categorisation. But certain postmodern cultural values and aesthetic effects can be teased out of the melee, particularly in cinema where the visual nature of the medium makes possible the analysis of postmodern traits. Postmodern theory also has the power to destabilise and question, particularly concerning ideas related to the 'subject'. For this reason it can be a useful tool for the analysis of cultural production from a feminist perspective.

The two films to be discussed now, *¡Plaf! (o demasiado miedo a la vida)* and *Mujer transparente*, both appear at the end of the 1980s/beginning of the 1990s, during an important period of transition for Cuba. As we shall see, both exhibit certain characteristics that could be deemed 'postmodern' and that both construct and reflect emerging new sentiments regarding male-female relations during this time of transition and harsh reflection.

Chapter Six: The Postmodern on Screen

Part One

¡Plaf! (o demasiado miedo a la vida) (1988, Juan Carlos Tabío)

Set in contemporary Havana, ¡Plaf! is a satirical comedy that centres on a middle-class household in a respectable neighbourhood. Concha does not want her son, baseball player José Ramón, to marry scientist Clarita. As the two women constantly fall out, Concha is the recipient of a number of eggs that are maliciously thrown at her. Unable to ascertain who is throwing the eggs and why, Concha becomes increasingly anxious and eventually dies of a heart attack. At the end of the film it is revealed that the first egg was actually thrown by Concha herself at her son and future daughter-in-law, in an attempt to drive Clarita away. The other eggs were all thrown by different people at Concha in an attempt to persuade her to leave her house to the young newly-weds and to go and live with her suitor, Tomás.

¡Plaf!, written by Daniel Chavarría and Juan Carlos Tabío and directed by Tabío, is a dark comedy that satirises many aspects of contemporary Cuban life, from the religious cult of *Santería* to state bureaucracy to the imperfections of Latin American cinema itself. But the most important aspect of the film for us here is the way it develops its themes through its focus on male-female relations. I will attempt to argue that this film (and *Mujer transparente* discussed later in this chapter) stands on the threshold of important change in Cuban cinema, coming as it did only a year before the collapse of the Berlin Wall on 11-12 November 1989, and the subsequent collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe. As Margarita Mateo Palmer states, there followed one of the most difficult periods in the history of the nation.

la del 90 fue una década oscura, la más oscura en términos económicos y de proyección al futuro. Como nunca antes el país estuvo aislado...En medio de la pobreza, de la lucha por la supervivencia, o quizás potenciada por esta ardua batalla, tuvo lugar un singular despliegue de cambios, rupturas y transformaciones en el arte, la literatura y el pensamiento insulares.

(2007: 7)

This film stands, then, as an important marker towards the future, particularly with respect to the way it deconstructs previously held notions of how to represent male-female relations cinematically.

Director Juan Carlos Tabío made his feature film debut in 1983 with *Se permuta*, a comedy about housing shortages and the difficulty of finding suitable accommodation in an overcrowded Havana. He went on to become one of ICAIC's most notable directors, his credits including *Fresa y chocolate* (1993), and *Guantanamera* (1995), both directed alongside Tomás Gutiérrez Alea; *El elefante y la bicicleta* (1994), *Lista de espera* (2000) and *Aunque estés lejos* (2003). Comedy has been at the heart of Tabío's film production and he is widely recognised as one of Latin America's most respected film-makers. As with many other feature film directors, he began life as a documentary film-maker in the 1960s and has grown up with the Revolution. He made 30 documentaries between 1963 and 1980 and has also acted as a teacher of scriptwriting at the International School of Cinema and Television at San Antonio de los Baños, outside Havana. He has won a host of national and international awards for his work.

¡Plaf! begins with a statement on screen from ICAIC, informing the audience that the film has been made in record time to release it on schedule for 'Film Makers' Day'. The opening frame, of two young lovers kissing on the sofa a month before their wedding day, is then viewed upside down, forcing an apology from the projectionist who says it is not his fault, and explains that the opening reel must be sent back to ICAIC to be repaired and then watched at the end. The film then 'restarts' on the day of the wedding itself. The nature of the film is thus established from the start. We are watching a film, primarily, about film-making. This was nothing new in Cuban cinema. Many other Cuban films from ICAIC had already made references to the very act of film-making. For example, *Aventuras de Juan Quinquín* had taken from a variety of Hollywood genres to make comments on film-making in the USA, and *Hasta cierto punto* raised a number of issues about film-making within ICAIC. This type of self-reflexive cinema formed part of the so-called 'modernist' film movement around the world in the 1960s (Jean-Luc Godard's *Une femme est une femme*, for example).

But, as we shall see, the type of self-reflexivity is different here. Whereas in the 1960s, self-reflexive film-making carried with it the sense that the film-makers were educating the audience as to the whys and wherefores of how a film was made and what it represented, in this film the audience is already informed and 'in on the act', thus questioning the supposed 'authority' of the film-makers themselves. Years of being exposed to the mechanisms of film-making via such films as *La muerte de un burócrata*, *Aventuras de Juan Quinquín*, *Memorias del subdesarrollo*, *De cierta manera*, plus television programmes on film and film-making, created an audience of intelligent and well-informed spectators, accustomed to the ideas of imperfect cinema and with a great deal of knowledge of the travails within ICAIC. So, with *¡Plaf!*'s repeated references to the film institute and humorous nods and winks regarding the theoretical practices detailed by Julio García Espinosa in his 1969 essay, the film develops a 'knowing' self-reflexivity in the way that Tim Woods speaks of postmodern films.

¡Plaf! contains all of the key characteristics Woods describes as typical of postmodern film. It alludes to a number of cinematic styles (imperfect cinema, modernist/avant-garde cinema, soap opera, Hollywood love story, detective fiction). It is in many ways nostalgic for a lost past as certain characters represent Cuba in the early years of the Revolution. It breaks the line between the camera and the audience by having the actors turn directly to the camera (in one scene Concha (Daisy Granados) pretends to have forgotten her lines; in another the actors become 'annoyed' when the props they need have been forgotten and have to be hastily thrown on to the set; and in another the 'director' of the film has to 'explain' to the audience a scene that could not be filmed due to a shortage of funds). The film also celebrates the mixing of high and low culture, not only by the mere fact that one of the young lovers is a highly intelligent chemical engineer, the other a not-so-intelligent baseball player, but also by its celebration of contemporary Cuban society and the richness of cultures it contains.

¡Plaf!'s onomatopoeic title refers to the sound an egg makes on impact when thrown against a wall. The first *huevo* the viewer sees, then, is performed against Concha (Daisy Granados), a middle-aged, nervous widow who is 'scared of life' and who does not want her son, baseball player José Ramón, to marry the strong-minded, intelligent, successful young

scientist Clarita (Thais Valdés). From this moment on, someone regularly throws eggs at Concha, driving her into a fit of despair. Whenever she confronts the person she believes is throwing the eggs, another egg is thrown to prove her wrong and thus increases her stress and anxiety. She seeks the help of a *madrina* both to help separate Clarita and her son and to find out who is throwing the eggs at her and why.

A hilarious sub-plot sees an affair develop between Concha and Tomás (Raúl Pomares). But Concha is so afraid of getting hurt again that she fails to see that Tomás is a decent man who loves her and not a deceiving philanderer like her ex-husband. Nervous, fearful and increasingly anxious, Concha falls ever deeper into personal desperation, eventually dying from a heart attack without knowing who had thrown the eggs.

The film cuts a swathe through many of the failings of the revolutionary process, not least the overbearing bureaucracy that is ever-present in the workplace. Through the course of the story, Clarita comes up against numerous (apparently sexist) barriers in her attempt to advance her scientific career. Eventually, however, she succeeds in persuading the powers that be to build a plant that will mass-produce a chemical polymer that she has developed and that can be made cheaply and efficiently out of pigs' excrement.

After Concha's demise, the *madrina* reveals that all the characters had thrown eggs at Concha, trying to force her out of her house to go and live with Tomás, and thereby leaving her home to Clarita and José. But who had thrown the first egg? When the 'first' reel of the film is then played at the very end, as promised by the projectionist, we see Clarita and José kissing on the sofa as Concha herself launches an egg that crashes on to the wall above them, in a bid to force them apart.

The comedy, as Michael Chanan comments, is absurdist, surreal, sometimes dark and, at times, scatological (2004: 436-440). Chanan calls the film 'anarchic' and follows D'Lugo's argument that it is 'a parody on those films that allegorize the nation through their female characters' (Ibid: 437). This will be explored in more detail later, but, as both critics assert, much of the comedy lies in the generational differences between Clarita and Concha, the younger girl being highly critical of Concha's values that have been developed over nearly

thirty years of Revolution. In one scathingly comical scene, Clarita witnesses an old man complaining to Concha in the shop where she works that his watch, bought on the premises, has broken. Concha explains that he can either have his money back or exchange it for a new one. He opts for the exchange, only to find that, instead of a six-month guarantee he would normally receive for a new purchase, he only gets a five-day guarantee for an exchange. He complains but Concha abruptly tells him to complain in writing to the management. Forlorn and submissive, the old man is about to leave the shop with his new watch when Clarita interferes. She tells the old man simply to give back the exchanged watch and, instead, to ask for his money back for the old one that is broken. Concha begrudgingly reimburses the old man, at which point Clarita then tells him to buy the new watch he had exchanged for his old one, thus receiving a six-month guarantee as it is now a 'new purchase' and not an 'exchange'.

But the absurdity does not stop there. Clarita leaves, having done the old man a good turn. Concha is then critical of Clarita, telling the old man that the Revolution has given her everything and yet she continues to complain. In a superbly understated moment, the old man then agrees with Concha, saying 'la juventud es muy mal agradecida'. Throughout the scene, he appears weak and submissive as if any strength he may have once had has been drawn from him by the type of bureaucratic absurdity we witness here. The man is so accepting of the situation it appears obvious that this is not the first time he has been treated this way. The stark criticism of such administrative ineptitude and the tacit acceptance of such by a population dulled by irrationality of this type is a major feature of the film and is repeated on a number of occasions.

The film is often highly critical of the contemporary Cuban day-to-day reality and, if Tabío's 1983 film *Se permuta* had ushered in a phase in Cuban cinema of 'socio-political comedy' (Chanan, 2004: 9), then *¡Plaf!* continued this phase but with a number of important differences. There followed a number of films that sailed pretty close to the political wind (with *Alicia en el pueblo de maravillas*, in 1991, being an example). It is partly this new element of criticism, coupled with the use of comedy that is of interest here in illustrating the

ideological twist that occurred in Cuban cinema at this time. When added to the notion that *¡Plaf!* adopts a nostalgic view of the treatment of male-female relations, the idea of a postmodern aesthetic becomes clearer.

The comedy in Tabío's work in general, and in *¡Plaf!* in particular, takes from a variety of traditions, and can be at times cynical and at other times farcical in the way of *teatro bufo* for example. As Paulo Antonio Paranaguá states, comedy can be very effective at creating a subversive atmosphere within a film and can involve the use of extremely subtle and complex aesthetic structures as 'humour corrodes all schematic ways of thinking, dogma and ritual' (1997: 175). The early years of ICAIC saw the production of a number of comedies but the genre dried up somewhat during the dogmatic, ideological phase of the 1970s. The comedy strand was picked up again in the 1980s with such films as *Vals de la Habana Vieja* (1989, Luis Felipe Bernaza) and *Adorables mentiras* (1991, Gerardo Chijona). Other notable comedies include, *Se permuta*, *Los pájaros tirándole a la escopeta* (1984, Rolando Díaz), and *De tal Pedro tal astilla* (1985, Luis Felipe Bernaza).

Cuban film-maker Daniel Díaz Torres also believes in the subversive power of comedy, although in Cuban cinema it has been more often used to question the 'evils' of pre-revolutionary Cuba. However, during the 1980s, a number of films began to use comedy to question Cuba's contemporary situation. Such is the complexity and contradictory nature of Cuban daily life that there exists a rich seam from which to mine comedic elements on film. As Díaz Torres points out, humour forms a rich part of Cuban daily life, much of it based on the ability to laugh at oneself and one's own situation. Comedy can be rebellious and dramatic and can offer the perfect antidote to some of the rigours of life in Cuba (Díaz Torres, 2003: 23).

Cuban comedy on screen provides the Cuban spectator with a degree of self-recognition. In a country understandably obsessed with the struggle and search for a sense of national identity, this is extremely important. If Cuba is a country born upon a bed of myth-making; the means through which a message 'of an ideological code is conveyed across time and across a society' (Kapcia, 2000: 24), then that myth extends to the comedic perception of

itself and how it can share its sense of humour with others. The comedies of the 1980s, then, took a sideways glance at a number of 'negative tendencies' such as bureaucracy, opportunism, double standards, conformism and repetitive propaganda. These films show that using humour means that the individuals involved can lift themselves in some way above the difficult circumstances that they are presented with. In this way sympathy is expressed for them through comedy. As Díaz Torres comments, we laugh with them not against them. As well as producing the effect of self-recognition, the exposure of negative elements in society alongside a self-effacing parody creates a distancing effect that allows for a degree of reflection on the part of the critically involved spectator. The Cuban spectator can laugh while at the same time realising that a serious point is being made about the society within which they live. Thus, there is a certain provocation to the spectator to be judgmental and to think as an individual in a search for better solutions (2003: 24).

However, Díaz Torres is somewhat contradictory in his analysis of humour in Cuban cinema. While on the one hand stating that it can provoke the spectator to think and act as an individual, he then goes on to say that, when a group of people (in this case a whole nation) can laugh together at themselves and their circumstances, it shows both a cohesion of the group and a sense of security of the individuals within that group. This type of all-encompassing, modernist statement fits neatly with some of the early goals of ICAIC in trying to create and foster a national cinema that would provide a focus for the creation of a new national, revolutionary identity. But Díaz Torres made *Alicia en el pueblo de maravillas* in 1991, perhaps the most controversial and politically sensitive of all Cuban films made after 1959. Caustic and biting satirical, *Alicia* presents a young female protagonist sent to Maravillas to run a theatre group, only to find that the town is run by a dictator trying to cure the town's inhabitants of all social evils and anti-social behaviour by use of a therapeutic mud. Alicia confronts the town and all its absurdities and eventually kills the dictator by throwing him from the back of a lorry into a ravine.

So does humour act as a cohesive device, or can it be the subversive 'devil' Díaz Torres claims? The answer is surely that it can be either or both at the same time, depending

on a variety of factors, including the spectator position and the historical moment in which the film is made and viewed.

¡Plaf! is a film that pokes fun at certain aspects of Cuban society, but it was written and made in the late 1980s, at a reasonably prosperous and stable time in Cuba's history. Although preparations were already being made within Cuban government for massive world change, no-one knew precisely when that change would come. As it happens, the change came only eleven months after *¡Plaf!* won the Premio Coral at the Festival of New Latin American Cinema in Havana of December 1988. *Alicia*, on the other hand, although written some years earlier, was released during the beginning of Cuba's most difficult period of economic austerity and near total world political and economic isolation. For this reason, although *¡Plaf!* was received warmly, *Alicia* was removed from public cinema screens after just a few days and was not seen again until it received a showing at the 1992 film festival (although it was not on general release throughout the country).

