

When the Soviets Came to Stay: the Soviet  
Influence on Cuban Cultural Institutions, 1961  
to 1987

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Thesis submitted to the University of Nottingham for  
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

April 2017

## Abstract

Cuba's post-1960 political and economic relationship with the USSR has long been debated, especially the extent to which the connection shaped the Cuban Revolution. Consequently, readings of the occasionally conflictive relationship between Cuba's state authorities and its cultural world have often relied on stereotypes inherited from Western interpretations of the USSR or the 1948-89 Socialist Bloc; such readings assuming that cultural policy was clearly defined and enforced by Soviet-style apparatchiks or Castro. While perhaps understandable for 1971-6, when the National Cultural Council (CNC) was led by ex-members of the pre-1959 communist party, recent research suggests that we look beyond the surface to see that 'policy' was often empirically formed and constantly challenged. Yet, perhaps due to those common assumptions, little has been written about real Soviet influence on Cuban culture, and different sub-periods during the 30-year Cuban-Soviet alliance have largely been ignored.

This thesis seeks to address this oversight in the scholarship of Cuba and the USSR by examining the Soviet influence on Cuban culture, specifically the theatre and the visual arts, between 1961 and 1986. It interrogates the ways in which culture was linked to the political priorities and nation building goals of the revolutionary leadership and how these differed from, or coincided with, the aims of the Soviet government. In doing so, it analyses the way in which culture and cultural interactions between the two countries were organised. Using evidence from materials (magazines, pamphlets, work plans, declarations) gathered from archival work in Havana and Moscow, and supported by interviews with Cuban artists and intellectuals, this study establishes that culture acted as a discursive space in which deliberations about the nature of the Cuban Revolution could take place in a way that they could not in other spheres. It also concludes that, throughout the period studied, the USSR occupied a conflicting position, acting as both a model to be learned from but also a force to be resisted. Furthermore, this thesis makes two important contributions to existing knowledge of the Cuban-Soviet relationship. First, that the 1970s, and the period known as the *quiquenio gris* in particular, were not 'Soviet' but rather nationalist and *macho*. Second, that the most 'Soviet' period in terms of structure, organisation and demands placed on artists was the 1980s when the component roles of art were separated as part of the revolutionary government's ongoing fight for independence.

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to express my utmost gratitude to my two supervisors Professor Antoni Kapcia and Dr Polly McMichael. Tony and Polly, you have been the best; always interested, always supportive, always pushing me to go further, and always a joy to work with. Working with you both has not only made this thesis what it is but it has also made me a better person. Thank you.

I have also had the privilege of being part of an incredibly supportive and rewarding PhD community that has been a constant source of inspiration and support. I am particularly grateful to: Stef, Jesse, Laura, Lauren, Helen, Gesine, Nicola, Em, Margarita, Laura, Sarah, Sam, Gianluca, Emma, Liv, Jovana, Kate, Katie, Abi, and Victoria. Outside of academic life Emma, David, Ilana, Dan and Hannah have been constant presences, sounding boards, and general all-round excellent people.

Particular thanks are due to Abi, Katie, Anna, Emma, David, Liv, Sam and Simon for their proofreading. An extra special thanks is also called for to Liv for four years of living the housemate dream and making this time so memorable.

Finally thanks to my parents, Sheila and Mike for always motivating me, supporting me, encouraging me to do what makes me so happy and for teaching me how to think. Thanks also to Ann, Vaughan and Frances for their enduring enthusiasm and support. Thank you all of you, your love and support is woven throughout this thesis.

I am particularly grateful to be surrounded by a cohort of strong women within academia and this extends to the British Federation of Women Graduates, whose financial support made the last year of my PhD possible. A further heartfelt thanks to the Departments of Spanish, Portuguese and Latin American Studies and Russian and Slavonic Studies, the Centre for Research on Cuba and the School of Cultures, Languages and Area Studies for the studentship and travel grants which allowed me to undertake this project.

I am also indebted to the many people who provided their time and expertise during my fieldwork in Cuba. These include Sonia Almaguer, Aurelio Alonso, Pablo Armando Fernández, Liz Armas, Lina Baniela, Yana-Elsa Brugal, Luisa Campuzano, Wilfredo Candebat, Osvaldo Cano, Sergio Chaple, Norberto Codina, Enrique Colina, Ana Curbeira, Ambrosio Fornet, Jorge Fornet, Ileana Zaida García, Angel González Abreu, Eduardo Heras León, Roberto Hernández, Nelson Herrera-Ysla, Jacomino Fernando León, Alberto Lescay, Gecer López, Manuel López Oliva, Emilio

The University of Nottingham  
Acknowledgements

Martínez Baniela, Esteban Martínez Baniela Olga Marta Pérez, Arturo Montoto, Daniel Motola Roffe, Fernando Pérez, Manuel Pérez Paredes, Enrique Piñeda Barnet, Graziella Pogolotti, Enrique Rio Prado, Rolando Rodríguez, Rafael Rodríguez Beltrán, Guillermo Rodríguez Riviera, Haydée Sala Santos, Raiko Samper Guerra, Juan Valdéz Paz, Anna Lidia Vega Serova, and Mirta Yanéz.

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## **i. Introduction**

### **'Kuba' and the 'URSS'**

On January 3 1959, the newspaper *Pravda* [Truth], official mouthpiece of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the USSR (CPSU), celebrated the triumph of the Cuban Revolution with an article entitled, 'Kuba boretsia – Kuba pobedit!' [Cuba fights, Cuba wins!] (Levin 1959). Accompanying the modest coverage of this momentous event was a small map of Cuba, to demonstrate to Soviet citizens where this revolutionary victory had taken place. Inset into this map was a wider map, covering the Gulf of Mexico and the Caribbean Basin, with a large arrow identifying Cuba, and indicating its geographical position in relation to the USA (Image 1).

Twenty-six years later, Cubans and Soviets were a more familiar presence in each other's cultural-political lives. *Kuba* a general magazine about the country had been in publication in Russian since August 1964 and regularly showcased the links between the countries and explored Cuban everyday culture. Explorations of popular everyday culture were complemented by *Latinskaia Amerika*, an academic publication on the region, which had been founded in 1969 in celebration of the first decade of the Cuban Revolution. *Latinskaia Amerika* was published by the Soviet Academy of Sciences and featured contributions from Soviet and Latin American individuals working in the fields of culture, politics and journalism. The journal was one of the few Soviet journals that focussed on Latin American culture, which it placed in the context of socio-political

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developments. Particular attention was paid to Cuba and, in order to help Soviet readers understand Cuba's 'originality', the developments in Cuban culture were presented systematically across the different fields of culture: literature, science, education, theatre, cinema and architecture (Shatunovskaia 1979: 306). The Day of Cuban culture in the USSR began in 1973 in celebration of the Moncada Assault's 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary (Shatunovskaia 1979: 306). Similarly, the Revolution's 20<sup>th</sup> year was celebrated with a dedicated book *Kul'tura Kuby: 20 let kubinskoï revoliutsii* [The culture of Cuba: 20 years of the Cuban Revolution] published by Nauka. This was an edited book with chapters from Cuban and Soviet cultural figures covering each form of artistic expression, cultural education and the ideological importance of culture and education.

In Cuba, the first widespread contact with Soviet culture came with the Soviet Exhibition of Science, Technology and Culture held in Havana in April 1960. From 1972 onwards regular Days of Soviet Culture were held and in 1985 the idea of the Soviet Union was cemented with the construction of the monumental building, the USSR's embassy, on Quinta Avenida between streets 62 and 66. The building, dubbed the *torre de control*, was built to a design by Aleksandr Rochegov and still remains a dominant feature on the Havana skyline, as the embassy of the Russian Federation (Image 6-7). The idea of the 'Soviet' lingers in Cuba today and is, in Damaris Puñales-Alpízar's opinion, 'uno de los imaginarios culturales más importantes' (2012: 362), representing a country and an associated world order that no longer exists and whose remains form an important part of the Cuban national cultural imaginary. However, the impact of the USSR on Cuba and on Cuban culture during its existence 'awaits an

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examination of the complexities of the actual exchanges without the burden of defending their national terrains' (Loss and Prieto 2012: 3). It is these actual exchanges between Cuba and the USSR that this work explores.

## Aims

This thesis investigates how Soviet cultural ideas, experiences and models shaped post-1959 Cuban culture until the period known as *Rectificación de errores y tendencias negativas* from c.1986. In doing so, this study analyses a set of circumstances in which the nature of politically engaged art was subject to wide-ranging debate, and in which the nature of Soviet 'influence' (economic, political and cultural) was interpreted and re-evaluated. It examines instances of cross-cultural dialogue, showing how notions of culture and internationalism, and the discourse surrounding these, were mutable, flexible and ambiguous during a period of intense political upheaval in Cuba and internationally.

The research for this thesis focuses on two key periods 1960-1963 and 1975-1986. The former was a time when relations between the USSR and Cuba were at their most positive and outward-looking perspectives were favoured in Cuba; the latter was a period during which Cuban-Soviet relations were strained. In investigating these moments, I have examined whether or not what is often described as times of political and economic 'Sovietisation' were reflected in the cultural evolution of the Revolution, or whether the relationship was more complex, as suggested by developments during the late 1970s. As a result, my research offers

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insights into the problematic relationship between politics, culture and revolutionary society as a whole. Specifically, it contributes a new interpretation of the Cuban-Soviet relationship and of the role that culture played in negotiating this relationship.

More generally, in this study, I distinguish between Soviet-influenced approaches to culture under socialism, such as the prioritisation of certain topics or styles and Cuban admiration for Soviet models for institutions that reflect the value placed on culture, and access to culture, in a socialist society, such as the Palaces of Culture, the Writers' Union and the Ministry of Culture. This, in turn, allows me to explore how, if indeed at all, the revolutionary government reconciled combatting the residual effects of colonialism and the borrowing of Western cultural norms with the need to create authentically Cuban intellectual spaces and to foster organic discourses, and the effect of this reconciliatory process on artists. Thus I examine how conceptions of the artist's role in revolutionary society changed according to the leadership's prioritisation of cultural, political and economic tasks. This research also sheds light on how Cuban cultural leaders responded to the wave of anti-institutionalism that spread following the sectarian power struggle, dubbed the 'mini-Stalinist' affair of 1961-2, and how they reconciled this impulse with the genuine need for cultural infrastructure.

The cultural institutions which form the backbone of this study are: the Consejo Nacional de Cultura (CNC), created in 1961 to establish the arts as an integral part of the Revolution and replaced in 1976 by the Ministerio de Cultura (MINCULT); the Unión de Escritores y Artistas de Cuba (UNEAC), established in 1961; and the Instituto Superior de Artes

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(ISA), established in 1967, but not opened until 1976 (Image 13-15). The latter two of these institutions played broad roles and were subordinated to the CNC and later MINCULT. These umbrella institutions had a significant number of orthodox Communists from the pre-revolutionary Party (the PSP) and radical *guerrilleros* who supported a Third world-oriented socialism within their structures. This made them the most likely institutions within which to find competing approaches towards cultural organisation and output.

When analysing these institutions, I focus on two specific forms of cultural output: theatre and the visual arts. The latter is known as the plastic arts [artes plásticas] in Cuba and will henceforth, when discussing Cuba, be referred to in this manner. Theatre and the plastic arts are at the centre of this body of work because of the different strategies adopted in the organisation of these two artistic forms and the different resulting relationships with the USSR. Both forms were prized for their educational capacity and inherent mobility, but were also highly valued as revolutionary vehicles with which to combat colonialism and imperialism, and defend an emergent national identity.

The plastic arts provide an excellent base from which to analyse the conflicting attitudes towards the USSR that abounded, and continue to abound, in Cuba, shaping cultural approaches and expressions of a certain period. These impressions were influenced by cultural changes, brought about by leadership changes and shifting political culture in the USSR and the knowledge in Cuba of the internal struggles with ideas about culture within the superpower. Dialogues about the tensions between different types of socialism and different approaches towards

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internationalism and foreign cultures become particularly apparent when viewed in the context of Soviet debates about the development of the Contemporary Style – a ‘modern style, embracing all aspects of visual culture’ (Reid 2000: 103), modernist influences, and the structural and aesthetic approach of what is known as ‘socialist realism’. Moreover, the close linking of art with pre-revolutionary culturally-based opposition groupings and magazines, and the expressive possibilities offered by non-verbal cultural output provide an important standpoint from which to analyse the Soviet-Cuban cultural relationship.

Theatre has been chosen as a focus as it provides insights into the Cuban relationship with the USSR in a complementary manner. Theatre, along with film, was the most underdeveloped cultural form in Cuba prior to the Revolution. However, unlike film, theatre was never totally independent from the broad-based cultural institutions such as the CNC and then MINCULT. Internationally, two of the most established theatrical theoretical systems (Stanislavskian and Brechtian), had become closely linked with ideas about socialism and socialist cultural production. In the USSR theatre was highly valued and had been intimately linked with the October Revolution from an early stage and was quickly mobilised during the Civil War. The combination in Cuba of theatre’s underdeveloped state, educative potential, low-skill threshold for participation and lack of other governing body, made theatre the ideal site for experiments in the organisation, production, and dissemination of a genuinely revolutionary Cuban culture. Finally, theatre was the cultural mode which was most seriously affected by the regulatory current of the 1971 to 1976 period, which has come to be known as the *quinquenio gris*. This period was a

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phase of institutionalisation, which included the implementation of certain structures that borrowed from the USSR, and coincided with Cuba gaining full membership of the Council for Mutual Economic Aid (COMECON). The period was also initiated by international outcry and suggestions that the treatment of writer Heberto Padilla was similar to the show trials of the Stalinist regime (Casal 1971: 462). Perhaps because of all of these factors, it is a period that has become classed as 'Soviet' and as evidence of the external and internal 'Sovietising' of the Cuban Revolution (Fornet 2007). Theatre, in particular, has become the emblem of this specific moment. Thus, the theatre in revolutionary Cuba provides a counterpoint to the plastic arts and an alternative paradigm through which to analyse the Soviet presence in Cuba's cultural arena.

Other art forms which could have formed part of this study were excluded because of either their systems of organisation or their relationship to other artistic forms or the wider population. Literature and music were well established art forms within Cuba prior to the Revolution, as was ballet under the aegis of Alicia Alonso. Their entrenchment and clearly Cuban styles do in theory make them excellent potential case studies for the purpose of this thesis but the high skill threshold for entry and cost of participation or dissemination of creative works make them less suited. While the plastic arts and the theatre share some of these characteristics, they also demonstrate others, as discussed above, which make them more suited to further investigation. Finally, cinema, while underdeveloped at the time of the Revolution, quickly became a flagship cultural form but its organisation meant that it remained largely

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independent and free from the kind of structural and organisational debates that form the basis of this study.

## Historical overview

What caused the formation of such a lasting alliance between two countries from the opposite sides of the globe? Most enduringly, it was pragmatism, facilitated by an ideological overlap. To the USSR, the opportunities offered by the Cuban Revolution were practical solutions to a pressing issue of supply; Soviet interest in Cuban sugar, and in Cuba itself, dates back to the beginning of the Russian Revolution in 1917.<sup>1</sup> However, initially, the USSR took great care to give its interaction with the country an essentially economic nature (Lévesque 1978: 15). Moscow made an initial purchase from revolutionary Cuba of 170,000 tons of sugar in April 1959, which was actually less than the USSR's order the previous year. The ensuing revolutionary reforms from the Cuban government, particularly the 1959 agrarian reform, fitted 'theoretical thinking about the need for land reform throughout Latin America' (Duncan 1985: 32). It also sufficiently encouraged the Soviets to begin to trade with Cuba on a more serious level, due to the political potential that the country presented to the USSR.

Meaningful cultural interaction between Cuba and the USSR began shortly after the disbandment of the Communist International (Comintern). The Instituto de Intercambio Cultural Cubano-Soviético (IICCS) was

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<sup>1</sup> In the joint publication *Rossiiā- Kuba. 1902-2002: Dokumenty i materialy* (2004) the Cuban and Russian foreign ministries trace links between the two countries back to 1902. In *SSSR-Kuba: Al'manakh* the two countries' intertwined history is traced back to 1530 (Progress and Martí 1990: 527).

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created in 1945 and presided over by the eminent anthropologist Fernando Ortiz (Bain 2013: 96). Through this institute Moscow was able to exert an element of soft power over Havana prior to the Revolution with the promotion of Soviet culture, society, politics and general awareness of the superpower through the Institute. This was arguably further augmented by the system of scholarships to the Soviet Union that began to be offered to Latin Americans in the 1950s (Rupprecht 2015: 196).

The IICCS had an associated publication *Cuba y la URSS*, which was published between 1945 and March 1952 (Bain 2015: 110). *Cuba y la URSS* is still remembered today by Cubans who grew up with the magazines, and indeed in interviews it has been cited by some as a source of inspiration for ways of practicing culture [López Oliva 2015]. The IICCS was closed in 1952, when diplomatic ties between Cuba and the USSR were cut in March, shortly after Fulgencio Batista came to power, in a demonstration of his pro-US stance (Bain 2013: 112). Cultural interaction, however, continued, and was often based around personal links such as those of Cuban ballerina Alicia Alonso and her Soviet counterpart Maia Plisetskaia, or through the system of scholarships offered to Cubans (and other Latin Americans) by the USSR. Large-scale, official events were also organised, such as the 1960 Soviet Exhibition of Science, Technology and Culture, that was held a month before the formal reestablishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries. João Felipe Gonçalves considers this event to be the first major contact of the Cuban public with Soviet culture, which ranged from everyday culture (clothing and appliances) to 'high' culture (film, music and literature). It was for many, also, their first interaction with Soviet individuals, as 147 Soviet

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citizens attended the exhibition. These individuals ranged from the 90 experts who installed the exhibition to the 57 artists, interpreters, journalists, air crew and security officials who came to the dedication ceremony (2013: 85).

In December 1961, the revolutionary leadership identified itself as Marxist-Leninist, and this ideological common ground became part of the foundational base of the Cuban-Soviet alliance (Bain 2011: 112). However, the first public statement declaring the socialist nature of the Cuban Revolution came on 16 April 1961, at the burial of the victims of the bombings which had occurred across the island previously. Shortly before Fidel's April speech, the Soviet cosmonaut Iurii Gagarin had become the first man in space, swiftly becoming a symbol of the mobility of the 1960s. Gagarin and the space race formed part of the international exploration and imagining of alternative models for society that characterised the decades of the 1960s and 1970s. The 1959 rebel victory and subsequent Revolution confirmed this advent of a hopeful period of seismic global and societal change and, to the average Soviet citizen, Cuba, thousands of kilometres away in the Caribbean, was almost as alien as space itself, perhaps explaining the need for a map in the first report of the Cuban Revolution in the Soviet press.

Cuba also presented an unparalleled opportunity for the USSR. The Revolution, and the young guerrillas who came to form the government in particular, symbolised the power and potential of youth internationally, at a time when the urban population in the USSR surpassed 50% and was disproportionately young (Noack 2013: 172). In this respect, 'for some younger people, [the Cuban Revolution] offered a heady opportunity to

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finally participate, if at a distance, in a revolution of their own. The [Soviet] regime was eager to encourage this perspective' (Gorsuch 2015: 505). By more fully linking itself to the Cuban Revolution, the Communist Party of the USSR (CPSU) could gain prestige on the international stage and demonstrate the vitality of the international socialist movement, at the head of which the Soviet government positioned itself. Moreover, the geographical proximity of a socialist country to the USA in a period of Cold War absolutes presented the very practical advantages of gaining access to new port facilities and potentially increasing the historically superficial Soviet presence in Latin America and the Caribbean basin. The country was arguably also seen as a valuable experiment, in terms of testing out the viability of Soviet theoretical models, such as 'revolutionary democracy' (Gorsuch 2015: 501), and in searching for solutions to perceived Soviet problems.

In the polarised environment of the Cold War, which subordinated other national histories to its binary dialogue, the Cuban Revolution's apparently sudden conversion to socialism seemed to demonstrate the hallmark of Soviet meddling and confirmation to external observers of the perception that Cuba had 'irrevocably become a communist state closely tied to the Eastern Bloc' (Goldberg 1965: 238). This is an enduring interpretation that has informed understandings of the Cuban Revolution and its policies in academia and beyond. In fact what was true was that the public declaration of the socialist nature of the Cuban Revolution was the continuation of a Cuban ideology based around national independence, ideas of Cubanness and anti-corruption which had been developing since the nineteenth century, rather than a sudden, imposed, conversion to

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Soviet communism. Marxism had been inscribed in Cuban ideology from the early twentieth century and the prominence of communists in both resistance movements and governmental infrastructure meant that much of the Cuban population had an awareness of the practical application of communism and its values (Kapcia 2008: 89-99). Moreover, the presence of Marxist ideas in the development of a Cuban ideology was not limited to Soviet interpretations of Marxism, but included Latin American currents, such as Aprismo, and the ideas of José Carlos Mariátegui and Eneyde Ponce de León which 'provided a broad intellectual and political framework from which to view the complex reality of Cuban social relations' (Whitney 2001: 48). Initially, between 1924 and 1929, the emergent Cuban ideology seemed to complement Marxism, and even Soviet Marxism, which was not yet completely orthodox (Whitney 2001: 49). These ideas were mixed with the thought of José Martí and Simon Bolívar, as well as other strains of thought, such as Julio Antonio Mella's conception of national Cuban Marxism predicated around anti-imperialism, anti-capitalism, nationalism, and Antonio Guiteras Holmes' ideas about Cuban socialism, insurrectional movements and societal transformation (Martínez Heredia 2017).

Revelations regarding the Stalinist regime in the period immediately after Stalin's death, known as the Thaw, and events such as the 1956 Soviet invasion of Hungary, provoked the need for a more nuanced approach to the USSR. The revelations also highlighted the ideological importance of the period of Bolshevik rule. Fears that a close relationship with the USSR would result in ideological dogmatism, repression or even a cult of personality abounded in Cuba and Latin America before the Revolution and during it. Evidence of these fears can be found in the

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outcry from Latin American intellectuals regarding a perceived emergence of Stalinist suppression of artists in the carefully orchestrated public apology of the 'Padilla affair' of 1970, or even in Fidel Castro's (henceforth Fidel) insistence that no streets or monuments be named after him in a bid to avoid the cult of personality (AP 2016; Ojito 2016). However, for the Cuba of 1961, the USSR was undoubtedly a solution to two pressing internal problems: the need for protection and the need to maintain levels of sugar exports. The rapid deterioration of Cuban-US relations had made it imperative for Cuba to find a new trading ally to support its economy and to secure military protection.

Concurrently, the Soviet pedagogical presence amongst the Cuban population was already growing: copies of *Los hombres de Panfilov* [Rezerv generala Panfilova] and the *Carretera de Volokolamsk* [Volokolamskoe shosse] by Aleksander Bek were distributed to Cubans fighting at the Bay of Pigs and at the military schools that were swiftly established in the face of impending attacks from the USA. Considered educational tools for the new Cuban soldiers defending their newly reformed country from imperialist aggression, the books are fondly remembered by some Cubans for the realistic way they spoke of the experience of what it meant to be a guerrilla (León del Río and Martínez Heredia 2010: 76); [Heras León, 2015]. More generally, the USSR was the model *par excellence* of rapid industrialisation, technical progress, economic development, and a culturally educated society. As the Cold War intensified, it was also arguably the easiest, and sometimes the only, country from which Cuba could receive technical training or appropriate particularly useful or successful organisational and technical artistic

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techniques.<sup>2</sup> Gorsuch considers the USSR's lack of a 'traditional' colonial past to have been particularly important for the revolutionary government (Gorsuch 2015: 502). This view is shared and expanded upon by Bain (2010) and Shearman, the latter of whom highlights the USSR's lack of historical intervention or colonies in North, Central and South America (Shearman 1987: 1-11).

After the Cuban Missile Crisis, the Cuban government was able to capitalise on the country's strategic geographic and propagandistic value in maximising Soviet economic support. In 1972 Cuba became a full member of COMECON and Soviet goods, many of which (such as radios, washing machines, and fridges) were given to the best workers as rewards in the 1970s, became a regular fixture in everyday Cuban life. The aid that the USSR provided Cuba totalled around USD \$65 billion between 1960 and 1990 and proved to be the 'golden handcuffs' that locked both countries into a relationship of mutual dependency (Leogrande and Thomas 2002: 342). The Cuban government found itself unable to move the country away from sugar exports destined for the Eastern bloc and COMECON, due to the enforced focus on sugar production, low international price for sugar on the open market and underdevelopment of other sectors of the Cuban economy (Leogrande and Thomas 2002: 342). On the other hand, the USSR itself was dependent on Cuba's prestige in the Third World and, by the mid-1970s, had become so financially committed to the Cuban Revolution that, were it to fail, there would be nothing to show for the investment (Bain 2005: 771).

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<sup>2</sup> See, for example, the reproduction of the questionnaire in *Unión* (Augier 1970) sent to literary figures and critics in the USSR.

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The ensuing Soviet support of the Cuban Revolution may have initially been an opportunity to show the superiority of one of the two antagonistic systems vying for global power. However, Cuba, and the type of socialism practiced by the revolutionary government, became a site of competition with and dispute of the Soviet projection of itself as the leader of the global socialist movement. The Cuban and the Soviet leadership had fundamentally different opinions of the global political situation and the best method to pursue socialism at an international level. While at first this resulted in economic manoeuvrings on the part of the USSR to gain influence in Cuba during the 1960s and 1970s, by the late 1970s and early 1980s the two countries ultimately adopted a more pragmatic approach. They worked together to achieve mutually beneficial goals, and the balance of influence shifted as Cuba cemented its reputation as vanguard of Third World socialism.

The shift in the relationship between the two countries was reflected in the way the other was presented in their respective national press. As the Cuban variant of socialism diverged from that of the USSR, from the mid-1960s onwards, the country was increasingly presented to Soviet citizens as a 'little brother' and the Revolution was positioned as a national liberation movement — the former being some ideological steps behind socialist Revolution as it did not consider class revolution as a decisive factor. Conversely, in Cuba, ideas about the USSR's superiority were rejected and the country was presented as an equal; the popular press focussed on the USSR's history and national traditions while efforts were made to demarcate the basis and bounds of cooperation between the two countries. This is in contrast to the 'romanticism' of the 1960s, which saw

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the relationship between the two countries 'characterised in both the Soviet and Cuban media as a parent-child relationship, a friendship, a brotherhood, a business partnership, and a military alliance' (Gorsuch 2015: 501).

From the late 1970s onwards tourism became an increasingly important point of Soviet contact with Cuba, leading to the propagation of certain stereotypes regarding the two countries. Interactions between Cuba and the USSR were tempered and informed by these popular stereotypes, many of which remain today and were arguably reinforced by each country in the promotion of their externalised image. To the Soviet citizen, Cuba was seen as an ideologically friendly tropical island, located in the 'West', full of beaches, beautiful women and rum. In her analysis of the Cuban imaginary in the Soviet population, Gorsuch argues that the emergent Soviet 'romantic passion for Cuba was often accompanied by a concomitant nostalgia for an idealised Soviet past' from the pre-Stalin years (Gorsuch 2015: 497). *Kuba*, the Russian-language general cultural publication, reinforced this idea: from the mid-1970s onwards the back matter was frequently a cocktail recipe involving Havana Club and young women, often in bikinis, frequently appeared on the front matter (Image 2-5). To the Cuban citizen, the USSR was monumental, brusque, and homogenous, earning its peoples the nickname "*bolos*" [bowling pins].<sup>3</sup> Soviets, or *rusos*, which was the blanket term frequently used by Cubans, were perceived as cold, insular and their culture as removed from that of the Cubans; indeed, initially, the Soviet citizens actually present in Cuba

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<sup>3</sup> This epithet provides the name of a 2008 documentary, *Los bolos en Cuba*, by Enrique Colina, which examines the Cuban-Soviet relationship within the Cuban everyday existence.

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were physically kept apart from Cubans in separate settlements and businesses. One of these former 'Soviet' settlements, with a statue of a globe that speaks of internationalism at its centre, now forms part of Alamar, in Habana del Este, one of the districts in Havana (Image 8). At an everyday level, these stereotypes are reflected in the popular tales about the Cuban streets being at their busiest when Soviet films were played on state TV, or children being threatened with Soviet children's cartoons, dubbed *muñequitos rusos* [Russian dolls], as a punishment for bad behaviour.

## Methodology

This thesis is an historical analysis of one dimension of the culture of revolutionary Cuba. As such it is concerned with wider cultural production and the application of policy. Detailed analysis of specific cultural output, produced either in the theatre or in the plastic arts is left to specialists in these respective cultural fields, such as Rachael Weiss, Adelaida de Juan, Gerardo Mosquera, Katherine Ford, Emilio Gallardo Saborido and Norge Espinosa. To balance this perspective, I have instead focussed on the discussion surrounding emblematic pieces of cultural output which have shaped the perceptions of Cuban cultural policy, analysing where they sit in the evolution of policy and national identity.

Fieldwork was conducted over three research visits, two to Cuba and one to the Russian Federation. In Havana, I sought contact with cultural practitioners, administrators, and policy-makers, conducting both informal and semi-structured interviews. In addition to numerous

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discussions with cultural practitioners twenty seven interviews were conducted over two research visits to Havana in 2015 made possible through contact with a small number of individuals who then referred my research to other Cubans considered to be important to the topic. These interviews encompassed a range of individuals active during the time-period examined and include high ranking members of the CNC, MinCult, ISA, ICAIC and Casa de las Américas such as Graziella Pogolotti, Ambrosio Fornet, Juan Valdés Paz, Manuel Pérez Paredes, Fernando Pérez, Guillermo Rodríguez Riviera, Eduardo Heras León, Loipa Araújo and Aurelio Alonso. Thus, these interviews were principally with, but not limited to, those individuals who had had extensive contact with the USSR during the period in question. Such contact enabled me to get a clearer view of the perceived influence of Soviet models of socialist culture, to explore which models were held in particular esteem, and to ascertain how the establishment of revolutionary cultural institutions in Cuba was experienced. In conversations with these individuals, we discussed specific moments in Cuba's revolutionary history, such as seminal speeches, controversial events, and periods of crisis. Wider organisational approaches and the perceived emphases placed on cultural production at different periods between 1961 and 1986 were also addressed. The relative lack of structure in the interviews provided me with opportunities to navigate past what it might have been assumed by some interviewees that I, as a researcher working within a field that has a clearly established ontology regarding the different periods of the Revolution, wished to hear. Conversations with the individuals who granted me an interview gave me a greater understanding of the context of events which form part of this

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study, and also a deeper comprehension of the way that practitioners and institutes perceived things, and, importantly, access to information and discussion often hitherto completely unavailable elsewhere due to the difficulty in finding written materials on the topic or their frequently contradictory nature. In some cases the interviews were sought in order to provide concrete information, for others a range of perspectives on the matter and yet more it was for corroboration of events, approaches and organisational tactics. The frequently corroborating and partial nature of the interviews conducted is reflected in the body of the thesis where interviews are identified by square parentheses and also the bibliography, where interviews are set apart from other sources. Research in Russia was based in the Rossiiskaia gosudarstvennaia biblioteka [Russian State Library] and the Gosudarstvennaia publichnaia istoricheskaia biblioteka Rossii [State Public History Library] in Moscow. It involved gathering supporting materials found in the Soviet academic and popular press such as *Latinskaia Amerika*, *Iskusstvo*, *Ogonek*, *Pravda*, and the Russian-language edition of the international Cuban magazine, *Kuba*. These materials allowed me to assess the Soviet perception of the Cuban Revolution, the way in which it was discussed in domestic literature and the Cuban projection of the Revolution through a Soviet lens.

Sub-periods within the Cuban-Soviet relationship, such as the *quinquenio gris*, remain contentious today. This is particularly pronounced in certain cultural arenas, such as the theatre, and in the cultural organs and systems directly related to this area. Moreover, many of the individuals who were active during the period examined remain active today within the cultural apparatus, albeit occupying different posts. The practical result of

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this ongoing unease surrounding discussions of the period or other elements of Cuban culture, which may or may not contradict accepted interpretations of the era, is that either interview requests were denied or certain topics remained off-limits, even if the interviewee was guaranteed anonymity. However, given that a large reason for the interviews, reflected in their informal/semi-structured nature, was to ascertain perceptions and corroborate information found in archival research, silence was at times just as informative as the most loquacious interviews.