The historical moment, then, is of vital importance in such a politically sensitive country as Cuba. Between 1988 and 1991 much changed in the country. In 1991 the caustic humour of *Alicia* was not tolerable but, as Díaz Torres states, 'la necesidad de reír de nuestros propios defectos era y es importante, y hasta redentora: el humor puede contener también no poca grandeza, ayudando al individuo a levantarse por sobre el fárrago abrumador de la cotidianidad, eximiéndolo del patetismo y la desesperación' (2003: 27).

Ultimately, Díaz Torres sees humour in line with the modernist project of allowing the individual to free him or her self from the forces of destiny and conventions, thus affirming their freedom of spirit. He sees it as essential to the socialist project and argues that there are many positive effects of comedy in Cuban cinema: 'La falta de humor, la escasa tolerancia ante la broma puede implicar una peligrosa tendencia a la rigidez y el dogmatismo, más peligrosos en su 'encorsetamiento' de la vida que las posibles inconveniencias liberadoras del humor' (Ibid: 29). Díaz Torres, then, would argue against the notion that the self-mocking comedy of *¡Plaf!* constitutes part of any postmodern aesthetic beginning to emerge in Cuba around the late 1980s. His belief is that Cuban comedy is entrenched in faith in the possibility

of man's improvement within socialist society, and that the comedy helps the spectator to establish the improvements s/he needs to make. By creating a distance between film and spectator via the comedic intent, the spectator can become critical of their own behaviour within Cuban society, and seek to change it.

But this makes a number of assumptions. Firstly, it assumes that the film being viewed by the spectator is a valid representation of the 'real' world within which the spectator lives. Postmodernists would disagree, as the postmodernist 'is sceptical about the ability of representations to capture aspects of the real world' (Peterson, 1997: 144). Certainly the film *¡Plaf!* can in no way be said to truthfully reflect the real world. Although it has a contemporary setting and is filmed in a naturalistic way, similar to *Retrato de Teresa* (Chanan, 2004: 438), the comedy is so absurd and the distancing techniques so frequent, that any reflection of reality becomes, at least in part, an illusion of such. In one scene, as Concha sits on her bed, the wardrobe door swings open to reflect the camera crew in its mirror. In another, Concha 'forgets' her lines and asks to be prompted. When Tomás, at one point, leaves Concha's house, we hear his car start up and drive away. Concha then calls after him and he reappears immediately, illustrating that, in cinema, time-space relations are at the whim of the film-makers and often bear no relation to reality.

This mixture of a naturalistic feel, absurdist comedy, and time compression techniques provokes this sense of the existence of the unreal within an approximation of a daily reality. This suggests that life for Cubans in the 1980s was a mixture of the real and the unreal, the quotidian and the absurd. The film is evidently making comments both about Cuban contemporary life, and also about the nature of film-making, and cinema in general. Thus, it is evident that cinematic techniques can be seen as aesthetic responses to a specific socio-political conjuncture.

As Peterson states, there is no such thing as the cinema, there are multiple cinemas, 'or, to be precise, a number of modes of cinema' (1997: 141). These include avant-garde, documentary, popular narrative etc. According to Peterson, the elitist, minimalist austerity of high modernism in art generally after the Second World War helped to create a postmodern

reaction that was decorative, accessible and fun. Certainly, *¡Plaf!* is all of these, its accessibility aided by its hilarious intent and, for Cubans at least, by its contemporary Cuban setting and numerous references to the difficulties of revolutionary life. The film deals with major social issues but in a radically humorous way, with many nostalgic references as we shall see. Such a mixture of conceptual frameworks, as Peterson comments, adheres to 'Lyotard's 'crisis of legitimation' where the myriad and competing conceptual frameworks for understanding the world cannot be separated and we cannot choose one or the other' (Ibid: 144). What world is *¡Plaf!* trying to convey? Is it absurd? Bureaucratic? Sexist? Hilarious? It is all of these and more. The fact that the film chooses to conceptualise multiple realities via a variety of narrative techniques, adds to the perception that there is no fixed reality. Even if there were, it would not be possible to express it on screen.

This kind of stylistic eclecticism is nothing new to Cuban cinema. What makes it slightly different here is the cultural transformation about to be witnessed in Cuba due to the collapse of Communism. What *¡Plaf!* does is bear witness to Davies' 'deregulation of national-revolutionary discourse and the emergence of heterodoxy, self-reflection and dispersion' (2000: 112), as 'the unified voice of modern(ist) mass culture' is 'dissolved into a fragmented cacophony of multiple, decentred, competing discourses' (Peterson, 1997: 147). If, as Jameson asserts, the postmodern is made up of a series of metaphors of 'superficiality, impurity, and fragmentation' (Ibid), then *¡Plaf!* is a grand metaphor for Cuba's imperfections on the threshold of a period of economic and cultural transformation. But is it a parody or a pastiche?

I would argue that, in line with Jameson's view of postmodern culture, *¡Plaf!* deals in pastiche more than the mockery and criticism inherent in parody. The pastiche lies in the film's lack of an ulterior motive and harsh intent. Although, as we shall see, it may seek to destabilise and criticise, such is the surreal comedic intent that this subversion is severely dulled, unlike *Alicia en el pueblo de maravillas* where the blackness of the comedy adds to rather than dulls down the subversion. In this sense the film follows Linda Hutcheon's view of postmodern cinema in that it is ideologically ambivalent and contradictory, and perhaps not

as politically radical as modernist cinema. It both supports and challenges, 'exploits and subverts that which went before' (Hutcheon, 1995: 107). Thus the modernist idioms that exist in this film (time compression, surreal images, self-reflexivity etc) are rewritten, as Tim Woods would say, into 'jargon, badges and decorative codes' (1999: 36). There are repeated references to this type of modernist questioning, using contemporary ideas, in a contemporary setting, and references too to ICAIC itself. It makes visible the 'rendering visible' that modernist film-making practice desired, and, as such, contains some of the postmodern effects that Woods and others mention. Not only is the transparency of the image investigated, but its reference to reality is severely undermined.

The comedy, the Brechtian distancing techniques, the game playing, ruptures and self-reflexivity are very consciously created and intimately related to the content. This relationship between form and content has been discussed at length since the inception of ICAIC. In García Espinosa's 1969 essay 'Por un cine imperfecto', much was made of creating this important distinction and using it for the purpose of cultivating a cinema that was pertinent to the needs of the developing world. But here, the whole notion of 'imperfect cinema' is being both exploited and questioned. Both Chanan and Davies believe that this critique represents a parodic homage to García Espinosa's essay. But, as Chanan argues, there is something different about this film that sets it apart from its predecessors.

¡Plaf! is clearly a film in the tradition of imperfect cinema, in which at the same time one senses a new departure, a turn towards a new sense of ambiguity in the representation of the social process which also finds expression in a growing susceptibility for the surreal. The film is rendered peculiarly disconcerting by its double set of interruptions, the surrealistic eggs and the technical mishaps, beginning with the interruption at the very start which only demonstrates that you can launch into a story anywhere you like. The interpretive cues are ineluctably mixed.

(2004: 438)

Through the representation of the relations between the sexes, the film takes a nostalgic look at Cuban cinema's attempts to address male-female relations since 1959, and, through the comedy it presents, undermines the authority of that vision. In a postmodern blurring of the

boundary between past and present, via numerous references to the way in which Cuban cinema had presented images of the nation through the production of female characters, the individual (female) subject is split in this film between multiple and competing positions within a fragmented and deconstructive narrative that questions both the political authority of the state and the cultural authority of ICAIC itself. In this way, the film adheres to the kind of postmodernism of which Ravelo Cabrera speaks; a preservation and a reconstruction at the same time, and a questioning of the teleology of Marxist-modernist canons formerly seen as absolute (Ravelo Cabrera, 1995).

Concha and Clarita are presented as cultural antagonists. Each represents a specific period of Cuba's revolutionary history. Unlike many other Cuban films, this one does not put the blame of negative behaviour on the shoulders of pre-revolutionary thinking but situates it squarely on those of the Revolution itself. Concha represents certain, now old-fashioned, early revolutionary ideas. Her dogmatic intransigence (illustrated perfectly in the shop scene discussed earlier) is a critique of 1970s political dogmatism and lack of imagination. If she is 'afraid of life' then the Revolution, according to this film, was afraid of change. Conversely, Clarita represents the new- thinking person in the modern Revolution, prepared to be imaginative and responsive to external situations in order to keep the Revolution alive, while, at the same time, not being afraid to be critical and independent when necessary. The comedy of the shop scene corrodes Concha's fixed beliefs in a bureaucratic order that is out of place in contemporary Cuba.

The female subject is thus split in this film between certain competing positions that question and disturb a previous authority emanating from ICAIC itself. When Humberto Solás talked of the 'transparent woman', he was saying how female characters are most appropriate for expressing national concerns as women are more obviously (transparently) affected by changes in society. Via an often burlesque comedic intent, this notion is parodied here. The film displays both affection for and criticism of this notion of 'transparency'. As Davies argues, the film is more subversive than some would believe. The parody and ridicule the film displays 'enable the spectators to go beyond the dominant fiction of officialdom and

assume a critical stance' (1996: 187). As D'Lugo argues the film juxtaposes old and new revolutionary values but avoids 'heavy-handed moralizing style of an earlier tradition of Cuban film-making' (1997: 163).

Solas' notion of the 'transparent woman' is discussed in the Introduction to this thesis and was articulated with regard to his acclaimed film *Lucía*. However, the simplicity of an idea that groups half of a nation's population under one term ('woman') is exposed in this film. Perhaps in a film like *Lucía* and in *De cierta manera*, where a modernist dialectic is being elucidated via a relationship between a man and a woman, set firmly within a modernist context, this notion of a female protagonist serving to illustrate a nation's dilemmas has some purpose. But, *¡Plaf!* was made and set during very different times in Cuba and the director is astute in acknowledging the historical difference. The humour of the film exposes the modernist dialectic as idealistic and unreal, perhaps even unsupportable in contemporary Cuba. Here, as the validity of both 'male' and 'female' 'subjects' is questioned, Solas' transparent woman becomes more complex than the conduit of national dilemmas he envisioned.

As Díaz Torres asserts, the comedy develops and exposes a number of complexities. 'Las incongruencias se multiplican y el espacio para la risa y la sonrisa – rasgos inmanentes de humanidad – se ensancha mientras más seriedad se quiere imponer a contrapelo de la vida'. This produces, 'un contexto rico, polémico, cambiante como el de la actual sociedad cubana' (2003: 24). The simple dialectic man/woman is thus disturbed hence creating a questioning of the 'authority' of ICAIC that had produced a number of films using a central female figure in this 'transparent' fashion (eg *Lucía*, *Retrato de Teresa*, *Cecilia*, *Amada*). Thus, as Marysia Zalaweski asserts, the postmodernism in this film lies partly within the implied criticism of modernist thought through a deconstruction of previously used terms (2000: 23). Within the field of criticism on Cuban cinema, the idea that female characters have come to embody aspects of nationhood has almost been 'naturalised' but here, this notion is deconstructed and the mask removed. If the Cuban revolutionary project is grounded

in the modern principle of the unified emancipation of the subject, as suggested earlier, then a postmodern aesthetic would perhaps be critical of this emancipatory logic.

Postmodernism, as Benhabib would argue, represents a critique of the modernist principles of linear progress and the desire for 'men' to master the world (Benhabib, 1995: 32). But, when Man is caught in a 'chain of signification', when the subject becomes nothing more than a position in language (Ibid), then the idea of the male-centred, modernist subject is deconstructed. In this film, the comedy develops this web of fictive meaning, where lines are blurred between the quotidian and the absurd, between the real and the surreal (as Chanan suggests). The constant references to daily life (*Santería*, television soap opera, street scenes showing daily life in the sunlit streets of the Vedado neighbourhood in Havana etc), and the simultaneous play of comedic intentions help to disturb any fixed subject position for either male or female characters. The characters may serve to 'represent' certain 'positions' within Cuban contemporary society but these 'positions' are always being undermined by the comedic attacks they face, as if every representation created in the film is subjected to an *huevazo* at some point, all of them ending up with egg on their faces as the *madrina* finds them all guilty of the egg-throwing against Concha. Using such techniques, the film reflects postmodernism's embrace of so-called 'low art' or the mass cultural.

Machismo is one of the traits of Cuban contemporary society that takes a beating here and it is precisely the male-centred subject that is disrupted. Actor Jorge Cao plays the character Contreras, who appears in many guises; at one point dressed in drag as the female president of the Institute where Clarita works. As well as critiquing the lack of advancement of female actors within ICAIC, this serves to displace and disrupt the male-centred subject position by foregrounding 'otherness' and difference in a comedic way in direct opposition to the naturalising processes of modernist reason that delegitimise the presence of otherness and difference (Benhabib, 1995: 32). Religion is also under attack as Concha's beliefs are constantly undermined by the comedy. At one point, when Concha goes to see the *madrina*, religion and bureaucracy are attacked simultaneously. Concha wants to know who is throwing the eggs at her and the *madrina* asks her to locate a number of items that will help her in her

search, adding 'los santos también tienen su burocracia'. This criticism of religion (one that stems from Catholicism but also has African roots) is a criticism of Christianity that is essentially male-dominated, and is another example of how the film upsets the spaces of dual gender categories, undermining the authority that has created those categories in the first place.

The film is asking the spectator to think outside of the traditional spaces of dual gender categories, exposing the very notion of gender as performative, as we have seen in Chapter Five (Butler, 1990: 323). If a film such as *De cierta manera* represents the demonstration of the possibilities of a revolutionary utopia then such foundational thinking in late 1980s Cuba, on the threshold of near catastrophe, is out of place and new modes of thinking must now apply. If the modernist social contract made a promise to women of equality then this film tells us it was never fulfilled. Clarita has many barriers put up before her in her attempts to advance her career, and calendars of nude women where she works point towards the continuation of sexism. As Raquel Olea comments, the social contract always excluded women with men being the true agents of change and development. If the socialist-modernist project was supposed to emancipate women from such roles as the 'mother function', for example, then this film shows us that, at least up until now, it has failed. Concha is a mother of one son and was a wife of a womanising husband who treated her badly. Her mother role in the film is purposefully reinforced as she strives without success to 'protect' her only son from a woman she sees as harmful. Her death at the end serves as a stark reminder to us that such devotion to domestication (while at the same time having a full-time job) can be highly limiting.

There are interesting echoes in this film of a previous role played by actor Daisy Granados, that of Teresa in *Retrato de Teresa* nine years earlier. Teresa's husband is a womaniser who Teresa eventually leaves for an uncertain future. But the possibility of an affair with a work colleague called Tomás, carrying the same name and played by the same actor as Concha's suitor in Tabío's film (Raúl Pomares), is hinted at. *Retrato de Teresa*, discussed at length in Chapter Four, provoked a remarkable public response when released

due to the explicit representation of domestic life in Cuban families. But the uncertainty of Teresa's future is a concern for some critics, including Julianne Burton (Burton, 1991). It may not be stretching the limits of imagination too much to suggest that Teresa's future lies here, in *¡Plaf!* Admittedly, the two characters are not identical. But Cuban cinema has the knack of self-referencing, and most films from ICAIC make some reference to previous Cuban productions, often using the same actors to play similar characters. Here, then, is Teresa, her future from the earlier film made stark and clear, and none too attractive. The point is that if the Revolution's modernising, modernist project was to create equality for women then it has failed because of the way the Revolution has considered and produced male-female relations and representations. If *Retrato de Teresa* tried to illustrate the complexities of the relationship between female emancipation and the socialist project, it did so from a male-centred point of view as discussed earlier. But *¡Plaf!* undermines that point of view by rediscovering Teresa as the anxious, pitiful but not particularly likeable Concha whose 'emancipation' from husband Ramón, continues in a life of desperation, hard work, mistrust, anxiety and fear. She can't even trust her new suitor, a character who is so obviously presented as decent, loving and trustworthy. Everyone but Concha can see that Tomás is a good man but she is so infected with the trauma of her past life that she is blind to him.

What was lacking in *Retrato de Teresa* (and in the modernist project) was a questioning of the power relations between men and women. As Olea states, this was also lacking in Enlightenment discourse, a discourse from which the Cuban Revolution initially developed (1995: 196). But *¡Plaf!* makes a very good effort at removing the mask of male/female power relations by presenting Clarita as a character who is far more intelligent than her boss, Contreras, whose stupidity, sexism and bureaucratic inefficiency is witnessed throughout the film. The fact that the actor playing Contreras appears in many guises, once as a woman, merely highlights how profound the 'crisis in male subjectivity' (Davies, 1996: 181) really is. When he appears as the 'director' of the film to explain a scene that could not be filmed as it was too expensive, we are also faced with the questioning of the authority of ICAIC itself, as

this self-parody contains within it the reality of film-making in Cuba at this time (it would later get a lot worse).

When Clarita is compared alongside the character Magdaly (José's former girlfriend and preferred wife for him according to Concha), the very notion of femininity is also questioned. For many postmodernists the terms 'masculinity' and 'femininity' are unstable, not fixed or given. They have become naturalised by successive generations who have chosen to accept systems of difference that generally create dualistic hierarchies. Where Clarita is a non-typical Cuban *señorita*: thin, self-sufficient, independent, strong-willed and not overtly sexual, Magdaly is presented as her opposite: full-figured, lacking in intelligence and overtly sexual. The brief scenes of Magdaly naked and having sex seem at first to be gratuitous. However, when the character is seen as Clarita's opposite, in order to create a stark distinction between perceived notions of femininity, the nude scenes develop the necessary language of sexuality that helps to undermine the naturalised perception of what being female means. In their attempts to persuade José to leave Clarita, both Concha and Magdaly appear foolish and hurtful, thus exposing the traditional view of femininity as old-fashioned. Thus, *¡Plaf!* exposes not exactly what woman 'is', but how woman has been constructed. It is brave enough (unlike *Retrato de Teresa*) to admit that it does not have all the answers, but at least it asks many of the right questions. In the words of Judith Butler, the 'false ontology' of women is exposed as Magdaly exposes herself to us (1990: 325).

Part Two

Mujer transparente (1990, Héctor Veitía, Mayra Segura, Mayra Vilasís, Mario Crespo, Ana Rodríguez).

Mujer transparente is a series of five short films, all set in contemporary Havana, by five different directors.

‘ISABEL’ (HÉCTOR VEITÍA)

Isabel is mother and wife who both looks after the home and works in a demanding job. In voice-over, the film elucidates her anxieties and desires.

‘ADRIANA’ (MAYRA SEGURA)

In a desire to see again a telephone repair man that had previously called to her house, elderly Adriana calls the telephone company to ask that he return. In a series of fantasy scenes she imagines marrying the young man. When he knocks at the door, she refuses to answer.

‘JULIA’ (MAYRA VILASÍS)

Julia is a recently divorced teacher who takes a young lover and, in voice-over, recounts her desires and wishes before her ex-husband returns in a possible reconciliation.

‘ZOÉ’ (MARIO CRESPO)

Zoé is a young, marginalised ‘punk’ artist who lives in a garage and is visited by a member of the young Communist Union to ask why she keeps missing classes at university. After abandoning him in her garage for hours, she returns drunk and they make love.

‘LAURA’ (ANA RODRÍGUEZ)

Laura is a bored mother who is preparing to meet an old female friend who had, many years previously, left Cuba for Miami. Set mainly in a hotel foyer, Laura, in voice-over, questions the disparities and inequalities caused by tourism on the island, before finally taking the lift to see her friend.

After ICAIC divided into three groups in 1987, each under the tutelage of a senior director, the group headed by Humberto Solás was asked by ICAIC to produce fictional shorts that

dealt with prejudice and taboos (Paranagua, 1992: 24). Solás coined the phrase 'mujer transparente' with reference to his film *Lucía*, and the five directors concerned came up with five films that all have a woman as the main protagonist and all represent daily lives of women in contemporary Cuba. But, unlike the majority of other Cuban films about women, as Zuzana Pick states, the films represent 'inner rather than social articulations through the predominance of voice-over in all but one of the short films' (1995: 76).

Each of the five films will be analysed separately, but they must also be considered as a single production, an ensemble piece that has its own voice within which exist the voices of five distinct elements. Each of the five segments is joined stylistically by the extra-diegetic music that ends one segment and then continues into the following one, each segment representing a separate story about a different woman in late 1980s Cuba. In this disjointed but integrated manner we can see from the outset a very distinctive postmodern style. The foundations of conventional narrative structure and characterisation are both maintained within the individual stories but also changed via the inclusion of five films as one production. Thus, the audience's suspension of disbelief is played with, but the meaning is not surreal in the way of a modernist classic like *Un chien andalou* for example.

If, as Matt Pearson asserts, part of the postmodern aesthetic in film lies in the development of a kind of bricolage with direct references to a 'source' of production (in this case Solás' 1968 comments), then *Mujer transparente* can be seen in this light.¹ If one includes postmodern notions of intertextuality, the 'blurring of high and low cultural boundaries, the inability to distinguish between the 'real' and the artifice, the commodification of everyday life and the sense of the fragmentary, ambiguous and uncertain nature of living',² then this film adheres well to any notion of the postmodern concept in cinema. When coupled with the film's desire to reflect and construct notions of woman then what we have is a postmodern feminist film that, as Benamou argues, elaborates a series of 'feminine identities

¹ Pearson, M. (1997). At: www.britishfilm.org.uk/lynch/blue_velvet.html (accessed 14/02/08).

² Ibid

that come into conflict with gender and the status quo and ‘transparently show the female imaginary at work’ (1999: 97).

This conflict with the reality of life in Cuba is central to the film’s postmodern style. As Scott Lash argues, ‘the logic of postmodernism inheres in its problemization of the reality’ (1990: 63). It is in this conflict, this questioning of previously established codes regarding the production and reflection of images of woman, where *Mujer transparente* differs from *Retrato de Teresa* or *De cierta manera*, for example. In its denial of history via a reformulation of previously held ideas, in order to make relevant for a new generation of thinkers, *Mujer transparente* breaks new ground in Cuban cinema, and I will attempt to show how, through its postmodern aesthetic, it demystifies the long-held notion of the ‘transparent woman’ in Cuban cinema via an analysis of the individual (woman’s) link to the Cuban national collective. However, the films also make deliberate references to Cuban cinematic and social history, adhering to Jameson’s notion that postmodernism in cinema both nostalgically conforms to and critically breaks with certain ideas or traditions of the past.

If it is true that Cuba, as a society, toward the end of the 1980s, began to resist the totalising narrative of Marxism with an alteration of Marxist principles, as Ravelo Cabrera asserts (1995: 62), and that, in the words of José Álvarez, ‘the homogeneous construction of socialist Cuba is already a proven impossibility’ (1998: 93), then this film illustrates this cultural shift. The fragmentation and ‘localised’ narrative, in opposition to Marxism’s grand emancipatory project, can be clearly seen in *Mujer transparente*.

‘ISABEL’ (HÉCTOR VEITÍA)

The first of the five short fiction films is called ‘Isabel’ and was directed by Héctor Veitía. Veitía was born in 1939 and began work at ICAIC in 1961 as an Assistant Director, taking the helm for the first time (in co-direction with Humberto Solás) in 1963 with the documentary *Variaciones*. He has since made many documentaries but ‘Isabel’ was his first fiction production as director. As Benamou comments, the fact that two of the five films are directed by men and three by women belies the argument that you can easily split up Cuban cinematic

productions about women into films made by either men or women. As she states, 'they are not aesthetically distinct bodies of work' (1999: 97).

The film's credits open with a quotation on screen from US writer and political activist Katherine Anne Porter; 'detente, detente, siempre puedes detenerte y elegir' ('stop, stop, you can always stop and choose'). The same quotation appears again in 'Zoé', the fourth film in the series, and represents one of its central themes, that of the possibility, or the impossibility, of choice. In this case it represents a call to the main character, Isabel (Isabel Moreno), to put an end to her domestic drudgery. Isabel is a mother of two grown-up children and wife of Luis, an evidently hard-working but uncaring husband who takes little interest in his wife for anything other than sex. He neither listens to the problems she is having at work, nor notices or cares when she changes her appearance by having her hair cut and styled. As in the films *Lejanía* and *Retrato de Teresa*, in 'Isabel' we have a portrait of a woman who is suffering due to the demands placed on her by her family and the Revolution.

Isabel both works in a demanding job where she is valued and hence promoted, and cares for her husband and children at home. Her two children make constant demands on her time and she is the only one in the house to contribute to the domestic chores. There are echoes here of *Retrato de Teresa*, some 11 years earlier, perhaps illustrating that the problem of developing equal rights for women in the private sphere has not yet gone away. As Jesús Rodríguez Calderín states, this series of five shorts shows that 'el conflicto de la subvaloración femenina aún es latente y requiere ser enfocado desde todas las aristas posibles'.³

In *Retrato de Teresa* much of the focus is on Teresa's home routine and on her position in Cuban revolutionary society. Here, as Glenda Mejía argues, the film concentrates on Isabel's journey of self-appreciation in a process of re-imagining (2006: 4-9). Her first words make plain the individualistic essence of the story: 'Es verdad. ¿Qué soy si no un fantasma, una sacacuentas, una madre melodramática que se despierta buscando oxígeno, como un puñetero 'goldfish'...¿Por qué me habré metido en este lío?' But if, in *Retrato de Teresa*,

³ Rodríguez Calderín, J. At: www.enfocarte.com/5.25/cine2.html (accessed 19/12/07).

Teresa's desires are only hinted at, Isabel has her desires elucidated more clearly as she rails against her domestic drudgery. At the end of the film Isabel rebels against her husband and children by walking away from them to a nearby park, the music of a popular song playing in the background. This harks back to the 1979 film by Pastor Vega and here, equally, the ending is left open. But, as Isabel says in angry voice-over that she would like to go off with the first man that passes, we are acutely aware of her inner thoughts and feelings.

Ay como me subestiman, todavía no saben de lo que soy capaz. Café. ¡Mierda!, qué se jodan, qué se quedan sin desayunar, qué se vayan a la escuela con la camisa sucia y ahora qué me busquen. Me voy con el primero que pase y soy capaz de cualquier cosa. Qué me vean con un pepillo de veinte años.

As José Álvarez remarks, Isabel is:

subjected to a symbolic repression, enagaged in a constant fight to obtain a legitimate space as a subject of society. Isabel is that individual in search of an autonomous social sphere, yet who cannot escape dependence upon the look of recognition from the dominant ideological apparatus. It is she who embodies the frustration of society as a whole, one which is crippled and thus prevented from expressing freely, a paradox evident in Isabel's confession 'because I always do the opposite of what I think'.

(1998: 93)

It is possible to see the character Isabel as a nostalgic repetition of Teresa in Pastor Vega's 1979 film. The basic plot dilemma is much the same and some of the techniques are repeated. This gives a sense of a nostalgic view of past aesthetic experiences if one has some knowledge of ICAIC's previous production. However, there are many stylistic differences that move 'Isabel' away from the natural realism of *Teresa* (a realism that has the effect of naturalising the gender differences presented in the 1979 film). Chief of the differences between the two films is the voice-over element that gives the latter piece an eerie, ghost-like quality that is repeated in three of the other four films in the *Mujer transparente* series.

During the opening titles Isabel wanders through her darkly-lit apartment as the rest of the family sleeps, the radio in the background quoting Vilma Espín (president of the FMC):

‘el primer deber humano es responsabilizarse con los hijos’. This serves both as an ironic critique of the paternalistic attitude of the Revolution towards the Cuban people and as a reminder that the ‘double-shift’ has not been eradicated. The quote by Espín refers not to women specifically, but to all people. The truth was, however, that with the Marxist ‘emancipation’ of women in the workplace, came the reality that many were doubly burdened by ‘duty’ toward the revolutionary purpose.

As Benamou states of the five films, the ‘chiaoscuro lighting emphasises the inner feelings of the women and obscures images that are often in shadow, thus contradicting the transparency of the title’ (1999: 97). This contradiction emphasises the idea of reformulation of previously held ideas of the representation of women in Cuban cinema, as no longer can Solas’ interpretation of the ‘transparent woman’ be held up as a paradigm. The subtle lighting (with brief interludes of deliberate over-exposure) confounds the very notion of ‘transparency’, instead presenting us with long episodes of self-reflection, despondency and a sense of futility.

Isabel’s life is clearly not her own. She asks herself why she always does the opposite of what she wants. Married at 17 and now stuck in a loveless relationship she even says yes to a promotion she has been determined to turn down until the last second when she is asked to make up her mind. She is obviously perfectly qualified for the job, well respected at work and extremely efficient, constantly being asked for advice by her colleagues. But her home life is driving her into a state of despondency and aggravation, culminating in her desire to leave her family and take off with the first man that passes.

Again this is reminiscent of *Retrato de Teresa* when Teresa is persuaded, against her better judgement, to continue with her out-of-work activity as leader of a dance troupe. Teresa also suffers moments of desperation, at one point throwing the crockery to the floor in anger, and finally leaving her husband. Such reminiscences are entirely deliberate and create a sense of pastiche that is common to postmodern cinema. As Douglas Kellner observes, pastiche formed a part of the postmodern cinematic aesthetic in the 1980s worldwide and was part of cinema’s break with high modernism (Kellner, 1989: 1). So, previous styles, authors and

works were cited and repeated just as they are here in 'Isabel'. In Jameson's terms, pastiche illustrates a lack of historical depth and mere simulation, representing a depthless postmodernism, a neutral mimicry (Jameson, 1991: 16).

But is this recycling subversive or reactionary? In Hal Foster's terms I believe that 'Isabel' does represent a cinema of 'resistance' (Woods, 1999: 253). Where *Retrato de Teresa* has a tendency to naturalise the proposed gender differences, this short film makes a bold attempt at a reformulation of the very notion of subjectivity by concentrating to a large extent on the central character's psyche and on her desire to re-create herself. In an ironic jibe at the very heart of the Revolution, as she puts her make-up on in the mirror she equates her reformulation with that of the process of 'rectification', undertaken by the Communist Party. 'Me hice un plan más duro que la plataforma del partido. Capítulo Uno: Rectificación.' The application of make-up in the mirror makes the spectator aware that she is at once tied to notions of femininity prescribed to her by a male-centred society, her direct reference to the ubiquitous Communist Party illustrating the weight of patriarchy that Cuban society has had to bear. But she is also, as Mejía suggests, gaining at least some control of her personal and private life, 'with a transformation of attitudes towards her companion, family, sexuality, and society. In particular, her changes should emphasise the transformation of traditional behaviours of domination and subordination, which permeate interpersonal, mostly sexual, relationships and manifest as power struggles, jealousy and possession' (2006: 5). She feels she will gain a better sense of herself by applying make-up and having her hair styled.