This thesis's Havana-centric approach was a conscious and logical choice, for two reasons. First, it used archives and libraries found in the capital and an existing networks of contacts. Secondly, Havana was chosen because of the historic concentration of cultural activities in the city, its role in the articulation and implementation of national cultural policy, and its reputation as a place of cultural ferment, drawing on the country's vast range of historical influences. The city, and its relationship with the Cuban 'interior', reflects the ever-present polemics regarding the evolution of a national consciousness (Kapcia 2005: 3). This means that Havana has been seen as both 'the channel for either "solution" or "problem" to enter exogenously, the "other" Cuba being either a site for "modernisation" or the essence of Cuba' (Kapcia 2005: 3). As such, it is ideally suited to a study involving the nature of one particular source of problems or solutions, and the way in which they were channelled into Cuba.

Interviews were complemented by analysing discussions and debate regarding cultural production, cultural policy, Soviet culture, and the USSR more generally, in the popular press. Practically, this involved the

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detailed examination of available issue of newspapers and magazines that spanned the time period examined, such as *Lunes de Revolución*, *Revolución y Cultura*, *Bohemia*, *Casa de las Américas*, *Unión*, *Gaceta de Cuba* and also, where relevant, *Granma*, principally in the Biblioteca Nacional José Martí and the Biblioteca-Hemeroteca de La Casa de las Américas. Such publications provided valuable insight into the explicit acknowledgement, or oblique rejection, of external influence, Soviet or otherwise. These examinations of journalistic coverage also served to provide a counterbalance to individual memories and the potential influence of changing political situations and national priorities on the way that things are remembered at an individual and at a public level.

In recognition of the Revolution's ongoing commitment to pursuing a distinctly Cuban variant of socialism, the theoretical framework of this study does not try to fit the model of a foreign theory, regarding socialism and cultural production, to the Cuban case. Rather it discusses an approach – socialist realism – that is still intimately linked to the happening of socialism and the debates surrounding different types of socialism. This thesis draws on the ideas of the Revolution's ideological forefather, José Martí, regarding culture and Cuba's identity, Nestor García Canclini's ideas of hybrid cultures and Latin American modernity, and Alexei Yurchak's work on ideology and everyday life in the USSR which advocates a movement away from the 'binary' approach to studies of socialism.

## **Approaches to Cuban culture, the Cuban-Soviet relationship, and Cuba in a post-Soviet world**

This research builds on recent work on Cuban cultural history and cultural transfer and moves beyond stereotypical readings of a progressive 'Sovietising' of culture in Cuba (Daniel 1961). In doing so, it contributes towards the reconfiguration of previous understandings of the political, social and economic relations between the USSR and Cuba. There has been limited investigation into the interaction between Cuba and the USSR in culture, or indeed into the relationship as a whole. Studies conducted while the USSR was still in existence, or immediately after its collapse, have frequently been derided and links ignored (Pavlov 1994), while current scholarship has tended not to examine Cuban cultural institutions in depth and, when it has, has tended to approach it in a somewhat unsophisticated manner, writing off periods and key events, such as the late 1960s and later as simply 'Soviet' or 'Stalinist'.<sup>4</sup> This is seen for example in studies of the *quinquenio gris*, which is frequently cited as an example of Stalinism and the USSR's pernicious influence in action in Cuba (in particular, repeatedly by Cuban intellectual figures such as Roberto Ferández Retamar, Miguel Barnet, and Ambrosio Fornet). However, newer research has rallied against the institutionalised interpretation of the 1970s as 'Soviet' (Menéndez-Conde 2012). Instead it has suggested that the period may actually be an example of Cuba's increasing focus on the Third World and fight against all forms of

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<sup>4</sup> See for example the works of Cole Blasier (1993, 1979), Eduardo González (1968, 1971) and Andrés Suárez (1969, 1971) all of whom, whilst sometimes recognising the nuances, in some way argue that Cuba became progressively Soviet.

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imperialism, including Western-inspired culture (Kumaraswami and Kapcia 2012: 28). Nor has there been a consideration of the nuances of translating terms and definitions, such as 'socialism', which, in the Soviet Bloc was synonymous with communism, and in Latin America and Cuba at the time was more nebulous, with 'communism' often understood as something apart.

Scholars of Cuban culture, Soviet culture and the Cold War have not yet fully explored Cuba's always unusual negotiation of geo-politics in its revolutionary project through culture. The entirety of the Cuban-Soviet relationship has been researched by Mervyn Bain (2013, 2008, 2007, 2005), Jacques Lévesque (1978) and Michael Shearman (1987), while Tobias Rupprecht (2012) has examined post-Stalin Soviet internationalism. Anne Gorsuch's (2013; 2011) work on Soviet tourism has led her to begin researching Cuba in the Soviet cultural imagination (Gorsuch 2015), while Jennifer Ruth Hosek (2012) has explored Cuba in the German imaginary.

However, despite cultural policy providing a key insight into Cuban-Soviet relations (Miller 2008, 1989), little study has been conducted into this area. Par Kumaraswami and Antoni Kapcia (2012), Rebecca Gordon-Nesbitt (2015) and Pablo Alonso González (2015, 2017) have all explored cultural themes, respectively, nation-building and the book, cultural policy in the visual arts, and heritage. Existing study of the cultural relations between the USSR and Cuba has principally examined the Cuban cinema industry. Joshua Malitsky (2013) has examined the similarities between Santiago Álvarez's and Dziga Vertov's documentary-making, while Vladimir Smith-Mesa (2011) has analysed Cuban film's influence on the

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Eastern Bloc and vice versa. In the field of the plastic arts, research has been conducted on the plastic arts after the *quinquenio gris* (Weppler-Grogan 2010), New Art of Cuba (Camnitzer 2003); (Weiss 2011b), the Havana Biennale (Weiss 2011a), the Salón de Mayo, and the Congreso Cultural de La Habana (Barreiro López 2015), but no work has seriously analysed the interaction between Cuba and the USSR in the field of the plastic arts. Research into Cuban theatre has explored pre-revolutionary and early revolutionary theatre (Muguercia 1995, 1988, 1983), rural theatre and nation building, particularly in the special period (Frederik 2012), and cultural policy within literary creation (Gallardo Saborido 2009). However, there are few academic studies on theatre and the *quinquenio gris*: Emilio Gallardo-Saborido (2015) has examined the role of prize-giving in shaping and reflecting the cultural priorities of the era, and Katherine Ford has explored the impact of the period on the Havana stages (Ford 2010).

The post-Soviet Soviet presence in Cuban culture has recently begun to be examined, Jacqueline Loss and José Manuel Prieto (2012; 2013) have addressed the cultural legacy of the USSR in Cuba and demonstrated how elements of the culture and politics of the USSR remain in Cuba and continue to inform cultural and societal practice. Damaris Puñales-Alpízar (2012) has also analysed the Soviet legacy in the post-Soviet cultural imaginary and highlights the importance of nostalgia for the USSR in contemporary Cuban culture. Meanwhile, Max Azicri (2000) has explored Cuba's foreign policy in the post-Soviet space and Frances Stonor Saunders (2000) has interrogated the USA's use of culture as a form of soft power during the Cold War. Thus, Cuba, and especially Cuban

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culture, remains very much on the peripheries of the cultural historiography of the Cold War.

## Chapter Summary

Socialist realism is one of the cultural approaches that is most clearly related to the cultural history of the USSR and its international perception. An interrogation of socialist realism allows for an analysis of the different historical attitudes towards culture in the USSR, particularly in periods that were important to the formation of Cuban revolutionary thought. It also allows for the discussion of Cuban interpretations of Soviet periods which are not analogous with the Cuban Revolution. Therefore, the first chapter of this thesis explores socialist realism so that the nuances of the Cuban approach towards socialist realism and, more generally, to the USSR are able to be properly examined in the following four chapters.

Chapter One opens with a discussion of socialist realism, providing a succinct overview of its Soviet context, before moving on to discuss the details of both the Cuban approach towards it, and in English-language academia more generally. The chapter also highlights the progression of socialist realism and distinguishes between socialist realism's different iterations. In establishing the different versions of socialist realism and their geneeses, the chapter provides the Soviet historical context necessary to understand the different ways in which socialist realism could have manifested itself in Cuba, and equally importantly, what element of the Soviet influence Cubans wished to emphasise when discussing socialist

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realism. The clarifications of these different terms and periods are then used throughout the remainder of the thesis.

Chapters Two and Three conduct an historical analysis of Cuban culture and the evolution of cultural policy between 1961 and 1986. They trace the developments within the field of culture, how policy was applied and how it related to political and economic revolutionary projects; in doing so, these chapters demonstrate the complex interplay between these spheres. Chapter Two explores the *quinquenio gris*, establishing that it was a period of intense expression of nationalism, with utopian aims of total inclusion, rather than one of Soviet imposition. Chapter Three demonstrates the closer linking of culture to economic sovereignty from the 1970s onwards and that the 1980s exhibited many more ‘Soviet’ characteristics. Both Chapters Two and Three explore a number of key features of culture in Cuba: first, the way in which culture was at the centre of the government’s ideas and approaches towards nation-building and, as such, tended to continue the ideas found in the 1940 Constitution, in José Martí’s writings, and in the Movimiento 26 de Julio (M-26-7) movement; second, the way in which culture afforded a valuable space for debate about models of socialism and about which sectors were best suited to different revolutionary tasks; and, third, that multiple co-existing currents of thought regarding the Revolution, socialism, and Cuba’s relationship with the USSR have always existed.

Chapters Four and Five examine the impact of cultural policy iterations on theatre and the plastic arts, respectively, and explore how and why the two forms might have been treated differently and manifest different characteristics. Each chapter examines the historical evolution of

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each form, the development of its organisation in Cuba and how it expressed different 'revolutionary' qualities differently. The conclusion identifies the importance of internationalism in Cuban culture and its external relations.

Finally, a word on style. All Spanish names and quotations will remain in the original language, but, when used, Russian names of institutions and journals will be transliterated into the Latin alphabet and will be accompanied by an English translation. Russian language quotes will remain in Russian and be accompanied by an English translation. The transliteration of Russian words follows the Library of Congress system. Embedded terms will be italicised with a translation provided with their first use. The USSR will always be referred to as the USSR when used as a noun and Soviet as an adjective, and, when used as a noun, Revolution will be capitalised.

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Image 2 'Isle of Pines' cocktail recipe. *Kuba* No.8, 1981



Image 3 'Bloody Mary' cocktail recipe. *Kuba*, No.11, 1974



Image 4 Cover of *Kuba*, No. 9, 1978

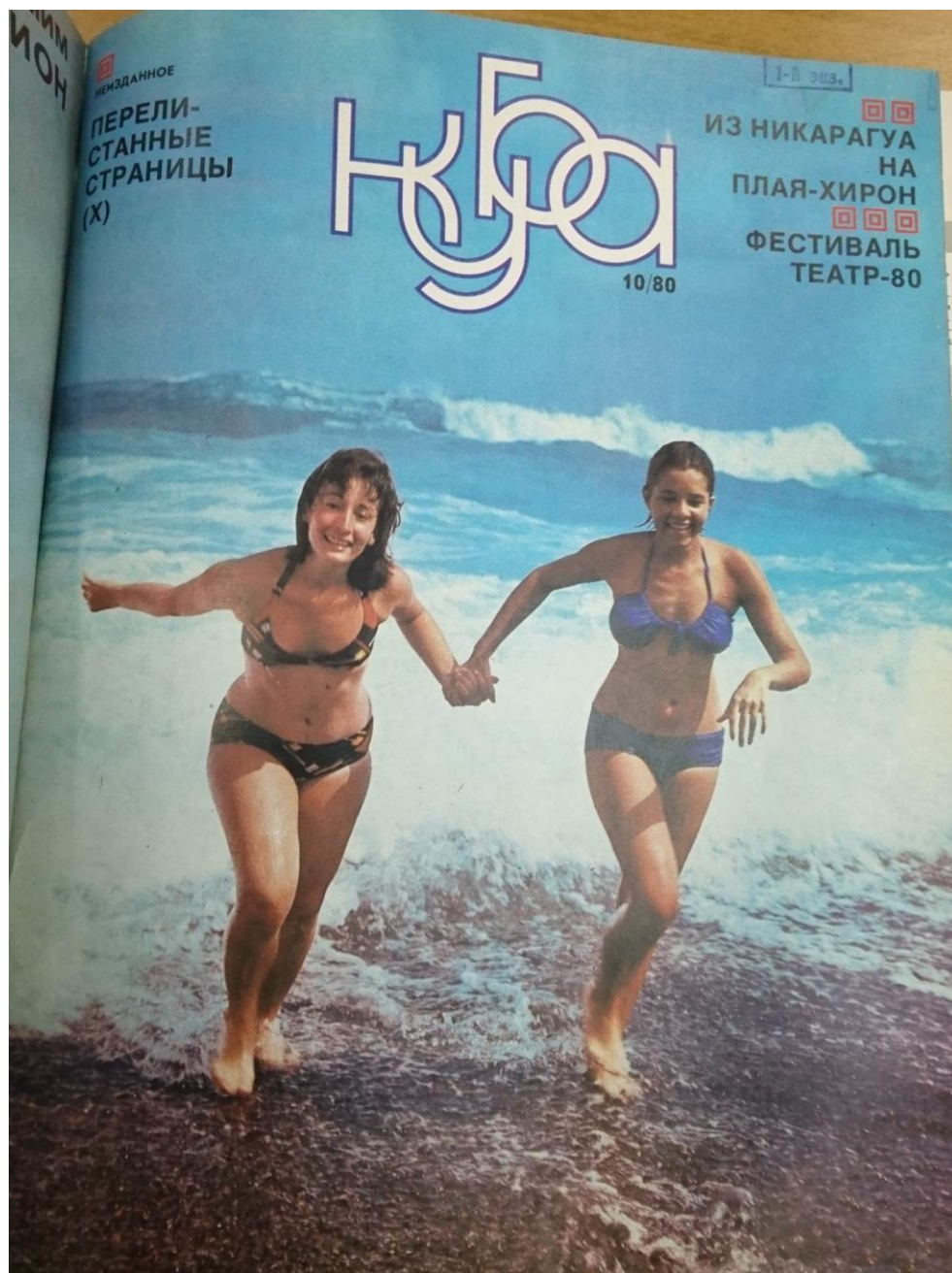


Image 5 Cover of *Kuba*, No. 10, 1980



**Image 6 Soviet (now Russian) Embassy designed by Aleksandr  
Rochev**

Copyright: the author



**Image 7 Soviet (now Russian) Embassy designed by Rohegov**

Copyright: the author



**Image 8 'Internationalist' sculpture in park in Alamar, bordered by the *casitas rusas* of Soviet citizens in Cuba**

Copyright: the author

## 1 Soviet cultural context

### Introduction

Qué falta me haces, Karina, se dijo cuando abrió el refrigerador y descubrió la dramática soledad de dos huevos posiblemente prehistóricos y un pedazo de pan que bien pudo haber asistido al sitio de Stalingrado. En una manteca con sabor heterodoxo de fritadas excluyentes dejó caer los dos huevos, mientras con la punta del tenedor tostaba sobre la llama las dos rebanadas que logró arrancarle al corazón de acero del pan. Puro realismo socialista (Padura Fuentes 2009: 148).

Assumptions about the Cuban Revolution have frequently been informed by Cold War biases and perceptions of a wholesale imposition of Soviet models and styles. The most emblematic of these styles is socialist realism, which, it is sometimes argued, was systematically implemented in Cuba, particularly in the early 1970s, by certain pro-Soviet sectors of Cuban society (Fornet 2007: 19; Yoss 2012: 65; Buckwalter-Arias 2005: 367; Toledano Redongo 2002: 422-24). Debates about the role of culture in a socialist system with international aspirations, and about the type of culture within socialism were a constant feature of the Cuban Revolution. Socialist realism, as the most obvious cultural product and approach towards culture under socialism, was therefore a constant spectre within these debates in and about culture.

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Socialist realism is arguably the clearest, most prolonged, cultural approach immediately identifiable with the USSR. The paradigm had two branches, one concerned with the organisation of culture and the conditioning of the interactions between society, politics and culture (Robin 1992: 43). The other branch was focussed on differentiating the culture produced within the USSR from that created in capitalist societies, and in harnessing culture's potential to transform society. These two different approaches could theoretically either exist separately from one another, or work together. Thus, politics and culture were formally inextricably linked by the term. Furthermore, as a cultural product that was completely specific to the USSR, socialist realism was closely linked to the USSR's international prestige, particularly when it tried to position itself as the theoretical leader of the global communist movement.

Socialist realism is also one of the USSR's most contentious cultural products and processes due to the specific way in which the idea manifested itself in the late Stalinist years (1946 to 1953). It has come to be the metonym for the restriction and repression of society experienced under the Stalinist regime, when culture was viewed in a binary manner (Gardiner 2014: 55). Because of this, perhaps, combined with the enduring perception of socialist realism as a uniform, inflexible approach, designed to dictate and not innovate, it is only recently that the approach has undergone a period of reassessment. However, the idea of socialist realism was always driven by debate. Initially, when the term was first introduced in 1934 at the Writers' Congress, at a practical level, it ended a prolonged period of in-fighting between literary groups and was the working result of an ongoing process of the reconciliation with Russia's

and the USSR's cultural history and its new historic direction (Robin 1992: 11). The debate about appropriate cultural approaches, facilitated by socialist realism's amorphous nature, continued throughout the USSR's existence and occurred at all levels.

Internationalism is also central to understanding the approach. Socialist realism demanded that the best of world culture, including cultures within the new nation, be suitably critically assimilated and re-elaborated within a union-wide context. The international element of socialist realism also existed outside of the paradigm's artistic content: the method could also be easily exported to help foster a greater revolutionary consciousness and popular mobilisation. It also could consolidate the steps already made towards socialism. Socialist realism's potential for export, if utilised correctly, could provide a valuable tool for establishing the USSR as the vanguard of the international socialist movement. Furthermore, as the USSR's cultural figurehead it had cultural weight and international prestige, and was a potential point of conflict for socialist countries — such as China — that did not always support Soviet approaches and models. These inherently international aspects of socialist realism, and socialist Soviet culture, were closely related to its discursive qualities regarding form, content and approach.

Such aforementioned qualities of socialist realism meant that understanding the surrounding debate is also central to the academic understanding of socialist realism in the USSR. As Eliot Borenstein notes in his review of Lahusen and Dobrenko's co-edited volume *Socialist Realism Without Shores* (1997), until recently, 'scholars in both the ex-Soviet bloc and the West tended to take socialist realist discourse at face

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value, treating it as the ideological monolith that it pretended to be' (1999: 224). Among non-specialists, it has come to be understood as best exemplified in the visual arts. However, socialist realism was an approach based on narrative, both in terms of cultural production, and the organisation of the mechanisms of cultural production. Socialist realism as a narrative form within the organisation of cultural production's mechanisms refers to the idea of a system of cultural apparatus organised to aid the coherent mass articulation of an emergent socialist culture in all artistic forms that reflected the revolutionary reality. Among specialists it has undergone a period of reassessment and this is fundamental to understanding of the subject. Therefore, I will briefly outline the key theories and approaches which have influenced my thinking on the topic before moving on to analyse its impact on the cultural hinterland from the 1930s onwards.

In her study of socialist realism, Régine Robin (1992) grounds her argument in an in-depth analysis of the 1934 Writers' Union Congress, which took place in Moscow between 17 August and 1 September, 1934, in twenty six sessions (Robin 1992: 9). Robin argues that socialist realism, which had its roots in the critical realism of the nineteenth century, sought to clarify misunderstanding and was the complex result of over a decade of gestation that was brought into a (specialist) public forum for discussion. However, this attempt to shape the 'collective unconscious of a society or the zeitgeist of an era' was one of socialist realism's most irresolvable elements (Robin 1992: 74). At the heart of Robin's argument is the idea that socialist realism was an impossible dream, because it was never articulated as a single concept. The multiple, personal, interpretations of

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what socialist realism actually stood for meant that eventually literary production was viewed as prohibitive, and therefore impossible.

In contrast to Robin, Boris Groys (1992) sees socialist realism not as the antithesis of the avant-garde but rather the culmination of the early revolutionary project, because it fulfilled the desire for art to begin to transform society through its unification with political purpose in a total aesthetic-political project. Thomas Lahusen (1997) broadens the reaches of socialist realism, looking not just at the literary work as the product, but also the writers and the audience; he considers the author, audience and novel to be intimately linked in a cycle of socialist realist creation. Vasili Azhaev, the socialist realist writer around whom Lahusen bases his work, is granted redemption through his novel *Daleko ot Moskvyy* [Far From Moscow], going from inmate at the Baikal-Amur Corrective Labour Camp to Stalin Prize laureate. The novel incorporates elements of Azhaev's experiences in the Labour Camp, and in deconstructing the autobiographical and fictional elements of the story with the discourses surrounding the work, from critics and everyday reader responses, Lahusen explores the relationship between socialist realist literature, the state and the reader in the USSR. In particular, he highlights how the real-life negative experiences of the Soviet individual could be assimilated and transformed into a work celebrating socialist production. In doing so, he demonstrates the relevance of the socio-political situation in which the work was produced. Evgeny Dobrenko (2007) further develops this idea, positing that socialism was a product of socialist realism, rather than the other way around. Socialist realism was a tool with which to transform Soviet reality into socialism, ready for ideological consumption by the

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general population. In Dobrenko and Lahusen's *Socialist Realism Without Shores* (1997), which explores socialist realism in some of the different countries, such as China and East Germany, in which they deem it to have been practised, the discussion surrounding the concept of socialist realism is underpinned by the various contributing authors' inclination to approach socialist realism as a process, rather than a monolithic, absolute product. The book explores the approach's manifestation in different cultural forms and is informed by the responses to Roger Garaudy's *D'un réalisme sans rivages* and the subsequent failure to make socialist realism more democratic (Lahusen and Dobrenko 1997: 1). Garaudy, the head of the French Communist Party, published *D'un réalisme sans rivages* in 1963, which questioned the existing method of socialist realism. In his book, which was particularly popular in Cuba, Garaudy argued for the expansion of the term outside of national boundaries. He argued for the opening up of the method, asserting that genuine artistic creations of value could not be produced without a clear political commitment, and definite ideological commitment on the part of the artist. Jørn Guldberg (1990) approaches socialist realism through institutional structures and practices and argues that it is only through practices of production, presentation and mediation that socialist realism came to mean something specific. Susan Reid advances this approach and highlights the political fluidity of the term, arguing that 'the definition of Socialist Realism was always contingent on the external power relations of any particular moment' (2001: 184). Paperny (2002) deals extensively with binary approaches in Soviet culture, highlighting sixteen binaries that divided Soviet culture into two parts: 'horizontal' Culture One (early revolutionary culture) and 'vertical' Culture

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Two (1932 – 1954), although these binaries also extended beyond that chronological reach. His argument is predominantly focussed on architecture, but spans cultural forms and suggests that culture shaped politics and aesthetics. In examining these binaries, he suggests that socialist realism – even at its most Stalinist – contained, perhaps contradictorily, an element of logic and mythical truth.

Socialist realism had distinct phases, which responded to the charged political atmospheres in which it operated. The inclusive and dynamic socialist realism(s) of the early 1930s were informed by the cultural dynamism of late imperial Russian culture. It was also influenced by the cultural experimentations and innovations of both the October Revolution and early Bolshevik rule as Soviet culture created its own traditions (Dobrenko 2007: 25). Gradually, the concept drew more and more on ideas and approaches from a small pool of works that became identified as the canon of socialist realism and were therefore safe from criticism and attack (Clark 2000: 4). Ultimately the approach culminated in a clear 'hierarchy of genres' (Gardiner 2014: 327), and the didactic, verisimilar, uncritical, aesthetic, narrative of culture during the period, 1947 to 1953, that has commonly been termed by academics as Late Stalinism (Fürst 1988; Gorsuch 2003; Clark 2000: 215). Under the periods that are known as the Thaw and Stagnation, efforts were made among some sectors of the cultural sphere to broaden the term and recover the dynamism of earlier cultural production. Concurrently, however, there were reactions against the pushing of boundaries of cultural policy, creating confusing and conflicting approaches towards cultural production. Finally, in the late socialist period of the USSR (mid 1970s to 1991), socialist

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realism became a source of parody and of kitsch through *sots-art's* (art in the USSR that appeared during the 1970s and 1980s which used the techniques of socialist realism to critique the ideological basis of the approach, in its orthodox form, and its cultural implications), reworking of the paradigm's perceived tenets and values (Cullerne Bown 1998: 456; Condee 2000: vi).

In theory, therefore, socialist realism could include many different methods and many different genres. It provided both a new way of seeing and a conceptual framework for the development of society and upon which to hang policies. The approach was therefore necessarily future-gazing in its outlook: 'able to glimpse [the USSR's] tomorrow' through the planned work of its today (Zhdanov 1977: 22). As such, it allowed the real and the phantom to exist side by side (Petrov 2011), reworking reality into 'an ideologically consumable product' (Dobrenko 2007: 14). Through externalising the essence of the immanent state of being, socialist realism was theoretically able to call these new realities to life (Petrov 2011: 880). Thus writers became revolutionaries at the 'front ranks of those fighting for a classless socialist society', actively helping to 'remould the mentality of people in the spirit of socialism' (Zhdanov 1977: 24).

Socialist realism, in all its different incarnations, still looms large in the Cuban cultural imaginary, and its potential introduction into the Cuban setting formed a basis for many of the heated public debates of the 1960s, the most pertinent of which are gathered together in Graziella Pogolotti's *Polemicas culturales de los sesenta* (2007). Cultural figures interviewed in Cuba for this research were aware of the debates of the Thaw, and of the existence of socialist realism as an organisational and aesthetic approach.

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There was also widespread awareness of the most commonly understood iteration of socialist realism, referred to here as ‘high Stalinist socialist realism’, and the damaging effects of this cultural approach. However, some individuals interviewed [Cano 2015; Heras León 2015; Pérez 2015; Pérez Paredes 2015], and other important cultural figures such as Mirta Aguirre (1963), were well aware of the different manifestations of socialist realism. In particular, Aguirre supported the view that socialist realism could be something inclusive, dynamic and diverse, in addition to recognising the fluid nature of the paradigm (1981). Although when pressed in interviews the motivation behind Aguirre’s interpretation was viewed with suspicion by some cultural practitioners who questioned her aims [Rafael Rodriguez, 2015].

### **The Bolshevik Revolution**

The October Revolution was a continued point of reference for the Cuban revolutionary government. This included the different approaches towards culture that were adopted during this initial period. Discussion of these approaches, and the development of socialist realism, formed an integral part of the cultural debates of the 1960s in Cuba. Therefore, it is important to identify the essential discussions and approaches during these years.

Just as the revolutionary government in Cuba refused to favour one particular artistic approach, the Communist Party of the USSR (CPSU) also initially refrained from promoting a specific style or approach. The social commitment, plurality and prolific nature of cultural production in the

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first decade of the October Revolution had its roots in the cultural effervescence of the Silver Age of Russian culture, the romantic anticapitalists' rejection of Western bourgeois civilisation in Central Europe and the cultural impetuses that grew out of the failed 1905 to 1907 Revolution against Tsar Nicholas II. For example, Rufus Mathewson (2000) identifies the enduring figure of the positive hero in 19<sup>th</sup> century Russian literary realism, its interaction with Marxism and its enduring presence in Soviet writing. The active role of the artist and intellectual in shaping a new society has its roots in late 19<sup>th</sup> century Russian thought, particularly in the ideas of the author Nikolai Chernyshevskii. As part of his radical solutions to the problems faced by late Imperial Russia Chernyshevskii's seminal novel *Chto delat'*? [What is to be done?] advocated the active role of the intellectual in the social development and moral regeneration of society (Chernyshevskii 1989). As Wagner (1989: 1-21) suggests, Chernyshevskii also argued for the reorganisation of society and means of production into cooperative principles, and argued that socially aware, morally robust, scientifically educated individuals would lead the way, enlightening others and providing models for emulation. Chernyshevskii's revolutionary ideas resonated with revolutionary theorists such as Vladimir Lenin, who borrowed Chernyshevskii's title for his 1902 political pamphlet discussing the necessary tasks for the instigation of Revolution (Lenin 1988).

In the wake of the Revolutions of 1917, intellectuals took up the task of transforming an underdeveloped Russia into a society that would become an international beacon in the political, economic and cultural spheres. Throughout the 1920s, no one group or approach was privileged

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over the other, as the state sought to keep all cultural practitioners within the Revolution. Free competition between groups was permitted, while none were allowed to speak on behalf of the Party. Artists, and particularly writers, were co-opted into supporting the new government and were allowed to write in any style they pleased, provided it was not counter-revolutionary (Maguire 1968: 20). While the potential methods to facilitate cultural and societal transformation were disparate and often hostile to one another (such as those of Proletkul't and Narkompros between 1917 and 1920), they were united by shared goals, such as a hatred of capitalism and its perceived effects on culture. Moreover, the coexistence of various rival factions stimulated a great outpouring of cultural works (Frolova-Walker 2012). Initially, the ritualisation of space, a common denominator among different approaches, was at the core of attempts to realise a culture with transformative powers and, during the 1910s and 1920s, visual art, architecture, theatre and the performing arts emerged as the sites and spaces most commonly chosen for creation of this new socialist culture. Thus cultural forms and their associated spaces became 'factories of the perfect' (Clark 1996: 23).

Performing arts were particularly important, as they provided participants with a way to enter the public sphere and stake a claim in the new community in which they were to have a voice. There was a veritable explosion of theatrical activity in the early years of the Revolution, creating a popular and participatory movement of previously unimagined scale. Proletkul't, the explicitly proletarian cultural institute, its name a portmanteau of the worlds *proletarskii* [proletarian] and *kul'tura* [culture], had hundreds of theatre groups performing agitational plays across the

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country, alongside which there were independent groups attached to factories, villages and social clubs (Steinberg 2002). One of the early revolutionary theatre groups springing from the October Revolution was Teatr Revoliutsionnoi Satiry, [the Theatre of Revolutionary Satire, Terevsat], the invention of Mikhail Pustynin, the director of the local branch of the Russian telegraph service — Rosta — in Vitebsk, (North-East Belarus). Teversat's activities began as a means of spreading news and propaganda to those unable to read the newspapers, in a type of 'living newspaper'. As Leach describes it 'in a collage of brief, unconnected items, structured according to the format of a revue, these "living newspapers" kept their audience informed about and engaged with the issues of the day' (1999: 303-04). The group went on tour in the countryside and at the Civil War Front before moving to Moscow permanently in April (Leach 1999: 304).

Narkompros [the People's Commissariat for Education], responsible for educational and cultural administration, also set up a theatre division in June 1919, Tsenoteatre, which 'awarded "academic" status, large subsidies and artistic freedom to the major theatres, and a lesser position, with smaller subsidies and less freedom, to the others' (Leach 1999: 303). Tsenoteatre was then dissolved in 1920 and replaced with the Theatre Department, which was headed by Veselovod Meierkhol'd (Leach 1999: 306). The academic theatres were broadly the 'best' of the Imperial theatres (the Malyi, the Moscow Arts Theatre, the Bolshoi, the Vakhtangov, and the Jewish Theatre), and they continued to function under the aegis of Narkompros. These theatres faced competition from other, more revolutionary, theatres such as the Moscow Trade Union and

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Proletkul't theatres, and the *Teatr rabochei molodezhi* [Theatre of Working Class Youth, TRAM] (Fitzpatrick 1971: 238-39). A more comprehensive discussion of this is offered by Mally (2000), who has examined the development of amateur theatre during the first two decades of the Russian Revolution. Her study addresses the development of the totalitarian culture that would develop from the late 1930s onwards, and argues that amateur theatre blossomed in the 1920s, due to heartfelt revolutionary euphoria and spontaneity, but was ultimately quashed by pressures from above. Mally (1990) has also studied Proletkul't in detail: its aspirations and its utopian ideas, which fell victim to the Civil War and NEP. In doing so, she emphasises that the Proletkul't movement did not necessarily reject all ties to the past, as is sometimes assumed; rather, a significant portion of its work involved training and cultural education, which were rooted in the country's pre-revolutionary history.