The film then operates within the 'schizophrenic postmodern space' that Ravelo Cabrera believes is opposed to the totalising discourse of Marxism within Cuba, and very much part of the reformulation of ideas that questions the precise idea of Cuban modernity (1995: 61). As argued earlier, Davies views this re-imagining of the Cuban revolutionary process in the emergence of a feeling of self-reflection in Cuban arts (2000: 112). Throughout 'Isabel' and in 'Adriana' (the next in the *Mujer transparente* series), this self-reflection is perfectly evident as the main characters reflect on their lives as women within the Revolution. In Woods' terms this has the effect of demystifying a grand patriarchal structure (Woods,

1999: 11) that was idealised in earlier films about women produced by ICAIC, such as *Lucía*, and *De cierta manera*. If the socialist (female) subject was made evident in these films then here it is put under scrutiny, adhering to Ravelo Cabrera's idea of the erosion of the very notion of the 'socialist subject' and the appearance of new subjects (1995: 66).

But 'Isabel' represents a transgression rather than any formal break with the past; a reinvention of certain historical characteristics as Kaplan would argue (1988: 16). As Álvarez astutely remarks, Isabel remains at the service of phallic society that dominates her (1990: 369). But at least she makes a justifiable questioning of that society. When she complains to Luis that he never listens to her, a brief interaction follows as she asks him:

- '¿Qué soy yo para ti?

- No te entiendo

- Claro que no me entiendes si para entender hay que oír. Nunca me oyes.

- Sí, mi vida, discúlpame. Pero que yo...no sé, lo hago sin darme cuenta, no lo hago por malo.

- Eso lo peor, que no te das cuenta.'

This conversation illustrates how the husband's behaviour, his lack of understanding or desire to listen to his wife, is almost naturalised as he does not do it on purpose. But this naturalisation process is put under severe scrutiny here as Isabel searches for something different.

At the end of the film she sits in a park surrounded by three trees, phallic symbols that remind us of the opening scene of *Retrato de Teresa* when the tower of the Castillo de Morro is visible in the background. Such constant referencing to one of the most talked-about and controversial of all Cuban revolutionary films can do a number of things. It can exploit, pay homage to or criticise that which went before. Here, the accepted cultural codes (i.e. the values associated with the representation of woman in Cuban films from 1959 onwards) are questioned via a reworking and re-formulation of them. The pastiche contained in 'Isabel' is a subversive tool that re-writes part of the (recent) history of woman's representation in Cuban cinema. Famous scenes and styles from one of Cuban cinema's most noted films are alluded

to in 'Isabel', adhering to the first of Woods' key characteristics of the postmodern film; that of the pastiche of other genres and styles, explained in the previous chapter (1999: 214).

In the words of E. A. Kaplan, 'Isabel' is a film that wears the 'stylistic mask' of pastiche 'without parody's ulterior motive, without the satirical impulse, without laughter' (1988: 16). So, this film contains both exploitation and subversion, via this pastiche of previously held cultural values. If *Retrato de Teresa* represented a modernist search for the self as Teresa struggles for parity in a chauvinistic society, then 'Isabel' questions and disturbs this notion of subjectivity. Perhaps this does represent Jameson's 'pathological symptom of a society incapable of dealing with time and history' (Hutcheon, 1989: 107). The darkness and feeling of detached emotion that emanates from the film suggests at the very least a deep uncertainty about the possibility for Isabel to 'discover' herself at all. The utopian optimism of the open ending of *Retrato de Teresa*, as she strides out alone to hopefully make her way in a new world, leaving behind her old struggles within a *machista* environment, are both exploited and questioned here as Isabel sits alone in the park after having abandoned her family (at least for the time being). The brightly-lit background echoes the sunny street that Teresa walked down away from her husband. But here Isabel is seated, static. What choices does she really have? Yes, she is economically independent having gained a recent pay rise. She can make herself look supposedly more attractive (within the confines of a male-dominated point of view), and she can walk away and refuse to make coffee for her husband. But the reality, as Mejía points out, is somewhat different from the utopia (2006: 6).

The critique here is a repetition of *Retrato de Teresa*: that *machismo* continues in a society that has supposedly eradicated such negative tendencies. The supposed optimism of the 1979 film is replaced by a cynicism (towards family life and marriage) that, as suggested earlier, Boggs and Pollard believe forms part of a postmodern cinematic aesthetic (2003: viii). The reality is that Isabel has nowhere to go. Her retreat to the street is a symbolic action, a simulacrum of Teresa's stride into 'emancipation'. Whereas Teresa strode forward into the camera, her mobility suggesting positive steps into the future, Isabel remains seated as the camera moves away from her, leaving her alone in the park, surrounded by phallic symbols.

‘Isabel is enmeshed in an individual search that wavers between the desire for social recognition, for personal contentment, and for public and private belonging’ (Álvarez, 1998: 97). But, as Álvarez rightly points out, she cannot resolve her dilemma and abandons the conflict in order to dream. In this repetition, this simulacrum, the mask of Teresa’s subjectivity is torn away and revealed to be false. The painting of Isabel’s own face, in the form of her make-up and new hairstyle, shows us that she also wears a mask of subjectivity in a world where the very notion of the female ‘subject’ is being questioned.

This questioning of the subject, this chaos exposed as a woman’s reality in contemporary Cuba, illustrates the failure of the social contract for women up to this point in Cuba’s history. If feminism and socialism come together within the possibilities of utopia expressed in *De cierta manera* and *Retrato de Teresa*, then here that utopia is questioned. In Olea’s terms, Isabel is still excluded from the social contract (1995: 194). Man is still the agent of history, cultural production and power while woman is still searching for her subjectivity and agency.

On another level the chaos represented in ‘Isabel’ represents a destabilisation of the very category ‘woman’. Thus, as Zalaweski points out, the constitution of the category ‘woman’ is put under scrutiny (2000: 23) through the uncertain and contradictory voice of Isabel. If we are led towards seeing her simply as a suffering ‘mother’ then her management position at work denies that category as total. Her uncertainty over whether to take that position at all destabilises further any attempt at a totalising categorisation.

One sentence in particular disavows any attempt by the spectator to ‘define’ her in simplistic terms. As she walks alone along the beach while her husband entertains his friends, she remarks ‘ni siquiera las ilusiones nos sirvieron para ser feliz...Si yo tuviera algo de puta todo sería más fácil.’ ‘Isabel’ is the first of the five films in the series and this questioning of female subjectivity continues in the other four.

‘ADRIANA’ (MAYRA SEGURA)

The second short film of *Mujer transparente* is ‘Adriana’, by Mayra Segura, who went on to become assistant director on *Fresa y chocolate* (1993). She also has many credits as a producer at ICAIC, including *Entre ciclones* (2003).

There is no definitive break between any of the five films in *Mujer transparente*, thus demonstrating the need to observe them simultaneously as separate identities and also as a complete and singular whole. As the closing music from ‘Isabel’ continues, the film cuts from the park where Isabel is left, to an old and dark apartment, the light being seen as shards breaking through windows. As the camera moves around the apartment we hear the voice of a man talking to Adriana (Verónica Lynn). As in ‘Isabel’, the radio is set to the station ‘Radio Reloj’, playing the news at 2 p.m. as Adriana is alone looking at old photographs. The radio gives us news of Gorbachev, of success stories in Cuban manufacturing and healthcare and continued bombing in San Salvador, thus locating the story firmly in a particular period of the late 1980s.

Adriana wanders around her apartment and looks at old photos of herself as a child. She tries on a wedding dress, puts on make-up and looks at herself in the mirror. She calls the telephone engineers from her home phone (which is obviously in good working order) to ask for the engineer who had previously repaired it, to return. She specifically asks for the same young man who had called before. A ‘Miss Haversham’ figure in her wedding dress, her home strewn with lighted candles, she imagines herself at a wedding reception married to the young telephone engineer, but she dances alone in the apartment. In her imagined scenario the guests look on asking her what she is doing and to look at herself. Continued radio news heard throughout the story talks of growing production levels and inefficiencies. Four hours later the doorbell rings as the telephone engineer arrives. But Adriana does not answer the door. As she has a flashback to her childhood, when she was shut inside whenever men were around, the engineer leaves and Adriana is left alone in the flat.

As Mejía argues, Adriana’s desires are expressed clearly. She fantasises about being married as she is probably a typical *solterona*, who had been prevented from marrying by her

parents whose high standards were never met by any prospective partner (2006: 9). Thus, an old woman's fantasies are revealed in perhaps the least successful of the five shorts, although, as I will aim to show, I disagree with critic Paranagua who believes that the film is a failure (1992: 24).

Again here a woman has suffered due to certain patriarchal constraints. A male voice is often heard, reining in Adriana's desires, reminding her of her age and telling her to act like a lady. The oppressive voice is no doubt the voice of her father, the authority who had repressed her desires in the first place. The mirror, as Mejía points out, acts as a window or 'portal' (2006: 10) to her self, her subjectivity. But this vision is merely an illusion, a false reality as she only sees superficial appearances. Here then the emphasis is once again upon the construction of the meaning 'woman' and not on providing any answer. Mejía believes, optimistically perhaps, that by looking into the mirror, Adriana starts herself on the road to:

self-discovery, her becoming of a subject – it does not preclude her from embarking upon a journey of truth-finding and self-exploration. It is clear that the image Adriana sees in the mirror is indeed an expression of her enjoyment, her freedom, and her ability to imagine what she possibly could be. By exploring where these illusions come from, who has defined them, and why she sees them, she begins a more profound search of her intimate and expressive self.

(2006: 10)

However, such a positive affirmation of Adriana's self-seeking belies the aesthetic experience the film delivers and its negative ending that leaves Adriana alone, obviously upset and disturbed by the impossibility of achieving her fantasy. The film might, as Mejía suggests, attempt to explore the reasons behind Adriana's delusions but, ultimately, it appears to deny Adriana any possibility of achieving agency – and perhaps this is the real truth that is being hinting at. She can imagine what she might like to be, a subservient housewife in a traditional marriage, as Rodríguez Calderín states, 'En el episodio 'Isabel', 'Adriana' y 'Julia' el sometimiento de la mujer es palpable, destinada al hogar, a los hijos.' But there is nothing optimistic about this supposed search for the self. As has been previously discussed in Chapter One, in Lacanian terms any image that Adriana sees in the mirror can only be a

‘misrecognition’, a false perception of self that can never approach any notion of truthfulness (Lacan, 1977: 1-8). The ‘trick’ that Sara Gómez plays on the audience in *De cierta manera*, discussed in Chapter Two, whereby a target audience is forced to misrecognise itself on screen and, as such, begin a process of reformulation, is re-enacted here through Adriana. In this case it is the central character rather than the audience, who is made to ‘look at herself’ as told to do so by guests at her imaginary wedding. This she is already doing in the mirror and what she sees is an entirely false perception of self. Her desires are elucidated but they neither illustrate a woman emancipated from the yoke of patriarchy, nor are they attainable.

Mejía does go on to say that the mirror image Adriana sees can only be a deception, illustrating, via Baudrillard, that any image Adriana has of herself in the mirror is an objectified one:

a woman, by looking at herself in the mirror, deceives herself because she only sees appearances, and illusions. Therefore, by looking at herself in a mirror, she is simply an object, because she cannot see her real self, thus she will never be a subject, she is just a simple simulation of that masculine truth of what it means to be a woman or, in other words, the ‘imaginary’ truth made real.

(2006: 10)

In Boggs and Pollard’s terms this film develops a cynicism, a dystopia and a longing for an imaginary past that are common to postmodern films (2003: viii). The nihilism is evident in the film’s denouement as Adriana realises that any truth that may exist does not lie behind the mirror but in the sad reality of her own life, lived alone and, seemingly, without love.

While the film develops the notion of fantasy as a way out of Adriana’s daily reality, the fantasy is one of subservience to male domination. As discussed with reference to the film *Retrato de Teresa*, fantasy scenarios often form part of a sub-genre of melodrama in what Haskell has called the ‘woman’s film’ (1999: 20-30). In such films Kotsopoulos argues that the fantasy scenarios are ones usually socially prohibited to the female protagonist because of her gender. Social restrictions of one sort or the other have prevented Adriana from marrying, and her fantasy, clearly developed, breaks with those old traditions. A comparison with

Retrato de Teresa makes this point clear. Whereas in the earlier film Teresa's desires are not clearly demonstrated, merely hinted at for fear of alienating the audience unprepared for such controversy, here, on the cusp of change, as Cuba was embarking on a dangerous process of transition, fantasy and desire are allowed to form part of the social 'contract' between filmmaker and spectator. While *Retrato de Teresa* stayed within the realms of the modernising, Marxist project, by producing a modern female socialist subject, this short film provokes and teases that project through its elucidation of a fantasy that hints at the disavowal of any unified subjectivity.

This crisis of subjectivity forms part of the Cuban postmodern revolutionary consciousness, as suggested by Ravelo Cabrera (1995: 61), and as such represents, in Martín-Barbero's terms, a critique of Marxism and its attempts at creating a unified subjectivity. Modernism's search for the self is disturbed here via an aesthetic that delivers an unstable and decentred subject who appears to have no real 'place' in contemporary Cuban society. The darkness of Adriana's apartment that contrasts with the sunlight in the one scene outside, the contrast between her old age and the engineer's youth, suggest a sad and nostalgic view of history as Adriana is left with nothing but faded memories and fantasy in a world that appears to have left her behind. Here, in Jameson's terms, we have an ephemeral depiction of a society 'incapable of dealing with time and history' (1991: 117). The film's ephemerality, its inability to express itself clearly, and its lack of direct and obvious political motivation, form part of its postmodern aesthetic. If modernists could accept 'the ephemeral and transitory as the locus of their art' (Harvey, 1990: 21), then postmodernists accept ephemerality without trying to define or explain elements within it. 'Postmodernism swims, even wallows, in the fragmentary and the chaotic currents of change as if that is all there is' (Ibid: 44).

There is a sense of aesthetic disjunction in 'Adriana' but it is a disjunction that sits neatly with the period of the late 1980s in Cuba, as we have seen a time of enormous transition in the arts. The film has an almost gothic intent, a sublime mixture of the grotesque and the beautiful as Adriana puts on the wedding dress, the pain of her fantasy all too evident. This appears to suggest some kind of return to a classical romanticism while firmly locating

the story in late 1980s Cuba. It is this kind of aesthetic disjunction that creates the film's ephemeral nature and, as such, has been difficult for some critics, such as Paranagua, to categorise. It is precisely this lack of categorisation that illustrates a shift from a modernist to a postmodern aesthetic, where no answers, no definitions are sought.