The visual arts also experienced a period of creative outpouring in the wake of the Revolution. The avant-garde, which, prior to the Revolution, had made its mark fighting bourgeois aesthetics and values, now found itself able to begin to realise what its adherents saw as their public role (Kelly and Milner-Gulland 1998: 140 - 41). Pre-revolutionary institutes were closed down and new art institutes were established, such as the Svobodnye Gosudarstvennye Khudozhestvennye Masterskie, (Free State Art Studios, SVOMAS). During this time other institutions also proliferated, such as the Institut Khudozhestvennoy kul'tury [Institute of Artistic Culture, INKhUK] in Moscow, and later Leningrad. SVOMAS was focussed on helping the underprivileged (workers and peasants) become aware of, and create, art (Clark 1996: 50-51). This was not necessarily a

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rupture with pre-revolutionary culture, but rather the practicing of ideas that had existed prior to the October Revolution, as part of the Romantic Anticapitalistic school of thought. Artistic production remained diverse and included both avant-garde and more traditional approaches. However, between 1921 and 1923, constructivism was particularly celebrated, possibly due to the close relationship between Constructivists and Narkompros (Kelly and Milner-Gulland 1998: 143-44). Constructivism's close links to economic productivity and clarity of expression, at a time when the focus was on economic recovery and greater involvement from the previously marginalised peasants, may also have contributed to its promotion. Not only an aesthetic movement, but also a way of perceiving the world and living in a manner appropriate to the new age, constructivism considered art and design to be a political means to be used in the construction of the new society. As such, they had a very clear, very direct social utility which should be prioritised over artificial style (Kaier 2005)

Once the Civil War ended in 1921, the Bolshevik government found itself in charge of a country in which peasants made up the majority of the population with an economy ravaged both by World War One, the Civil War itself and the policy of War Communism (1918-1921). The government desperately needed to rebuild the economy and moved to do so by introducing a variant of capitalism in the *Novaia Ekonomicheskaiia Politika* [New Economic Policy, NEP]. NEP was a type of state-controlled capitalism, which, it was thought, would help to gradually establish socialism though returning to a limited market system, in which market mechanisms would gradually strengthen the state sector at the expense of

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a private sector over several decades. The hybrid system would create a changed political atmosphere in the country that would eventually allow Russia to reach socialism, driven by Cultural Revolution and the expansion of cooperatives among the peasantry. The NEP was also a tacit admission that the Bolshevik Revolution had thus far failed to bring about the desired dictatorship of workers and peasants. NEP permitted small-scale private enterprises, established taxes on harvests, brought in labour reforms and incentivisation to promote productivity, sought foreign investments and began to advocate an early version of peaceful coexistence. The policy improved the life of the peasantry and parts of the intelligentsia, but many urban workers experienced worsened conditions as industry was subsidised at the cost of investment in housing and urban wages. Under the NEP, social relations were fluid, there were many opportunities for self-advancement. The fastest growing group were the service workers, who (theoretically speaking) were an unproductive layer that formed part of the petit-bourgeoisie. The Bolsheviks thus tried to control this seemingly spontaneous proliferation of social groups, which they saw as having no place in a socialist society, by imposing old class categories. Society was classified into exploiters/disenfranchised — those who had actually benefitted from the NEP, but also those perceived to have done so, such as kulaks [rich peasants], NEPmen [small traders], spetsy [technical specialists] — and toilers [poor and middle peasants] (Ball 1997). The NEP also gave considerable liberty to intellectuals and their cultural practices. Nationalities that formed part of Soviet Russia and then the USSR were allowed to reinstate customs and use of their language, which had previously been banned under Imperial rule. Cultural production during the

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NEP was characterised by fierce competition between proletarian artists and their dedicated institutions, with alternative artistic movements from the avant-garde (such as constructivism, utopian projects, suprematism, futurism, experimental theatre).

This diversity was reflected in the cultural policy of the 1920s, which became concerned with obtaining and maintaining the intelligentsia's support rather than antagonising it, and official cultural policies were generally carried out by government agencies rather than the Party itself (Fitzpatrick 1974: 267-68). Worker-oriented groups such as Proletkul't, 'raised dissonant themes out of step with the dominant ideology of the 1920s' (Mally 1990: 229-30). Lenin's death in 1924 and the subsequent power struggle signalled the beginning of the decline of the international aspirations of the October Revolution and also heralded a more significant change in cultural policy.

Towards the end of the 1920s, the inclusive culture that thus far had existed began to be limited by the increasing militancy of proletarian cultural organisations in the search for an authentic Soviet revolutionary culture. These proletarian organisations were often completely opposed to the trends of the avant-garde and equated revolutionary aesthetics with a return to the realism of the nineteenth century (Clark 1996: 183-200). However, the Party still did not yet favour any one single approach and, in July 1925, the Central Committee responded to (rather than pre-empted) the mounting tensions in the increasingly factionalised cultural world with its resolution 'O politike partii v khuzodhestvennoi literatury' [On the Policy of the Party in the Sphere of Artistic Literature]. In the drive to assimilate cultural achievements, a guarded variant of internationalism was

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propounded in the assimilation of Soviet constituent national and ethnic cultures into the expression of a Union-wide culture. The resolution set the tone for a broadly inclusive cultural policy, which allowed for plurality in both terms of cultural output and cultural institutions and associations, lessened the power of the proletarian movements and established the position of the *poputchiki* [fellow travellers]. *Poputchiki* was the term given to artists and intellectuals who did not join the Communist Party but who were sympathetic to the Revolution; during the Cultural Revolution they were more derogatorily referred to as *burzhuanye spetsialisty* [bourgeois specialists] - linked to the term *spetsy*.

In setting an inclusive tone, the 1925 resolution also contributed to the debate on social positions within revolutionary Russia, which were becoming increasingly linked to political and ideological positions. The resolution highlighted the existence of a Cultural Revolution within the Revolution and emphasised the ongoing class struggle, which in turn meant that no art could be neutral. It also reoriented the proletariat's goal as one of affirmative construction and focussed on the involvement of wider sectors of society than ever before. It called for the proletariat to immediately move towards the take-over of positions in the cultural world. However, it also recognised that the occupation of the cultural world was trickier than in other areas, as a culturally repressed class could not work out its own literature, art, or style. In order to overcome this obstacle, the Party argued that its job was therefore to help the proletariat win its right to hegemony, whilst recognising the differences with *poputchiki* and facilitating their transition as rapidly as possible to communist ideology. Criticism was a key educational tool in this battle. Yet it drew the line at

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establishing a unitary style and organisation, and refused to support any one literary faction and therefore any one literary style or form. Instead the Party stated that it supported free competition among groups and movements, as they were at the core of the development of proletarian literature and an eventual style appropriate to the epoch. It promised to streamline literary administration, combat uninformed meddling in literary affairs, and emphasised the different roles of the artist and the critic. The resolution ended with a call to arms, stressing the importance of the assimilation of the technical accomplishments of the old masters for the eventual creation of an appropriate form that could be comprehended by millions (KPSS 1925).

As mentioned, the assimilation of characteristics specific to the constituent Soviet nationalities and ethnicities was also encouraged. In a speech made by Stalin to students of the Communist University of the Toilers of the East [Far East University / Stalin School] on 18 May 1925, the inclusiveness of socialist culture was emphasised:<sup>5</sup>

Пролетарская культура, социалистическая по своему содержанию, принимает различные формы и способы выражения у различных народов, втянутых в социалистическое строительство, в зависимости от различия языка, быта и т.д. Пролетарская по своему содержанию, национальная по форме – такова та общечеловеческая культура, к которой идет социализм. Пролетарская культура не отменяет национальной культуры, а

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<sup>5</sup> The Communist University of the Toilers of the East was established on 21 April 1921 by the Comintern, with the aim of training Communist members in the parts of the world that had been subjected to colonial rule and had regional branches in Baku, Irkutsk and Taskhent.

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дает ей содержание. И наоборот, национальная культура не отменяет пролетарской культуры, а дает ей форму.

[Proletarian culture, socialist in its content, takes different forms and means of expression among different peoples drawn into socialist construction, depending on differences of language, ways of life, etc. Proletarian in content, national in form – such is the universal culture towards which socialism is heading. Proletarian culture does not annul national culture, but gives it content. And conversely, national culture does not annihilate proletarian culture, but gives it form] (Stalin 1952: 137).

However, between 1921 and 1927, there was a fundamental redefinition of what Revolution in Russia and the USSR meant, which included reassessing the country's viable path to socialism. The subsequent politics of class warfare, the offensive against all perceived backwardness, unleashed by Stalin and his supporters, the resultant climate of fear, and the increasing international and intellectual isolation changed the development and implementation of socialist cultural policy. In 1928, the NEP ended and the First Five Year Plan was introduced; there was a return to central planning, a focus on rapid industrialisation, the collectivisation of agriculture and the elimination of class enemies. The change in structure of the means of production, towards greater collectivisation and industrialisation, was symptomatic of the move away from a mixed economy. Industrialisation enthroned the proletarian agenda and weakened the arguments of the *poputchiki*, who seemed increasingly anachronous with the emergent social order, as the Party increasingly

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favoured the proletariat and the State remained neutral. The pluralistic and vibrant cultural competition that had characterised culture under NEP gave rise to the Cultural Revolution, a period of intense cultural upheaval (1928 to 1932), caused by a drive to create a proletarian intelligentsia. During this period, the Red Army was demobilised and the Komsomol (the Communist Party's youth wing) began to mobilise, which created an aggressive anti-intelligentsia sentiment. The permissive attitude and artistic experimentation of the NEP, along with the positions of the pre-revolutionary intelligentsia, so far tolerated by the government, came under relentless attack. Collectivisation and forced industrialisation swiftly ended the mixed economy and workers and peasants received preferential treatment in areas such as education, providing a previously unmatched opportunity for social mobility (Fitzpatrick 1979).

In 1928, a group of engineers in Shakhty (North Caucasus) were arrested and accused of having conspired with the former owners of nationalised coal mines in a bid to sabotage the Soviet economy. The engineers were brought to trial; the majority were sent to prison and some were executed. The Shakhty engineers were held up as proof that the bourgeoisie were now using sabotage as a means of class struggle. The *Shakhtinskoe delo* [Shakhty Affair] was emblematic of a type of binary discourse that would come to dominate during the Cultural Revolution, as the Party's conflicts with the intelligentsia became conceptualised in terms of all-out class struggle between the 'exploiters' and 'toilers'. The process of class war also reflected the grievances of the younger generation, with powerful roots in social mobility and the fight against established authority, and these pre-existing tensions shaped the form that the Cultural

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Revolution took in different cultural areas (Fitzpatrick 1992: 118). One particularly extreme movement that thrived during the Cultural Revolution was the magazine *Novyi Levyi Front Iskusstv* [New Left Front of the Arts, New LEF], the second run of the *Levyi Front Iskusstv* [Left Front of the Arts], in circulation from 1923 to 1925, which advocated a literature of fact, factography. Factography was the idea of the active transformation of reality through work. The boundaries between style and genre were fluid and at the core was the idea of dialectical revolt and of moving artistic practice towards information, production and discourse (Tupitsyn 1996: 7). New LEF believed that fact was something that was made and signification was a labour process, not a process of reflection (Fore 2006: 6). The editorial board's argument was that contemporary reality contained such a variety of conflict and characters that fictional renderings of reality, particularly those that looked to the nineteenth century and its literary techniques, were entirely unnecessary (Kenez and Shepherd 1998: 40).

Within the visual arts, the standing of the *Assotsiatsiia khudozhnikov revoliutsionni Rossii* [Association of Artists of Revolutionary Russia, AKhRR] was initially boosted by the Cultural Revolution until infighting weakened the leadership. During this period of 'repressive anarchy and institutional improvisation', government activity in the arts declined and Party activity increased (Fitzpatrick 1971: 253). The class-war nature of the Cultural Revolution saw aggressive, but unsuccessful, competition between groups for hegemony in the arts. Here too, the Shakhty Affair had ramifications within the cultural world, as Narkompros's policies of cooperating with the *burzhuaiznye spetsialisty* and discouraging iconoclasm were questioned by cultural figures and bodies (Fitzpatrick

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1971: 242-43). Narkompros began to fall from favour but did not disappear; however, due to in-fighting neither did RAPP and other proletarian organisations establish dominion. Despite lacking an official mandate they assumed leadership, exercising 'a repressive and cliquish dictatorship over literary publication and criticism' but also engaging in intense competition with Communist radicals from other institutes (Fitzpatrick 1992: 137-38). The intense competition between groups reflected the divisions by questions of taste in wider society. Undoubtedly, some sectors of society embraced, and were empowered by, the avant-garde ideas that were closely linked to production and utility. However, others found these ideas alienating. The majority of Soviet citizens were grounded in a nineteenth-century concept of art that favoured realist narrative paintings, sentimentality, melodrama and ornamentation (Bowl 2002: 39-40). The increased social mobility begun by the NEP, meant that individuals whose backgrounds would previously have excluded them from cultural practices took up positions within culture and cultural administration. This change in the composition of the cultural administration began to contribute to the gradual promotion of realist narratives in cultural production, reflective of the popular tastes of the Soviet population.

Proletarian organisations such as RAPP were closed in April 1932 by the Party Central Committee's decree '*O perestroike literaturno-khudozhestvennykh organizatsii*' [*On the Reformation of Literary-Artistic Organisations*], as part of a concerted effort to bring cultural production together in a unified, but diverse, socialist front (Fitzpatrick 1992: 243). Specifically proletarian organisations, with their aggressive policies,

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seemed increasingly out of step with the atmosphere and rationale of the 1930s; theoretically the inequalities caused by the NEP had been addressed, creating a more unified Soviet society. Cultural institutions were beginning to reflect this new equality; meanwhile, the way was being made ready for a single cultural entity to replace the existing multiple organisations, each with its own disparate aim. As Andrei Zhdanov argued at the 1934 Soviet Writers' Congress, 'the main difficulties confronting [the nation] in the work of socialist construction [had] already been overcome' (Zhdanov 1977: 15).

The enforced unification of cultural institutions, which sought to reflect the unity of collectivised, industrialised Soviet society, severely limited the available artistic affiliations and compelled many diverse practitioners onto a common ground, thereby creating an artificial sense of unity (Tupitsyn 1996: 127). Old factional divisions remained however, and loaded terms such as 'formalism', 'naturalism' and 'socialist realism' began to be used to score points and settle conflicts.

### **Unifying term**

With the creation of a superficial sense of unity and the overcoming of the challenges of socialist construction an important point of focus of the authorities of the USSR in the early 1930s was the happening/embedding of socialism. This was pursued rather than the *post-hoc* creation of the right theoretical conditions for socialism to flourish. This process was also socialist realism's focus.

At the same time as the disbanding of RAPP, and the creation of the Soviet Writers' Union in 1932, the concept of socialist realism as both an 'institutional formation and artistic practice' surfaced and was the subject of great debate, which became formally articulated in 1934 at the Writers' Congress (Petrov 2011: 873). The idea for a Soviet Artists' Union also arose in 1932, but it was slow to form and it was not until 1936 that the All-Union Committee on Artistic Affairs of the Government of the USSR, which included the Main Administration for Visual Arts Institutions and the Main Administration for Supervision of Performances and Repertoires, was founded. The Cultural Revolution of the previous years, it was argued, had raised the cultural awareness of the people to such a level that it was no longer necessary to decree specific organisations for distinct sectors of society.

Initially, socialist realism served as a loose rhetorical framework within which policy could be built. It also functioned as a convenient empty term that would help to unify the factionalised cultural community and provide a democratic style that would ensure that culture was understood by all sectors of society, regardless of their class origin or educational level (Robin 1992). The term arose out of the need to support diversity and rule out exclusivity in culture and was an early attempt at crossover between elite and mass culture (Ivashkin 2014: 447). As such, it both defined and was defined by the theories and practices of high and low culture (Kenez and Shepherd 1998: 47-48).

As revolutionaries, socialist realist writers were also called upon to continue to defend the USSR from the attack, obvious or insidious, of western bourgeois values. The focal point of this was the *anti-formalism*

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drive that criticised art for showing excessive influence from the West and overtly avant-garde approaches. The drive began in the 1920s, with Rossiiskaia Assotsiatsiia Proletarskikh Muzykantov [Russian Association of Proletarian Musicians, RAPM] and the attack on works such as Shostakovich's *Ledi Makbet Mtsenskogo uezda* [Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District] gained considerable force in the 1930s and ended in the restrictive period known as the *Zhdanovshchina* of late 1940s (Fitzpatrick 1992: 189). This defensive capacity was to eventually play a heightened role in the late 1940s, as perceived foreign influences became increasingly undesirable. The socialist realist model, therefore, actually supported the internationalism of the 1920s and called for writers to subsume all that was good from world literature and art. In doing so, it should gather up the best of the squandered literary heritage of the bourgeoisie, study it, critically assimilate it and take it further deploying these new weapons (genres, styles, forms and methods of literary creation) in the engineering of the new Soviet soul (Zhdanov 1977: 22). Thus, socialist realism also helped to form a 'cultural quarantine' against foreign modernism (*formalizm*), seen as a product of the late stages of capitalism (Fitzpatrick 1992: 197-214).

In addition to highlighting the inexorable path towards socialism in their work, the socialist realist artist had the task of educating and inspiring the consumer of culture through the propagation of appropriate myths and images. This necessarily differentiated socialist realism from bourgeois culture and society, which according to Gor'kii had 'completely lost the capacity for invention in art' (1977: 44). Within the terms of socialist realism, myth-making involved extracting the cardinal idea of reality, embodying it in imagery, and adding the desired and the possible with the

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aim of provoking a revolutionary attitude (for example, a desire to change for the better, for the ideal) towards reality (Gor'kii 1977: 44). Gor'kii's argument can be understood as the application of what the art critic John Berger would later term 'glamour', but within a Marxist framework, rather than the capitalist, consumer framework Berger discusses (1973). With the commercial drive removed, publicity is replaced by the idea of Revolution — the arrival of full communism —, the fruition of which promises happiness. By buying into the promise of the artwork towards which the viewer looks for affirmation, encouragement and inspiration for the tasks they aim to solve, the viewer imagines themselves transformed by the product – Revolution – into an object of envy for others who have not yet been liberated from the capitalist system. The burgeoning industry of copying artworks in the Stalinist era contributed to 'glamour' in Soviet society by turning art into a culturally and socially loaded consumer good that denoted success (Yankovskaya and Mitchell 2006). This complements Dobrenko's argument that socialist realism created socialism and also Clark's argument that socialist realism was the USSR's myth repository (2000). Socialist realism thus became not only a style but also the foundation for cultural state-building, and, within this 'myth bank' the October Revolution became the foundational myth of the contemporary USSR (Frame 2012: 289; Clark 2000). Internationalism was, therefore, a necessary element of the construction, and evolution, of the constituent myths contained within socialist realism, as was the appropriation of potentially useful cultural tropes and practices from other countries. Clark terms the revival of pre-Soviet Russian culture in the 1930s part of a 'Great Appropriation':

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In building up its own image, Moscow appropriated both laterally (absorbing contemporary trends in other countries, primarily western European, but also American) and also diachronically (appropriating Great Russian and European culture of the past) (Clark 2011: 8).

The Great Appropriation was to some extent tempered by conflicting interpretations of cultural policy. Increasingly the Party had final authority; it set forth a list of vague cultural aesthetic labels and an idea of functionality, but left debates about specific artistic form and content to the professional community of established individuals within cultural institutions (Rolfe 2009). Cultural policy was legitimised often by reference to individuals already hailed in their own profession, rather than through party doctrine or official announcements. Socialist realism was no different; its framework was established early in the 1930s but the detail was never glossed, and because of that, it never became completely clear if socialist realism was the only method, a style or one of a number of equally acceptable methods, and if realism could refer to a realistic style or a certain perception of the moment (Robin 1992).

Therefore, in theory, socialist realism could take any number of forms in any number of genres, but once it was hailed as the official method of Soviet literature, writers were urged to follow novels that had been identified as exemplars of the nascent system. In literature this included figures such as Gor'kii, who swiftly became the standard figure to evoke when the intelligentsia sought the safety of unfailing reliability in literature as the world around them became increasingly unreliable (Fitzpatrick 1976: 223). The avant-garde progressively came under attack

and the classics were reinstated (Solovyova 1999: 329). This move towards the classics was arguably part of the wider idea of *kul'turnost'*, of being 'cultured', promoted in the 1930s, which entailed the rise of traditionally middle-class values such as propriety, culture and good taste. *Kul'turnost'* was a state to be aspired towards and came to symbolise both individual achievement and industrial efficiency (Kelly and Volkov 1998: 297).

By the end of the second decade of the October Revolution, socialist realism had therefore changed from an approach for the potential construction of international socialism to one for the construction of intranational — Soviet — socialism, as the Party's focus shifted inwards. Perhaps the best known result of the drive to construct 'socialism in one country' was the systematic rooting out of those deemed to be damaging or dangerous to Soviet society. The Great Purges between 1936 and 1938, which saw millions of Soviet citizens sent to their deaths in the Glavnoe upravleniye lagerei [Main Camp Management, GULAG] prison camp network, left an indelible mark on Soviet culture. Socialist realism began to become a more restrictive term as the vague cultural edicts of the Party and the culture of fear and instability created a self-reinforcing set of culturally acceptable aesthetic labels which were ruthlessly policed, often by critics with little or no interest in culture whatsoever (Rolfe 2009).<sup>6</sup> The once open and inclusive term became condensed into a set of catchphrases or keywords, which ultimately became the signifier and not the signified: *narodnost'* [national character], *partiinnost'* [party spirit], *dostupnost'* [accessibility], *opora na klassiku* [support of the classics]. The

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<sup>6</sup> Fitzpatrick (1992) argues that these individuals also had a great interest in political advancement.

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catchphrases highlighted the need for a socialist realist work to contain elements of folk or national music and culture, reflecting the ideology of the CPSU, ensuring that the work was accessible to everyone and open to popular demands, and finally based on past classical models. The net result was that writers began to draw from this small, celebrated repertoire of works and 'socialist realism became so intensely citational that, by the mid-1930s, a single, conventionalised system of signs was already evident in virtually all novelistic depictions of positive heroes' (Clark 1997: 31).<sup>7</sup> Paradigmatic literary works from which inspiration was drawn included; in the 1930s, Nikolai Ostrovskii's *Kak zaklialas' stal'* [How the Steel was Tempered], the story of Pavel Korchagin's (the archetypical positive hero) journey towards socialism and the sacrifices he made for society. Maksim Fadeev's *Molodaia gvardiia* [The Young Guard], which focusses on the activities of the antifascist underground Komsomol organisation, active during the Second World War (WW2, 1939-1945), seemed to be the chosen paradigm of socialist realism for the forties, although it was never clarified (Clark 2000: 160). Other post-factum models of Socialist realism included: Gor'kii, Vladimir Maiakovskii, Vesevolod Ivanov — *Partizanskii povest'* [Partisan Tales], Dimitri Furmanov — *Chapaev*, Alexander Fadeev — *Razgom* [The Rout], Sergei Eisenstein — *Broenenosets Potemkin* [Battleship Potemkin], Anton Makarenko — *Pedagogicheskaiia poema* [Pedagogical poem], Fedor Gladkov *Tsement* [Cement], and Marietta Shaginian — *Mess-Mend, ili lanki v Petrograde* [Miss-Mend, or the Yankees in Petrograd].

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<sup>7</sup> In a similar line to Lahusen's argument about socialist realism's politico-social context, Clark also discusses *Pravda's* influence on Socialist realism (Clark 2000: 68 - 91) as does Jeffrey Brooks (Brooks 1994).

The Stalin Prize, established in 1941, further reinforced the bounds of acceptability and cemented the nascent hierarchy of artistic forms.<sup>8</sup> The process for approving the award (which involved six stages of oversight going through the *Komitet po Stalinskim premiiam* through to Stalin himself) became more obscure over time (Frolova-Walker 2016: 19). The Prize, and the exclusion of certain artists from its consideration, served to establish a hierarchy of authority, but the long process of selecting recipients and the surrounding debate also reflected the ongoing arguments between those promoting 'high' art and those aiming to promote mass popular culture (Frolova-Walker 2016: 55-56). The Prize, which included different classes of award and categories for film, literature, the visual arts and music, was in turns both tolerant and restrictive, particularly when it came to music. Within the visual arts, Oliver Johnson argues that the Stalin Prize was intimately linked to the re-establishment of the Academy of Fine Arts, its emphasis on traditional realism, and the bid to centralise power (Johnson 2011).

Within theatre, Konstantin Stanislavskii became the legitimising figure and the founding paragon of socialist realist theatrical production. Stanislavskii, with Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko, had founded the joint-stock company, the *Moskovskii khudozhestvennyi akademicheskii teatr* [Moscow Art Theatre, MKhAT] in 1898. The theatre focussed on realism in its productions and Stanislavskii pioneered an acting system that would facilitate heightened psychological and emotional realism in actors'

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<sup>8</sup> The Stalin Prize endowed the recipient with the title of Laureate and grants that ranged from 10,000 to 100,000 roubles (Chen 1944: 9)

portrayals of characters.<sup>9</sup> Stanislavskii's system, which has become a world-wide institution, is based on a series of linked techniques that are used to help actors communicate believable emotions from three-dimensional characters in their performances. A holistic system, it drew on currents from the Russian avant-garde, in addition to incorporating elements of psychology and physical fitness.<sup>10</sup>

An alternative theatrical figure who eventually became a high-profile victim of the 'hard left', and an indication of which styles and approaches might not be acceptable, was Vsevolod Meierkhol'd. A former student of Nemirovich Danchenko at the MKhAT, Meierkhol'd had been active in the Theatrical Department (TEO) of Narkompros, of which he was appointed the head in 1920. Before he founded his own theatre in 1923, Meierkhol'd and other avant-garde artists led the 'Theatrical October' campaign, a campaign focussed on creating a revolutionary style of theatre that would render obsolete the academic theatres and their style.<sup>11</sup> Like Stanislavskii, he argued that an actor's emotional state was linked to their physical state; however, his style was a significant departure from the realism of Stanislavskii. Meierkhol'd strongly advocated the use of ideas of symbolism and constructivism in theatre, devising the biomechanics acting technique, which advocated that every movement of the actor must demonstrate an inner reaction to an emotion and combined elements of

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<sup>9</sup> Benedetti (2008b, 2008a) offers a detailed study of Stanislavskii, his life, work and system and an authoritative translation of Stanislavskii's works. Leach and Borovsky (eds) (1999) present a comprehensive overview of Russian theatre from its earliest inception to contemporary developments. Russian theatre's initial marked Western influence is highlighted.

<sup>10</sup> Kaier and Naiman (2006) offer a detailed discussion of the rise of realism in theatre and the privileging of a variant of the Stanislavskii system.

<sup>11</sup> Leach (1989) and Pitches (2003) both offer thorough discussions of Meierkhol'd's work and life.

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circus-esque styles and ideas about mechanics and efficiency. Meierkhol'd also emphasised the artificiality of theatre, rejected the idea of a 'fourth wall' and had earlier sought to reject 'traditional' theatre in the search for a more radical variant that would be capable of expressing the new reality. A victim of the anti-*formalizm* campaign, Meierkhol'd was convicted of anti-Soviet activity and shot in 1940. He was rehabilitated in 1955.

In the climate of fear and paranoia directors became increasingly unwilling to take risks or experiment with theatrical forms that could be interpreted as a departure from the officially sanctioned, stunted version of the Stanislavskian system. This narrow reading of Stanislavskian 'stage realism' (psychological realism and emotional authenticity), that traced a genealogy from the System back to the nineteenth-century realist school of Aleksandr Fedotov and Mikhail Shchepkin, consequently became popularised (Gardiner 2014: 49-50). By the 1940s the naturalistic focus on detail of the sets of the MKhAT and the Malyi (two of the 'academic' theatres against which Meierkhol'd had rallied) became the unfailingly reliable approach against which all other theatre productions' set designs and aesthetics were measured. This saw the widespread implementation of naturalist three-walled sets, which maintained the fourth wall, the use of real props and mass choreography alongside avoidance of theatrical stylising and devices or techniques that emphasised the artificiality of theatre such as Meierkhol'd's biomechanics method. Dramatic plots did not differ wildly from the emergent format of the Soviet socialist realist novel that followed the masterplot and dramatised journeys of heroes and heroines from class ignorance to ideological enlightenment (Gardiner

2014: 51). By 1950 the number of theatres had fallen from 900 to 545 (Deza and Matthews 1975: 718 - 19).<sup>12</sup>

Socialist realism was slower to become enshrined within the visual arts, perhaps in part because the nebulous nature of the term, and the erratic enforcement of its perceived boundaries, meant that art forms with a less clear narrative, such as the visual arts, were more flexible. An emphasis was placed on realism in paintings, and the *kartinka* – a large, oil-on-canvas, labour-intensive composition featuring multiple figures and dealing with a significant theme – became a promoted style (Reid 2001: 164). This trend notwithstanding, alternative approaches that drew on impressionism and other figurative trends were also given space for expression. Until Anatolii Lunacharskii's departure from being Commissar of Enlightenment in 1929, realism made little headway compared to other artistic forms such as literature and cinema, despite efforts from Proletkul't or AKhRR. The association's works tended to be neo-realist treatments of workers and soldiers or mythologisations of Soviet history, and clearly looked up to Il'ia Repin as the figurehead of Russian realism (Kelly and Milner-Gulland 1998: 145). Repin had been a member of the *Peredvizhniki* [itinerant wanderers], a group of Russian realist artists who, in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, broke away from the Imperial Academy of Arts and formed an independent artistic cooperative. The cooperative began life based in St. Petersburg but then travelled around the Russian provinces in an effort to bring art to the people. The *Peredvizhniki* eschewed high society and focussed on popular themes, including inequality and injustice, folk

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<sup>12</sup> Ballet, opera, and children's theatres are excluded from this statistic. Jack Chen's *Soviet Art and Artists* (1944), provides a comprehensive outline of the structure and networks of art institutions and education for the later 1930s and WW2 years.

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customs, and landscapes. The group was strongly influenced by literary critics such as Vissarion Belinskii and Chernyshevskii, and also brought together artists from diverse geographical locations. Elizabeth Valkener (1989) charts the development of the tradition of realist art from a socio-political perspective, which necessarily deals with the influence of Chernyshevskii's generation of thinkers on Russian art.

1932 was also a key year in the organisation of the visual arts; all existing artistic groups were dissolved and the Union of Soviet Artists, a 'loose co-ordinating body for the various regional and republican Unions', was founded (Kelly and Milner-Gulland 1998: 146). Vsekhudozhnik, [the All-Russian Union of Artists' Cooperatives], founded in 1929, became a key player in the manoeuvrings of power after 1932. It unified conflicting groups and promoted artistic production on a mass scale and worked out the economic system of the Soviet art world. Cooperatives such as Vsekhudozhnik were the principal producers of socialist realist visual media for everyday life, offering artists thematic plans and advance contracts: 'the artists would sign a contract with an enterprise, institution, or the cooperative itself and would then deliver the work, which was based on an assigned theme, within a predefined period of time' (Yankovskaya and Mitchell 2006: 776). However, a significant proportion of Soviet painters did not participate within this system (Yankovskaya and Mitchell 2006: 776). The first regional sections of Vsekhudozhnik were in Rostov-on-Don, Nizhnii Novgorod, Samara, and Sverdlovsk. Eventually nearly all regional capitals, from Leningrad in the West to Khabarovsk in the Far East, had a cooperative section. When Vsekhudozhnik was closed down in 1953 it had a total of sixty-seven societies (Yankovskaya and Mitchell

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2006: 780). Landscapes, still lifes, and other nature scenes that, due to the demands of the style, could not offer the clear narrative demanded by socialist realism, offered nonconforming artists a protective space within which they could avoid ideological commissions with clear socialist themes (Swanson 1994).

From 1932 to 1933, a milestone exhibition, *Khudozhniki RSFSR za 15 let* [Artists of the Russian Federation after Fifteen Years], was held. This exhibition presented the main players in the competition for socialist realism, consigning the avant-garde to history. Reid argues that the contenders could, broadly speaking, be separated into two camps, adaptations of the Russian realist tradition versus more expressive abstract tendencies (Reid 2001: 155). There was considerable room for differing interpretations of the new directives of socialist realism; orders from 'above' were contradictory and inconsistent but were also interpreted and implemented against the backdrop of factional conflicts between both artistic factions and the bureaucracies that patronised them. Such heterogeneous approaches can be found in the differences between the treatment of Kuz'ma Petrov-Vodkin who died in 1939 and whose work was infrequently shown from then until the Thaw, and Aleksandr Gerasimov whose work was regularly shown in exhibitions and who received numerous honours. The treatment of Pavel Kuznetsov, or Aleksandr Deineka, the latter of whom became a key figure once more during the Thaw, also demonstrate these irregularities. Such competing currents prevented socialist realism from achieving a clear, established ontology (Reid 2001: 154). Greater regulation and centralisation of the art world came in 1938, with the establishment of the Organisational Committee of

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the Union of Soviet Artists. Aleksandr Gerasimov, protégé of the Commissar of Defence Kliment Voroshilov (Reid 2001: 159), and president of the Moscow Union of Artists in 1932, was the Organisational Committee's first president, and then the first director of the Academy of Arts (Kelly and Milner-Gulland 1998: 146). The Organisational Committee specified that, to be a member of the new system of local artists' unions, an individual should: have specialised education, produce independent original works of high quality and exhibit regularly; independently stage theatre productions; be a critic or scholar publishing in the Soviet press regularly; or be a master of folk art and create independent, original, high-quality products (Yankovskaya and Mitchell 2006: 783). These requirements made a significant portion of artists ineligible to join the Union.

Visual arts were closely linked to the idea of, and drive for, *kul'turnost'*. In the context of a changing value system and the popularisation of certain desired practices 'art provided, not only a space for the visualisation of ideas, but also a marker of belonging to a socially successful group' (Yankovskaya and Mitchell 2006: 770). It was perhaps in this context that the paradigmatic exhibition *Industriia Sotsialisma* [The Industry of Socialism], the first All-Union art exhibition was conceived. Preparations began in 1935; the exhibition, which would involve 700 artists, was to be held in 1937, although in the end it did not take place until March 1939. The exhibition's purpose was twofold: it would be the first public display of socialist realism, and would enact the integration of artists into useful, planned, socialist production (Reid 2001). A brainchild of the Commissar for heavy industry, 'Sergo' Ordzhonikidze, the exhibition

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was closely linked to the industrialising drive of the 1930s. As such, the problems of the art world therefore took on a political tone and complaints about shortages of materials, spontaneous or orchestrated, could be used as evidence, against the supplier, of criminal dereliction of duty (Reid 2001). The exhibition 'identified socialist realism with the forms of "high" art canonised in the pre-revolutionary academy, oil painting and sculpture' (Reid 2001: 157). Reid also points out that in commissioning work according to a written script, it privileged, 'from the outset, narrative painting, identifying socialist realist art almost exclusively with the *kartinka*' (Reid 2001: 164). Nevertheless, within this remit, it was still able to maintain a guarded diversity of styles within the boundaries of acceptability; the *kartinka* dominated but still life and impressionist-inspired pieces still abounded (Reid 2001: 169). The public reaction to, and subsequent 'серьезное, всестороннее обсуждение [serious, comprehensive discussion]', of the exhibition was to help guide artists in the synthesis and improvement of a national art form (Grigor'ev 1939).

The guarded diversity of *Industriia Sotsialisma* was already anachronistic by the time it opened in 1939. Clear hierarchies of style had been established during this time and the labels 'formalism' and 'naturalism' now implied a wilful inaccessibility to the wider population. In discussing the exhibition Grigor'ev used loaded language to criticise the perceived shortcomings of some of the artists:

Мы остановились на главных творческих удачах наших мастеров. Было бы, однако, ошибкой закрывать глаза на многие слабости художников. Социалистический реализм не терпит слащавости, фальши, лакировки, отрывки натурализма'

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[We dwelled on the main creative achievements of our masters. However, it would be a mistake to turn a blind eye to the many weaknesses of the artists. Socialist realism does not tolerate the sentimentality, falsehood, varnishing and belching of naturalism] (Grigor'ev 1939).

Within *The Industriia Sotsialisma*, and the types of art and artistic production it privileged, there was a return to neoclassical canvas painting and sculpture, the privileging of novelistic realism over modernism and the identification of these forms as the most appropriate to depict proletarian subjects. There had been plans to incorporate an abridged and revised version of *Industriia Sotsialisma* into a Museum of Soviet Art as the core collection that would constitute the canon of socialist realism, but these were put on hold with the advent of WW2 in the USSR in 1941 and 'the definitive statement of the nature and scope of socialist realism was deferred once more' (Reid 2001: 183). However, while a once-and-for-all official definition remained elusive, institutional reforms that had taken place between 1936 and 1940 were reinstated and legitimised social and cultural hierarchies, and these dictated the direction that socialist realism would take in the late Stalinist period.

### **Dogmatisation**

Socialist realism was understood in Cuba in a variety of iterations and contexts, and this understanding changed over the course of the Cuban Revolution as new generations of Cubans were brought up within the Revolution. Initially, the group that had the strongest understanding of the

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paradigm was, understandably, the PSP and therefore to some extent, Sociedad Cultural Nuestro Tiempo (henceforth Nuestro Tiempo). However, as struggles for power intensified within both the budding infrastructure and the differing interpretations of culture under socialism, socialist realism became synonymous with enduring prejudices about the PSP and the type of cultural production (it was assumed) some of their more 'orthodox' members wished to promote. Discussion about the paradigm in the 1960s was, therefore, particularly heated and attention focussed on the high Stalinist variant of socialist realism.

During the late Stalinist period, the backward-looking approach towards socialist realism, which had developed between 1936 and 1940, became progressively internalised. What is referred to here as 'high Stalinist socialist realism' has come to be understood generally as the only variant of socialist realism. This is perhaps because of the lasting damaging effect that the application of this manifestation of the approach had on cultural expression and promotion, creating an easily identifiable, homogenous narrative style across the visual arts, literature, theatre, and the cinema that remains emblematic of the period. The approach, in both aesthetic and organisational applications, moved from inclusive to exclusive as experimentation became increasingly dangerous. This stunting of culture, by which socialist realism has come to be characterised, was only partially addressed in the wake of Stalin's death and the ensuing institutional readjustments.

The need to mobilise the population during WW2 opened up the boundaries of acceptability within Soviet culture. The fight against fascism became synonymous with the national struggle for survival: ideological

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controls were relaxed and the use of pre-revolutionary imagery was encouraged. The Orthodox Church was allowed to re-establish the Patriarchate and the secret police had its activities curbed. To many citizens, this liberalisation created hope that a victory would ignite more widespread reforms (Fuller 2002: 334). However, after the war, against the increasingly hostile backdrop of the Cold War, the artistic and the political became even more inextricably linked. In the post-war USSR, reconstruction of the economy was once more a priority, along with a greater imposition of domestic political controls (Fuller 2002). There was more intense regulation of culture, a rise in national chauvinism and a significant narrowing of the parameters of acceptability. Within approved socialist realist works there was a greater interest in the true and the false, rather than focussing on an individual journey towards enlightenment. In keeping with the trend of rising nationalism more symbols relating to the native land were used in art and the heroism of socialist realist works of the late 1930s faded away (Clark 2000: 192-98). In a further acknowledgement of the realist agenda, the space that had been the Imperial Academy of Arts in Leningrad was made into the Il'ia Repin Leningrad Institute for Painting, Sculpture and Architecture in 1944.

The effect on cultural production was twofold; the scope of socialist realism contracted, and the importance of an artist's legitimising biography, giving them the right or the experience to embark upon the creation of a realistic socialist cultural product, increased.<sup>13</sup> In 1946 a campaign that became known as the *Zhdanovshchina* — after Andrei Zhdanov, Commissar of Culture in 1946 and Chairman of the USSR between 1946

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<sup>13</sup> Such as Vasilii Azaev's biography, which Lahusen uses as the basis of his exploration of socialist realism.

and 1947— was initiated.<sup>14</sup> The *Zhdanovshchina* marked a reactionary, conservative period that saw a drive to remove all Western, bourgeois influences from Soviet intellectual and cultural life and artists. The Zhdanov Doctrine divided the world into two spheres, imperialistic (with the USA at its head) and democratic (with the USSR at its head). It advocated significant anti-Western sentiment in all spheres of Soviet life, including science. Artists had to ensure that their creative works conformed to the party line or face persecution. During this period intellectuals deemed to have Western leanings were persecuted and their work banned. The period began in August 1946 with two resolutions from the Central Committee. One criticized the publication by the Leningrad-based journals *Zvezda* [Star] and *Leningrad* of works by satirical writer Mikhail Zoshchenko and the Silver-age poet Anna Akhmatova. Zoshchenko and Akhmatova were expelled from the Soviet Writers' Union and the journal editors were replaced. These developments also reinforced the idea of Moscow as the centre of authoritarian culture. St Petersburg had been the more liberal centre of culture in the USSR and the attack on their only 'thick' (serious) cultural journal *Leningrad* signalled that the liberalisation of culture which some members of the intelligentsia had hoped for would not be forthcoming. The second resolution was 'O repertuare dramaticheskikh teatrov i merakh po ego uluchsheniu' [Concerning the repertoires of dramatic theatres and measures to improve them]. The resolution, issued on 26 August 1946, lamented the direction of Soviet theatre and lack of plays that dealt with contemporary themes (according to the resolution, only twenty five of 115 productions) and opined that too many artists were

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<sup>14</sup> The suffix *-shchina* in Russian implies negative judgement.

removed from or avoided dealing with contemporary issues and that this rendered theatre's educative potential ineffective (Anon 1946: 593).

The resolution denounced the focus on bourgeois foreign works, called for an increase in new plays that dealt with Soviet contemporaneity, emphasised the need for theatrical critics, less bureaucracy, and a union-wide competition for the best contemporary Soviet plays. Gardiner identifies three playwrights who were particularly promoted by the Writers' Union during the *Zhdanovshchina*, Anatolii Sofronov, Anatolii Surov, and Nikolai Virta (2014: 61-70). Their plays dealt with contemporary topics, such as municipal government and Party leadership, good and bad workers, and the *kolkhoz* [collective farm]. The theory of *beskonfliktnost'* [conflictlessness] was also promoted in theatre during the late Stalinist period: it proclaimed that plays should not depict any real conflict because society was now free of all class-based antagonism. This theory led to a glossing-over of the negative and promotion of unrealistically high individual moral standards in theatrical works, subsequently criticised as *lakirovka* [varnishing].

Within the visual arts, realist works, drawing on the nineteenth century, national-populist ideas of the *peredvizhniki* tradition were increasingly privileged from the mid-to-late 1930s. Three types were particularly favoured: the portrait, above all of political or military leaders; the historical painting; and the genre painting (depicting scenes of everyday life) (Kelly and Milner-Gulland 1998: 146). These styles and genres became further enshrined with the re-establishing of the pre-revolutionary Academy of Arts in 1947. Previously in Leningrad but now in Moscow, the new Academy was led by Aleksandr Gerasimov, who

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remained its director until 1957. However, while the *Zhdanovshchina* provided clear guidelines for composers, writers, filmmakers and theatre producers, visual art did not suffer from the same degree of intervention from the Central Committee. Within this context, the Stalin Prize became an important site of negotiation rather than a space for reinforcement (Johnson 2011: 821). Gerasimov's circle dominated the selection process for the Stalin Prize, attempting to promote the criteria determined by the Academy of Fine Arts and thereby consolidating its hegemony. Artistic works were assessed by their ideological, political and productive criteria. The net result of this was that the prize was increasingly seen by younger artists as a closed system, awarded on nepotistic grounds rather than merit (Johnson 2011: 842-43). The production of original artworks diminished and copying increased. The copying of sanctioned artworks helped to guarantee a comfortable existence during the late Stalinist period, without the danger of political repercussions. It also helped to turn art into a regular, accessible consumer product that ensured artistic education on a mass scale and the standardisation of audience reception (Yankovskaya and Mitchell 2006: 785-88). Yankovskaya and Mitchell also argue that late Stalinist paintings were characterised by their monumental size, attention to detail and group nature, possibly due to the way that works were priced after the war (Yankovskaya and Mitchell 2006: 789).

In this increasingly regulated atmosphere, a further decree, this time directed at the music world but symptomatic of the wider approach to culture, was issued in August of 1948, cementing the drive against

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perceived non-Soviet trends.<sup>15</sup> Georgian composer Vano Muradeli and his opera *Velikaia druzhba* [The Great Friendship] were accused of *formalizm* [formalism]. Other composers, such as Prokofiev and Shostakovich, were also accused of formalist tendencies and their work banned. This heralded the beginning of the campaign against *formalizm*. The *Zhdanovshchina* and the anti-*formalizm* campaign reignited the type of binary division that had characterised the Bolsheviks' early thinking about bourgeois specialists and the proletarian intelligentsia in the early 1920. In politics the division was between Western-imperialist/ Soviet-democratic; in culture the division was between formalist and socialist realist. Socialist realism thus became a term used by those in power to indicate approval or bestow a value on a cultural production, although it could equally be co-opted to legitimise works that would otherwise be viewed askance, in the same way the label '*formalizm*' could be used to condemn a work and its author (Gardiner 2014: 51).

As the chill of the Cold War set in, foreign influence on culture became conflated with anti-patriotic sentiments and, on 28 January 1949, the campaign against *kosmopolitizm* [cosmopolitanism] began. As Gardiner discusses (2014: 87-93), the editorial 'Ob odnoi antipatrioticheskoi gruppe teatral'nykh kritikov [On one Antipatriotic Group of Theatre Critics] in *Pravda* denounced a group of theatre critics, who had found the quality of some plays that dealt with Soviet contemporaneity lacking. The critics in question were deemed to be Western-oriented, and harshly criticised for holding up the development of Soviet literature and potentially distracting the youth because of their 'rootless cosmopolitanism'

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<sup>15</sup> Frolova-Walker (2007) analyses the development, and state support, of Russian nationalism in music between 1836 to 1953.

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(Anon 1949a). This article was then re-used and applied to the visual arts on 10 February of the same year, clearly linking *kosmopolitanizm* to *formalism* and wilful meddling in the creative work of realist artists (Anon 1949b).

The anti-*kosmopolitizm* campaign was further complicated by the puzzling appearance of a clear anti-Semitic drive. This prejudice saw the closure of the Moscow State Jewish Theatre (GOSET) and the Kamernyi Theatre run by Aleksandr Tairov — which in 1932 had incorporated the Realistic Theatre's company into its troupe (Beumers 1998: 92-95).

### Thaw(s)

After Stalin's death on 5 March 1953, and the ensuing power struggle until Khrushchev's departure from power in 1964, there was a period of frenetic reformism across all spheres of Soviet life, known as the Thaw. During this period the government sought political change through the reform, and in some cases rebuilding, of institutions of Party and State. This included addressing the cult of Stalin, which after Nikita Khrushchev's 'Secret Speech' in 1956, began to be more systematically dismantled.<sup>16</sup> Il'ia Erenburg's novel *Ottepel'* [Thaw] gave the period its name, Erenburg's novel addressed subjects, such as the Purges and anti-Semitism, which had previously been taboo in Soviet society. The novel is loosely based around two painters, a Party hack and a talented artist who does not paint in the socialist realist style.

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<sup>16</sup> 'Secret' because the speech was only made public some weeks after the 20<sup>th</sup> Party Congress on 24 and 25 February 1956. It was also not until 1961 that Khrushchev denounced Stalin publicly at the XXII Party Congress.

The Thaw was 'a time of rapid change, of moving back – though not eliminating – barriers, of asking new questions, raising new subjects, and to some extent experimenting with new techniques' (Hosking 1980: 19). As such, it was a hopeful, yet disorienting, period (Dobson 2009: 15), that was not actually a continuous process of relaxation and liberalisation but a series of several 'thaws' that were almost immediately followed by reactionary clampdowns by the Party (Jones 2006b: 11). These 'thaws' occurred in 1954 (following the September 1953 Central Committee Plenum), 1956 (following the 20<sup>th</sup> Party Congress) and from 1961-62 (following the 22<sup>nd</sup> Party Congress), while periods of reactionary policy are identified from 1954-55, late 1956-57 and 1962-63 (Clark 2000: 211). For example, Garaudy's *D'un réalisme sans rivages*, published in 1963 was placed on a black list in the USSR, due to his 'revisionism' (Reid 2012).

During the Thaw artists were no longer obliged to give primacy to the party and social issues at the exclusion of the personal, and could enjoy greater freedom of artistic expression (Woll 2000: 4). Socialist realism remained the dominant cultural paradigm during the Thaw, and, however, was actually strengthened by the re-opening of discussions about what the creation of a socialist art form could include. The cautious openness in the cultural world was first (publicly) ushered in by Vladimir Pomerantsev's essay 'Ob iskrennosti v literature [On Sincerity in Literature] (December 1953). The essay attacked the rigid, reductive Stalinist, canons of socialist realism that had prevailed since the 1930s (Pomerantsev 1953). This included an attack on the tendency to varnish reality (*lakirova deistvitelnosti*) — through false descriptions of prosperity, avoidance of extremes and the ignoring of potentially problematic topics

(Freeze 2002: 353).<sup>17</sup> *Lakirovka*, and the overly romanticised, embellished view of Soviet reality that it implied became a particularly resonant term (Pomerantsev 1953). Between the *Industriia Sotsialisma* exhibition and the Thaw, the master narrative of socialist realism had become one of affirmation, the enactment of Soviet myths, and the inexorable move towards full communism. Set against the environment of mass repression and totalitarian politics, the efforts to produce 'glamour' within a socialist system turned into what Pomerantsev considered *lakirovka*.

Pomerantsev's approach did not mean a rejection of socialist realism, but it rather, in its argument for a synthesis of unflinching representation of reality and socialist commitment, sat neatly within the earlier boundaries of the approach, and even earlier traditions in Russian intellectual thought. This expansion of the limits of socialist realism was at the heart of cultural discourses within the Thaw, as cultural practitioners made a concerted effort to broaden the term into a paradigm that 'could embody a multiplicity of styles, genres and forms' while retaining its didactic message (Gardiner 2014: 22). The idea of *beskonfliktnost'* was debunked in 1952 in an official campaign against the movement. In 1953, the Ministry of Culture took over the responsibility of repertoire control and delegated the responsibility for municipal theatres to Moscow City Council. The canonised Stanislavskii system was attacked and Meierkhol'd was rehabilitated (Beumers 1998: 95). New appointments to theatres were made, which included Anatolii Efros to the Theatre of the Lenin Komsomol (1963) and Iurii Liubimov to the Taganka Theatre (1964). New theatres

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<sup>17</sup> For a more detailed discussion of Pomerantsev's letter see 'Barometer of the Epoch: Pomerantsev and the Debate on Sincerity' in Dennis Kozlov, 2013. *The Readers of Novyi Mir: Coming to Terms with the Stalinist Past*. Pp. 44-87.

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were also founded: Oleg Efremov, along with young graduates from the Moscow Art School, founded the Sovremennik Studio which became an official theatre in 1965 (Beumers 1998: 95). The Sovremennik 'reflected a new atmosphere in the Soviet theatrical sphere and aimed to speak to a younger generation with its modern choice of repertoire and progressive stage aesthetic' (Gardiner 2014: 262).<sup>18</sup>

As part of the periods of reassessment and debate ushered in by the Thaw(s), debates about internationalism re-entered the public sphere. Initially, the concept of socialist realism, as *the* socialist art form and cultural approach, had had a strong international element to it. For, just as the USSR's model for the transition to communism, via the late stages of capitalism and then socialism, came to be viewed as the de facto political and economic model to emulate (above all by the USSR), socialist realism had the potential to become the principal cultural approach for international communism and its constituent cultures. This international dynamic began to be rediscovered by artists from the mid-1950s onwards, particularly within the context of debates about modernism and the Soviet Contemporary Style.

This rediscovered internationalism permitted an opening-up to external influences in the theatre and the *dramaturgo*,<sup>19</sup> Bertolt Brecht played a significant role in the revitalisation of Soviet theatre. Brecht was awarded a Stalin prize in 1954,<sup>20</sup> the same year as future Cuban national

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<sup>18</sup> According to Deza and Matthews 70% of the Sovremennik's audience was between 20–40 years old (1975).

<sup>19</sup> *Dramaturgo* is best translated as a production specialist; someone who had the skills of playwriting in addition overseeing the assembling and telling of a story.

<sup>20</sup> The International Stalin Prize or '*Mezhdunarodnaia Stalinskaia Premiia za ukreplenie mira mezhdu narodami*' was renamed as the 'International

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poet and head of UNEAC, Nicolás Guillén. In May and June of 1957, the Berliner Ensemble toured Moscow and Leningrad for the first time since its creation in 1949. This was also the first time that Brecht's work had been staged in Russia since the playwright relocated to the German Democratic Republic (GDR). The tour was important and influential in both the cultural and political spheres. Brecht's international reputation, ardent support of communism and the USSR and public opposition to war and increased armament meant that the USSR had a figurehead for its nuclear disarmament campaign. In the Soviet press, an image of Brecht which emphasised his Marxist ideals and his opposition to American imperialism was constructed. This also consolidated Brecht's position and influence within the cultural politics of the GDR, and the Ensemble's staging of the work of an artist previously considered 'formalist' by Soviet critics helped to contribute to the reassessment of appropriate forms of socialist realism (Gardiner 2014: 196-209). In 1959, two years after the tour of the Berliner Ensemble, an anonymous Soviet writer published a critique of socialist realism in the French press. The writer is widely thought to be Abram Tertz, the pseudonym under which the dissident writer Andrei Siniavskii wrote. Siniavskii and fellow writer Iulii Daniel were placed on show trial between September 1965 and February 1966, accused and convicted of publishing anti-Soviet work in the foreign press. The article which sparked the trial drew parallels between socialist realism and religious thought and doctrine. It also underlined how socialist realism had become hermetic and

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Lenin Prize' in 1955 following Khrushchev's secret speech and the ensuing de-Stalinization campaign. Previous winners were encouraged to trade in their medals for new ones without Stalin's image. In Soviet memoirs Brecht's award is referred to as the 'Lenin Prize', whereas in Western accounts it is known as the 'Stalin Prize' (Gardiner 2014: 203).

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rooted in the past. However, the essay did also hint that socialist realism – if, in its new permutation, it could still be called that – had the potential to evolve further into something altogether broader (Tertz 1960).

The concept of socialist realism was also broadened in the visual arts prior to, and concurrent with, the periods of crisis and clampdown during the Thaw(s). Within painting, the paradigm evolved through efforts to define and contest the 'Contemporary Style', a style that reflected the artist's awareness of the momentous changes occurring in Soviet society (Bown 2012: 99-101). Bown identifies Nina Dimitrieva's 1958 article 'K voprosu o sovremenom stile [Towards the Question of a Contemporary Style in Painting]' as the keystone of the debate about the Contemporary Style. This debate was fundamentally about the modernisation of Soviet art and its opening up to international influence, such as Mexican muralists. At issue was the legitimacy of selectively assimilating modernism — Russian, Western and, increasingly, post-colonial — which for so long had been anathematized as formalist decadence and *kozmpolitizm*, into a modern, civic, social art; and the question of whether this art could be considered 'realist' (Reid 2006: 209-12). The question of modernism arose during the Thaw and was 'embraced by reformist elements within the art establishment as a means to strengthen and reinvigorate the art of socialism' (Reid 2009: 89). Reid argues that a Soviet variant of modernism (the Contemporary Style) — frequently considered anathema to Soviet culture and more widely, socialist culture — came into existence in the 1950s and 1960s (Reid 2000). Garaudy, in the face of strong criticism for *D'un réalisme sans rivages*, was also particularly vocal in the defence of modernism and its place within Marxist culture.

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This emergent modernism was an assimilated, re-elaborated variant, a socialist hybrid of modernism and a way of moving past the late Stalinist period and reinvigorating socialism (Reid 2009). Abstract art was still odious to conservative movements; however, complete quarantine was no longer a viable method, given the resurgence of the internationalist project and its Soviet leadership (Reid 2012). The new focus on internationalism in the USSR meant the necessary interaction of Soviet culture with other national (socialist) experiences (Reid 2000). International cultural exchanges 'were recognised as a means to reduce international tension as well as to glean useful models for selective imitation' (Reid 2012: 262). Back in the USSR, exhibitions featuring French impressionist and post-impressionist artists, such as Paul Cézanne helped to broaden the idea of socialist realism, stimulated the artistic world, and inspired debate. The inventory of subjects that fell under the remit of socialist realism was opened up, socially critical paintings were encouraged and family breakdown, sexual politics, conflicts with the Party and poor work practices all became acceptable subjects (Bown 2012: 97).

However, in the face of foreign affair failures, such as the Cuban Missile Crisis, and mounting economic inefficiencies, dissatisfaction with the Khrushchev administration began to mount. Disgruntlement with Khrushchev's government reached a head in October 1964 and, after an extraordinary session of the Central Committee, he was removed from power. The initial artistic freedom and opportunities presented by the Thaw dissipated and were soon replaced by a policy that became progressively stricter and more alienating. These were implemented within a cultural apparatus – the 'interlocking system of censorship, unions and patronage

which had taken form and had always been present in the Stalin era' that had remained impervious to de-Stalinisation (Jones 2006b: 13).

### **Stagnation (1964 – 1986)**

In Cuba in the 1970s, as the cultural authorities focussed on educating and including the Cuban population in cultural production, socialist realism became a point of entry for discussions about the USSR in cultural magazines. This coincided with the promotion of cultural administrators who had grown up within the Revolution and who had been politically educated via the USSR's Marxism manuals. The subsequent greater regulation of culture during this decade, particularly 1971 to 1975, has come to be taken by some academics as evidence of the existence of what has been termed high Stalinist socialist realism — organisational and aesthetic — in Cuba (Farber 2011: 23; Puñales-Alpízar 2012: 54).

Shortly before this period in Cuba, socialist realism underwent a further period of reassessment in the USSR. The change in leadership sought to establish political and economic stability but was ultimately restorationist, halting institutional reforms, avoiding wide-sweeping change, and to some extent rehabilitating Stalin. The discursive spaces that the Thaw had opened up began to close. Explorations of the meaning of socialist realism decreased and instead the period was characterised by a reactionary approach towards culture, particularly after 1966 (Beumers 1999: 370-71). A host of cultural figures known for their liberalising approaches were removed from positions of influence or had their membership of official cultural organs, such as the Writers' Union,

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withdrawn. At the Twenty-Third Party Congress, held in 1966, a number of controversial theatrical productions were banned and posts were reshuffled — Anatolii Efros was dismissed from the Lenin Komsomol Theatre and placed in the Malaia Bronnaia Theatre (Moscow Drama Theatre) as staff director in 1967. Party membership and the location of the theatre that was being considered, along with key political or public events, played a role in censorship decisions (Beumers 1998: 95-96).

However, a number of trials of creative figures with links abroad/foreign links (such as Siniavskii and Daniel', poet Iurii Galanskov and fellow poet Aleksandr Ginzburg) resulted in significant international criticism of the USSR. The following furore formed part of the basis for the adoption of a guardedly more flexible cultural policy. It allowed for a degree of experimentation within the boundaries of socialist realism and access to a greater range of discourses within which the intelligentsia could frame its discussions. This more flexible approach included the selective and small-scale publication of some outstanding and controversial works, including pre-revolutionary and early post-revolutionary literature, such as Osip Mandel'shtam's poetry, the 1979 edition of Andrei Belyi's novel *Peterburg* [Petersburg], or the 1973 editions of Mikhail Bulgakov's novels, including *Master i Margarita* [The Master and Margarita]. Foreign literature in translation was also published, including selections of a trinity of writers — Kafka, Proust and Joyce — who had previously been particularly singled out as clear example of the decadence of Western modernism. A similar approach was taken within the visual arts and, after the infamous bulldozed exhibition at Beliaevo Park in 1974, and the ensuing international outcry, a second exhibition was successfully held

in 1975 at Izmailovo Park (Lovell and Marsh 1998: 62). As the boundaries of socialist realism continued to be questioned by artists and intellectuals cautious currents still circulated underneath the surface of the seemingly-stagnating cultural world. One such individual was Dmitrii Markov, director of the Institut slavianovedeniia i balkanistiki Akademii nauk SSSR [Institute of Slavic and Balkan Studies of the Academy of Sciences],<sup>21</sup> who argued that socialist realism was always an open, aesthetical broad concept, unlimited by expressive style or subject matter and capable of expressing the various truths of contemporary life (Markov 1977). From the 1960s onwards the continuing reassessment of socialist realism and art and culture under socialism also saw some artists consciously and directly confront and parody the tenets of socialist realism and tradition of realism in Soviet culture through *Sots-art*.<sup>22</sup> The key figures in the movement began to utilise the tropes of socialist realism but subvert them by substituting established symbols, such as busts of Lenin, with subtle reworkings, such as utilising the faces of loved ones. In this way, *Sots-art* questioned the ideological basis upon which socialist realism, specifically late Stalinist socialist realism, operated.

By the 1980s in Cuba, assumptions behind the idea of socialist realism had been internalised. Artists found themselves working in a changed political environment characterised by a continuing sense of siege, focus on rapid economic development, and anti-Soviet currents. In this atmosphere new debates among artists about different styles and

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<sup>21</sup> In 1997 the institute became known as the Institute for Slavic Studies.

<sup>22</sup> *Sots-art*, a term used to refer to unauthorised socialist art — an ironic imitation of pop art — used by the older generation of artists (such as Vitaly Komar, Alexander Melamid, Eric Bulatov, and Il'ia Kabakov) who were critical of the Soviet system (Yurchak 2006: 250).

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political commitment with culture, and the concerted effort to avoid any form of foreign domination, contributed to the development of approaches and demands that demonstrated occasionally conflicting elements of the different iterations of socialist realism. In the 1980s, as in the rest of the time period examined, with the exception of the early 1960s, socialist realism was not mentioned explicitly, but remained a looming force in the background. Equally, throughout the entire time period examined in this thesis, socialist realism in Cuba remained a polemical subject, not only because of the assumptions and stereotypes surrounding the paradigm, but also because of the Revolution's central tenet of national sovereignty, coupled with the pursuit, and development, of a type of socialism that sought to depart from the ossified variant in Europe, and the focus on Latin America as an alternate pole to the historic domination of Europe or North America.

### **Socialist, realist and international**

This chapter has explored the development of socialist realism and the ways in which it reflected the nation-building project of the USSR. It has also highlighted the approach's inherent internationalism and the ways in which it initially brought together disparate artistic approaches. It has demonstrated the centrality of culture in Soviet society, its instrumentality in the shaping of economic development and the ways in which it has been understood in various contexts throughout the history of the USSR.

Cultural development in the USSR is sometimes viewed as a series of discrete historical periods, each isolated from the other, in the political,

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social, and economic evolution of the nation. 1917 can be viewed as a point of rupture, a dislocation from Imperial Russia's history, culture and politics and the creation of a new political landscape. However, these functionally 'discrete' periods are closely interrelated and share many of the same concerns such as the preoccupation with being cultured and the educative role of culture, in addition to being equally susceptible to landmark political events. However, the Revolution and the subsequent victory in the Civil War changed the priorities of Russian society. Culture came to occupy a central role, and popular, accessible forms of culture increasingly gained centrality, the nadir of which was the late Stalinist period with its reductive approach towards culture for which the term 'socialist realism' has become shorthand in Cuba.

The early years of the USSR were characterised by competing approaches to culture, put into practice by different institutions, an enthusiastic outpouring of creativity and a determinedly inclusive atmosphere. This was the first manifestation of one of the features of Soviet culture, and cultural policy: debate. Debate and reconfiguration was at the heart of Soviet culture and therefore at the heart of socialist realism, which was the clearest product of Soviet culture. Intimately linked to economic production, the iterations of socialist realism reflect the shifting governmental, and societal, goals of the USSR. The cultural sphere was a space of contestation for different ideas about the Revolution, concerning the best approaches and priorities. This debate, which occurred at all levels and among all artistic forms, became increasingly codified as the focus within the Revolution turned ever more inwards, before once more opening up to external models, but it remained a constant factor. Because

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of this, culture and cultural policy in the USSR cannot be analysed in terms of a simple top-down approach but rather a continuous process of debate and reconfiguration, even during the most restrictive periods of Soviet history.

As this chapter has demonstrated, socialist realism was an approach that provided a conceptual infrastructure upon which to build and implement policies and an idea that sought to link culture to the wider political, social and economic developments of the time in the journey towards socialism. At a practical level in 1934 it ended a prolonged period of in-fighting between literary groups and was the result of an ongoing process of debate at all levels of society regarding the reconciliation of the USSR's cultural history and its new historical direction. It was both an approach that sought to propel the country towards socialism — future-gazing within a theoretical framework — and a democratic style that ensured 'culture' could be understood by all sectors of society, cultural institutions (and their functionaries), irrespective of their level of education.

Finally it is worth reiterating that the concept of socialist realism had a strong international element to it. As a cultural product, and a process, the method had the potential to be exported to other countries to help cement or inspire political change. Such qualities made socialist realism a potentially invaluable tool in establishing the USSR at the forefront of socialist culture, to accompany its self-proclaimed position at the vanguard of socialist theory. The method had successfully encouraged the assimilation of other cultures, with their re-elaboration into a distinctly Soviet, politically committed, cultural product. As a distinctly 'Soviet' entity, socialist realism was a flashpoint for criticism from other socialist countries

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which departed from Soviet theories. Socialist realism therefore had a number of appealing characteristics: as a cultural approach with intimate links to rapid economic development that had (seemingly) successfully transformed the country from a feudal, peasant society that lagged behind the larger European nations into an urban, industrialised proletariat society in a matter of decades and also as an internationalist art form that could help defeat a colonial legacy.