The film, as Mejía rightly states, is as much about female desire as anything else, Adriana's desires being made evident through her wedding fantasy and her wish to see the young, good-looking telephone engineer return to her apartment. Ultimately her desires are never fulfilled, being repressed by a patriarchal authority that historically has restricted the expression of female sexual desire, particularly in a relationship between an older woman and a younger man. At the end of the film she cannot find the courage to 'resist' the weight of traditional patriarchal oppression upon her and she does not answer the door to the engineer. As Mejía comments, she remains 'abandoned' and cannot 'break the stereotype of the 'good father's daughter'' (2006: 11). The omnipresence of patriarchal authority is too much for this elderly lady, still scarred with the marks of a pre-revolutionary, bourgeois childhood. In this sense the film does not break any new ground as it continues to place this weight of patriarchy firmly in pre-revolutionary times.

However, in its contradictory and dystopic view of female subjectivity it does enter what might be considered as 'post-feminist' terrain. Here, there is no fixity of the female subject but there is a denial of what might be considered the ideal socialist subject as seen, for example, in *De cierta manera*. Once again, as Zalaweski argues, the category 'woman' is under attack (2000: 23). If modernists tried to fix an identity of woman then here that notion is disturbed with the presentation of yet another representation. Adriana exists as a woman, but it is what constitutes her that is questioned. Although Adriana is repressed by the authoritarian voice that dominates the story, she is able to elucidate her desires and hence destabilise that voice to some extent.

Through immersing herself deeper into her world of fantasy, she poses a challenge to the constant voice that reminds her of her socially-defined roles and positions as an elderly woman, even though ultimately this voice triumphs in arbitrating her identity conflict. Nonetheless, her

representation does exhibit emancipatory elements whereby, contrary to the popular (and thus patriarchal) discourses of women in general, and elderly women in particular, she not only has the ability to fantasise, but to a certain degree enjoys her fantasies, even though in the end they are not fully realised.

(Mejía, 2006: 11)

This story, then, does represent a critical analysis of the power structure between male authority and woman. It disturbs the authority of masculine power by creating some resistance, however small and difficult to identify that might be. 'Adriana', therefore, forms part of the necessary multiplicity of discourses by and about women in Cuban contemporary arts and as such, adheres to the argument that Cuban cinema in the late 1980s was developing a postmodern aesthetic through its representations of women.

'JULIA' (MAYRA VILASÍS)

'Julia' is a tale of divorce and female desire, and, as in the others in the series, takes a close look at the very intimate and personal side of a woman's reality in Cuba. Director Mayra Vilasis began working at ICAIC in 1974, directing her first documentary short ('Una pareja de oro') 11 years later. She was also a prolific writer and critic, publishing regular articles on cinema in magazines such as *Cine Cubano*, *Revolución y Cultura*, *Moving Pictures Bulletin* and *Gallerie*. She won many awards for her work including, for 'Julia', a mention at the Festival Internacional de Cine de San Sebastián, in 1990. She died in Havana in 2002. The subject of divorce had been touched on previously in Cuban cinema of the Revolution, notably in *Lejanía* through the character Aleida, and in *De cierta manera* through Yolanda, as Álvarez remarks (1990: 369). But here the tale is far more intimate and personal and delves deep into the psyche of a divorced woman in contemporary Cuba.

Julia (Mirta Ibarra), has had a torrid relationship with her husband from whom she is now divorced. As she embarks on an affair with a younger student, in voice-over she articulates her sexual and other personal desires while looking back on a failed marriage in

which she was evidently disempowered. Her husband appeared to take most of the important decisions in the marriage, including the decision not to have children.

Now, however, she is free to do as she pleases, turning the tables on one of the primary forces within patriarchal society, that of the sexual objectification of women, commenting that 'Las mujeres maduras sí sabemos disfrutar los amantes, ir más allá de los clichés, de los orgasmos panorámicos.' Previously, her husband had undertaken affairs with his younger female students and Julia herself talks of a relationship she had with a student of hers who:

era un poco tonto, pero tenía un cuerpo maravilloso, una facilidad de novela radial para decirme todo lo que mi marido nunca me había dicho o gritarme en la cama lo que nadie me había gritado. Sin embargo yo sabía lo intrascendente de estas aventuras. Mi matrimonio, en cambio, había sido un bello real pero su fracaso oscurecía mi vida.

Here, then, the contradictions inherent in any personal relationship are witnessed, further illustrating the development in Cuban cinema of the multi-dimensional Cuban woman, one not inextricably linked to the Marxist-socialist revolutionary process. Julia sexually objectifies her young lover, Carlos, but laments the failure of her marriage dream. She voices her sexual desires towards him but also admits to being subject to certain inexplicable forces that appear to prevent her from enjoying the pleasures entirely. As she sits at home, soon after her husband has left, she remarks, 'a todos nos gusta seducir, comprobarte todavía a un chiquillo que nos mira turbado de placer.' At this point we see her in the street, laughing with Carlos, until the film cuts back to her on the bed and the phone rings. Her tone changes and she says; 'claro, siempre hay una cadena invisible que te ata a tu rol de mujer responsable, en tu casa, sola, esperando quién sabe qué.'

The extent to which she can develop and continue with her personal desires is limited by social factors that, she admits, weigh heavily upon her, even though she tries her best to deny them. She makes cutting remarks about marriage saying that it is, 'como un tatuaje, lo que fuiste y que no fuiste, todo tiene que ver con ese hombre que nunca logra sacarte encima.' She had always wanted to have children but was dominated by her patronising husband who had persuaded her that it was a bad idea, saying in one of the many flashbacks; 'No mi cielo

no. ¿Cuántas veces nosotros hemos hablado de eso? Sería complicarnos la existencia mi amor.' Julia then accepted her 'fate' and fell into a relationship with her husband based on mutual disrespect and misunderstanding, avoiding each other and passing most of their time together in silence.

As she sits alone in her apartment some time after her divorce, she contemplates the future. Her contradictory thoughts are made clear as she ponders the possibility of her husband's return. 'Tal vez él regresaría, todo era muy extraño. Todavía sus cosas estaban aquí, y él conserva una llave, sin embargo yo cada vez me sentía más tranquila...' The mixing of tenses here illustrates both how recent the divorce was and also demonstrates Julia's difficulty in accepting the failure of her marriage and also the possibility of his return as he still 'has' a key. This highlights the contradictions she has to face. As Álvarez comments Julia 'remains anchored to the parameters of social conventions' that do not view an older, single woman sympathetically (1990: 369).

Julia constantly imagines her husband with his ex-student, Olga, and wished he had remained with her after the divorce, arguing that in that way she could accept that he had made a choice. But he had in fact chosen to leave the city and go and live on his own, something she found difficult to explain and accept. After about eight months apart she begins to accept her situation as a woman alone although this is not easy, burdened as she is by the mores of a society that tells her that to be a woman alone is shameful. 'Con el tiempo perdí el miedo de estar sola,' adding, 'muchas mujeres creen vergonzoso no tener un hombre, yo no.'

As Glenda Mejía comments of the character Julia, the 'description of her enjoyment of her desires is also a rejection of patriarchal prejudices that dictate that only men can feel or are entitled to sexual pleasure' (2006: 14). In this way, Mejía believes that Julia becomes empowered as a subject, who 'takes control of her own thoughts, emotions and behaviours' (2006: 14). Of her young lover she says, 'en su cuerpo yo disfrutaba mi soledad. Ese placer me permitía establecer verme a mi misma...'

However, one evening, as she waits with Carlos at the bus stop, she sees her ex-husband's car and, naturally, still feels nervous at the prospect of seeing him again. She wants

to see him but appears to have no desire for reconciliation even though she says that she was very much in love with him. In the final scene of the film they meet as he enters their old apartment. The overexposed frame highlights the tensions that continue between them as she says, 'los buenos boxeadores nunca abandonan', hinting at one of two possibilities; that they either work hard to get back together again or that the fighting and tensions between them will carry on. The stark lighting and hard faces on both of the characters, coupled with Julia's insistence that they will only be friends, hints at their continued separation, adding to the concept of the bleak postmodern outlook where marriage and personal relationships are viewed cynically (Boggs and Pollard, 2003: viii).

For Álvarez, 'Julia' does not present anything particularly new for Cuban cinema in that, although it creates the possibility of a liberating vision for women, it puts forward a protagonist whose story is enclosed 'alongside man, who...gives her valoration and a sense of life as a feminine character' (1990: 369). But Mejía believes that the film 'creates a new space for women' as it presents a woman 'disconnected from that of mother-wife through an exploration of her own subjectivity' (2006: 13). In previous Cuban films, she suggests, women were represented as embodied within a family, and divorced women were portrayed as re-establishing familial links; for instance, Yolanda in *De cierta manera* (1974). By contrast, Mejía states:

Julia searches for an identity disconnected from that of mother-wife through an exploration of her own subjectivity. Through knowing more about herself throughout these experiences, she maintains control of her gender power, explores her sexuality, and becomes increasingly confident and comfortable with herself. Fundamentally, this film describes the process of the empowerment of a woman who becomes unafraid of prejudices, and journeys deeper into an exploration of her satisfactions, pleasures and desires.

(2006: 13)

In many ways I would agree with Mejía as the film definitely turns the tables on aspects of patriarchy, particularly to do with sex and desire. Here, in the Cuba of the late 1980s, female sexual desire is clearly elucidated in no uncertain terms. As Julia objectifies Carlos and makes

pointed comments about sexual activity in Cuba generally, the comparison with *Retrato de Teresa* is, again, unavoidable. Whereas the 1979 film was unable to construct a female figure whose sexual desires could be clearly expressed, for fear of alienating the audience, only a decade later this fantasy could readily be presented on screen. Times, therefore, have changed. As we have already seen, Cuba was not detached from the emergence of a 'postmodern condition' in the 1980s even though it was resisted and contested within the country by certain academics and critics. As Davies asserts, this postmodernism became evident and sex is one of its primary concerns.

Postmodern aesthetics in Cuba privilege heterogeneity and subjectivity; a critical awareness of sexuality, sexual preference and sexual discrimination; a reassessment of existing 'minority' cultures (women, gay culture); the creation of new styles ('freakies', roqueros); an engagement with concomitant issues (private sex life of individuals, domestic life, AIDS); a reencounter with belief systems other than Marxism...a deconstruction of sacred myths...

(2000: 112)

By presenting a female character so capable and willing to divulge her sexual desires and to talk about female sexuality in such candid terms, this film does much to subvert traditional notions of sex and sexuality in Cuban film. However, Julia is also a complex character, enmeshed in traditional patriarchal notions of marriage and family. The film, therefore, does not simply allow her, or grant her, some kind of subjectivity or agency. It reveals a web of intricacies concerning both male and female sexual desire, at the same time as understanding that female subjectivity is a complex arena. Its open ending allows for two resolutions, neither of which is ideal.

'ZOÉ' (MARIO CRESPO)

'Zoé' is the only film of the five in the series without voice-over, the narrative depending on dialogue between the two characters: young student Zoé (Leonor Arocha) and a man she calls 'El Acorazado Potemkin' (Leonardo Armas) who has come to find out why she has been missing her classes at university.

Director Mario Crespo was born in San Antonio de los Baños, Havana, and started his film career as a scriptwriter and Assistant Director in University Television from 1972-1975. He then to work for ICAIC, where he worked continuously until 1992 when he left to live in Venezuela, in order to further his filmmaking career, opportunities in Cuba being extremely limited at this time. His credits, prior to 'Zoé', include: co-scriptwriter and assistant director on *Pablo* (1978, Víctor Casaus), assistant director on *Aquella larga noche* (1979, Enrique Pineda Barnet), *Cecilia* (1981, Humberto Solas), *Se Permuta* (1988, Juan Carlos Tabío), and a number of documentary shorts as director such as; 'Camino' (1985), '¿Qué tú crees?' (1986), 'Menos tiempo en la mirada' (1987) and 'No es tiempo de cigüeñas' (1987). 'Zoé' won prizes at festivals in San Sebastian, Huelva and Havana. Crespo currently spends his time making films and teaching about film in both Venezuela and Spain.

Zoé lives in her mother's garage, an agreement they have come to in return for Zoé attending university. The young girl thus enjoys the rare privilege of privacy for young Cubans where space is at a premium. She is the first 'punk' to appear in Cuban cinema, as Álvarez points out (1990: 369), and the space she inhabits has been described by Álvarez as a 'post-modern space of broken furniture, self portraits and graffiti on the walls' (Ibid). This chaotic living area, enhanced by the playing of what Zoé describes as simply 'ruido, ruido' on her tape recorder, and the darkness of her 'lair' that contrasts with the bright sunlight that streams in from outside, is designed to illustrate Zoé's marginality as a non-typical Cuban woman, living outside the norms of Cuban contemporary society. '¿Cómo soy? Distinta. Falsa, sí soy falsa...' she says on a tape recording that 'El Acorazado' listens to.

Mejía describes this film in terms of a game of seduction between the two characters and they do eventually sleep together in a scene that, as Álvarez points out, shows the first full-frontal male nude in Cuban revolutionary cinema (Ibid: 370). As Mejía states: 'Essentially, this film is about the shifting power dynamics embedded in a game of seduction between Zoé and El Acorazado, which presents to the audience a duel between alternative constructions of femininity and the traditional patterns of masculinity' (2006: 18). The game starts when 'El Acorazado' sits on a chair covered in wet paint and Zoé tells him to remove

his trousers. He refuses but later, having also spilt coffee on them, agrees and Zoé takes them in to her mother's house to wash them. The young man is left alone and begins to peruse Zoé's space and listen to tapes she has made of herself philosophising about her life. Hours later, Zoé returns drunk, having completely forgotten about the man in her garage. They continue their sexual power play and eventually she paints a naked portrait of him in return for him not reporting her lack of attendance in class to the university's Dean. 'El Acorazado' appears now to have had his 'armour plating' removed, having succumbed to her charms. But after they sleep together he seems to return to his old self as he gets up and leaves, not wanting to miss a class. As if distancing herself from such dogmatism, Zoé tells him to leave as she has a lot to do and he does so with barely a word between them.

What is at stake in this film is the notion of difference and whether it can be accepted in a traditionally conservative society, particularly concerning individual behaviour. Zoé is openly sexual and promiscuous. When asked by 'El Acorazado' if she has slept with many men she replies, 'Sí con muchos, con muchos. Cientos, miles,' to which he asks: '¿Por qué? – ¿Por qué no, por placer, por vivir, por ser.' In its exploration of the relationship between the traditional as represented by 'El Acorazado' and the new as represented by Zoé, the film examines the postmodern space of difference in the terminology of sex and gender relations. It is perhaps here where the notion of transparency lies. It is not, as Solás argued, through the image of women that we can see, transparently, the image of a society and its problems, but through the relationship between men *and* women. If many of the certainties of the past were being questioned at such a difficult time in Cuban history, as Kapcia suggests (2000: 215), then one of these 'certainties' is that of sexual relations between men and women. If, in a *machista* society men are traditionally seen as the promiscuous seducers then this film complicates that view. Zoé has slept with more partners than 'El Acorazado' and the film highlights her sexuality. When asked if a self-portrait she has created is called *Esperando a mi novio* she replies 'No. *A los hombres*, es una serie.' 'Con esa frase ella rompe, y esto por primera vez en el cine cubano, con el tabú institucionalizado de la monogomía femenina' (Álvarez, 1990: 369). As Álvarez points out, when 'El Acorazado' is left alone by Zoé he

listens to tape recordings she has made that consist of her own 'existential reflections' plus the sound of Zoé masturbating. 'Nuevamente derrumbando así es el falso concepto de la pureza femenina que la sociedad judeo-cristiana le exige a la mujer' (Ibid).

Zoé provides direct and obvious opposition to the hard-line communist youth representative, who comes to visit her at the behest of the Dean of one of Havana's (and the Revolution's) most important institutions, the university. She doesn't attend classes and is a sexually promiscuous woman who stays out late and drinks heavily. She accuses 'El Acorazado' of being boring and, after coming home drunk, compares him to the more interesting people she has been out with. She lives at the margins of a society that, traditionally, has found it difficult to accept such behaviour. Her garage existence illustrates this marginality, her postmodern space hanging on to the edge of the authoritarian space of her mother's house, but entered into by a young (authoritarian) representative of the modernist space of the Revolution. In Ravelo Cabrera's terms Zoé's garage may well represent the 'schizophrenic postmodern space' (1995: 60) of artistic production in Cuba in the 1990s that is oppositional to the totalising narrative of Marxism. As Mateo Palmer argues, from the beginning of the 1990s there was a subversive intent on the part of the *novísimos* (those writers born in Cuba in the 1960s and 1970s), and this film could be seen alongside this kind of artistic production. In Hal Foster's terms (Foster, 1985: x), this would represent a postmodernism of resistance to an inflexibility on the part of revolutionary society to accept difference, particularly concerning female sexual behaviour.

Oppositional and subversive this film might be but it is also inclusive up to a point. As the two worlds unite, the possibility of understanding and acceptance is hinted at, only for this to ultimately collapse. In the terms of Boggs and Pollard, elements of modernity and postmodernity 'coexist within a tense and uneasy equilibrium' (2003: vii) and the film illustrates well this delicate balance.

In terms of a feminist appraisal of 'Zoé' it seems clear that it validates otherness and difference; an important part of a postmodern philosophy, and any critique of the attempt to unify or totalise must surely be welcome by feminist critics searching for new ways to

interpret the world. 'Western reason posits itself as the discourse of the one self-identical subject, thereby blinding us to and in fact delegitimizing the presence of otherness and difference which do not fit into its categories' (Benhabib, 1995: 19). Zoé certainly does not fit into any delineated category; as the film strives to point out she is marginalised. The fact that the authority of marginalisation comes into her chaotic space points at the possibility of some kind of equilibrium being established. Any notion of unity or fixity is rejected by the ending that separates the individuals and leaves Zoé in her own space. The film calls for the acceptance of difference and the possibility of peaceful individual existence.

'Zoé' certainly questions the power relations between men and women (at the level of sexual behaviour), and for this reason alone can be seen as part of a 'post-feminist' aesthetic and, at least for Judith Butler, might represent the disturbance of socially conditioned categories concerning sex (1990: 325). In this film both the male and female masculine subjects are destabilised as traditional notions of masculinity are placed in opposition to alternative notions of feminine subjectivity; which, however, is not presented as whole, fixed or stable. As Mejía states, Zoé's existential musings 'reveal her fears and insecurities about being different from other women' (2006: 18) and yet she appears confident and in control. As in the other films in the series, here the very notion of female subjectivity is being questioned, thus undermining any universalising category of 'women'.

At one point, Zoé says that she could fall in love with the young man, something that might at first seem anathema to the feminist representation of her strong and independent character. But strong and independent people do fall in love and the film is not afraid to examine all of Zoé's possibilities and desires. As Paranagua comments, she appears to feel some kind of abandonment or loss when 'El Acorazado' leaves and such admissions of emotional fragility amidst evidence of strength and power merely add to the proposal that the film is perhaps the most representatively postmodern of all films produced by ICAIC. It is certainly one of the boldest.

Zoé es un filme que trasciende las barreras ideológicas que siempre han dominado en los filmes cubanos donde se protagoniza la experiencia femenina...Zoé es hasta ahora el filme más

atrevido, no sólo por presentar el primer desnudo frontal masculino o a la mujer en control de su destino y cuerpo, sino al llevar a la pantalla pública a un individuo usualmente marginado, transgrediendo los paradigmas sociales de la revolución.

(Álvarez, 1990: 370)

It is interesting that the character Zoé should be presented as an artist. As we have already seen, the film makes an ironic comment about filmic production and film theory by christening the member of the UJC⁴ 'El Acorazado Potemkin'. Constant references to artistic production at all levels are made during the film, from punk music to painting to contemporary US fiction. Such artistic references create another dimension to the film that adds to its value as a postmodern tract via this celebration of so-called low cultural styles and techniques, as Woods would argue (1999: 214). And, by ironically referencing the Potemkin, the very authority of the film institute is being questioned. This self-referencing is acknowledged by the film-maker as Zoé tells 'El Acorazado' that all art has an ugly side, it is not simple, 'no es un postre'.

This challenge to a supposed aesthetic authority is part of a postmodern aesthetic, as Hutcheon agrees. It is, she states, 'both a respectful – if problematized – awareness of cultural continuity and a need to adapt to changing formal demands and social conditions through an ironic contesting of the authority of that same continuity' (1995: 107). 'Zoé' therefore questions the role of ideology itself in the formation of subjectivity. Such questioning of authority continues along different lines in the final film in the series.

'LAURA' (ANA RODRÍGUEZ)

The last in the series deals with another woman in an unhappy marriage but the theme is somewhat different from the first film, 'Isabel'. Here, Laura (Selma Soreghi) remembers her past by looking at old photos of her and her friends during the early years of the Revolution as she prepares to see one of them for the first time since that friend left Cuba for Miami years before. Laura could never understand why her friend Ana, apparently a committed

⁴ Unión de Jóvenes Comunistas.

revolutionary and idealist, had left but she goes to a popular tourist hotel to meet her some twenty years later. It is in the hotel foyer where the majority of the film takes place as the stark differences between Cubans who stayed and those who left are revealed. This film then, deals primarily with the theme of exile from a woman's point of view, as does *Lejanía*. But here the view is from the other side, from that of a Cuban who stayed, and it provides a stark reminder of some of the divisions that exist in contemporary Cuba.

As Laura enters the hotel foyer she is told that she cannot go upstairs as Cubans are not allowed into the tourists' bedrooms. As she waits in the foyer contemplating seeing her friend again, she is surrounded by returning exiles bearing gifts for relatives, *jineteras*,⁵ and tourists trying to buy her a drink, thinking she might be one herself. As she says, bitterly: 'no me gusta este ambiente, todos te miran como si fueras una puta o una gusana'. The receptionist ignores her and everything must be paid in US dollars (illegal for Cubans to use in the late 1980s). Again Laura's distaste for this environment is made clear as she says angrily: 'no sé que piensa la gente que trabaja en estos lugares, como si la situación les diera derecho a tratar, precisamente, a los que nos quedamos con ese desprecio'.

Using photo stills from Laura's past, the film takes a nostalgic look at the early years of the Revolution through her eyes, even using footage from Gutiérrez Alea's 1968 classic, *Memorias del subdesarrollo*, to highlight this use of aesthetic and cultural memory. As émigrés are seen in the hotel foyer bearing gifts from the North for their families who remained in Cuba, the opening scenes of *Memorias* are shown as families are parted, and valuables, including watches, are left behind with the authorities. The irony is not lost on the spectator, as those who left taking nothing are seen returning with everything.

In voice-over Laura says: 'aquí toda elección colectiva le plantea a cada uno un problema moral...es el peso de las circunstancias'. For many Cubans, perhaps the weight of a collective consciousness was too difficult to bear; the only possible choice being a selfish one. The film does not attach blame to those émigrés but it establishes a link between the internal

⁵ Translated as 'jockeys', the term is used to describe women who sleep with tourists for material gains, not always just for money.

dilemmas of an individual Cuban woman and the collective decisions taken that led to the parting of friends and families. Laura's sadness for a life lived in relative hardship and mundanity (she became pregnant with her first boyfriend, has a loveless marriage and works in a boring job as a data processor), contrasts with that of her life before Ana left as part of a group of idealistic friends who would spend a lot of time together.

At first Laura wonders what she is doing in the hotel and decides to leave and forget the meeting with Ana. But she changes her mind saying that it would be easy to think of Ana as an enemy. She re-enters the hotel and takes a drink from the two tourists at the bar whose advances she had previously rejected, deciding to confront this part of what she calls 'nuestra compleja realidad que es la historia efectiva de cada uno de nosotros.' Calling Ana on the phone she defies the restrictions to go up to the room and enters the lift as the film ends with a shot of the two women reunited in an embrace of reconciliation that preceded a similar but much more famous embrace of the same nature in *Fresa y chocolate*.

Once again the film contains a variety of techniques: stills photography, newsreels, letters, voice-over and flashbacks that locate it within the realms of the 'imperfect cinema' of Julio García Espinosa. Via these techniques, the audience is given an insight into Laura's treasured memories of her youth, while at the same time being delivered a satire on a much-debated and extremely sensitive part of contemporary Cuban reality: the disjunction between the Cuba as a tourist destination and the Cuba as lived reality for Cubans.

But once again, as in all the other films in this series, the personal is made very much political as Laura clearly expresses her private viewpoint about an aspect of Cuban contemporary life, created as a by-product of the political system in force. Her distaste for the 'tourist apartheid' that became evident in Cuba at the end of the 1980s, when the US dollar was illegal for Cubans but used as the currency for tourists, when those working in the tourist industry had access to material wealth while those outside this industry did not, is made very clear. Coupled with her nostalgic view of a lost past, plus an examination of the theme of exile, the film is about as politically daring as one could be at such a sensitive time in Cuba's history. As García Borrero comments:

Pocas veces se ha visto en el corto cubano de ficción tanta habilidad para reflejar en tan poco tiempo, la complejidad de las relaciones humanas, en circunstancias tan especiales como la Cuba de finales de los ochenta. Un texto provocador, desmitificador hasta donde uno a veces no se atreve a imaginar.

(2001: 184)

Paranagua believes the film 'offers the most daring political conclusion one could imagine' (1992: 24) as Laura defies the authorities and heads for Ana's room. As Álvarez argues, Laura challenges both established government codes and the patriarchal order in taking a drink from the two men who had previously tried to buy her one and whom she calls 'comemierdas'. As Álvarez points out she is 'doubly marginalized' as both a woman in a patriarchal society that objectifies the female form, and as a Cuban in her own country but treated with a lack of respect and dignity. Laura feels betrayed, both by the system that has let her down and by her friend who abandoned her years before. But, as Mejía argues, Laura faces up to her crisis of identity and challenges her own prejudices against her friend by finally deciding to meet with her.

The film is addressing a very contemporary issue; that of tourism, and in so doing places itself at the vanguard of social commentary. Using a female protagonist it discusses a dilemma that, even today, tears at the heart of Cuban society, creating social divisions that are anathema to Cuban socialist philosophy. It appears then that Solás' idea of using women protagonists to express society's dilemmas, as they are more transparently vulnerable than men, is being adhered to in 'Laura'. This is true to an extent but the film also breaks with this notion by placing more importance on the subjectivity of the individual and how she has been affected by aspects of Cuban revolutionary society, rather than on how that individual can fit neatly into that society.

Laura is suffering a crisis of conscience as Mejía suggests, this crisis being caused by a series of circumstances that have led to various inequalities becoming evident due to the introduction to the island of tourism on a large scale. Coupled with her friend's exile, Laura is

notably confused and upset by her own personal circumstances and by the direction in which she feels Cuban society is heading.

Fundamentally, whilst presenting a pertinent socio-political issue such as exile, that upon a superficial reading appears to be something external to Laura's identity, this film prefers to explore deeply her own feelings, and the intimate stories of discontent and betrayal that she feels as a result of her closest friend's exile.

(Mejía, 2006: 21)

This crisis of subjectivity forms part of the postmodern trajectory of Cuba in the late 1980s as previous values, seen as absolute, are being eroded. The figure of Laura represents a postmodern disillusionment with a master narrative that has not produced the promised ideological utopia. In its obvious criticism of the possibility of delivering a socialist subject, the film, in Ravelo Cabrera's terms, 'captures and problematizes' the tensions within Cuba's contemporary social modernity, via a study of one female's experience of the economic opening to foreign capital (1995: 66). For Laura, the experience is a negative one, seemingly having no access to this capital, and her nostalgia for happier times (within the Revolution) is made clear. But in her final confrontation with her conscience, in her transgression of society's given codes of conduct, she recuperates and renovates the classic values of modernity, making them 'post-modern'. In a symbolic re-entering of the hotel foyer, after leaving it and abandoning the idea of meeting up with Ana, she reformulates her own disturbed subjectivity and re-enters the dialectic to confront both her past in the form of her friendship with Ana, and her present, in the form of the negative vision she holds about the Cuban society in which she lives.

In Jameson's terms, the film traces a nostalgic path back to Laura's missing past, in a world where, for Laura, history has been destroyed by a confusion of ideologies. The spectator's sense of temporality is deliberately confused in this film by way of the nostalgic flashbacks using photographic stills and newsreels that have been taken from *Memorias del subdesarrollo*. The confusion is both historical and aesthetic and mirrors Laura's confused

state as she tries to come to terms with what seems for her to be the 'end of everything' (Jameson, 1991: 1).

Conclusion to Chapter Six

Catherine Davies argues that the subversive intent in *¡Plaf!* is stronger than many critics have observed and I am inclined to agree, with the caveat that this subversive intent is brilliantly disguised by Tabío. Old values are deconstructed while new ones are created via a recycling process of pastiche and parody. This is postmodernism Hal Foster style, resisting and questioning established cultural codes (Foster, 1985: x). The polysemic nature of the script that circulates around various characters, rather than working in a uni-directional linear fashion, has the effect of highlighting a society of multiple conflicts and behaviours, of contradictions and hetero-glossia. It manages a brilliant balancing act between the questioning of the authority of state institutions (including ICAIC), while at the same time supporting the Revolution as a valid national project.

Is it a postmodern film? It certainly has many postmodern stylistic and political elements and appeared in Cuba at a significant moment of transition, one that saw a break with a linear trajectory of history and a change in Cuba's perception of itself. This schizophrenic space is highlighted in this film as previously held cultural certainties are both supported and exploited. There is irreverence for authority, rebelliousness and a chaos that Boggs and Pollard consider to be part and parcel of a postmodern film (2003: viii). In its references to sexual politics it makes an essential critique of both male and female subjects, both at times adhering to and questioning the emancipatory discourses of Marxism. When Clarita finally achieves her goal of being recognised as a top scientist, having the new polymer she has developed from pig excrement mass-produced in a purpose-built factory, she is told it has to be done in an impossibly short amount of time to be ready for 'National Chemists' Day'. Even when her (feminist) goal is achieved, it is done so under the burden of a heavy-handed bureaucracy planned and directed by men. But if *machismo* is the foot soldier of this hegemony then this film, in its disturbance of the 'rules' of patriarchal subjectivity,

attempts to halt its march through history via a disruption of some of the 'universal truths' of the early years of the Revolution.