## **2 Cuban cultural policy, 1959 to 1975.**

### **Introduction**

Between 1959 and 1965, the Cuban Revolution had a heterodox ideology, which resulted in an inclusive and dynamic atmosphere with constantly forming institutions that sought to cater to the developing needs of the Revolution.

There were three primary trends that contributed to this environment. On the one hand, the Revolution was seen as the continuation of the emancipatory, revolutionary socialist, nationalist ideals expressed by Félix Varela and José de la Luz, Carlos Manuel de Céspedes, Ignacio Agramonte, Antonio Maceo, José Martí, and Antonio Guiterras, as well as the continuation of the 19<sup>th</sup> century independence movement and the 1933 uprising. However, on the other hand, particularly among trade unions and sectors of the intelligentsia there was a pro-Soviet, socialist, Marxist-Leninist current that was strongly influenced by the October Revolution. Yet another ideological strain was anti-communist, anti-imperialist and nationalist. Each of these currents entailed different approaches to the building of a national culture and specific foci of interest. However, confronted with the task of the cultural reconstruction of the nation, it became imperative that these diverse ideological currents be reconciled into a unified patriotic movement with a coherent cultural identity and agenda.

The power and centrality of culture and establishment of a clear national identity had been a key ideological component in the liberation

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movements against Spain and the concepts of *cubanía* [cubanness] that had subsequently emerged. The goals of the rebellion that empowered the Revolution had these codes of *cubanía* at its heart. The Cuban concept of national identity drew on several codes which, briefly, included: agrarianism, a belief that the countryside held 'an almost sanctified connection with the past heroism and the future glory of the "real" Cuba'; collectivism, moralism, activism, internationalism, and later youth (Kapcia 2000: 85-92, 201-02). Thus began a decade (1959 – 1969) of searching, characterised by rich and creative debates, an unprecedented political dynamism and polychromatic nuances (Díaz Sosa 2006: 79). However, affected by Cold War tensions, particularly in the period 1960 to 1969, the Revolution was pushed ever closer to the USSR. Moreover, the pragmatic early adoption of some of the pre-1959 communist party structures, and the predominance of pro-Soviet individuals in positions of power, suggested the privileging of Marxist-Leninist politics and the move towards a cultural approach that did not necessarily recognise Cuba's specificity. The rapid radicalisation of the population due to landmark political events and the founding of the Partido Comunista de Cuba (PCC) in 1965, to some extent united these increasingly disparate ideological currents. The PCC was dominated by members of the guerrilla group the Movimiento 26 de Julio (M-26-7), and championed a distinctly Cuban brand of communism that did not renounce its international aspirations, its focus on national liberation or its ideological debt to figures involved in Cuba's historical struggles for independence. Neither, however did the founding of the PCC mean that the Revolutionary government renounced its ideological affinity with the USSR (particularly with the early years of the

October Revolution and the actions and approaches of the Bolsheviks). As sentiment of attack from external factors/forces increased among the population, the open debates became progressively internalised, as the Government's imperative moved towards defence of the emerging nation. The search for the expression of an inherently Cuban ideology and identity had not ended by the 1970s, but rather had been relocated within the developing institutional structures. The focus moved from organisation at a higher institutional level to a more individual level and greater focus was placed on national identity. The erratic proliferation of cultural institutions, the uneven development of cultural forms (literature, theatre, dance, plastic arts, music) before the rebellion, and the subsequent differences in their administration in the Revolution meant that there were not necessarily clearly defined boundaries between institutions, leading to multiple interpretations and applications of cultural policy, grouped around distinct cultural hubs.<sup>23</sup>

The apparent discursive hiatus the institutionalisation of the debates of the 1960s created, and the increased focus on the individual in a period that demanded heightened mobilisation and defence, led to the promotion of dogmatic codes of behaviour and the privileging of cultural production that clearly embodied the codes of *cubanía*. With the Primer Congreso del PCC and the ideological clarity this brought, enshrining the ideas of Martí, Marx and Lenin into the new constitution, cultural policy began to anticipate the needs of the Revolution, rather than respond to

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<sup>23</sup> For more information on the cultural policy of the Revolution in the 1960s and beyond see the following studies (Kapcia 2000, 2005, 2008; Sarusky and Mosquera 1979; Kumaraswami 2009; Kumaraswami and Kapcia 2012; Gordon-Nesbitt 2015; Chanan 1985; Padura Fuentes and Kirk 2002).

them. The subsequent relationship with the USSR, and the remaining worries surrounding this relationship, were to a large degree quarantined by being irrevocably subsumed to the codes of *cubanía* but within a Marxist-Leninist, internationalist framework.

### **Organisational poles and orientation**

Four artistic forms were well established before the Revolution with international recognition and corresponding dedicated, high-quality institutions: ballet, music, the plastic arts, and literature. These institutions comprised the Ballet de Cuba, numerous music schools such as the Conservatorio Nacional, Conservatorio Municipal (Amadeo Roldan), Grupo de Renovación Municipal, the Academia San Alejandro, the Universidad de La Habana and influential literary magazines *Ciclón* and *Orígenes*. There was also a strong tradition of self-imposed exile, particularly of literary figures, in protest at the scant cultural opportunities available under the Batista administration. Theatre, however, was underdeveloped and had no associated educational institution. It was restricted to small, short-lived *salitas*, run by individuals on a vocational basis outside the hours of their regular jobs, and a nascent theatre group, Teatro Estudio, which had been founded in 1958 in response to the perceived cultural inadequacies of the Batista era. The group had begun working towards cultivating a Cuban theatre, and had produced a manifesto detailing its commitment to this effect (Linares et al. 1989: 311). Cinema was also under-represented officially but played a significant role within *Nuestro Tiempo* and the film club at the Universidad de la Habana.

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Culture responded rapidly to the Revolution and the immediate post-rebellion period was characterised by a remarkable diversity in the forms and styles of cultural expression, and a proliferation of small cultural 'groups'. Cultural heavyweights, such as writer Alejo Carpenter, returned to partake in the cultural rebuilding of a nation and groups were rapidly formed around specific cultural magazines that followed disparate trajectories. Two particularly important nuclei were *Lunes de Revolución* — focussed on spreading knowledge about the European and North American vanguard and without a specific political philosophy (Anon 1959), roughly centred around Carlos Franqui and Guillermo Cabrera Infante — and *Hoy Domingo* — focussed on the popular, national type of cultural expression expounded by Carlos Rafael Rodríguez, Juan Marinello, Manuel Navarro Luna and Nicolás Guillén (López Segrera 1985: 12). Two key cultural institutions were formed very quickly and a broad and inclusive cultural policy, or lack of explicit directives, was adopted, celebrating all forms of cultural output and expression. The first of these institutions was the Instituto Cubano de Arte e Industria Cinematograficos (ICAIC), directed by Alfredo Guevara, a member of the PSP who had supported the rebellion from Havana. ICAIC was one of the Revolution's flagship institutions, committed to fostering high-quality, politically-aware cinema. It was founded on 20 March 1959 as a non-military alternative to the Rebel Army's film unit. Many members of ICAIC had been members of *Nuestro Tiempo* and a number had trained at the Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia in Rome. Casa de las Américas (Casa) was the second institution of the Revolution, founded on 28 April by Haydeé Santamaria, a

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former M-26-7 rebel and Moncada veteran, with the aim of promoting pan-Latin American cultural dialogue.

The Primer Encuentro Nacional de Poetas y Artistas in Camagüey echoed the desire for greater cultural interaction with Latin America and also reflected the anti-imperialist sentiments articulated in the Primer Declaración de La Habana. The meeting was held between 27 and 30 October 1960 with the idea of unifying and co-ordinating the creative and intellectual efforts of the artistic community with that of the Revolutionary Government. The manifesto, *Hacia una cultura nacional en servicio de la Revolución* was produced as a result. It emphasised the unity that existed between the intellectual and creative worlds before moving on to highlight the negative influence of colonialism and imperialism on the development of a Cuban culture and the fact that the Revolution had now given the people the power to participate consciously in the development of a national, revolutionary culture (Gordon-Nesbitt 2012: 217). Points of immediate action included: the recovery and development of national cultural traditions; the conservation and encouragement of Cuban folklore; the recognition that criticism was at the heart of improving artistic works; the drive to achieve a clear identification between artistic work and the needs of the Revolution in a bid to bring the people to the intellectuals and the intellectuals to the people without damaging artistic quality; the recognition that cultural contact and interchange with Latin American writers, artists and intellectuals were vital for 'our America'; and the affirmation that Cuba's national patrimony formed part of world culture, which, in turn, contributed to Cuba's national aspirations. Education was also prioritised and focussed on incorporating previously marginalised

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sectors of society and equipping them with the necessary skills to be active participants in the new society. Initially, education programmes centred on political instruction (Escuelas de Instrucción Revolucionaria, EIR) and basic literacy (the 1961 Literacy Campaign) but, once these were established, soon included culture.

### **Establishing an organisational tradition**

The creation of the CNC and then the UNEAC established official organs that catered for the specific needs of the Revolution's artists and intellectuals. In theory the two institutes had different roles that clearly delineated their respective fields of influence and organisational capacity. However, the uneven development of different cultural expression in pre-Revolutionary Cuba, and their perceived varying strengths as educational tools, somewhat blurred the boundaries between these two institutes. The first of these two key bodies to be founded was the CNC, in January 1961. The CNC was responsible for cultural education, mobilisation and organisation, and replaced the Ministry of Education's (MINED) Cultural Directorate. Like the Cultural Directorate, the CNC was subordinated to MINED, and, with the exception of the years 1964 to 1966, it reported directly to the Council of Ministers in order to give it greater autonomy from the State (Gordon-Nesbitt 2012: 153). Edith García Buchaca, Vicentina Antuña and Mirta Aguirre, members of the PSP, the Ortodoxos, and the PSP respectively, were all founding members of the CNC and occupied positions of considerable power.

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The CNC began by unifying and centralising the organisation of cultural matters and produced the first annual plan by the end of 1962, for implementation in 1963. Culture was divided into four main sections: theatre and dance, plastic arts, music, and literature (Manzor-Coats and Martiatu Terry 1995: 60). 1961 also set the tone for the cultural policy of the 1960s, and beyond, which was essentially pragmatic. The 1961 debates, held in the wake of the *PM* affair at the Biblioteca Nacional, which culminated in Fidel's *Palabras a los intelectuales*, assumed the support of artists and intellectuals for the Revolution's aims, unless explicitly stated otherwise. It was also a clear demonstration of the pragmatic Cuban solution of not coming to a clear resolution regarding the freedoms and responsibilities of the artist in a revolutionary, socialist, society. By saying 'dentro de la Revolución todo, contra la Revolución ningún derecho' (Castro 1961a) Fidel, as Weiss has observed, 'set the terms for both an expansive cultural mandate and concern about how and by whom the borders of "inside" and "against" would be determined' (2011b: xii-xiii). However, the speech also had more concrete suggestions. In *Palabras* Fidel identified the need to improve organisation within culture and highlighted the CNC as the organ responsible for recognising and fulfilling the needs of artists and intellectuals — through dialogue with them — and organising cultural activities and dissemination throughout the island (Castro 1961a). The speech also mentioned the second general cultural institution, UNEAC, which would be home to two dedicated, official, cultural magazines, *Unión* and the *Gaceta de Cuba*, in which public debate among Cuba's intellectuals would be encouraged. UNEAC was a non-partisan, federal umbrella that brought together all revolutionary cultural

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groups within a designated cultural space.<sup>24</sup> UNEAC was the arbiter of cultural quality and membership was dependent on an established body of critically recognised work; it was divided by artistic form and each component was autonomous. UNEAC members were grouped according to different artistic modes of expression: literature, plastic arts (sculptors, painters, ceramicists, architects, and photographers), music, theatre, cinema, ballet and dance. UNEAC was responsible for the work plans for literature, plastic arts, music, and ballet, the CNC for theatre and dance, and ICAIC for cinema. The CNC still organised cultural activities across all genres (Anon 1970b). Structurally, UNEAC was comprised of an Executive Committee, and branches in literature, music, and plastic arts that coordinated the activities of their respective forms, a publications committee and an auxiliary editorial board for *Unión* and *Gaceta*. Entry was dependent on a high-quality body of work that demonstrated an element of continuity. Applications would be considered by an admission committee, with the possibility of appeal to the higher levels of the UNEAC (García Buchaca 1961: 86-87).

However, the predominance of PSP activists, and the orthodox view of the role of culture under socialism that this seemingly implied within the CNC, as well as the structural similarity between UNEAC and the Soviet Writers' Union, were not universally welcomed. Some individuals, such as poet and playwright Antón Arrufat, expressed fears of the possibility of the regulatory and reductive approach to culture experienced under Stalinism. Arrufat argued that Cuba's historic

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<sup>24</sup> In highlighting the success of cultural syndicates and unions in other socialist countries García Buchaca suggested that UNEAC was conceived as an umbrella institution because of the relative lack of a cultural organisational tradition within Cuba (1961: 82-89).

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relationship with the USSR had its own demands, one of which was that culture was passed to the hands of its representatives in Cuba, such as García Buchaca. García Buchaca had published a pamphlet, *Superestructura* in 1961, within which she analysed culture in a socialist country from a Marxist perspective. Arrufat argued that the manual gave 'respuestas rapidas a problemas' and these were implemented in the absence of other, less provocative, answers (Arrufat 2002: 73). These fears of Stalinism were to some extent acknowledged, if not addressed, publicly in the Primer Congreso Nacional de los Escritores y las Artistas de Cuba, held 18 to 22 August 1961.

Al definir el carácter y los fines de la Unión de Escritores y Artistas, quedan perfectamente establecidas sus diferencias, como afirmó el compañero Fidel Castro en el discurso de clausura, con el carácter y las funciones que toca desempeñar a otras organizaciones, como el Sindicato de Artistas, al que pertenecen o deben pertenecer una parte de los que han de integrar también a la Unión de Escritores y Artistas, como son los músicos, los que trabajan en el teatro y la danza. [...] En todos los países socialistas la existencia durante muchos años de esos dos tipos de organizaciones ha arrojado una experiencia muy positiva que debemos saber aprovechar en beneficio de nuestras artistas y, en general, de la cultura (García Buchaca 1961: 88-89).

In addition to acknowledging the awareness of similar socialist institutional structures, the Congress also built on the manifesto of the 1960 meeting. It

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discussed the role of artists and intellectuals as defenders and educators through their diverse creative work, and the nature of art in a socialist society, rather than analysing the emergent revolutionary opus. Once again culture was aligned with the struggle against imperialism and the fight for genuine independence, while the importance of the rescue and revalorisation of national traditions was emphasised.

The organisational and educational impulse, demonstrated by the Literacy Campaign of 1961 and the establishment of the EIRs, now moved into the cultural arena, manifesting itself in the *aficionado* and *instructores de arte* movements. The creation of an Escuela Nacional de Instructores de Arte (EIA) had first been called for in May 1961, and the school dedicated to fostering amateur involvement in culture was created in 1962, allowing Cubans from socio-economic and racial groups that had traditionally been marginalised from culture to begin taking an active role in cultural creation. The missions of the art instructors were threefold: (1) to help develop an interest in the different art forms among people who had not received formal education; (2) to stimulate individuals with creative talent; and (3) to assist in the organisation and activities of the performing groups of *aficionados* (Matas 1971: 433). The planned first cohort of 4,000 students would create 950 instructors each in theatre, music, and dance, 500 each in artisanal plastic and plastic arts and 150 literary advisors (Anon 1963b: 23). By 1965 1,093 instructors had graduated in the specialisations of theatre, music and dance and were hailed as a cultural army ready to bring culture to the most isolated areas of Cuba: ‘con los que se constituyó un verdadero ejército de promotores de la cultura distribuidos por todo el país, preferentemente en las zonas más alejadas

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de los centros urbanos' (Anon 1970b). Expression-specific cultural movements were also developed, such as the creation of the Escuela de Brigadistas de Artes Plásticas, which travelled around the country giving slide-shows and talks on the history of plastic arts (García Buchaca 1963a: 20). The *instructores de arte* movement had two important functions: it helped to democratise culture and to deal with the country's cultural underdevelopment. This Cuban specificity was emphasised in the intersession of José Garófalo — the Coordinator of the province of Havana —in the 1962 report on cultural activities. Garófalo pointed out that *instructores de arte* had not been necessary in the USSR or Czechoslovakia, because the population already had a sufficiently developed cultural level, unlike in Cuba (Garófalo 1962: 40).

The *aficionado* movement, complementary to the *instructores de arte*, also began in 1962 and became very closely related to the CNC's cultural promotion programmes (García Buchaca 1964: 45). A government initiative, it was designed to develop the population's interest, knowledge and participation in the various facets of 'art' and was accompanied by an annual *aficionado* festival (Conte 1965). Headway was also made regarding higher-level creative education, and plans were drawn up to turn the former country club for the elite, in Cubanacán, into the Escuela Nacional de Arte (ENA) – inaugurated on the symbolic date of 26 July 1965 (Loomis 1999: 129). Loomis views the subsequent decline of the ENA as evidence of the progressive Sovietisation of Cuba and the repudiation of inherently Cuban characteristics – the tropical nature of the country, the spontaneity of its population, the diversity of thought, and the disordered nature of doing things. He argues that this Soviet influence and

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emulation was visible in architecture through the rise of anonymous, functional architecture exemplified by post-War Stalinism and then Khrushchev's building programme. Organisationally, Loomis argues, this was reflected in the abolition of the Colegio de Arquitectos in 1963 and the absorption of its functions into the Centro Técnico Superior de la Construcción, which downplayed architecture's artistic qualities and emphasised its scientific, engineering and technical elements (1999: 115). The change in institution redefined the concept of the role of the architect from public art to design and industry.

UNEAC's official organs, the *Gaceta de Cuba* and *Unión*, began publication in April and May 1961 respectively and the following year the Hermanos Saíz group, which mobilised youth cultural activities for upcoming artists that were not yet eligible for UNEAC membership, was founded (Anon 1962a). The CNC had begun signing cultural exchange programmes with socialist countries or countries sympathetic to the Cuban Revolution. They included the promotion of Cuban culture abroad and, in 1962, twenty-four Cuban painters toured the 'brother' socialist countries of Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania, the USSR, and Poland (Pogolotti 1962). From 1962 Cubans were also able to study Russian language and literature at the University of Havana's Escuela de Letras (Cinco Colina 2010: 25), and in the same year the first *Casa de Cultura* for a 'brother socialist country', Czechoslovakia, opened in Cuba. The following year a Cuban *Casa de Cultura* was established in Prague (Antuña 1963: 9). 1962 ended with the Primer Congreso Nacional de la Cultura, Gallardo Saborido considers the event an important informative congress that also emphasised the value of a popular culture (2009: 90). In discussing the

Congress, García Buchaca (1963: 16-17) highlighted the CNC's understanding of the most urgent aspects of the Revolutionary Government's cultural policy, emphasising its international focus, and emancipatory and educational potential.

1963 heralded a more systematic and increasingly centralised organisation of culture. The CNC's annual preliminary plans (*anteproyectos*) began, heavily focussed on points eight and nine of the Revolutionary Government's ten-point plan.<sup>25</sup> The plan, which had been

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<sup>25</sup> These ten points were:

1. Estudiar y revalorizar nuestra tradición cultural, y muy especialmente la del siglo XIX, en que surgió la nacionalidad cubana. Divulgación de sus más positivas manifestaciones.
2. Estudiar e investigar nuestras raíces culturales. Reconocimiento del aporte negro y la significación que le corresponde en la cultura cubana.
3. Despojar las expresiones folklóricas del campo y de la ciudad y las manifestaciones populares de nuestra cultura, de las mixtificaciones de los elementos ajenos a su propia esencia, creando las condiciones necesarias para que puedan expresarse en toda su pureza.
4. Trabajar porque se reconozca sin reservas el talento, la capacidad del cubano y se valore adecuadamente a nuestros creadores, ofreciéndoles las oportunidades necesarias para que puedan producir en las condiciones más propicias, poniendo fin al desvalimiento en que hasta ahora han tenido que hacerlo.
5. Formar, a través de las escuelas de arte y seminarios, una nueva intelectualidad surgida de la propia masa obrero-campesina.
6. Propugar un arte y una literatura en consonancia con el momento histórico que vive Cuba. Esto, a través de una labor educativa paciente que propicie cada vez en mayor grado el contacto íntimo de nuestros creadores con el pueblo, su convivencia directa con los hombres del campo y los obreros de las fábricas. De este modo podrán entender y reflejar mejor en su obra las grandezas y privaciones de los que están forjando el presente y el porvenir de Cuba.
7. Dar a las ciencias el lugar que les corresponde en la actividad cultural, en el proceso de superación de nuestras condiciones de país subdesarrollado.
8. Propiciar la superación cultural de las grandes mayorías, desarrollando intensivamente actividades encaminadas a interesarlas en el buen arte y en la lectura de los libros de valor literario o científico.

presented to cultural assemblies throughout the country's provinces, linked cultural activity to the Revolution's greatest needs, emphasised taking culture to the people and focussed on the training of artists and cultural educators and raising the general population's cultural level (Anon 1963b). The authority of the CNC was also advanced, and its remit now included the coordination and direction of all cultural activity at a national and local level and the rescue of national traditions. A spate of organisations with objectives concordant with these goals of organisation and orientation sprang up over the year. They included a school for cultural cadres that began teaching in 1963. The purpose of the school was to create cadres at all levels (national, provincial, municipal, and rural), and include courses on political orientation, and intensive courses on general culture which covered history and artistic, literary and scientific culture. Students from the working and peasant classes were admitted on the basis of their aptitude for cultural work. These courses lasted three months on an alternating basis, so that students were not taken away from production (Anon 1963b: 23). At the same time, the first cohort of *instructores de arte*, 'hijos de la Revolución, forjados por ella', began to graduate from their courses (Pita Rodríguez 1963: 24). In reporting the graduation of 220 of the theatre cohort, Félix Pita Rodríguez emphasised the *instructores*' roles in helping to create a politicised, socialist art that served the Revolution

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9. Hacer desaparecer el gran desnivel que hoy existe entre la vida cultural de la capital y la del resto de la Isla, propiciando las actividades culturales en las provincias, tanto en las localidades urbanas como en los medios rurales.
  10. Desarrollar, aprovechándolas a lo máximo, las posibilidades del intercambio cultural con todos los países, de manera que ello permita que el pueblo de Cuba, sus intelectuales y científicos, tengan la oportunidad de conocer las expresiones culturales y criterios científicos de diferentes escuelas y continentes (García Buchaca 1963a: 16-17).

and was capable of responding to the historical moments from which it was born. He also emphasised the core duty of the *instructores de arte*:

con la excelencia formal más depurada, pero con la almendra de la ideología marxista-leninista en su entraña, para lograr en el menor tiempo posible la elevación del nivel cultural y político de las grandes masas, necesidad incontestable para el avance y robustecimiento de la Revolución (Pita Rodríguez 1963: 14).

The CNC's authority in the plastic arts was extended with the creation of the Directorio de las artes plásticas, which subsequently took responsibility for all activities pertaining to this field: exhibition, acquisitions, and conservation. It was also responsible for overseeing artistic education, material provision, artists' travel, artistic and literary competitions and their juries. In this way the CNC's dominion over culture became almost absolute (Gordon-Nesbitt 2015: 195). Cultural organisation was specifically addressed in the Primera Plenaria Nacional de Coordinadores Culturales, held between 10 and 14 July. Grass-roots cultural organisation also continued with the founding of the first domestic *Casa de Cultura* within Cuba – copying the Bulgarian model – by Manuel López Oliva. In interview López Oliva reports being inspired by an article he saw in the cultural publication *Cuba-URSS* as a boy, and was involved in the founding of the *Casa* in Manzanillo along with Miguel Ángel Botalín, Manuel Navarro Luna and Celia Sánchez [López Oliva, Zaida García and López, 2015]. The *Casas de Cultura* would ultimately become a national phenomenon in the

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1970s, acting as a social space where all could enjoy and experience cultural activities and training.

With the close of an initial period of intense organisation began an era of trenchant polemics regarding different cultures and aesthetics within the Revolution. This period coincided with the CNC becoming autonomous (Gordon-Nesbitt 2015: 196), and the founding of the Department of Philosophy at the University of Havana, a department that would swiftly come to occupy an important place in the ideological education of the nation and the exploration of versions of socialist ideologies from sources other than the USSR. By 1963 there was already theoretical distancing among some sectors, such as the University of Havana's Department of Philosophy, from Soviet Marxism (and its manuals) and a concerted move towards the Bolsheviks and the October Revolution (León del Río and Martínez Heredia 2010). Soviet manuals continued to be used in the EIRs, in part due to the intensive nature of the courses, which made deeper study of the original texts impossible, and also due to the lack of teaching personnel equipped to deal with more in-depth study (Soto 1965). The school Raúl Cepero Bonilla, run by the Dirección Nacional of the EIR and the Universidad de la Habana, was founded to train teachers for university-level teaching. It ran two courses, between 1962 and 1963, and from this school came the teachers who would later form the Department of Philosophy at the University of Havana. The school was directed by Felipe Sánchez Linars and classes were given by: Isabel Monal, Pelegrín and Jacinto Torras, Sergio Aguirre and others. Among these, the Hispano-Soviets (from Spain's Civil War): Anastasio Mancilla and Luis Arana particularly excelled. The topics covered included Dialectical and Historical

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Materialism, Political Economy, History of Philosophy, Universal History, and more focussed topics such as Colonialism and Underdevelopment. (Díaz Sosa 2006). In 1964 the first national Encuentro de Profesores Universitarios de Marxismo was held. Presided over by José Antonio Portuondo it included Lionel Soto — head of the Escuelas de Instrucción Basica — on the panel. However, after the Tercer Encuentro de Profesores Universitarios de Marxismo (the Second National Meeting) held in September 1966, the Department of Philosophy formally broke with the Soviet conception of Marxism in the midst of the ‘crisis del manualismo’. The resultant course was called ‘historia del pensamiento marxista’ and lasted until 1971, with the course text-book, the ‘Yellow Book’ (Lecturas de Filosofía), compiled by members of the Faculty and later adopted by the Universidad del Oriente and Universidad de Santa Clara. The Yellow Book contained works by Aleksei Leontiev, Amílcar Cabra, Che, Antonio Gramsci, Manuel Sacristan, Luis Althusser and Fidel, among others (León del Río and Martínez Heredia 2010). However, although the Department of Philosophy had broken with Soviet Marxism, the Revolution was still ideologically heterodox and numerous currents were still in circulation, under the uniting banner of the Revolution.

This period of cultural (and ideological) polemics is commonly thought to involve a CNC-led promotion of socialist realism versus an ICAIC-led endorsement of aesthetic plurality and focus on the reality of the revolutionary binary (Bonachea and Valdés 1972b: 497). This approach is useful in that it acknowledges the uneasy relationship between the pre-revolutionary political parties that were suddenly brought together under the aegis of the Revolution and exacerbated by the necessary co-opting of

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some of the PSP's structures into the post-rebellion political landscape. However, continuing to view the 1963-1965 period in this manner makes a reading of the 1971-1975 *quinquenio gris* period as the culmination of the CNC's persistent efforts to fit Cuba blindly into the Soviet socialist mould inevitable. Moreover, this perspective fails to include a recognition that the 1963-1965 period was characterised by an open and polemical atmosphere across all spheres of revolutionary life, as a sustained and acute political debate was developing regarding the appropriate models to follow in the Cuban process. Such a view also only marginally recognises that Marxism was becoming an increasingly mass phenomenon among the population thanks in part to the work of the EIRs but also to the geopolitical events in which Cuba was enmeshed, which inevitably radicalised the population.

These polemics by no means paralysed cultural activities, however, and by 1964 30,340 cultural events had been organised with an uptake of 11,000,000. 21,000 of these events were held outside of the city of Havana, with an uptake of over 7,000,000 (García Buchaca 1964: 43). Cultural organisation continued apace into 1965, as did political organisation and orientation. The ideological distance some had identified between the USSR and the Cuban Revolution began to widen still further and the publication of Che Guevara's (henceforth Che) 'El socialismo y el hombre en Cuba' marked a shift in ideology and in the role of cultural practitioners. The text became a seminal piece of cultural policy that signalled the beginning of a more inward-looking focus on the development of a national character and a Cuban route to socialism. Che's idea of the *hombre nuevo* was at the core of the radicalising, mobilising,

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and increasingly anti-sectarian current of the late 1960s. This *hombre nuevo* was seen as an actor in the construction of socialism who was an individual, but also a member of the community, which interacted, as a collective, with the revolution's leaders (Guevara 2006: 52-53). Closely linked to the concept of the *hombre nuevo* was the development of a revolutionary consciousness, which entailed cooperation, sacrifice, struggle, political loyalty, and dedication to revolutionary heroes and legends (Frederik 2012: 10-11). Attention therefore turned to the countryside and its inhabitants: the countryside was an area which had great cultural and political significance in the history of the nation and which embodied elements of nostalgia, notions of purity, cultural authenticity and a genuine national heritage (Frederik 2012: 2-5). As a result of the need for self-definition and the perceived attack on the nation, a search began for a clearly defined institutional structure and doctrine in culture and politics. In addition, the interaction with external cultural currents, even if conducted with the aim of adapting these currents, was increasingly viewed askance. Greater attention was placed on unity, the Cuban national character, and the continued integration of the population into culture.

As the Cold War escalated and the Cuban Government became increasingly isolated, the Revolution moved towards greater definition and this united the competing ideological currents under the (radicalised) banner of 'Marxist-Leninist socialism' with the formation of the Partido Comunista de Cuba (PCC) in October 1965. However, the founding of the Party signalled, in reality, a departure from traditional 'Soviet' socialist models and a decline in the influential positioning of members of the

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former PSP, some of whom, like García Buchaca, had already been removed from positions of power. Although it might be expected that members of the former PSP would be particularly prevalent in the PCC, it was in fact dominated by the M-26-7 movement (Gordon-Nesbitt 2015: 314). The new political unity was reflected in the official publications and *Revolución* merged with the former PSP newspaper, *Noticias de Hoy*, to become *Granma*, the official organ of the PCC. Granma was the yacht on which members of the M-26-7 movement sailed to Cuba from Mexico. By naming the official newspaper of the Party after the boat, the PCC, and Communism in Cuba, was inextricably linked to armed struggle, the 1953 Moncada attacks, and the *guerrillero*.<sup>26</sup>

By the end of 1965, the circulation of numerous creative currents and differing interpretations of Cuban socialism no longer sat comfortably alongside a Revolution that was increasingly moving towards a clear definition of what it stood for (Fay 2011: 418-19). Culture became increasingly linked with politics, education, social production and the Revolution's international fight against underdevelopment. In January 1966, the first meeting of the Organisation of Solidarity with the Peoples of Africa, Asia and Latin America (OSPAAAL) — the Tricontinental Conference — was held in Havana and attended by over 500 delegates from 82 countries. Kapcia (2008: 117) asserts that the conference was organised by the USSR in a tactical move to present itself as the ideological ally to Latin America rather than China. However, while the

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<sup>26</sup> For an analysis of the *guerrillero* in Cuban political culture see Clayfield, Anna. 2013. 'An Unfinished Struggle? The guerrilla experience and the shaping of political culture in the Cuban Revolution', (The University of Nottingham).

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organisation may have been Soviet, the focus on armed revolution and the implicit rejection of peaceful coexistence (more forcefully articulated in the open letter sent to Pablo Neruda by Cuban intellectuals after he attended the PEN club in New York) were distinctly Cuban. The Cuban delegation presented resolutions on topics that included imperialism's cultural and ideological penetration, cultural Revolution in countries free from the yoke of imperialism, cultural and scientific patrimony, and the national formation of cadres (Soto 1966: 78).

At the Tricontinental, graphic design – which had developed into an important revolutionary vehicle – played a significant role. It was by no means the only cultural form represented, however, and a survey was conducted by the intellectuals present regarding the role of the intellectual in national liberation movements (Anon 1966c).<sup>27</sup> The conference resulted in the creation of the short-lived Organización Latinoamericana de Solidaridad (OLAS) an organisation that promoted revolutionary action, which would meet the following year. The continued active cultivation of a culture of political engagement also contributed to the active cultivation of a politicised culture: a determined effort was made to continue educating the population about the importance of culture as a form of social production which could be used to help overcome the conditions of underdevelopment. The CNC produced a didactic pamphlet for general dissemination that brought together articles regarding culture in Cuba, previously published in UNEAC's *Gaceta de Cuba*. The introduction to the booklet examined the meaning of 'culture', emphasising the emancipatory

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<sup>27</sup> *Casa de la Americas* published the following survey respondents: Carlos Núñez, Regis Debray, Roberto Fernández Retamar, Manuel Galich, Francois Maspero, Alberto Moravia, Lisandro Otero, Gonzalo Rojas, Manuel Rojas, Alfredo Varela, Mario Vargas Llosa, and Jorge Zalamea.

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potential of culture under socialism, that it was at the heart of any growth as an individual or as a society: 'cultura es sinónimo de cultivo' (Anon 1966a: 3). A complementary programme to educate workers culturally also began in 1966. It began in the Gerardo Abreu Fontán factory before being taken to other factories whose industries represented a large portion of the nation's production. Key cultural figures from different cultural forms presented to the audience at each event (Pita Rodríguez 1966: 36-37). The aforementioned scheme echoes Aleksei Popov and Nikolai Pogodin's forays into the factories in the Urals with Pogodin's play *Poema o Topore* [Poem of the Axe] in the 1930s. Pogodin has begun his career as a journalist and until 1930 was a roving correspondent for *Pravda*. His early plays were clearly informed by his experiences as a journalist, for example *Poem of the Axe* was written about the foundry-workers from Zlatoust (Solovyova 1999: 343-4). The director Popov had left Moscow for more rural Russia to teach amateurs before retuning to Moscow to join the Vakhtangov Teatre and then the Theatre of the Revolution, the latter of which he was head of until 1942. When Popov left the Vakhtangov he took Pogodin's *Poema o Topore* with him and went, with the author, into the Urals into the factories (Solovyova 1999: 345). *Poema o Topore* deals with a factory's struggle to create stainless steel. Finally, while Cuba appeared to be moving ideologically away from the USSR and towards Latin American-wide Revolution, aesthetically it began to move closer to at least one aspect of Soviet culture: architecture. On 17 October 1965, a prefabricated housing factory, donated by the USSR to Santiago de Cuba, was inaugurated and a new phase in urban planning and architecture began. The plan was that the plant would ultimately produce 1,700 houses

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or apartments every year, but to begin with, the constructions were to go towards building the 'José Martí' district (Anon 1965). The plant produced concrete panels for the Soviet *krupnopanel'noe domostroenie* [large panel housing construction, KPD] system in which concrete panels are held together by steel rods and the joints between filled with poured concrete, nicknamed *khrushcheviki* in the USSR after the administration that popularised them. The buildings, which could be a maximum of five floors (after which a lift had to be installed) were economical to produce and assemble and provided a (short-term) solution to the housing crisis that was threatening Havana. The proliferation of these *khrushcheviki* demonstrated the government's continuing commitment to the ideals fought for in the Batista-era rebellion but also seemed to offer irrefutable visual proof that the country's cityscape and everyday life was progressively being 'Sovietised', a sentiment confirmed in the interviews conducted [Herrera Ysla, 2015].

### Defending the New Man

The heterodox currents that had characterised the discourse of the first half of the 1960s began to move towards orthodoxy towards the end of the decade. A pronounced 'siege mentality' began to set in and unity became increasingly important in the face of continued overt and covert aggression from the USA, including CIA-funded cultural programmes like the Congress for Cultural Freedom (Image 9).<sup>28</sup> Perhaps in response to some

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<sup>28</sup> Francis Stonor Saunders' *Who Paid the Piper* examines the level and scope of CIA's covert involvement in the diffusion of the pro-American cultural freedom movement in Eastern Europe and Latin America. See

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of these fears, some of the economic systems that characterised culture under capitalism, which were still in existence in Cuba, were abolished with the rejection of copyright for creative works and the founding of the Instituto Cubano del Libro (IdL) in May 1967. Culture continued to play a key role within society, and freedom of creative expression, the political nature of art, and the idea that art should be politically committed in whatever form it took, were emphasised. Cultural effervescence was once again linked to the M-26-7 and the Revolution with the visit of the Salon du Mai, in celebration of the anniversary of the Moncada attack of 1953. The active participation of the cultural sector in the nation building project was reiterated in October 1967, when Casa issued a declaration that emphasised the role of the intellectual in the Revolution, and hence the US interest in co-opting intellectuals.<sup>29</sup> In an environment in which the enemy was invisible, Cuba's historical cultural and aesthetic affinity with the US and Europe now began to present potential security problems. In turn, this meant that research into Cuban folklore and traditions and the rescue of these forms of expression were of ever-increasing value, and as such also became a way to protect artists who might otherwise have had problems, such as *Nueva Trova* or the later Grupo de Experimentación Sonora. Finally, Che's death in Bolivia and the CIA's part in it provided irrefutable proof that the Cuban Revolution was under attack. In some aspects (symbolically, economically), this seemed to herald the end of an epoch

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also Alfred Reisch, *Hot books in the Cold War: the CIA-funded secret book distribution program behind the Iron Curtain*, (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2013).

<sup>29</sup> The previous year, Radio Havana had held a round table on 'Yankee Imperialism' (reproduced in *Casa*) highlighting the possibility that the US was using subtle methods to undermine and destabilise the Revolution (Gordon-Nesbitt 2015: 420).

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and an inevitable return to the Soviet style of constructing a socialist Revolution. However, as Clayfield observes, guerrilla movements continued to emerge and the image of the 'heroic guerrilla' endured (Image 10), serving for many as inspiration to realise the dream of a hemisphere-wide revolution (Clayfield 2013: 74).

The 1968 Congreso Cultural de La Habana was uniquely positioned to continue advancing the international aspirations of the Cuban Revolution, bringing over 400 intellectuals together from both industrialised and less economically developed countries. The Congress considered the role of the intellectual in the revolutionary context, with Fernández Retamar drawing on the thinking of the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci regarding the social function of the intellectual as a starting point for the discussion (Gordon-Nesbitt 2012: 58). The Congress occurred at the same time as the discovery of a 'micro-faction', seemingly indicative of a shift away from the USSR (although perhaps, an adoption of some of its tactics). The uncovering of the micro-faction, led by disgraced Aníbal Escalante and comprising of 35 members of the former PSP party, coincided with the announcement of strict fuel rationing, due to a dispute with the USSR. The micro-faction were accused of denigrating the PCC's line and of having engaged in unauthorised relations with members of the Soviet embassy. As result of this collaboration the embassy had received negative reports and recommendations that the USSR should impose economic sanctions (Lévesque 1978: 135). Escalante was sentenced to thirty years in prison for working against the Revolution.

A subsequent series of events seemed to provide further proof that the Cuban Government was assimilating the USSR's historical modus

operandi. In October, Padilla was awarded the UNEAC prize for *Fuera del Juego*, a cycle of poetry modelled on outspoken poets like Evgenii Evtushenko, Nikolai Voznesenskii and Bella Akhmadulina of the USSR, who were all tolerated by the system but constantly pushed the boundaries. Padilla had learned of these poets and their work during his time as a correspondent for *Prensa Latina* and admired their sense of moral responsibility (Prieto 2012: 126). In theatre, Arrufat was awarded the UNEAC prize for his work *Los siete contra Tebas*; these events provoked a sustained controversy that ended with the publication of both works, but with a disclaimer from UNEAC condemning both pieces.<sup>30</sup> To an interested external viewer it would, perhaps, have been difficult not to see the fingerprints of the USSR on these events. Over the previous months, Padilla had openly attacked the vice president of the CNC (Lisandro Otero and his novel *Pasión de Uribe*) and defended Guillermo Cabrera Infante, who had broken with the Revolution, entered self-imposed exile, and been expelled from the UNEAC. Arrufat had worked with Cabrera Infante on *Lunes* and *Ciclón* and was also openly homosexual at a time when stereotypical hypermacho characteristics were being emphasised. These events, and the failure of Cuba to condemn the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia,<sup>31</sup> set alarm bells ringing in Latin American and European intellectual circles that were ready to see the malign shadow of the Stalin-era USSR pulling the strings behind 'restrictive' actions and driving the country inexorably towards the historical type of intense cultural regulation

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<sup>30</sup> Arrufat argues that it was Raquel Revuelta who began the campaign against *Los siete contra Tebas* (Arrufat 2002: 74).

<sup>31</sup> In reality the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia did not contradict the ideology of the Revolutionary government at the time, and Fidel Castro's public response included a veiled criticism of the Soviet Union's past actions and ideological inconsistencies.

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implemented by Zhdanov in the USSR twenty years earlier. The annual Writers' Conference in Cienfuegos, held the same month as the UNEAC prizes, responded to these events with the production of a declaration that emphasised the writer's duty to contribute to the Revolution through their work. Towards the end of the year, a series of articles against Padilla and Arrufat began to appear in *Verde Olivo*, the cultural publication of the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias (FAR), signed by 'Leopoldo Avila'. The impact of the commotion surrounding *Fuera del juego* and *Los siete contra Tebas* rumbled on into 1969, leading to a number of discussions and declarations regarding the role of the intellectual in the Revolution, and Casa marked the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Revolution with a round table examining the intellectual in this first decade.

The failure of the 1970 ten million tonne *zafra* marked a turning point, which saw a closer alignment with the institutional structures practiced in the USSR, and an increasing emphasis on the active participation of the artist in society and their active contribution to the development of the Cuban economy. Fidel issued a strong self-criticism that signalled the beginning of a move away from the economic ideas expounded by Che and a necessary move closer to the USSR, the only ally that was capable of salvaging the floundering economy. The Revolution's inexorable slide into the Soviet camp must have seemed almost complete when the government accepted that socialism was a transitory stage on the path to achieving full communism, which — intentionally or otherwise — privileged a certain ideological current. Accordingly, there began a sustained period of institutionalisation, previously synonymous with bureaucracy, anathema to the Revolution's

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ideological currents of the 1960s.<sup>32</sup> Soviet-Cuban economic collaboration became coordinated through the Intergovernmental Soviet-Cuban Commission for Economic, Scientific, and Technological Cooperation, established in December 1970 (Packenham 1986: 72), and was further bolstered in 1972 by Cuba joining the Council for Mutual Economic Aid — although it had been observing proceedings since 1963 — (Zwass 1989) and then by the creation of the System of Economic Planning and Direction in 1976/7.

1971 seemed to confirm that Cuba had been drawn wholly into the orbit of the USSR and was swiftly becoming a satellite state. Indeed, the year was characterised by a number of events that would appear indicative of a progressive ‘Sovietisation’ of the country. In chronological order these events included: the construction of Alamar predominantly using the Soviet prefabricated KPD system; the implementation of the law against ideological deviationism; the closure of the Department of Philosophy (staunch defenders and promoters of non-Soviet Marxist theories); the meeting of the Directors of Writers’ Unions of Socialist Countries in Moscow; the passing of the anti-parasite law; the arrest of Padilla; the exhibition of Modern Soviet Architecture held in the Palacio de Bellas Artes; a photographic exhibition on the development of ‘space science’ in celebration of the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Gagarin’s space flight in the Academia de Ciencias de Cuba. In addition the Primer Congreso Nacional de Educación y Cultura was held, resulting in a more regulatory and narrow interpretation of culture and its role. Shortly after this Congress Padilla issued a suspiciously Stalin-esque self-criticism after being

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<sup>32</sup> See, for example, Che’s ‘Contra el Burocratismo’ (1963) which argues that bureaucracy is not an inherent component of a socialist society.

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released; Luis Pavón Tamayo, the former editor of the cultural magazine of the FAR, became head of the CNC; and greater regulations were implemented in the cultural field, which included closer examinations of artists' lifestyles. In the political arena Raúl Roja conducted an extensive tour of the USSR and other socialist countries; Cuban cinema won four prizes at the Moscow Film Festival; Cuba and the USSR signed a protocol for Economic and Scientific collaboration; Soviet ships arrived in Havana, and on two separate occasions Aleksei Kosyguin and Andrei Kirilenko visited Cuba and its seemingly most 'Soviet' area — Alamar (Image 16-18).

However, simultaneously a number of other, perhaps less well-reported, events demonstrated a continued commitment to culture, education, Cuba's Latin American identity and the emerging sense of national identity and *cubanía*. These were a continuation of the ideals expressed in key cultural fora, such as the Tricontinental, the 1968 Congresses, and the Second Declaration of Havana. The Escuelas Secundarias Básicas en el Campo (ESBEC) that were constructed in 1971 were indicative of the ongoing commitment to the education of the population and of the Revolution's promise to combat the inequalities between the country's urban metropolis and the rural peripheries. Eduardo Galeano's *Las venas abiertas de América Latina*, detailing the destruction of a continent at the hands of imperialist forces operating within capitalism, received an honorary mention in the Casa literary prize; the Concurso 13 de marzo (in honour of the student revolutionary group the Directorio Revolucionario 13 de marzo, founded by José Antonio Echeverría) was created; the Cuban Rooms at the Palacio de Bellas Artes opened (on 26

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July); the exhibition *Arte Popular Latinoamericano*, exhibited in the windows of San Rafael street between Galiano and Prado, in celebration of the Moncada attack, was held once again linking the (plastic) arts to the Revolution; the new academic year saw the highest intake of students in the history of the Revolution (Fornet 2014, 167), and the *Primer Salón Nacional Juvenil de Artes Plásticas* opened in the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes. Finally, Alamar, whilst clearly deeply influenced by Soviet aesthetics, provided a much-needed solution to the housing crisis that had enveloped Havana, demonstrated the Revolution's ability to adapt and assimilate the best of other cultures, and was representative of the movement away from the traditional bourgeois and classical centres of the city (Scarpaci, Segre, and Coyula 2002).

### **Culture of the masses, for the masses: redefining mass culture**

El gran recurso de un país subdesarrollado en revolución es el pueblo mismo (Anon 1970b).

By 1971 the institutionalising drive of the previous years moved down a level in an effort to address the inequalities between the urban and rural centres. Greater attention was placed on internal organisation and unity, leading to the rise of socialist realism as a method of organising culture. Moreover, the continued sense that the country was under attack and its increasing isolation from Latin America meant that the open debates of the 1960s had been internalised, ideas of national identity became expressed in a more bellicose nature, and hypermacho ideas — focussing on

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romanticised ideas of the *campesino* and the *guerrillero*, and heterosexual sexual practices — began to circulate. These ideas mixed with the decolonising drive, which moved the creative focus from the metropolis to the *campo*, and the continuing commitment to education in order to give as many Cubans as possible ownership of the emergent cultural imaginary.

Thus began a period which has come to be known as the *quinquenio gris*. The period was characterised by a more regulatory approach towards culture, and narrower parameters within which its practitioners were permitted to operate, which directly impacted on cultural production, above all in theatre. The *quinquenio gris*, and its treatment of culture and society, seem to present obvious parallels with the USSR during the Stalin regime, suggesting what might be construed as a demonstrable Sovietisation of Cuba. Contemporaneous publications would seem to support this. Over the five-year period, reference to the USSR appears more frequently in *Granma*; in 1969, there were c.57 articles that mentioned the USSR, leaping to 129 in 1970 and then dipping to 103 in 1973, before increasing again to 155 in 1975 (Figure 1). However, a re-reading of the period suggests a more complex situation than Soviet imposition or Cuban appropriation of Soviet cultural methods and ideas. Some investigations into this topic have already been conducted by Jorge Fornet (2013) and Hortensia Montero Méndez (2006).

As previously discussed, 1968 marked a liminal point in the (cultural) ideology of the Revolution, and to fully understand the seemingly new direction in which the Revolution had begun to move decisively in 1971 it is necessary to re-examine trends that began to emerge at this moment. The January 1968 Congreso Cultural de La Habana heralded the

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beginning of a strong focus on anti-colonialism, the Third World, and the more active societal role required of the artist, particularly those immersed in the revolutionary process (Gallardo Saborido 2009: 149). The conscious deconstruction of pre-existing discourses further fused the political and artistic responsibilities of the artist. Artistic production and cultural development necessarily became an essential element of the mobilisation to both defend and advance the Revolution (Wepppler-Grogan 2010: 144). Valdés Paz also identified it as marking the beginning of a rupture between the Cuban intellectual world and the European Left, who applied European models of socialism to the Cuban reality without recognising its specific condition of underdevelopment [Valdés Paz, 2015]. Within culture, the decolonising process manifested itself in an ideological deconstruction of the dominant critical discourse(s) (Villegas 1989: 505). Cultural figures attempted to reconcile combating the residual effects of colonialism and the borrowing of Western cultural traditions and tropes with the need to create authentically Cuban intellectual spaces to foster organic discourses. Cuba's search for an economic ally outside the USA's influence also involved distancing itself from the traditional cultural hubs of Paris – where many pre-revolutionary Cuban artists had studied – and later New York, seeking out alternative centres as part of the island's 'recalibration towards novel, non-aligned and post-colonial poles' (Fay 2011: 421). This recalibration also caused (or allowed) the revolutionary government to assert its leadership in the international arena and thus to a more active resistance to perceived Soviet 'meddling' in Cuban affairs.

This situation in Cuban culture in the late 1960s and early-to-mid 1970s was analogous to what Yurchak terms the emergence of the

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'Imaginary West' in the late Soviet period. The concept opened up 'space of interpretation of what concrete foreign cultural forms might mean in different contexts' (Yurchak 2006: 164). The creation of the Imaginary West, and its inextricable linking to late Soviet culture, stemmed from the discussion in the USSR in the 1940s about cosmopolitanism versus internationalism and the evaluation of cultural production from the correct ideological standpoint (Yurchak 2006: 163). Yurchak (2006: 34-35) defines the Imaginary West, which emerged in the 1950s and came to dominate the lives of young people in the 1970s and 1980s as 'a local construct and imaginary that was based on the forms of knowledge and aesthetics associated with the "West," but not necessarily referring to any "real" West'. In its bid to create a Cuban, yet international, culture and develop different artistic forms, foreign cultural forms, their meanings and their dangers meant different things in different context. This was further complicated by the enduring sense of siege and the way the CNC tried to counter foreign influence with a renewed focus on clearly 'Cuban' elements of culture. Practically, what this meant was that the CNC began to focus more actively on the countryside and the inclusion of peasants in the nation's intellectual life through sustained education and organisation – one of its founding principles (CNC c.1973).<sup>33</sup> The cultural gaze of the nation had turned to the countryside and its inhabitants: an area which had great cultural and political significance in the history of the nation and which embodied elements of nostalgia, notions of purity, cultural authenticity and a genuine national heritage (Frederik 2012, 2-5).

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<sup>33</sup> Date not present in original source material, the BNJM's catalogue estimates it to sometime in the 1970s, most likely the first half of the decade.

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Within the theatre these objectives were evident in the formation of Teatro Escambray, a troupe that was firmly focussed on both Cuba's provinces and the role that theatre could play in the development of the Revolution and in addressing regional and local concerns (Rudakoff 1996: 78). The group's move to the isolated region of the Escambray came in part out of a strong sense of frustration; its members felt that theatre in Havana reflected colonial culture, mostly with plays from the European repertoire, within a traditional style of performance - in short, plays that spoke of foreign concerns and foreign cultures (Tunberg 1970: 48-54). Other theatre groups that emerged, or changed their orientation in 1968/1969, also demonstrate the shifting attitude towards culture and increasing focus on the younger generation that had been 'formed' within the Revolution and the evolution of the Revolution's ideology.<sup>34</sup> Teatro Estudio broadened its remit (the creation of a national theatre) to create a cultural hub with a strong educational and collective bent, Teatro Tercer Mundo had a specific geo-political focus and a more 'militant' approach towards revolutionary commitment and social behaviour, and Teatro Joven

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<sup>34</sup> In 1969, RC produced a guide for ideological orientation in cultural work. The booklet, facilitated by the CNC, was produced with the aim of enabling ideological study in an organised and unified plan (RC 1969). The supplement introduced each text, summarising the key argument and included questions for a guided study circle 'just one part – the collective and guided part – of the ideological self-improvement of the functionary or the artist' - at the end of each text (RC 1969: 3). The texts included: the closing speech at the Preparatory Seminar for the Havana Cultural Congress, the opening and closing speeches for the Havana Cultural Congress, Fidel's *palabras a los intelectuales*, Fidel's speech in response to the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, Fidel's speech celebrating the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Moncada attack, the Minister of Education's – Jose Llanusa – speech given at the 1968 meeting to organise the work plan in education, 'lo que hemos hecho y lo que falta por recorrer', the declaration from Cuban Students at the 1968 assembly of middle and higher education teaching students, and Che's 'El Hombre y el Socialismo en Cuba'.

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— which operated as a collective — became recognised as an official troupe. Finally, a series of cultural interchanges were planned from later in 1971, geared towards artistic and technical improvement, principally to help with the technical shortcomings of the *aficionado* movement (Quesada 1972).

The plastic arts reflected the increasing preoccupation with defence, development and national identity in a slightly different manner that focussed on the promotion of young artists (as products wholly of the Revolution) and a broadening of the definition and reach of ‘art’. A systematic professionalisation of the plastic arts began in 1969, with plans to continue rolling out this organisational scheme over the following years, reflecting the drive for greater organisational unity within cultural policy (Anon 1970b). The mobilising capacity of the plastic arts was celebrated, as were the art’s close links to the country’s productive forces. Moreover, in the same way that Teatro Escambray was celebrated as the best exemplar of theatre and mass culture in the Revolution, the poster movement (discussed in Chapter Five) was particularly celebrated as a national product that was conceived of and produced completely within the Revolution.

The 1971 Primer Congreso Nacional de Educación y Cultura, as with the 1961 Biblioteca Nacional meetings and 1968 Congreso Cultural de La Habana, responded to these emergent trends. The Congress reflected the desire for a greater cultural unity and for a more forensic examination of past cultural trends and productions, in order to combat potentially damaging tendencies. The resolution from the Congress stated that emphasis should be placed on the development of revolutionary

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values through historical analysis, the use of Third World solidarity themes, and a new look at contemporary revolutionary conflicts (Lent 1998, 64). The Congress also stressed the drive to eliminate (malign) foreign tendencies within the cultural world in the continuing battle against cultural imperialism in any form, from any source. The siege mentality had become entrenched, and, to a certain extent, codified in cultural policy. The ramifications of this were subtle but pervasive and clearly led to some uncomfortable interpretations of the parameters within which cultural practitioners should fit. The mobilisation of culture in the defence of the nation and therefore the role of the artist as a combatant (but also educator) placed new, *macho*, demands on the cultural practitioner. Masculinity and hyper-masculinity became more desirable characteristics and cultural expression become more bellicose. That the 1971 Congress addressed both education and culture (even though the latter was a last minute addition to the programme to help deal with the extraordinary events preceding the congress) is significant. Culture and Education had been linked to one another in 1970 in the CNC's *Política cultural de Cuba*, which was reproduced as a report for UNESCO: 'entendemos que si bien es cierto que la educación y la cultura están situadas en áreas diferentes forman parte de un solo complejo y exigen una acción simultánea' (Anon 1970b).

The failure of the ten-million tonne sugar harvest, the decisive act to lift Cuba out of poverty and underdevelopment, had demonstrated unequivocally that the technical education of the Cuban population was failing, and therefore prolonging the nation's state of dependency. As a result, a concerted effort to remedy this pervasive skill deficit began in all

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spheres of Cuban society. In this respect culture occupied a particularly powerful, and privileged, position as it bridged both worlds. Culture was in itself an educative tool, but it was also a form of social production that, when mobilised correctly, contributed to the development of the nation and national economy both directly and indirectly (Otero 1971). The prizing of culture in the continued defence and development of the nation and the economy also hints at the continued 'Latin American' strain of socialism and a very practical application of the words of the Revolution's enduring ideological forefather, José Martí: 'ser culto es el único modo de ser libre' (Martí 1963 289).

In this light, the presence of the USSR in the Revolution during the *quinquenio gris*, and beyond, can be read as taking on another function. This is not to completely negate any ideological affinity between the Cuban Revolution and the USSR, but rather to highlight that the *quinquenio gris* was more complex than the idea of the USSR's cultural and structural imposition on the Cuban Revolution. There was unarguably an increased presence of the USSR, and the other brother socialist countries, in the Cuban consciousness, but this was largely performative or informative. The anniversary of the October Revolution was regularly celebrated in the cultural press, with whole magazine issues dedicated to the USSR and the culture of the October Revolution every October/November; these tended to showcase the best of Soviet (Bolshevik) culture and promote greater knowledge of the country and its constituent republics.

Outside these significant months, regular informative articles appeared in cultural magazines, showcasing culture in other socialist countries. Lenin Park, after four years of construction, was inaugurated in

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1972, the same year that the first Jornada de la Cultura Soviética was held. The first iteration of the Jornada was held in Havana (inaugurated by the Soviet Minister of Culture, Ekaterina Furtseva) and Santiago de Cuba (inaugurated by the Moldavian Minister of Culture, Leonid Culiuc). It was held between 1 November and 12 November to celebrate the 55<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the October Revolution and saw the introduction of the Weeks of Soviet Cinema (Oramas 1972a; Pavón 1972; Furtseva 1972; Camacho Albert 1972; Vázquez 1972; Oramas 1972b; López Oliva 1972). It was also the year that Teatro Político Bertolt Brecht was founded: a political theatre group that in some respects, due to its very pronounced political commitment and the predominance of productions from Socialist countries in its repertoire, functioned as a designated Soviet/Eastern European space.<sup>35</sup> Concurrently, *Revolución y Cultura*, which dedicated a significant amount of space to the plastic arts in its publications, and constantly engaged in dialogue with the official cultural policy, began to be published regularly.

It is precisely during this more regulatory period that the plastic arts began to play a more active role in mass culture and the continental struggle for independence (Image 12). Less affected than theatre by the normative demands placed on them by interpretations of cultural policy, perhaps because of their well-established status or the less clear narrative of visual culture, they responded to the foci of the 1971 and 1968 congresses and established themselves at the heart of Latin America's continued fight against imperialism. Under the auspices of Casa, the

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<sup>35</sup> *Die Tage der Commune* [The Days of the Commune], a Cuban-GDR co-production with Hannes Fishcher, was the piece that inaugurated Teatro Político Bertold Brecht [Anon, 2015].

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Primer Encuentro de Plástica Latinoamerica was held in 1972. The meeting proposed a central role for art in the fight for justice against imperialism. A programme of activities was devised that helped situate the struggle on a local and continental level, encourage the development of a system of signs and symbols for the revolutionary struggle and engage the population (Gordon-Nesbitt 2012: 348-52). The Segundo Encuentro de Plástica Latinoamerica, held in October 1973, expressed solidarity with Chile, and assessed how the objectives of the 1972 meeting had been achieved and the effectiveness of art in fighting imperialism, in addition to formulating specific action plans.

The mobilisation of the plastic arts in this way coincided with the beginning of a sustained period in which Cuban students studied culture and art at Higher Education level, and which saw the creation of the Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores en Artes y Espectáculos (SINTAE) and of a school for the improvement of cadres, with courses lasting 90 days or two years (Anon 1974e: 4). The teaching and dissemination of art began to be systematically reorganised and a report was published outlining the new directives for the teaching of art in Cuba, with the aim of forming ISA, providing art education at Higher Level. The report emphasised that the system would be restructured following the recommendations of Soviet advisors, that Marxism-Leninism would become a mandatory topic on the curriculum, and that the MINED would be responsible for teaching at the basic level, and would approve the study plans for general teaching, while the CNC would be in charge of teaching methodology, technical skills and artistic specialities (Anon 1974b). Plans were also made to incorporate artistic education more fully into the

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curriculum at the ESBEs, with two hours a week dedicated to culture and art classes with seminars focussing on culture's ideological force and its influence on societal behaviour (Martinez 1974). 1974's work plan from the CNC underlined the Council's continuing focus on revolutionary culture, on equalising cultural disparities and on the mobilisation of culture in the defence of the nation. This was to be achieved through the critical assimilation of world culture, the study of cultural values of countries fighting for their independence, the study and assimilation of the experiences of the socialist countries, the study of the character and origin of Cuban culture, the tactical mobilisation and promotion of cultural forms according to their social impact, the elevation of the ideological content of cultural magazines such as *Revolución y Cultura*, and the continued promotion of young artists (Anon 1974e).

The Primer Congreso del PCC cemented the intimate relationship between education and cultural production and development of a culture that genuinely interested and resonated with the masses. That the masses should be sufficiently educated to understand vanguard artistic movements that responded to and engaged in dialogue with the political concerns of the time (in a way that had not been possible when Cuban artists responded to the October Revolution, due to the population's low educational level), was a concern (PCC 1976c: 467-502). In the PCC's programmatic resolutions, it committed itself to the continued roll-out of cultural installations and their material bases and the continued professional organisation of artists and writers, in order to critically assimilate the best of universal culture and articulate it in a culture of and for the people that was reflective of the aspirations of the Revolution. In

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order to achieve an educated citizenship that was both capable of understanding vanguard art movements and producing an art that reflected the new societal values, the PCC committed itself to holding days of culture and fostering co-productions with Socialist, Caribbean and Latin American countries, in addition to incorporating art education into citizens' basic instruction (PCC 1976b: 111-13). Books and translations that would deepen the Cuban population's knowledge about the other socialist countries were also identified as an educative cultural tool (PCC 1976c: 473).

### **The Great Appropriation**

The period 1965 to 1971 can in some ways be viewed as analogous to China's 'Great Leap Forward', due to the frenetic nature of institutional formation and economic organisation, geared towards lifting Cuba out of underdevelopment and the rapid achievement of communism. By the same token, the late 1970s and very early 1980s can be viewed as the Great (Cultural) Appropriation. During this period, there was a deeper fusion of economy and culture, the latter of which was ambitiously developed in all its forms, including amateur. There was also an intensified drive to assimilate the best of universal culture, deepen understanding of Latin American culture and articulate Cuban national culture within a socialist international framework. This period was characterised by the systematic effort to remedy the technical shortcomings that inhibited the coherent expression of national characteristics and perpetuated Cuba's state of dependency. Ideologically, Cuba and the USSR still differed, but

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there was more common ground, specifically the idea that socialism was a path through which to achieve communism. Pragmatically speaking, this served both parties well: the USSR remained the leading light of Communism and was able to play the role of 'big brother', guiding Cuba through the transition and helping the island's technical development by educating Cubans in all subjects in the USSR (which would also demonstrate the prowess of the Soviet educational system), while Cuba was able to take advantage of the technical knowledge that it lacked. This indeed implied looking to the USSR and the Socialist Bloc for useful cultural aspects, organisational or technical. Consequently, there was a proliferation of cultural scholarships for Cuban students who excelled to study in the USSR and Socialist Bloc: Bulgaria for opera, the USSR, Ukraine and Poland for painting, monumental art, and sculpture. For students wishing to specialise in theatre, destinations included the GDR, USSR, Hungary, Poland, Bulgaria, and Czechoslovakia to specialise in theatre direction, dramaturgy, puppet theatre direction, scenography, costumes, lighting and in the GDR a specific specialisation in organisation and planning of theatre and in the specialisation of Brecht's theatre. Upon their return, these scholars were expected to teach at the planned Higher Arts Institution (ISA) (Quesada 1972: 29).

The CNC's Directive No.1 for the development of work in 1975 laid out the path for culture for the following year. The Directive was comprehensive but among its plans and directives emphasised the need to strengthen and develop Cuba's cultural relations with socialist countries and particularly the USSR (in accordance with the norms and directive of the meeting of the Ministers of Culture of Socialist Countries the year

before). The Directive also emphasised the need to make the most of the advice from Soviet specialists and stressed that Marxism-Leninism was to be taught so that it would ultimately be viewed as the foundational base upon which creativity was built, rather than 'just' another subject in the curriculum (Anon 1975c). Other institutions were created or reorganised along more Leninist lines: the 1975 Congreso del PCC established a new Political Bureau, Secretariat and Central Committee, creating a ruling institution built on a Leninist model.<sup>36</sup> The political system was also substantially reorganised, with the implementation of the pyramidal structured Soviet-styled *Poder Popular* in 1976, with ex-PSP member Blas Roca as the first president of the one-chamber parliament (Kapcia 2005: 123). A Council of Ministers was introduced into the institutional landscape and membership in the PCC grew significantly, from 100,000 members in 1970 to 202,807 members in 1975 and then to 434,143 members in 1982 (Duncan 1985: 108). Finally a darker chapter in cultural politics seemed to be coming to a close as the CNC's strictures against homosexuality, which had so particularly affected theatre, were abrogated in 1975 and those marginalised by the edicts of the *quinquenio gris* had their wages paid retrospectively (Kapcia 2005: 156).