As Paranagua comments, the films in *Mujer transparente* all show various tensions at play in contemporary Cuban society, tensions created by tourism, lost illusions, bureaucratisation of the elites and wasted energies (1992: 24). In all of them, the central character is a woman, a 'socially representative figure' (Álvarez, 1990; 371) who has to live with the many complexities and contradictions of Cuba in the late 1980s. In contrast to previous films where women have been the main protagonist, here the focus is on their individual subjectivity and how this has been questioned by a constantly changing and evolving society. If *Retrato de Teresa* and *De cierta manera* in particular, show women coming to terms with their position as women within the new Cuba of the Revolution, here this position itself is put under scrutiny as five individual women are presented as very different characters, with very different dilemmas, but with one thing in common; they are all women living within the terms of a Revolution that has given them a great deal but that also asks a lot in return.

If there is a common thread in the five films it is one of a crisis of subjectivity. The self-reflection of 'Isabel' as the protagonist questions her role as wife and mother; the sense of loss, despair and solitude created in 'Adriana', a woman constrained by patriarchal traditions; the sense of confusion and anxiety over a woman's sexual desire created in 'Julia'; the chaos and difference as suggested in 'Zoé', and the sense of disappointment for a lost utopia in 'Laura', all create a postmodern sense of the 'casualty' proposed by Jameson. The casualty here is epistemological. The modernist search for truth is displaced by the knowledge that there is not one singular reality, but a series of realities. In the words of Foucault, the 'actions, thoughts and desires' of the women in these five short films are developed by 'proliferation, juxtaposition, and disjunction' (Harvey, 1984: XIII).

How politically effective the films are from a feminist point of view is debatable, as not only do they question the treatment of women in contemporary Cuban society but they also question the very notion of the existence of female subjectivity. For some feminists this can

be politically damaging. For Nancy Fraser and Linda Nicholson, for example, the concentration on the metaphysical perspective may detract from the social critique (Fraser and Nicholson, 1990: 19). But the use of pastiche, juxtaposition and irony in the five films creates a real sense of criticism on a grand scale, and the harsh questioning of the female subject has the effect of destabilising the idea of the masculine subject thereby exposing traditional notions of masculine power. Female subjects do exist, but the films question their construction by delivering a variety of subjectivities, none of which are representative of any universal category of 'woman'. The films are 'open' and 'libidinal' in the words of Judith Butler (Butler, 1990: 327) and as such expose the universal truth posited by Marxist discourse as a mask of power.

Conclusion

One cannot overstate the impact that the crisis of the early 1990s had on Cuba, across all areas of society. The collapse of the Socialist Bloc caused a conceptual and theoretical crisis in Cuba concerning Marxist-Leninist theory. As Acanda has noted:

En Cuba, desde 1986, cuando se inició lo que se conoció como 'Proceso de Rectificación', se desplegaron procesos de recomposición económica, política y social, que marcaron nuevos espacios, prioridades, tácticas y estructuras, y que recibieron una nueva dirección tras la desaparición de la Unión Soviética. Todo ello provocó la existencia en Cuba, a partir de estos años, de una percepción generalizada, en todos los niveles y sectores sociales, sobre la necesidad de transformaciones. La discusión se estableció en torno a cómo entender las dimensiones, objetivos y dirección de las mismas.

(1996: 6)

This stage of economic, political and ideological difficulty is marked by the crisis of the traditional Marxist paradigm. Ravelo Cabrera speaks of a 'transgression' of ideological thinking:

...no como una conspiración o maldición sobre nuestros códigos y valores más consagrados...sino como redefinición de ellos en un contexto socio-histórico y cultural que, por encima de nuestros deseos y aspiraciones legítimas, han mutado violentamente y necesitan ser recontinuados y readecuados a este más constatado que declarado mundo 'tardomoderno'.

(1995: 61)

The necessity, therefore, to revitalise Marxism as a revolutionary theory and a theory for the Revolution demanded that its followers look for the creative side of it, rather than remain with the dogmatic Marxism that had dominated up until then in certain intellectual circles, and in the politico-ideology of the nation in general. In this context such theorists as Gramsci, as Chanan points out, were being revisited in an attempt to re-evaluate the entire revolutionary process.¹

¹ Chanan, M. (2000). At: <http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/nepantla/v002/2.2chanan.html> (accessed 02/12/08). Acanda agrees:

But with the need to save the Revolution and socialism, the specific cases of so-called marginalised groups, such as women and the black population, were, for a short time, relegated and lumped into the notion of the 'Cuban Nation'; national unity being the common objective. This led, for a time, to a crisis of ideas as well as material concerns and an absence of new theories and lack of knowledge related to areas such as gender relations. However, there is today a growing body of research in the area that reflects a changing attitude to the gender debate in Cuba. For example, Cuban studies on masculinity have a short and recent history, but illustrate well both the changing affinities amongst the nation's intellectual classes, and the will to break through the barrier of the Marxist modernist paradigm that viewed gender inequality as a problem that could be solved by giving women access to employment. González Pagés, without doubt one of the most authoritative voices on this theme on the island, notes that it was not until the final decade of the last century that these studies started to have a presence in the narrow field of Cuban social sciences, and as such they are mere first approximations. The studies include work by Patricia Arés (Universidad de La Habana), Ramón Rivero (Universidad Central de Las Villas Marta Abreu), María Teresa Díaz (Centro Nacional de Educación Sexual, CENESEX), and Mayda Álvarez (Centro de Estudios de la Federación de Mujeres Cubanas, FMC). These works look at the themes of paternity, sexuality and the social construction of masculinity.²

Alongside these studies, workshops have started to develop with the express purpose of promoting a debate on the theme of gender. Such workshops, cited by González Pagés are: 'Masculinidades y violencia en los jóvenes' (2002), del Proyecto María Luisa Dolz de la Escuela de Capacitación de la FMC, Fe del Valle, y 'Masculinidades y cultura de paz' (2000-

'El derrumbe de la interpretación mecanicista del marxismo, y lo que es más importante aún, de la interpretación mecanicista sobre el socialismo, abrió el camino y preparó las condiciones para que muchos volvieran su mirada hacia Gramsci. Su relectura ahora entre nosotros está caracterizada por la necesidad de criticar al stalinismo y de buscar los elementos para un nuevo comienzo con el socialismo. Son estos años, los de fines de la década del 80 y principios de los 90, de redefinición de todo un conjunto de espacios, de funciones de instituciones, y de las relaciones sociales mismas. La percepción sobre Gramsci, su utilización o su no utilización, y el carácter de esa utilización, estará condicionada por la posición de cada uno con respecto a estas transformaciones que se dan en la sociedad cubana' (Acanda, 1996: 6).

² See the following studies: Arés, P. (1996); Rivero Pino, R. (2000); Díaz Álvarez, M. T. (1999); Álvarez Suárez, M. (2001). González Pagés, J. C. (2003) and (2002).

2004), de la Comisión Género y Paz, del Movimiento Cubano por la Paz (González Pagés, 2004: 1). They have as their objective a new socialisation of masculinity outside of traditional cultural limits. Developed by social workers and university students, amongst others, they constitute a space in which these groups can unite to debate real social problems and propose alternatives to these situations.

En estos grupos aprendemos a intimar, descubrimos y contamos cosas de nuestras vidas, algo que en otras circunstancias no haríamos. Es muy raro que un hombre, ante cualquier problema de trabajo, de estrés, o depresión vaya a llorar al hombro de un amigo para confesar sus frustraciones. Como se nos construye socialmente para rivalizar, regularmente el hombre debe cuidarse de no tener puntos endebles. Ni siquiera a los amigos se puede mostrar algún grado de vulnerabilidad.

(Ibid: 10)

The work by Patricia Arés illustrates the ways in which both men and women have been victims of the Revolution's old system of ideas, stemming from, at times, dogmatic Marxist principles. In an interesting analysis Arés makes reference to how the traditional patriarchal family was seriously affected by the already mentioned Marxist modernising social practices that gave many women economic independence, power and security; but that, at the same time created new conflicts, prejudiced the stability of the couple and caused an increase in divorce and single mothers. Dalia Acosta states that, 'since the triumph of the Cuban Revolution in 1959, the authorities have encouraged women's participation in traditionally male-dominated spheres, particularly in the world of work, which has caused a relative shift in power away from men...'³

These changes led to crises of both masculine and feminine identity, as Arés points out (1997: 7), such crises being perfectly illustrated in the films analysed in this thesis. In their struggle for parity some women interpreted this as the need to behave in a traditionally masculine way, for example continuously changing partners or maintaining multiple sexual relations. For men, their social contract with the Revolution has developed the sense that

³ Acosta, D. (2007). At: www.ipsnews.net/news.asp?idnews=40337 (accessed 15/04/08).

simply being a man can bring its own problems and creates a crisis of identity. As Arés shows, in general men feel that they ‘no son machistas’ when they undertake the domestic duties (1997: 8). What does not seem to occur is the understanding that these tasks are not specifically male or female; the feeling appears to remain that any domestic duties undertaken by men are done to help women out.

So, despite the attempts by the Revolution to erase certain negative tendencies regarding male-female relations (specifically addressed in the 1975 *Código de Familia* for example, and debated across the full range of Cuban culture, including cinema), traditional values concerning relations between men and women continued in Cuba even through the 1990s.

A partir del precedente análisis empírico, se puede concluir que a pesar de los esfuerzos educativos por ofrecer información que facilite la formación de concepciones más humanas y universales en cuanto a la sexualidad, y en particular respecto a las singularidades y similitudes de uno y otro género, todavía la fuerza de la costumbre, de la cultura y de los valores tradicionales es suficiente como para confundir y mantener criterios que desfavorecen especialmente a la mujer, y que a su vez limitan al hombre en su pleno desarrollo.

(Ibid: 39)

The economic crisis of the 1990s and its difficulties and restrictions (the fall in average salaries, the insufficient growth in numbers of childcare places, the reduction of transport, the power cuts, and the increased complexity of domestic life as a result, for example) impacted more on the one who works both outside and inside the home; and that continues to be the woman.

On 31 March and 1 April 2008, a conference entitled ‘Taller De Equidad y Violencia de Género en Los Medios de Comunicación’ took place, organised by ICAIC, la Cátedra de la Mujer de la Universidad de La Habana and la Cátedra Mirta Aguirre del Instituto Internacional de Periodismo José Martí. This bulletin from ICAIC states the objectives of the conference:

...crear de un espacio de debate y reflexión sobre la importancia de la perspectiva de género en los medios de comunicación, potenciando la utilización del patrimonio filmico cubano a partir de su digitalización y recuperación; desarrollar la sensibilización hacia el tema que redunde en la aplicación del enfoque de género a los medios de comunicación y la producción audiovisual; así como facilitar el intercambio de ideas y experiencias que generen estrategias comunes para lograr la equidad de género en los medios de comunicación.⁴

The conference developed four themes with different titles: 'El género como construcción sociocultural; Género y medios de comunicación: Mujeres miradas/miradas de mujer; Una mirada al audiovisual desde la perspectiva de género; y Violencia de género en el audiovisual'.⁵ Such a conference would not be out of place in a US or UK university and illustrates how far the interaction between issues of gender and Cuban cinema has come since 1968, when Humberto Solás made his comments about the use of female characters in his films to 'transparently' reflect national concerns, comments that were entirely appropriate in their day. The importance of the period cannot be overestimated. Solás made his comments at a time when the ideological left had a powerful voice throughout the world and when Cuba and Cuban cinema were taking centre stage in the production of that ideology. His remarks reflected the relationship between Marxism and the gender debate, where gender oppression is seen as class oppression.⁶

The conference also illustrates the progress in terms of the type and breadth of intellectual study concerning gender relations that has occurred in Cuba since the late 1960s, much of that progress stemming from an engagement with this complex subject (however misjudged at times) by the Cuban film institute.

Films such as *Lucía*, *Memorias del subdesarrollo*, *Retrato de Teresa*, *De cierta manera* and *Hasta cierto punto*, it can be argued, fit within Humberto Solás' Marxist view of women and Revolution. They are all films that, to a greater or lesser degree, place the work of the

⁴ At: <http://www.cubacine.cu/boletin/index.htm#convoca> CONVOCATORIA (accessed 01/04/08).

⁵ Ibid

⁶ This is discussed in more detail in the Introduction (for more on the debate between Marxism and feminism, see Sargent, 1981).

Revolution higher than women's struggle within it. That is not to say that the films do not question aspects of the revolutionary process concerning gender issues, as, in many instances, they do.

De cierta manera is, perhaps, the paradigm of Marxist-feminist cinema. It produces a dialectical relationship between the film and the spectator that aims at raising (and ultimately changing) the spectator's consciousness to fit within the Revolution's aims and objectives concerning gender issues. In its elaboration of a modernist aesthetic, using the filmic techniques discussed by Julio García Espinosa in his essay 'Por un cine imperfecto' it approaches the theme of *machismo* in Cuban society from a historical point of view; framing its subjects within a revolutionary perspective that places the blame for *machismo* at the feet of history, at the feet of the Spanish knife-wielding, brutish colonisers. Using its grand theme of reconstruction it highlights a country in a rapid process of modernisation at the same time as using a modernist aesthetic to drive home its point – that the progressive forces of the socialist Revolution can help eradicate the negative forces of *machismo*, and can produce the desired equality between men and women. It is not a complex message, although the style of the film conveys complexity and subtlety. Using a variety of aesthetic forms and techniques, it develops the idea that, through work, men and women can become equal. Many of the scenes are staged either in the bus depot where Mario works or in Yolanda's school. Work is one of the primary characters of the film. When Mario makes an attempt to save his and Yolanda's relationship he stands outside the school where she works, waiting for her to leave, before he can approach her. As they walk off in discussion, and are seen at a distance as the camera moves up to show the spectator the modern housing built by the Revolution, the modernising message of physical and spiritual rebuilding is clear. Just as the Revolution is rebuilding the material and spiritual lives of its subjects, so Sara Gómez takes part in the modern construction of Cuban cinema in the early to mid-1970s, after the experimentalism of the Sixties.

Retrato de Teresa, in the late 1970s, continues that process, but this time makes pointed remarks about the lack of progress made concerning male-female relations after nearly 20

years of revolution. Still placing the weight of the blame for *machismo* at history's door, it does manage to critique the way in which the Revolution has placed the burden of change on women's shoulders. Allowing them access to work and public activity is all very well, but the failure of the Revolution to change men's attitudes is highlighted in the film's denouement as Teresa's possible infidelity is starkly brought to the surface, only to be pushed aside quickly for fear of alienating the audience. As we witness Teresa's fall into a state of anxiety and stress, taking time off work when her marriage breaks up, we see her as bearer of the family's burden, while Ramón continues his affairs and progression towards a job promotion and a new life in Santiago. The strength that Teresa has shown throughout the film emerges, as Martín-Barbero asserts, from *machismo* itself (1993: 200), filtered through a vision of maternity that is wrapped up in a traditional view of the family. 'Maternity is the explanatory and projective symbol of popular awareness of the family. The popular historical role is meaningful to the extent that the family functions in the interior of the social movement as the structure of organisation and the motivational motor of hope' (Ibid: 199). So the image of woman (Teresa) as bearer of the family burden 'paradoxically cloaks and protects *machismo*' (Ibid: 200).