The Primer Congreso del PCC resulted in the elaboration of a more detailed cultural strategy (as opposed to simply reflecting attitudes, as in 1961, 1968 and 1971). The Thesis and subsequent Resolution outlined culture's educative and emancipatory role in the new Cuba and that the

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<sup>36</sup> In an article written by Mirta Aguirre, Denia García Ronda and Isabel Monal (1975), the authors stressed that being Leninist did not mean copying all that Lenin did, but rather taking on his ideas and using them as a guide. The article then went on to examine similarities between the intellectual father of the October Revolution and the ideas of Fidel Castro in 'La historia me absolverá'.

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aim of the PCC was to establish a climate favourable to the creation of art and literature that would ultimately be of benefit to the world.<sup>37</sup> The experience of the USSR in cultivating a culture that was aimed at combating man's exploitation of man and the establishing of a state that encouraged the national expression of its constituent peoples was hailed as a particularly valuable example from which to learn (PCC 1976c: 473). A more marked cultural participation from youth (who had been suitably educated through the system of artistic education) was identified as an area of focus. The youthful participation was linked to the nation's continued fight against imperialism and cemented the political and militant nature of artistic creation in Revolutionary Cuba:

El enemigo trata, con cuantiosos recursos, de aprovechar las necesidades y aspiraciones culturales y artísticas de los jóvenes para influir en ellos a través de sus elementos seudoculturales y costumbres deformantes. Nuestro propósito es educar el pensamiento y el sentir de nuestra juventud con criterios marxista-leninistas sobre la cultura y los valores humanos para ella lo utilice como arma, desde lo más hondo de su personalidad, contra la ideología antihumana y la corrupción de la reacción y el imperialismo (PCC 1976c: 495-96).

The structural weaknesses that had perhaps affected UNEAC's capacity to respond to events in the 1960s were also addressed in the 1975 Congreso

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<sup>37</sup> The *Thesis and Resolution* also stated some very clear and specific aims, such as the development of a clearly Cuban cinematography (PCC 1976c: 481).

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del PCC, as cultural, political and technical education of educational figures was assigned to the CNC and MINED (and then to MINCULT), and UNEAC, which had to guarantee that it operated on the basis of collective direction and democratically elected positions, was charged with supporting, promoting, and defending Cuban artists (PCC 1976c: 499).

The work of UNEAC, which was tasked with organising cultural exchanges, co-productions and educative translations, was also recognised as of equal importance to the CNC' : 'las tareas relacionadas con la promoción de la cultura y el disfrute de una existencia culta para todo nuestro pueblo, son metas tan irrenunciables como las del mejoramiento de sus condiciones materiales de vida y su educación' (PCC 1976c: 501). In addition to recognising culture's formative value in society, the document acknowledged the need to improve material conditions for cultural expression. This declaration marked the beginning of sweeping reforms of cultural policy, which are often interpreted as 'pragmatic responses from a revolutionary regime confronted with unfavourable social and political circumstances' (Tonel 2009: 180).

The evolving, more inclusive, atmosphere seemed to be confirmed by the inauguration of two key new institutions: ISA, providing University-level art education, and MINCULT, replacing the CNC. Significantly, the former Minister of Education and M-26-7 urban coordinator, Armando Hart Dávalos, was Minister of Culture. MINCULT was concerned with the development of the material and technical bases of art, the problems that were related to material resources, funding and technological development, artistic education (organised along the lines of the national education system), and all cultural aspects of cultural dissemination (Báez

and Hart Davalos 1986: 11). ISA was housed in the ENA, symbolic of the new institution's encouragement of individual thought and expression and the recognition of non-Soviet aesthetics. The new Constitution that had been drawn up the year before was also ratified, institutionalising the Revolution (Azicri 2000: 112). The Constitution ended a period of prolonged debate between different proponents of socialist models - radical-Guevarist-*fidelista*-nationalist versus orthodox-Soviet-PSP (Kapcia 2014: 133). The broadly inclusive sentiment of *Palabras* was resurrected (replacing the exclusive interpretation of the speech that had appeared to predominate between 1968 and 1975) and the freedom of artistic expression was guaranteed (PCC 1976a). The State's continuing commitment to the democratisation of culture was codified as the Constitution reaffirmed the State's role in cultural education, encouragement and cultivation of the masses (PCC 1976a: 31). The Constitution, which was not dissimilar to the Soviet Charter, possibly because of the important role played by Blas Roca, activist of the former-PSP, in its drafting (Kapcia 2014: 140), also made explicit mention of the USSR. It affirmed Marxism-Leninism as the Revolution's ideological lodestar, socialist internationalism as its supporting framework and cooperation, mutual aid, and solidarity as its preferred method. The Constitution, while acknowledging the close relationship with the USSR, did so in terms that emphasised the equality of the relationship, whilst also recognising the Revolution's Latin American focus (PCC 1976a). MINCULT's commitment to supporting the development and dissemination of culture and the greater focus on cultural cooperation and interchange with the USSR were confirmed with a series of protocols signed with the

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USSR in June 1976. The protocols concentrated on Ministry-level cultural cooperation, and cooperation in the performing arts between 1976 and 1977, and a plan on cultural and scientific cooperation for 1976 to 1980 (Ginsburgs 1987: 159, 425).

With internationalism now having been enshrined in the Constitution, and the critical assimilation of external cultures now being a priority, the revolutionary government's cultural focus turned outwards once more. A renewed emphasis was placed on the idea of the nation, and on national culture within a wider socialist culture. To some extent, this translated into a celebration of the individual within society — which fitted with the CNC's 1970s (re)definition of mass culture as the 'suma de fuertes individualidades desarrolladas a plenitud como consecuencia del proceso de liberación personal que propicia el hecho revolucionario que ocurrió en nuestro país' (Anon 1970b). Some rights were gradually restored to artists, such as authors' rights and royalties, which were reinstated in 1977 for the first time since their abolition in 1967.

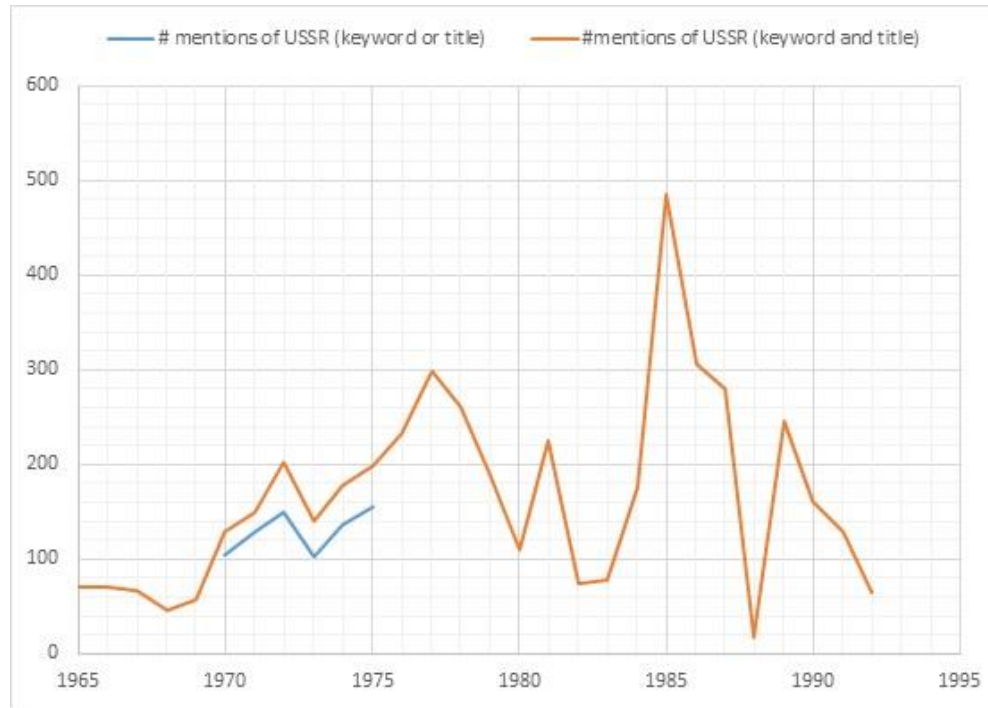
1976 represents, then, not a turn away from the USSR and the end of a period of supposedly pernicious Soviet-style influence, but rather a clarification of the basis of the cultural relationship between the two countries and the structural apparatus that directed culture. The PCC's *Thesis and Resolution* on artistic and literary culture, the ratification of the 1976 Constitution, and the inauguration of MINCULT organised the Revolution's cultural spaces and, in articulating the role of the intellectual and the anticipated forthcoming cultural tasks, left less-ambiguous spaces in which alternative interpretations of the role of culture and its practitioners could be promoted, or indeed denigrated.

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### Cuban cultural policy, 1959 to 1975

Such uncertainty regarding the Cuban relationship with the USSR demonstrates the complexities and conflicts of deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation and the 'unequal appropriation of knowledge and art' (García Canclini 1995: 240). The deterritorialisation of culture and knowledge cannot be reduced to particular movements or cultural codes and policies, but rather 'their meaning is constructed in connection with social and economic practices, in struggles for local power, and in the competition to benefit from alliances with external powers' (García Canclini 1995: 241). Thus Soviet culture, for the Cuban revolutionary government and cultural apparatus was therefore a product of imperialism, but also the 'realism of common people's culture' (Yurchak 2006: 164). These conflicting perceptions continued to co-exist throughout the 1970s and 1980s, informing and reflecting emergent cultural policy.

## Figures and Images



**Figure 1** A graph charting mentions of the USSR in *Granma* between 1965 and 1992



Image 9 Casa de las Américas #53 (1969)



Image 10 Casa de las Américas #46 (1968) dedicated to Che



Image 11 Casa de las Américas, #59. Centenary of Lenin's birth.



Image 12 Casa de las Américas #77 (1971) Fighting imperialism in mass media



**Image 13 Sickle seesaw in the grounds of the School of Plastic Arts, ISA**

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**Image 14 The Theatre School's  
amphitheatre, ISA**

Copyright: the author



**Image 15 Entrance to the School of Plastic Arts, ISA**

Copyright: the author

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**Image 16 Alamar**

Copyright: the author



**Image 17 Alamar - KPD flats, Lada, and replica monument to José Martí**

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**Image 18 Alamar – ‘Soviet-styled’ doctor's surgery and house**

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### 3 Cuban cultural policy 1976 to 1986

#### Introduction

‘Una exigencia de enorme significación para la cultura nacional, es la de la conservación y desarrollo del arte de origen inmediatamente popular’ (MinCult 1986: 5).

At first glance, the late 1970s and 1980s seem to offer little in the way of landmark cultural policy. In part, this is due to the fact that debates, at least for the remainder of the 1970s, remained largely internalised as a result of the 1971-1976 *quinquenio gris*. However, a closer analysis reveals the existence of multiple strains of thought: orthodox Marxism, Latin American Marxism, and revolutionary socialism. Some found common ground around certain ideas, such as the emergence of a genuinely Cuban culture. Others had opposing stances to certain ideas, such as the nature of the relationship between culture and productivity (superstructure versus a more holistic approach), or what unity might look like within culture. Yet more were not always clearly identifiable and tended to merge with the changing dominant strains of thought, but occasionally surfaced – best evidenced by attitudes towards Martí and Cuban traditions. The organisation of the cultural world, and the clear demarcation of the roles and boundaries of each institution, appeared to have been set: MINCULT was concerned with guidance, technique and methodology, while the municipal and provincial authorities of the *Poder Popular* administered the cultural centres and facilities. National defence was clearly still the priority

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for cultural and political leaders, and within culture this defensive impulse manifested itself in the drive for a united front within the cultural world, quality and clarity in artistic production, and a clearly defined role for artists and intellectuals. This defensive requirement also demanded that the population — and specifically artists and intellectuals — have an adequate ideological and political education, which would allow artists and audiences to assimilate the best of universal culture without the antagonistic politics and history that elements of this culture was potentially imbued with. Attitudes such as these led to the beginning of the embedding of socialist realism in both the aesthetic and organisational senses in the late 1970s. Perhaps the most important impact that the siege mentality, which developed because of a prolonged sense of attack and increasing isolation, had on culture during the 1970s and 1980s was in the fervent focus on the development of clearly identifiable revolutionary Cuban forms and styles of national expression.

Concurrently, the Revolution entered what was arguably its most utopian/egalitarian phase, leading to greater focus on the nation's youth and the prioritisation of widespread dissemination of, and access to, culture. The heightened level of attention placed on the Revolution's younger generations was also an expression of the emerging concept of *cubanía rebelde* which particularly prized youth.<sup>38</sup> Hope for the *nuevo hombre* of socialism thus moved towards the *aficionado* movement, which also fitted with the cultural apparatus's focus on the rescue and investigation of national and regional traditions, as well as the search for national culture in popular and mass culture. Additionally, culture came to

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<sup>38</sup> For a greater discussion of *cubanía* and *cubanía rebelde* see Kapcia (2008).

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be viewed as an economic stimulant and key developmental tool, resulting in a sustained focus on the greater integration of different cultural forms and of culture into the economy. Cultural plans and congresses were articulated within the same timeframe as the socio-economic *quinquenio* plans, which also fitted with the cycle of PCC Congresses (1976-1980 and 1981-1986), which in turn called for clear organisational structures and accountability. Finally, throughout this period, there was a change in the official approach towards the USSR, from using it as a model to learn from, to positioning Cuba as its equal and then restricting the relationship to the public performances of alliance. However, these myriad currents each seemed to privilege different interpretations of socialism and different ideas of the role of culture and the artist within the Revolution and other national liberation movements. While institutional clarity was achieved, informal and formal discursive spaces in the cultural world remained, and policy was applied erratically. The decentralised system meant that 'basic decisions in cultural matters rest[ed] with the community' (Saruský and Mosquera 1979: 23). Kapcia (2008: 107) argues that 'Cuba's revolutionary ideology was a complex, contested and evolving body of values and beliefs rather than a predetermined set of doctrines'. In keeping with this, I argue that *Palabras*, the 1976 PCC's *Thesis and Resolution* on literary and artistic culture, as well as other key moments of policy articulation, were able to be used to praise or criticise a work, or justify a particular institution's or section's approach.

### **Cuban culture in 'our' America**

The 1976 *Thesis and Resolution* on artistic and literary culture to some extent prioritised education and research within Cuba's creative sphere. This impulse was also inextricably linked with the drive to improve the organisational clarity and coherence of the cultural world. This was seen as a way of ensuring high quality cultural production and as a necessary step towards the greater integration of artistic production into the country's economic structure and drive: indicative of the growing perception of culture as an economic stimulant and developmental resource.

Constructive criticism, i.e. the viewer critiquing a piece of work to make it better and thus contribute to the Revolution, formed the backbone of this renewed prioritisation of education.<sup>39</sup> Criticism was presented as a cohesive activity that would ensure a high quality Cuban form of art that had safely assimilated the best of world culture, regardless of its socio-economic or ideological origins, and re-articulated it into a Cuban setting. Cultural criticism was also therefore an indispensable tool in the defence of the nation and the nurturing of a national culture (PCC 1976c). The *Thesis and Resolution's* section regarding criticism closed with a reminder of the heightened state of change that the Cuban population found itself in and with a call to the youth of the nation to embrace their role as critics. After 1976, concerted efforts were made to improve the political and ideological education of the Cuban population in order to equip them with the necessary skills to be productive critics.

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<sup>39</sup> This is not dissimilar to what Mally terms the 'education Vs enlightenment' debate that occurred in 1920s Russia regarding culture (Mally 2000: 74).

Despite the renewed focus on criticism, the institutionalising drive of the early 1970s had not disappeared by the latter half of the decade and, after the founding of MINCULT, a number of institutions continued to be created after fulfilling a number of the goals set out in the 1975 Congreso del PCC. For example, the 1975 Congress' call for a greater focus on studying Cuba's national traditions led to the founding of the Centro de Estudios Martianos on 19 July 1977. The centre had the aim of demonstrating the links between the revolutionary democratic goals of Martí and the socialist ideology of Marx, Engels and Lenin (Hart Dávalos 1977: 57). In some ways, the centre was demonstrative of the deeply entrenched relationship between culture and the political tasks of the nation. However, it was also indicative of the potential inscription of the 'Cuban' into the internationalist narrative of socialist Revolution, articulated by Martí: 'injértese en nuestras repúblicas el mundo; pero el tronco ha de ser de nuestras repúblicas' (1963: 18).

On the surface the approach that Martí was endorsing would seem to conflict with the socialist project of the USSR under Stalin which was predicated around consolidating socialism in one country. This had been state policy from 1928; however, the nationalities policy, which had begun in 1921 at the same time as the NEP, was in some ways contradictory to the creation of socialism in one country and sits closer to Martí's argument. The nationalities policy was closely linked to the USSR's foreign policy and internationalist goals. It aimed to position the USSR as a future model for a global political order which respected the rights of all nations (Suny 1998: 285). It was also a practical response, built on compromise, to the underdeveloped state of the nascent nation (Suny 1998: 141). The USSR

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was a union that was comprised of political units based on nationality. Each of these constituent nationalities was given a geographical territory, educational and cultural institutions that operated in their national languages, and members of non-Russian peoples were promoted to positions of power (Suny 1998: 284). Education in non-Russian languages was promoted to help combat underdevelopment and bring levels up to those of the more developed. As part of this, written languages were created for minority Soviet peoples who had not previously had their own alphabet or written language (Suny 1998: 285). In culture, the drive for a greater (umbrella) national consciousness was reflected through the promotion of a national form with a socialist artistic content, the latter of which Pablo Alonso González argues was reversed in revolutionary Cuba (Alonso González 2017: 109-10). The development of national cultures was encouraged, although Soviet Russian culture occupied the primary position in the family hierarchy of cultures. The other Soviet republics were encouraged to celebrate their national cultures and histories, but also had to emphasise ties with Russia and the progress afforded by their annexation to the Russian Empire (Suny 1998: 288). Manifestations of nationalism were punished harshly, but patriotism was promoted; the definition of these two manifestations was fluid and contingent on the politics of the day.

Returning to Cuba and the Centro de Estudios Marianos, the increasing tendency to view the country as a composite part of Latin America and the Caribbean — ‘Nuestra América’ — also allowed both these views regarding the construction of socialism via nationalism and internationalism to co-exist. In 1977, a variety of changes were made to

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existing institutions that placed an emphasis on promoting Cuban culture, whilst balancing this with the ever closer relationship to the Soviets. Some institutes were amalgamated and new organisations were created to fulfil ongoing cultural-political needs. Two such institutes which facilitated further informed cultural exchange were the Instituto Superior Pedagógico de Lenguas Extranjeras Pablo Lafargue (ISPLEPL) and a filial to the Gosudarstvennyi institut russkogo iazika imeni A. S. Pushkina [Pushkin State Russian Language Institute in Moscow]. The ISPLEPL, which placed a particular emphasis on Russian language, was the result of the merging of the Instituto Máximo Gorki and the Instituto Pablo Lafargue (Cinco Colina 2010: 27). Lafargue was a Cuban-born French Marxist journalist, political writer, literary critic, activist, and son-in-law to Karl Marx. The naming of the new institute after him (or rather, the keeping of Lafargue's name and the loss of Gor'kii's in the merge) helped highlight the Marxist nature of the Revolution, but in keeping with the presentation of Marxism as inherently international, also simultaneously reaffirmed the 'Cubanness' of the brand of socialism cultivated in and by the Revolution. Meanwhile, the centralised publishing house, the IdL, was dismantled into separate specialised publishing houses in what Kumaraswami and Kapcia argue was an attempt to rectify the errors of the *quinquenio gris* and simultaneously formed part of the ongoing commitment to institutionalisation (2012: 122). Publishing responsibilities were ceded to MINCULT. Rolando Rodríguez, founder and director of the IdL until 1976, remembers the period after the PCC's 1975 Congress as a time when Soviet models began to be copied in a Cuban NEP-esque<sup>40</sup> period that

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<sup>40</sup> NEP-esque because it was a time of intense focus on economic

was particularly damaging to the institute and fraught with *caciquismo* [Rodríguez 2015].

As part of the drive to further democratise culture and the belief in culture's emancipatory potential, two key cultural movements were also revived: the *instructores de arte* and the *movimiento de aficionados*, which laid the foundations for the creation of the *Casas de Cultura* in each municipality. After the Segundo Congreso de la UNEAC, these two movements, but particularly the *aficionado*, became increasingly important in the nation's cultural policy. The *aficionado* movement was progressively valued as a vehicle that enabled the people to directly participate in the creative process, for its educational capacities and as a form of cultural creation that also fed back into the people's creative process, thereby helping to raise the quality of the work produced and awareness among the people. The revival of these movements laid the foundations for the creation of a nationwide network of *Casas de Cultura*. The *Casas de Cultura*, which were distributed across each municipality, were designed to enhance 'the notion of cultural democratization and mass participation in a collective good' (Kapcia 2008, 106). The *Casas de Cultura* organised and ran the *aficionado* movement, and were responsible for all cultural activities at a community level. They aimed at raising the educational level of the population, disseminating culture and providing recreational opportunities; they did not, however, train professional artists (Saruský and Mosquera 1979: 25-26). It would appear that, as Judith Weiss has suggested (1985: 124), and as Manuel López Oliva asserted in an interview [López Oliva, 2015], the network was founded directly from the

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development as a necessary stage of the Revolution's development.

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Soviet model of *Doma kul'tury* [houses of culture]. The systems share a name but also the same purpose of mass political and cultural education and enlightenment as well as the national structure of organisation (White 1990).

However, the creation of the *Casas de Culturas* was, as Kapcia argues, also the 'formalisation of a more organic process' and coincided with an increase in addressing the training of professional art teachers at a national and continental level (Kapcia 2005). Between 25 and 26 July 1977, the Primer Encuentro Latinoamericano de Escuelas y Centros de Formación Teatral was held in Caracas, Venezuela. The Cuban delegation was led by Mario Rodríguez Aleman, the rector of ISA, Miriam Learra, an actress in Teatro Estudio, and Manuel Galich, editor of *Conjunto* (Anon 1977a). The Cuban contribution to the event clearly laid out the Revolution's international and egalitarian aspirations (and the implication that Cuba was to Latin America what the USSR was to Eurasia), and the importance of criticism to cultural work (Galich 1977; Rodríguez Alemán 1977).

Concurrently with the focus on education within theatre, changes were made to the higher education system for the arts and ISA began to develop a postgraduate course training teachers in Marxist-Leninist aesthetics (Rodríguez Alemán 1977: 100). A union for cultural workers was formed, the Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores de la Cultura (SNTC), with the First Congress being held on 6 September 1977. The Congress elected members of the organisational committee, discussed policy and quality control, as well as organisational and administrative matters (Tellería, Vázquez, and Elvira Peláez 1977).

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Interest in Latin America and its cultural production was also spreading in the USSR, with the publication of a number of books dealing with Cuba and more widely Latin America, in addition to the already existing publication of the works of Cuban poets and novelists. For example, in 1977 *Sotsialisticheskii realizm na sovremennom etape ego razvitiia* [Socialist realism in its current state of development] (Rodionovich Shcherbina 1977) was published by the publishing house Nauka [Science]. The book contained a chapter on 'реальность народной борьбы и реальность народного сознания в современном латиноамериканском романе' [the reality of people's struggle and the reality of national consciousness in the modern Latin American novel]' (Kuteishchikova 1977). The majority of the discussion in the chapter was about Manuel Cofiño's novel *La ultima mujer y el próximo combate*, which he had consciously classed as socialist realist. Earlier in the year Progress publishing house had also published the collection of poems *Moscú-La Habana, La Habana-Moscú*, which was celebrated in Cuba for covering both sides of the relationship 'en este libro se oyen dos voces: la de los Cubanos que cantan la patria del Octubre y la de los poetas rusos que engrandecen la isla de la libertad' (Kuteischikova and Terterian 1979: 67).

Towards the end of the year, and against the backdrop of the build up to the celebrations of the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the October Revolution, the Segundo Congreso de la UNEAC was held. The Congress, which ended on 13 October, was presided over by Raúl Castro, Armando Hart Dávalos, Blas Roca, Carlos Rafael Rodríguez, Osvaldo Dorticós Torrado, Antonio Pérez Herrero, Raúl Roa, Nicolás Guillén, and José Carneado. The Congress, which also included a resolution on the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of

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the October Revolution (UNEAC 1978c), was opened by the President of UNEAC, Nicolás Guillén. Guillén emphasised the unity of the cultural world, the role of the artist and intellectual in the continuing fight for national liberation and the permanent need to defend the nation against those who would seek to interrupt this emancipatory process. In doing so he presented the Revolution as the continuation of the liberation movements begun in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, thereby emphasising the 'Cuban' and to some extent negating the 'Soviet' in the Revolution:

Al reunirnos ahora los escritores y artistas cubanos bajo la gran sombra del Padre de la Patria, tenemos clara conciencia de la responsabilidad que asumimos, del deber que contraemos, dispuestos como estamos a afianzar cada día más profundamente el proceso liberador de Cuba y su síntesis nacional: de Céspedes a Martí, de Martí a Fidel Castro (Guillén 1978: 36).

Guillén acknowledged the diversity of expression and opinion among the creative world, but simultaneously emphasised the unity of the Revolution by likening the arguments and disputes among artists and intellectuals to those within a family. He also clarified the need to assimilate the best of culture — from different political outlooks — in the synthesis of a Cuban, socialist culture. He did this by grounding his argument in Lenin's accommodating approach towards bourgeois art during the October Revolution and his opposition to the desire to destroy all links with previous culture in a bid to create truly proletarian art. Guillén reiterated the role of the artist and intellectual; firmly locating them within the

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Revolution's internationalist aspirations/outlook: to produce art that was linked to the Revolution's fight and that might serve as a guide or inspiration to further struggles for national liberation. Throughout all this he stressed that the enduring high quality of cultural production remained a key concern. Finally, he finished by rejecting all forms of cultural chauvinism and reiterating the value of bourgeois culture when it contributed to the growth and development of a Cuban culture. However, he also emphasised the need to nurture and defend, by all means possible, the nascent national culture, which was rooted in two opposing, but equally valid cultures: that of the African slave and that of the colonial Spanish. By doing so, Guillén acknowledged the seemingly contradictory cultural currents, but subsumed them under the umbrella concepts of 'cubanness' and 'socialist'. This approach of Guillén's paralleled the Soviet discussion of socialist realism as concurrently national and socialist.

A second reading of Guillén's opening speech also offers some insight into some important ideas and currents that fitted into the emerging national narrative that had begun to be articulated by the new constitution. Guillén singled out two of the arguably most contradictory cultural legacies, the African slave and the Spanish colonial – one which fitted into an orthodox Marxist narrative and one whose preservation and assimilation was ideologically problematic. In doing so, he provided a concrete example of the (inter)cultural chauvinism that he had declared had no space in the Revolution.

The merging of these two sides of Cuban identity into a unified Cuban national identity remained true to Ortiz's concept of the Cuban *ajiaco*, the emblem of the Cuban concept of 'transculturation'.

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Transculturation was the term coined by Ortiz to help express the numerous cultural transmutations that occurred throughout Cuba's history and that Ortiz considered fundamental to understanding the nation (Ortiz 1991: 86). The *ajiaco* is a stew that is made up of different indigenous root vegetables, and a dish used by Ortiz as an example of Cuba's distinctive ethnic diversity. The *ajiaco* brings together the indigenous, Spanish, African, and Chinese elements of Cuban society. Transculturation, and specifically the idea of the *ajiaco*, emphasised the blending of cultures, rather than the domination of one at the subjugation of the other (Ortiz 1991: 90).

The speech also indirectly extolled the value of the role of the critic in socialist cultural production, through nuanced and informed criticism the best of these cultures could be neutralised and assimilated into Cuban culture. This reassertion of the benefit of recognising the value of 'bourgeois' art was a practical application of some of the goals put forward in the 1975 Congreso del PCC. Each organisational section of the UNEAC produced a statement regarding its opinion on the work plan/report for their section, and an executive summary of each was reproduced in *Unión* as part of the reporting on the 1977 Congress. These summaries, and the reports they mentioned, had been approved by the members of each section and they vary in the level of specificity, but all respond in one way or another to the ideas put forth in Guillén's opening speech. The verdict from the Plastic Arts Section's emphasised the arts' contribution to the people's spiritual enrichment, and focussed on education and debate. It highlighted the importance of ideology in artistic work and the need to study Marxism-Leninism so that artists would have the right theoretical

weapons with which to adequately reflect the essence of social phenomena in their work. The Section also highlighted that it considered one of its fundamental jobs to be the fostering of free discussion about the problems of artistic creation in order for artists to share experiences and get results that might be of collective benefit. The Section reiterated that it would protect its members' rights and would actively stimulate the development of new plastic artists, and technically qualified criticism, for which it would provide adequate (ideological) orientation (UNEAC 1978b: 154-55).

In contrast, the executive summary of the verdict from the Scenic Arts Section's, reproduced in *Unión*, was much shorter than that of the Plastic Arts Section. The Scenic Arts' commission was formed of 32 delegates and twelve national invitees, but had 78 interventions – suggesting there was a particularly lively debate when deciding the final statement. Ultimately, twenty one modifications (none of which are specified in the summary) were made to the report, relating to the clarification of concepts and dates including defining the different manifestations of the scenic arts (theatre, dance, ballet, radio and television). The statement also revealed that there had been demand for recognition of the boom in scenic arts in the provinces since the rebellion that brought the Revolution to power. Other points related to the implementation of the Section's work plans and it was recognised that the Section needed to consider the different ways of collaborating with the different provincial sections (UNEAC 1978a).

In his closing speech, Hart built on Guillén's argument, referring back to the Dentro/Contra paradigm in Fidel's *Palabras a los intelectuales*.

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He argued that previous difficulties experienced over the past decade and a half had arisen through a misinterpretation of *Palabras a los intelectuales*:

Las deficiencias, dificultades, y los logros que han existido durante el período comprendido entre el I y II congresos de la UNEAC, están en parte relacionados con la mayor o menor comprensión que cada cual ha tenido de la esencia más profunda de las palabras de Fidel, cuando en pensamiento que todo lo sintetiza proclamó: “Dentro de la revolución todo, contra la revolución nada”, o cuando dijo: “El arte es un arma de la revolución” (Hart Dávalos 1978a: 63).

For Hart, the best way to defend the emerging national culture and ensure high quality was through the recognition, study, and assimilation of the Latin American and Caribbean roots of Cuban culture into socialist cultural expression (Hart Dávalos 1978a: 63). In this vein, Hart also issued a call to bring debate back into the public sphere, in contrast to the internalisation of debates in the early 1970s. Debate, the Minister of Culture argued, was a way of defending Cuba from malign forces. At the same time, he located the forthcoming Cuban experience in the shadow of the achievements of the USSR:

Podrán la calumnia, la intriga y el divisionismo ideológico engañar a los que se quieran dejar engañar. A nuestro pueblo y a sus trabajadores intelectuales no podrán engañarlos. La Unión

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Soviética es hoy el país más culto de la tierra y la avanzada del movimiento cultural en el mundo. A sesenta años del amanecer de Octubre, la cultura en el mundo entero tiene un poderosísimo elemento estimulante en el formidable progreso cultural alcanzado por la Unión Soviética. Partiendo de estos hechos, los trabajadores intelectuales en nuestro país deben estar preparados para el debate [...] Los trabajadores de la cultura en Cuba han de estar muy interesados en denunciar cuanta falsedad, hipocresía y tergiversación hay en la propaganda burguesa que gira alrededor de esas ideas (Hart Davalos 1978b: 167).

Thus criticism was also identified as an essential tool for the cultural development of the country, and as a way of avoiding unnecessary individualism that would separate the individual from the collective and reality. Hart called for the coherent application of the cultural policy set out in 1976. He extolled the organisational achievements of MINCULT and the moves it had made to combat the lack of organisational tradition within the creative world. He also emphasised that the preparations for the Congress, conducted over the previous ten months, had revealed that there was a common 'substrate' of ideas and unity of opinions that linked the different artistic forms together (Hart Davalos 1978b: 170-86).