Teresa is elucidated as an icon, the Cuban 'super-mother' who apparently gains her independence at the expense of a pre-revolutionary *machista* past, such traditions no longer being viable in the modernising Marxist revolution. But the creation of such iconography, particularly in such stark opposition to the image of the *macho*, as argued in Chapter Four, has the tendency to position the viewing subject as apparently unitary, 'one of the central ideological operations of dominant cinema' (Kuhn, 1982: 47). It therefore refuses to acknowledge the possibilities of the multiple and sits comfortably within the defined parameters of the Marxist, modernising process.

In *Hasta cierto punto*, an attempt is made to rework the thinking behind *De cierta manera*, only this time at the level of the intellectual rather than the working classes. Ultimately unsuccessful the film stands between two aesthetic positions (Eisensteinian pathos and Brechtian distancing) and becomes a confusion of sympathies that exposes itself as

party to the very chauvinistic mechanisms it attempts to critique. It is evidently a film about *machismo* made by a man who had little understanding of the intricacies of the subject area, whose version of feminism was deeply influenced by a Marxist reading. It attempts to sit within the parameters of Marxist-feminist cinema but at the same time develops a sentimental romance couched in the (male) language of mainstream cinema; the central character, Oscar, 'going transcendental' at the end as he imagines his love interest, Lina, leaving him.⁷ The film attempts to illustrate how *machismo* is a problem that transcends classes, but fails to critique the mechanisms of classic cinematic viewing pleasure that retain patriarchal power.

Lejanía is a much braver film than *Hasta cierto punto*, both in form and content. The silence from the critics is evidence enough of its powerful impact in Cuban intellectual circles. Without the sentimental romance of Gutiérrez Alea's film it develops a more radical aesthetic; the claustrophobic *mise-en-scène* drawing the spectator in to become almost a part of the family reunion that tragically reflects a Cuban national dilemma – exile and the break-up of families who are powerless to change their situations. But the film, although it can easily be read as a reflection of national concerns, posits a reformulation of the figure of the mother using a postmodern sensibility that not only reflects aspects of nationhood, but helps to construct evolving ideas on gender that began to appear in the mid-1980s. It is a film that calls for tolerance and understanding, using the figure of the mother as a transparent referent of a difficult problem. However, in so doing it represents a departure from the traditional (Cuban) construction of motherhood and forms part of the general re-evaluation of Cuban (even Latin American) cultural politics at this time.

This re-evaluation continues in *¡Plaf!*, a film that provokes a Cuban audience to critically question its own reality. Using black humour it is able to get to the heart of the fractured female subject in its portrayal of another mother, Concha, whose demise at the end of the film adds to the (re)-construction of new sensibilities concerning gender in Cuba. The

⁷ During my presentation of a paper on this film at the University of Nottingham in June 2007, critic Bernard McGuirk made this pertinent comment regarding the ending of the film and Oscar's reaction to the loss of his extra-marital love interest.

references to *Retrato de Teresa* are too strong to be ignored as Teresa ‘reappears’ as Concha (both played by actor Daysi Granados). When Teresa walks out of her husband’s life at the end of the earlier film, the spectator is left pondering her fate. But, such was the power exerted over her by the mores of a *machista* society, that she became a product of those values, her paranoia and anxiety re-surfacing in the later character in *¡Plaf!* (reflecting similar psychological trauma for Teresa) illustrating the difficulties Teresa had in coming to terms with those values while, at the same time, attempting to resist them. Concha, in her attempts to resist the postmodern sensibilities of the new Cuba, and its reworking of issues of male-female relations reflected in the non-traditional relationship between Concha’s son and his wife, is killed by her fear of this new life, this new Cuba. She is a ‘casualty’, using Jameson’s term (Jameson, 1991: XI), of postmodern fractured subjectivities; but a necessary one if a new and better Cuba is to emerge out of the chaos created in the new world order. In effect, *¡Plaf!* provides a critique of the notion of progress expressed in *Retrato de Teresa*, the earlier film’s protagonist emerging as a tired and broken product of the project of Marxist modernity, to be replaced by the emerging product of a country on the threshold of enormous change, in the guise of young scientist, Clarita.

With its knowing self-reflexivity and allusion to a variety of cinematic styles and conventions, along with its critique of a number of aspects of contemporary Cuban society, *¡Plaf!* can be described as a postmodern narrative. Set in real locations it appears to wish to reflect the reality of life in Cuba, while at the same time subverting this very proposition using comedy and the absurd – the unreal existing within the real. The modernist voice in *Retrato de Teresa* is dispensed with to be replaced by a multiplicity of voices, none more powerful than the representation of the ‘new’ Cuban woman (Clarita).

This representation is taken even further in the final film analysed, *Mujer transparente*. If, as Arés asserts, the social changes that occurred in Cuba after the collapse of the Soviet Union led to a crisis in feminine identity, then this is clearly seen in the concluding film in this thesis. The five female protagonists clearly illustrate the breakdown in the Revolution’s dominant view of what it is to be ‘Woman’. This is a film that breaks through the classic

Marxist paradigm of gender that views women in terms of class rather than sex. If Cuban postmodernism inheres in its critical questioning of previously held Marxist-modernising values, related to the unifying possibilities of a type of egalitarian discourse that perceived a category 'Woman' (as addressed in *De cierta manera*), then the multiplicity of voices, the postmodern bricolage, fragmentation, and the representation of an ambiguous and uncertain way of living make *Mujer transparente* perhaps the most postmodern of all Cuban films up to this point. The title is, in itself, a postmodern irony in that it makes reference to Solas's comments on *Lucía*. It reworks and demystifies the long held notion of the 'transparent woman' of Cuban cinema. By presenting not one but five different Cuban women, the film resists any totalising narrative that might wish to portray the *essential* Cuban woman. In its questioning of both male and female subjectivities it asks many questions and does not try to provide easy answers. By provoking the notion of the 'crisis of historicity' (Jameson, 1991: 25), via the crises being suffered by the female protagonists living within the revolutionary process, it both helps to construct and reflect new visions concerning gender relations in Cuban society.

This type of 'resisting' narrative went a step further in 1991 with the film *Alicia en el pueblo de maravillas* (Daniel Díaz Torres), in which a strong, independent, central female character (played by Thais Valdés, who played Clarita in *¡Plaf!*), single-handedly defeats a vicious dictator in a strange land called *Maravillas*, in a questioning of the dominant political discourse. The film was condemned in the newspaper *Granma* as pessimistic; full of 'defeatism, hopelessness and bitterness' (Paranagua, 1997: 167), and was withdrawn from the cinemas after four days.

The collapse of socialism in Europe, as Paranagua points out, was a crossroads for Cuban cinema, Julio García Espinosa resigning as President of ICAIC in 1991 (Ibid: 168). But Cuban cinema continued apace, now requiring external funding from foreign production companies to survive. Between 1990 and 1995 ICAIC made approximately 175 fictional releases, either features or shorts. This demonstrates that the collapse of socialism in Europe did not signify an end to the Cuban film institute, merely a reworking of its methods and

practices. If expressions of the modernising practices of a Marxist revolution can be witnessed in *De cierta manera*, *Hasta cierto punto*, and *Retrato de Teresa*, then those of a resisting postmodern discourse as Hal Foster describes (1985: viii-xiv), can be seen in *Lejanía*, *¡Plaf!*, and *Mujer transparente*, expressions that disturb, provoke and question the earlier Marxist values.

...through most of the twentieth century, modernism was both depicted in and delivered from the screen to the city, defined in architectural styles and urban sociological profiles. At the end of the century, however, postmodern cinema, as a mode of representation and creative narrative, emerged to challenge this dynamic...it sought either to recognize the inherent nature of fragmented realities or to deliberately project fragmentation so as to unsettle stable beliefs'

(AlSayyad, 2006: 3)

Modernist cinema also unsettled stable beliefs and, indeed, all of the films analysed in this thesis have certain unsettling elements. The difference between them is that, while *De cierta manera*, *Hasta cierto punto*, and *Retrato de Teresa* all question the fixed beliefs of a pre-revolutionary era, *Lejanía*, *¡Plaf!* and *Mujer transparente* disturb and question the modernising Marxist practices of the Revolution itself.

In terms of creating a corpus of films that clearly expresses concerns about male-female relations in Cuba, there has yet to appear a period as rich and as powerful as the late 1970s-early 1990s, a period in which, if viewed through the prism of the discourse on gender relations, Cuban cinema moved from dialectical discussions of the possibilities of a modernist utopia to examinations of the realities of a postmodern dystopia.

The postmodern condition has often been defined as one of fragmentation. If modernity is about a unified narrative, a single, all pervasive truth, post-modernity is a condition of several narratives, and many simultaneously valid truths. If the modernist city was one with a single centre that held more or less the same meaning for all its inhabitants, the postmodern city offers varied cultural and spatial experiences and no single unified vision...while a postmodern utopia would appear to be impossible, there is every possibility for a modernist utopia. Indeed, modernism – and especially the modernist urban experience as depicted in film – frequently

regresses into utopianism. The postmodern condition then only appears dystopic when contrast with the idealized modern experience.

(Ibid: 123)

Cinematic modernism is characterised by fragmentation, and all of the films illustrate aesthetic elements that could be termed 'modernist' or that could represent what is considered to be 'postmodern' in cinema. As we have seen it is not easy to define the formal characteristics of 'modernist' or 'postmodern' cinema. As such any purely formal analysis of the films is necessarily limited, the historical and social context being at least equally important. If Cuba entered a modern period of socio-cultural development with the onset of revolution, attempting to do away with certain negative tendencies that were a hangover of pre-revolutionary (pre-modern) times, then this is reflected in the earlier films in this thesis (*De cierta manera*, *Retrato de Teresa* and *Hasta cierto punto*), that all play a part in the construction of a Marxist-modernising revolutionary process. If they are 'modern' it is because they baulk at certain traditions regarding gender relations in Cuba. If they are examples of 'modernist' film-making then this may be an aesthetic by-product of their involvement in the construction of the modern, for they also contain certain aesthetic sensibilities that could also be described as 'postmodern'. But whether they are aesthetically modernist or postmodern is not the central issue. The important point is that, via their treatment of gender relations, they help to construct the type of modern, progressive, revolutionary society desired by the Revolution. Cuba's modernity was never purely its own, as Cuban artist Reinaldo Pagán Ávila claims it was.⁸ After all, Marxism was not a Cuban invention. But the earlier films analysed do express the Cuban desire to forge a specific brand of modernity pertinent to the island's particular socio-historical situation.

The later films (*Lejanía*, *¡Plaf!* and *Mujer transparente*) operate somewhat differently, and both reflect and help to construct a reformulation of Marxist-modernising principles through their treatment of gender relations. This period of re-evaluation began in the 1980s in

⁸ Cuban artist Reinaldo Pagán Ávila in an interview with Reinaldo Cedeño Pineda (translated by Ellen Rosenzweig). At: www.cubanart.org.english/pagan_interview.htm (accessed 23/01/08).

Cuba with the Rectification Campaign and, subsequently, with the difficulties caused by the collapse of socialism in Europe. For some critics, such as Ravelo Cabrera (1995: 61) and Acanda (1996: 6), this reworking of Marxist-modernising principles can be called 'postmodern' and reflects the need to keep the Revolution alive albeit in a different form.

As we have seen, the gender debate in Cuba has moved on, some of the current discussions emanating from a critical, liberal, viewpoint that would have been out of place in the 1970s and 1980s; and so too its representation and production in film. The realisation that a unifying, (deleted term modernist here) Marxist approach to this area, (relevant as it was in the seventies and eighties), does not reflect, nor can it help to construct, Cuba's new realities, has meant that new studies are emerging that, in line with 'Western' debates in the area, agree that a pluralistic approach to aspects of gender is necessary.

This does not mean the end of the Cuban Revolution. Indeed, its survival is perhaps partly due to the greater acceptance of the necessity for critical questioning and pluralistic discourse. The recent debates on gender relations illustrate that this is an ongoing process in Cuba. This pluralistic discourse is necessary both for the survival of the Revolution and for a more constructive debate on male-female relations. If that debate was hugely productive in the 1970s and early 1980s it is because the films at that time provoked a (Marxist-modernising) questioning of traditional beliefs that were difficult to displace in a society entrenched in a *machista* past. Those films, then, were entirely appropriate for the times. But new histories required new solutions, and Cuba's changing socio-historical circumstances of the mid-late 1980s demanded new approaches; approaches that continued to question pre-revolutionary negative tendencies, but that also provoked a critical questioning of the manner in which the Revolution dealt with gender relations in cinema (and elsewhere) up to this point. A veritable *mis-en-abyme*, then, of questioning within questioning, triggered by a collapse of firmly held socialist beliefs, was perhaps the Cuban postmodern reality at the beginning of the 1990s. Via the prism of gender relations in Cuban cinema, this *mis-en-abyme* is made visual. Films within films, women within 'Woman', stories within '(his)-stories', is how Cuban cinema, between 1974 and 1990, engaged both with the modern and the

postmodern. If one of the casualties in the emergence of postmodern sensibilities in Cuba is the history of its treatment of gender relations, then that same history is what informed and, ultimately, helped to create Cuba's postmodern cinematic experiences at the beginning of the 1990s.

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Blue Velvet (1986, David Lynch)

Body Heat (1981, Lawrence Kasdan)

Brazil (1985, Terry Gilliam)

Bringing Up Baby (1938, Howard Hawks)

Caught (1949, Max Ophüls)

Citizen Kane (1941, Orson Welles)

Daisy Miller (1974, Peter Bogdanovich)

El Cid (1961, Anthony Mann)

Gentlemen Prefer Blondes (1953, Howard Hawks)

Hannah and Her Sisters (1986, Woody Allen)

Jaws (1975, Steven Spielberg)

Jeanne Dielman 23, quai du commerce, 1080 Bruxelles (1976, Chantal Akerman)

Kiss of the Spider Woman (1985, Hector Babenco)

Letter from an Unknown Woman (1948, Max Ophüls)

Marnie (1964, Alfred Hitchcock)

Morocco (1930, Josef von Sternberg)

Now Voyager (1943, Irving Rapper)

Orlando (1993, Tilda Swanson)

Pulp Fiction (1994, Quentin Tarantino)

Raging Bull (1980, Martin Scorsese)

Rebecca (1940, Alfred Hitchcock)

Sex, Lies and Videotape (1989, Steven Sodebergh)

Spartacus (1960, Stanley Kubrick)
Stardust Memories (1980, Woody Allen)
Star Wars (1977, George Lucas)
Stella Dallas (1937, King Vidor)
The Elephant Man (1980, David Lynch)
The Reckless Moment (Max Ophüls, 1949)
Thelma and Louise (1991, Ridley Scott)
Un chien andalou (1928, Luis Buñuel/Salvador Dalí)
Une femme est une femme (1961, Jean-Luc Godard)
Who Framed Roger Rabbit? (1988, Robert Zemeckis)
Wild At Heart (1990, David Lynch)
Wings of Desire (1987, Wim Wenders)
Zelig (1983, Woody Allen)