With his position established, Hart explored the different ways in which cultural policy could be applied, and highlighted that organisation, and an approach that was not specific to individual artistic forms, but rather holistic, were the keys to the effective implementation of said policy: 'solo con una visión integral del fenómeno de la cultura y analizando las

relaciones entre las diferente artes, podrán estas desempeñar su papel en la transformación revolucionaria de la sociedad' (Hart Davalos 1978b: 175).<sup>41</sup> A dedicated body — the Consejo Popular de La Cultura — was created to coordinate interaction between the state apparatus and the working masses in culture. Ultimately, the closing speech was deeply pragmatic, elaborating on the ways in which cultural policy could be applied, warning of the potentially damaging approaches and tendencies within culture, and, above all, highlighting the ways in which a cultural production of a higher quality could and should be achieved. In his closing words: 'Martí dijo: "la justicia primero, el arte después". ¡Ha triunfado la justicia! ¡Adelante el arte!' Hart (1978a: 76) articulated the overriding preoccupation of the 1970s and 1980s: with socialism established and systemic inequalities addressed, how should the nation create a high quality, authentically 'Cuban' art?

### **Culture is not a luxury**

The PCC and UNEAC's call for greater cultural interaction and exchange with the USSR had already begun to manifest itself at an institutional level. A protocol of cooperation between the Soviet and Cuban Ministries of Culture and a plan of cooperation between the Union of Painters of the USSR and the UNEAC, for the period 1978 to 1980, were signed in February and April 1977 respectively (Ginsburgs 1987: 426). However, later in the year, the importance of culture to the spiritual and economic

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<sup>41</sup> Hart expressed a similar sentiment when discussing the relationship between art and economy, in which he argues the individualism of an artistic form reduces its overall value, and that this approach could be applied to the art-society relationship (Hart Davalos 1978c: 19)

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development of Cuba was forcefully rearticulated by Hart at the IX Meeting of the Ministers of Culture of the Socialist Countries, held in Moscow in July 1978. In a speech concerning the meeting's first point of action – 'papel y lugar de la cultura y el arte en el cumplimiento de los planes de desarrollo socioeconómico' – Hart explained the Cuban government's approach to culture. It was necessary, he explained, to take a two-pronged approach towards art and culture when considering its role in socio-economic development: first, its role in solving the problems of occupying workers' free time and second, the influence of art on material production (Hart Davalos 1978c: 9).

Regarding the first approach, Hart signalled that art and culture were valuable practices because they facilitated a greater understanding of reality and aimed to provide spiritual satisfaction to the people. Because of this, art and culture were particularly useful ways of learning about and understanding the human condition. Hart posited that if workers spent their free time in increasingly cultured ways, this would have an economic impact as it would create a demand for culture and cultural products that needed to be satisfied. This would potentially create a cycle of positive feedback: if workers spent more of their free time in cultured activities, this could create a strong craft movement, which, in addition to its artistic and entertainment value, would have dual economic value (product and process). Hart considered that this hypothetically liberating development was dependent on a greater cohesion between different sectors of Cuban society and a fundamental change in the way that art and artists were viewed by society:

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Las relaciones entre las técnicas de producción material y la creación artística son tan antiguas como el arte mismo. Y es en esa profunda relación entre las técnicas de producción y las de la creación artística, donde quizás podamos encontrar un punto de referencia para determinar el papel del arte en el seno de la producción material. En los tiempos actuales, para analizar la influencia del arte en el seno de la producción material es imprescindible tomar cada vez mayor conciencia de que el desarrollo de las relaciones socialistas de producción y la propia revolución tecnológica de nuestros días a escala internacional, introducen aspectos cualitativamente diferentes en la visión tradicional que tenemos del arte y del artista mismo. Y este cambio de conciencia debe producirse no sólo en los artistas, sino en toda la población (Hart Davalos 1978c: 14-15)

Hart argued for the greater integration of culture into the Cuban economy. An essential component of this was the assimilation of the best technological and scientific advances in the international community, and their re-elaboration into a Cuban cultural context that also recognised the value of traditional methods of cultural production. This necessarily entailed a closer relationship between art/culture and industry/economy, which was in turn based on an informed understanding of the value of culture and heightened cultural appreciation. Design was hailed as a particularly good example of the close interaction of culture and industry given that its core aim was to produce something to settle the spiritual and material needs of the population. Hart singled out the plastic arts as an area that was poised for greater investigation into the interaction of art and

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industry, and the subsequent production of products for everyday consumption. This laid the way for projects such as TELARTE (discussed in Chapter Five), which emerged from the late 1970s onwards. Technical mastery and the greater unity between different cultural genres were deemed essential for the more integrated relationship between art and socio-economic development. Aesthetic requirements and scientific progress were considered the driving forces behind the demand for the greater integration of different aspects of culture. The discovery of this point of convergence of culture, technical mastery, and scientific development was regarded as providing the greatest range of possibilities for artistic expression. Hart also reminded the conference of the interrelation between material production and intellectual production. The speech closed with Hart arguing for the use of new methods of mass production to help produce a cultured, educated, discerning population that could partake in the cultural life of the nation and produce high quality art.

Cultural production that was integrated into the Cuban economy was also hailed as means by which Cuba could break out of its cycle of dependency on sugar and earn valuable hard currency. This demanded a change in the way cultural investment was therefore viewed:

Para su desarrollo, el país requiere de una fuente importante de inversiones que es imprescindible priorizar al máximo. Ello impone que cualquier inversión importante en la cultura deba ser analizada no sólo desde el ángulo de su significado artístico o literario, sino también desde el punto de vista de su interés económico e incluso, de su interés para las exportaciones. Nosotros no podemos darnos el lujo de

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tener la cultura como un lujo. Nuestro desarrollo cultural debe servir también, en cuanto sea posible, como una fuente de recaudación interna, y como una vía para adquirir divisas. Además del principio estrictamente cultural, que no puede subestimarse, deben tomarse también en cuenta criterios de costeabilidad [sic]. Y estos dos aspectos son perfectamente conciliables (Hart Davalos 1978c: 23).

Therefore, Cuba's cultural history had to be reassessed with a financially oriented eye. Hart highlighted the fact that the cultural diversity that was characteristic of Cuba was in global demand, and that this necessitated a greater recognition of some of the constituent elements of Cuban culture, such as the popularity of the Spanish language and the international recognition and diversity of the Cuban plastic arts (Hart Davalos 1978c: 25). Cuban music – most likely popular music – was singled out as a form of artistic expression that had many universal characteristics that made it potentially attractive to large sections of the world. Because of this, there were many opportunities for exchanges, and moreover as an artistic form that had creative input coming directly from the people. Hart's call for the re-evaluation of the relationship between art and material production was the continuation of the ideals of the 1953 rebellion, and implied the prizing of culture and cultural expression. In addition, Hart's suggestion that art and culture be linked more clearly with industry was not a complete change of direction of cultural policy – indeed it can be seen as an extension of *Palabras a los intelectuales*, which was in part an affirmation of the new and important role artists and intellectuals would occupy in a time of great socio-economic change (Kumaraswami 2009). However,

while *Palabras* had touched on the idea of an international cultural economy, Hart was now articulating the idea more fully, clearly linking artists and intellectuals to the international and national economy.

Steps had already been taken to bring cultural production into the economic sphere and an official institution dedicated to this task was quickly established. The Fondo Cubano de Bienes Culturales (FCBC), which still exists today, has the aim of promoting and commercialising works of art from artists working in the plastic and applied arts, which are comprised of decorative arts, and the wide-ranging manifestations of artisanal work and design (MinCult 2016). The FCBC as a national organisation was created in 1978 (Alonso González 2017: 139) with a provincial branch inaugurated the year before (Mesa 1977).<sup>42</sup> Hart's ideas regarding the closer integration of culture and economy gained considerable traction after the 1978 rise in global sugar prices that meant Cuba swiftly returned to trade with the CMEA and into an 'even closer and more exclusive economic relationship with the Soviet bloc' (Leogrande and Thomas 2002: 333).<sup>43</sup> Cultural activities and cooperation were planned along the same timescale as the economic *quinquenios*, as the particular skills of the artist were increasingly integrated into the country's economic development.

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<sup>42</sup> From 1987 onwards, the FCBC has organised the Feria Internacional de Artesanía (FIART) an annual artisanal fair often held in PABEXPO that brings together artisans from all over Latin America and the rest of the world with the chance to exhibit and sell their products.

<sup>43</sup> Over the next two *quinquenios*, Cuba continued to benefit from Soviet economic aid and technical assistance, including a space mission (MID and MinRex 2004: 356) and, by the 1980s, electricity stations built with Soviet cooperation were supplying 42 per cent of the country's generation capacity (Blasier 1993: 84). The year 1985 marked the highpoint in trade between the two countries at almost 10 billion roubles (Bain 2005: 774).

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The linking of culture with socio-economic production in a bid to construct the socialist modernity more fully, had clear historical antecedents outside of the Revolution. The linking of the two areas has echoes of the positive interaction of art and culture with economy and industry that can be found in the Bauhaus movement, Constructivism (the object-as-comrade), the New Deal, and, lastly, Dobrenko's interpretation of socialist realism as the real producer of socialism through the consumption of socialist realist cultural production.

Perhaps because of this — the setting in which the Minister of Culture made his 1978 speech, and the lack of definition in how this greater integration of culture and economy was to take place — Hart's ideas were also able to be interpreted and applied in a reductive manner that viewed culture as superstructure — in the Marxist sense of the term — rather than base (Marx 2010). By 1979, it had become clear that the government considered that the educational challenges the country had faced in the early years of the Revolution had been overcome. In consequence, the focus had shifted towards raising the quality of cultural production within Cuba, both as a means of further educating the people, but also as a way of articulating the emergent national identity. This attitude, and that cultural development was synonymous with social development and economic progress, is evidenced in Sarusky and Mosquera's UNESCO 1979 report on the cultural policy of Cuba. The report detailed the development of the country's cultural infrastructure, the aims, implementation of, and reasoning behind the country's cultural policy. In doing so, the report reiterated the close relationship between education and culture and alluded to the shift in investment in culture after

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educational goals had been met (Saruský and Mosquera 1979). ISA was flagged as a key formative institute and emblematic of the Cuban government's approach towards art and culture:

The Instituto Superior de Arte will provide training to licentiate and doctoral level in: music (composition, musicology, orchestral conducting, choral conducting, string instruments, wind instruments, percussion instruments, the guitar and singing); the scenic arts (acting, drama, theatre); and the plastic arts (engraving, painting, sculpture). Consideration is being given to the possible inclusion of town planning, interior design, furniture design, toy design and stage design in the plastic-art section. The institute serves as the centre for instruction in the various specialised fields, the objective being to train all-round artists and teachers who take a global view of art, who understand and are receptive to each form of artistic expression. The university-level artists graduating from the institute will have a guaranteed place in society and will be able to devote themselves to creative activities without any concerns or difficulties. In addition to providing specialised artistic instruction, aesthetic education forms part of the general education system, since it is considered to be inseparable from the all-round formation of the human personality (Saruský and Mosquera 1979: 39-40).

Culture continued to be actively linked to the fight against the colonial legacy and imperialist aggressions, and cohesion in the cultural world and cultural production once more became closely related to the better defence

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of the nation. Culture became the subject of passionate mobilisation drives that focussed on organisation, inclusion and unity — a by-product of which was a demand for greater structure, coherence and accountability.

Theatre and the plastic arts were particularly valued forms of cultural national defence. Both forms had come to the fore after 1959 — theatre with *Teatro Nuevo* and the plastic arts with the poster — and both exemplified the potential for the effective mass inculcation of culture into the population. Both were also cost effective for organising tours or exports, and efficient in terms of the size of audience that could see one piece of work (as opposed to literature where potentially hundreds of copies had to be made to reach a comparable audience size). There was significant crossover between the two forms and, along with music, they were well placed to reflect popular culture and taste. Against the backdrop of increased economic dependency on the USSR, the Cuban government's organisational drive and focus on the creation and consolidation of dedicated cultural institutes continued. Greater links between the different artistic forms were encouraged. The unity of the cultural world having been established, at least to some extent, with the founding of MINCULT, the focus on raising the cultural (production) level, resulted in a progressively close working relationship between official cultural institutions and the PCC to achieve the goals set out in the 1976 *Thesis and Resolution* on artistic culture. Institutional organisational coherence (internal and external) was subsequently prioritised. Within this organisational drive there was a focus on political and ideological education as a means to guarantee quality and widespread cultural

participation, and in this aspect the *aficionado* movement played a particularly active role.

In July 1979, in keeping with the PCC's commitment to investigate national and regional folklore, and build cultural links with the Caribbean and Latin America in particular, Cuba hosted the third festival of Caribbean culture, Carifesta. The theme was 'A Rainbow of Peoples Under One Caribbean Sun' (Carifesta 2016). The national commission for the event was formed by Hart, Santamaría, Rene Rodríguez Cruz, Manuel Moreno Fragnals, Carpentier, José Luciano, Franco Electo Silva, Olavo Alen, Nivaldo Herrera, and Guillén (Elvira Peláez 1979b). The festival, which runs to this day, celebrates the folklore traditions of the Caribbean and is held as a way of deepening understanding of the region's collective cultures. It is also a way of bringing the community together and combatting the isolation of its constituent countries (Carifesta 2016).<sup>44</sup> Events were held in Havana but also in Matanzas and Santiago de Cuba as part of the celebrations. Folklore had also come to occupy an important position in Cuba's international cultural dealings with the USSR, helping to control the degree of interaction between the two countries (Image 32-39). Folklore, and culture that overtly drew on national traditions, was an effective way of mediating any influence due to the protection afforded by its historic nature. For example, the 1979 Dni kubinskoi kul'tury [Days of Cuban Culture] celebrations, which took place across the USSR, showcased the Ballet Nacional de Cuba, members of the *Nueva Trova*

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<sup>44</sup> For more information about the festival see, among others, (Anon 1979c; Leante 1979; Anon 1979e; Elvira Peláez 1979a) (Elvira Peláez 1979b; Anon 1979g; Camacho Albert 1979).

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movement, folklore ensembles, choirs and Teatro Estudio (Anon, Hart Dávalos, and Vélez 1979: 139-40).

Public culture, or at least one aspect of it, in Cuba was given its own institution when the Consejo Asesor para el Desarrollo de la Escultura Monumentaria (CODEMA) was created in 1980 (Alonso González 2017: 139). CODEMA was responsible for the analysis and approval of monumental sculpture, and the restoration and construction of monuments. The continued institutionalising focus was also evident in Cuba's international cultural policy, and cultural relations with the USSR were further consolidated when a protocol on the Intergovernmental Soviet-Cuban commission on cultural cooperation was signed on 7 April 1980. A further agreement between the USSR and Cuba on cooperation in the field of culture, education and science was also signed at the same time (Ginsburgs 1987: 426; TASS 1980). The cooperation agreement came into effect on 28 November 1980, but was provisionally in force from the day of signing. It superseded the agreement on cultural cooperation of 12 December 1960 and was to last ten years, and, if not terminated six months before the expiration date, would automatically be renewed in intervals of five years. The intergovernmental protocol came into effect upon signature and was for an indefinite period with a six month notice period (Ginsburgs 1987: 355). Agreements such as those signed with the USSR were of the type recommended in MINCULT's 1980 report 'objetivos, técnicas y medios para la promoción cultural' (MinCult 1980). Such reorganisation of the way in which the two countries interacted also reflected the overwhelming focus on bureaucratic efficiency of the Brezhnev administration. This focus was centred around two theories of

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*nauchno-tekhnichestaia revoliutsiia* [scientific-technical revolution] and *nauchnoe upravlenie obshchestva* [scientific management of society], minor ideological innovations characteristic of the increasingly immobile Soviet political system (Brudny 2000: 59)

The continuing focus on anti-imperialism, anti-colonialism, and defence was thrown into sharp relief by the landmark Mariel boatlift. Early in 1980, hundreds of Cubans, disenchanted with the Cuban system and the economic situation in the country, sought asylum in the Peruvian embassy. On 21 April, it was announced that discontented Cubans would be allowed to leave Cuba if they were collected by boat from the western port of Mariel. By September, 124,779 Cubans had left the island with the USA's assistance. This perhaps contributed to the continuing focus at the Segundo Congreso del PCC (18 to 20 December) on defence of the nation. The Second Congress was also significantly geared towards socio-economic development. It brought together economic nationalism, cultural promotion, and education in the defence of the nation. The Congress' main report celebrated the cultural achievements of the Revolution, the consolidation of cultural agencies and the subsequent work done by MINCULT and UNEAC, and the emergence of a 'coherent cultural policy' (PCC 2011a: 15). Between 1975 and 1980, eight new vocational art education schools were in the process of construction, with over 5,000 students enrolled in the sixteen basic and twenty-one intermediate art schools and ISA. The *aficionado* movement had also increased significantly, and by the Congress had reached 250,000 members in 33,000 groups (up from 200,000 members in 18,000 groups in 1975) (PCC 1980: 25). The movement was singled out for yet further development as

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part of the continuing drive to further relate culture to material production (PCC 1980: 26). Finally, culture was formally linked to national defence, with the establishment of a new recruiting policy 'for drafting more and more young men with an ever higher cultural level, men who are more generally capable in every sense, for active military service' (PCC 1980: 46). In addition to rearticulating the PCC's commitment to the *aficionado* movement, the report extolled the progress made in the application of cultural policy and the resultant cohesiveness in production. The plastic arts, perhaps due to their ability to be widely disseminated rapidly, were an area of a special interest:

Progress has been made in defining the main guidelines for artistic and literary production. Measures will be taken to change the traditional concept of plastic arts and assign them a broader social role, relating artistic work to production (PCC 1980: 26).

The *Resolutions* on literary and artistic culture echoed the main report's focus on youth, the need to build greater links between art and industry, the importance of political education within culture, and the militant nature of the artists in the Revolution. It called for a greater focus on the quality of production in the scenic arts, the increase in the influence of Cuban music on youth, and the greater linking of the people and the creators in the field of plastic arts. Within the plastic arts monumental and mural sculpture were highlighted as a particular area for focus over the next *quinquenio* (PCC 2011b). The renewed focus on the merging of cultural and material production fitted with the upcoming *quinquenio*'s (1981-1985) emphasis on

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economic protectionism, in part to be achieved through increasing exports and replacing imports with national products (PCC 1980: 35). The Second Congress also discussed the Strategy for Socioeconomic Development through to the year 2000, the planning of which had begun in 1978. Once more, material cultural production was linked to the strengthening of the Cuban economy: 'in the industrial sectors that produce consumer goods, specially [sic] in the food and light industries, development must be based on meeting consumer demands and increasing export products, promoting local arts and crafts' (PCC 1980: 42). The economic and organisational focus on culture extended into the way artists were paid, with the trial of a new payment system and regulations within theatre in the collectives in Havana between November 1981 and April 1982 (Sala 1985: 32).

Towards the middle of the 1980s, the anti-colonial drive that had begun in the latter half of 1968 had effectively become institutionalised and there was a gradual move away from the appropriation of Soviet technical skills towards the application of these skills in the elaboration of a Cuban culture that built on studies of Cuba's national heritage. Uncorroborated interviews suggest that this was reflected in ISA in both the plastic arts and theatre sections with the difficulty some postgraduate students returning from the USSR experienced in being accepted to do their social service and the decision not to renew the contracts of the Soviet theatre educators. The preceding events of 1981, such as the *Volumen Uno* exhibition and the Primer Encuentro de Teatristas Latinoamericanos y del Caribe, were indicative of this shift in focus and of the drive to develop Cuban cultural expression more fully. The subsequent process of renewal after the 1971 to 1975 period had ignited a new wave of cultural creativity

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and this renewed enthusiasm created something of an artistic boom in the 1980s. New genres developed, and areas such as the plastic arts, which were quicker to respond than other mediums, 'thrived in a fertile and open space, clearly connected to contemporary art trends in Latin America, Europe and the United States' (Tonel 2009: 180). Concurrent with the continuing anti-imperialist sentiment a 'guardedly more relaxed pluralism' developed (Manuel 1990: 311), building on the calmer 1976 constitution that echoed Castro's *Palabras* speech: 'es libre la creación artística siempre que su contenido no sea contrario a la Revolución. Las formas de expresión en el arte son libres' (Documentos 1977: 138)

The Tercer Congreso de la UNEAC in 1982 confirmed the more tolerant attitude towards cultural practitioners and reiterated the constitutional provision that artistic creativity was free as long as its content did not run contrary to the Revolution. The Congress emphasised that the essence of Cuban cultural policy was to promote a broad popular movement around culture, so that it could facilitate both precision and high aesthetic standards with the 'broadest creative freedom for the masses, artists, and writers that spring from them' (Lent 1988: 60). In these more democratic conditions, culture flourished and 'the self-confidence and self-reflexion on the part of the writers in the 1980s was reflected in the quantity and diversity of the cultural debates and publications organised to celebrate the landmark of twenty five years of Revolution' (Kumaraswami 2007: 76).

In this inclusive and aesthetically diverse atmosphere, a Soviet book was finally published that seemed to run against this current. *El Gran Octubre y la Revolución Cubana* [original title: *Velikii Oktiabr' i kubinskaia*

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*revolutsiia*] had been edited in commemoration of the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the USSR in 1977, but was only published in Spanish-language translation by Editorial Ciencias Sociales in 1982. The book was written by Anatolii D. Bekarevich, K. O. Leino, V. A. Borodaev and A. Mansilla and constantly drew parallels between the USSR, Cuba and the steps that Lenin took, presenting the Cuban organisational methods and policies as the continuation or copying of Lenin's ideas. The book covered all general aspects of Cuban life, but of particular interest are its comments regarding education, theatre and plastic arts. The authors championed the revolutionary government's educational achievements, highlighting the shift from the study of humanities towards the specialised study of material production in fields such as industry and agriculture (Bekarevich et al. 1982: 255-56), and emphasising the USSR's contribution to the training of cadres within Cuba. It also opined — in keeping with the focus on the importance of youth within the Revolution — that the formation of the (Cuban) new man was the 'contenido principal de la revolución cultural cubana' (Bekarevich et al. 1982: 251). However, it seemed to depart from the dominant Cuban line of thought regarding the linking of workers' cultural education to greater economic output and ownership of the Revolution. Instead, it linked cultural education to the wider understanding of the advantages of socialism: 'una importante tarea de la revolución cultural es *la elevación de la cultura y la conciencia del campesinado trabajador*, la cual le otorgará la posibilidad de comprender las ventajas de las formas superiores socialistas de producción [emphasis in the original]' (Bekarevich et al. 1982: 262). Comments such as this and the use of loaded terms such as 'cultural revolution' suggested that the Soviet

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authors considered Cuba to still be both in the early stages of building socialism and also going through a necessary period of contradiction and compromise — the latter of which is analogous with the USSR in the NEP period. The authors celebrated the emergence of new art forms (specifically theatre, music, plastic arts — particularly posters — and popular involvement in the creative processes), and were at pains to emphasise the political and ideological within these forms, and to stress the realist nature of these new forms of national expression (Bekarevich et al. 1982: 266-67).<sup>45</sup> Ultimately, the authors defined internationalism in terms of a close relationship with the USSR:

En nuestro tiempo, el internacionalismo proletario es una palabra hueca si no está ligado a la defensa, el fortalecimiento y el apoyo a la Unión Soviética y a toda la comunidad socialista, conquista primordial del movimiento obrero internacional. Según la opinión de la mayoría de los partidos comunistas, el criterio decisivo del internacionalismo es la actitud hacia la Unión Soviética, el primer país socialista en el mundo. Son incompatibles con las concepciones internacionalistas de los comunistas no sólo cualquier manifestación de antisovietismo sino nacionalistas, hostiles a la causa de la clase obrera. Estas opiniones son plenamente compartidas por el Partido Comunista de Cuba (Bekarevich et al. 1982: 311).

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<sup>45</sup> Gorsuch highlights the Soviet press' use of language that recalled the Russian Revolution and Civil War in its discussion of Cuba in the 1960s (Gorsuch 2015: 504-05).

*El Gran Octubre y la Revolución Cubana*'s publication in Cuba was delayed by five years. Given the proliferation of Russian-speaking Cubans by this stage, it seems unlikely that this delay was due to a shortage of translators. Indeed, the delay is suggestive of an element of discord between what the Soviet authors were arguing, and what the Cuban editors and translators considered the reality. This in turn hints at the underlying tension between Cuban and Soviet approaches towards the Revolution, or perceptions of them — particularly visible in ISA — and the depth of the anti-colonial sentiments within the emergent Cuban ideology.

Cuba's communist credentials were explored and celebrated once more in the 30th celebrations of the founding of *Nuestro Tiempo*. Carlos Rafael Rodríguez's celebratory speech was reproduced by Casa, as a means of deepening their knowledge of Cuban politics regarding art, culture and their study. Rodríguez, member of the Buró Político, Vice President of the Consejo del Estado and member of the former Comisión Intelecual of the PSP, which worked with *Nuestro Tiempo*, charted the society's foundation and evolution. In his speech he stressed the diversity of expression, and the validity of this diversity, among the young artists who were united by a single cause, which also explained the society's focus on national culture. In discussing the work of the society, Rodríguez (1982: 5) was at pains to stress that *Nuestro Tiempo* did not propagate reductive socialist realism and did not measure 'la excelencia del arte por su acercamiento mayor o menor a la expresión realista del objeto'. Finally, he linked *Nuestro Tiempo*'s efforts to the continuing labours of cultural organs such as *Caimán Barbudo* and young artists and intellectuals more generally. Rodríguez explored the society's cultural and political

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credentials, continental focus, and spent a significant part of the speech analysing what a national (but not nationalist) culture was, theoretically and also aesthetically, and how it fed into an international culture. By doing so he reaffirmed the enduring focus on the development of the expression of a Cuban culture, which was in turn an integral component of Latin American, and Caribbean culture, as well as the Revolution's commitment to aesthetic plurality, and its emancipatory potential.

Events and publications such as these do not provide a comprehensive overview of the cultural developments, debates and ideas that abounded in Cuba in the early 1980s. Instead, they are demonstrative of the continued prevalence of multiple strands of thought within the political and cultural world that resulted in different approaches towards cultural production. These threads were increasingly united, as per the enduring call for a united cultural front against the attacks of imperialism, under the ideas of the development of a coherent national culture that recognised its place in Latin America and the Caribbean, the further holistic integration of culture and economy, and the involvement of the population. As a result of these umbrella concepts – or master-narratives – existing cultural policy was able to be interpreted reductively and applied somewhat erratically, but could also be used to 'combat' unwanted Soviet influence in the field of cultural production. This saw an interesting mix of collaborations with other socialist countries, such as the 1983 co-production of *Humboldt y Bolívar* by Klaus Hammel (GDR) and directed by Hanns Perten and Mario Balmaseda at Teatro Político Bertolt Brecht (Hammel 1983), celebrations of Cubanness and Latin Americanness within

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culture, and projects that seemed to resonate with the October Revolution (in the discourse of the Soviet Union of the 1920s).

In 1983, one of the first clear applications of the call to link culture and material production was put into practice. TELARTE was an experiment in mass distribution with artists contributing designs for textile painting. (Camnitzer 2003: 114-15, 351). A similar project, 'arte en la fábrica', which was based on an idea by the artist Flavio Garcíandía also began: artists went to factories and planned work using available materials normally used for industrial production (Camnitzer 2003: 116). Projects such as this echo the early revolutionary projects, such as Tveresat, the ROSTA windows and Theatrical October, in theatre and cultural education conducted in the 1960s, and the onus on collectivity exemplified by the Teatro Escambray. The integration of art and industry/productivity, and the individual into the collective also possibly draws inspiration from Russian Constructivism (Image 19). The Constructivists saw art as a political tool that was intimately linked to the rest of society, artists were considered artist-engineers that formed part of a collective (Kaier 2005). They attempted to achieve this by entering the realm of industrial production more fully and promoting art's utility and combatting the commodification of objects found in capitalism. Part of this involved attempting to imbue the everyday object with a political consciousness, producing useful objects that sought to forge a conscious, socialist relationship 'between human subjects and the mass-produced objects of modernity' (Kaier 2005: 5).

The differing and competing currents of thought, and their attitudes towards the USSR and socialism, coalesced around the Monument to Lenin in Parque Lenin at the beginning of 1984 (Image 21). In what Alonso

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González considers to be evidence of Cuba's use of heritage in the negotiation of international relations with the USSR, there was significant debate surrounding the construction and inauguration of the monument designed by Soviet architect Lev Kerbel and Cuban counterpart Antonio Quintana. Alfonso Gonzalez (2017: 146-47) argues that from 1980 the USSR and Cuba had been in discussions about the monumental, socialist realist monument, with Soviet bureaucrats and artists and architects offering materials and workers (Alonso González 2017: 139). The Soviet side, including vice-presidents and ministers of culture, had argued for inaugurating the monument in November 1982, in commemoration of the 65<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the October Revolution. In contrast, the Cuban side pushed for 26 July in commemoration of the Moncada attack, and the use of local materials to avoid interpretations of the monument as evidence of Cuban subordination to the Soviet superpower (Alonso González 2017: 146-47). The monument, built using Cuban marble, was eventually inaugurated on 8 January, commemorating the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Revolution, definitively presenting the monument as a Cuban accomplishment and sending a clear message about perceived Cuban subservience to the USSR (Rodríguez 1984). 1984 was also a landmark year for architects, who, after having been reorganised into the Centro Técnico Superior de la Construcción in 1963, were now grouped into the Unión de Arquitectos e Ingenieros de la Construcción de Cuba (UNAICC). UNAICC had been created in 1983, but was not officially founded until a year later. Later, a Sociedad de Arquitectos was created within the UNAICC and when architecture was eventually included in UNEAC it was done so under the title of *Diseño Ambiental*, in a departure from what

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Loomis has argued was the 1970s Soviet-styled valuing of architecture for its constructive capabilities and negating its artistic capacities (Loomis 1999: 147).

During this time of competing ideas and approaches to culture under socialism, cultural debate came to the fore once again and new voices entered the dialogue. In 1984, a cultural magazine, *Temas*, was founded,<sup>46</sup> dedicated to cultural investigation across the cultural forms and economy.<sup>47</sup> A large portion of its content was drawn from studies conducted by various research centres. A good number of the articles addressed the economy of the cultural sphere, reflecting the wider, coherent, concerted effort that was being made to consolidate the links between art and the economy. This effort to integrate the two spheres was undoubtedly heightened by the upcoming prospect of the renewal and renegotiation of the trade agreements with COMECON and the USSR in 1986 for the following *quinquenio*. In some ways, this focus prioritised the organisational drive that had begun to emerge in the Segundo Congreso de la UNEAC and Hart's 1978 Ministers of Culture meeting, but, at the same time, it also added renewed vigour to the search for, and articulation of, distinct Cuban cultural expressions. Practically, this resulted in different applications of policy towards the same goals. Some programmes and directives focussed on improving the quality of workers' free time, such as plans for galleries, exhibitions, museum exhibits, improvements made to the national cultural network. Others focussed on integrating artists more practically into economic production (TELARTE, Alberto Lescay's winning

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<sup>46</sup> The increased dialogue between the people, practitioners, researchers and policy had been another aim of MinCult's 1980 report.

<sup>47</sup> Another, better known, magazine also called *Temas* was created in the early 1990s and is still running today.

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entry for the Antonio Maceo sculpture in Santiago de Cuba, cultural exchanges and tours abroad). Yet more programmes and directives focussed on improving the quality of cultural production and the reach of cultural integration as a primary step to the first two approaches. This last approach included criticism, education, the search for new expressive means through greater dialogue between artistic forms and expression, and, of course, organisational improvement:

no basta con querer trabajar en equipos interdisciplinarios, si no se crean, las condiciones administrativas, económicas y metodológicas que lo hagan posible, aunque formalmente se integren a estos equipos especialistas de varias ramas del arte (Navarro 1985: 114).

These different strains of thought and approaches towards culture that were united by a common goal arguably led to what can be viewed as a 'peaceful coexistence' between different aesthetics, or a dynamic and pluralistic organisational socialist realism. The discussions surrounding 'revolutionary art form(s)', the 'dentro/contra' argument, the focus on public debate, public contact, and constructive criticism, or other aspects of the key policy documents discussed in this chapter, functioned as a useful umbrella term that allowed cultural practitioners to pursue their own aesthetics safely within the Revolution. This approach was similar to the way that, in the 1930s, socialist realism functioned as a convenient (empty) term that would help to unify the factionalised cultural community and provide a democratic style that would ensure that culture was

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understood by all sectors of society, regardless of their class origin or educational level (Robin 1992: 11). Moreover, the 1980s in Cuba were particularly focussed on facilitating the crossover of 'elite' and mass culture (educating the population and democratising culture further), and in using art and culture more generally to produce (exportable) socialism ready for popular ideological and material consumption.<sup>48</sup>

However, there was also potential for the beginnings of the application of socialist realism as an aesthetic approach as clear archetypes of the Revolution definitively emerged. These archetypes were a continuation of the ideas of the early independence wars and the Moncada assault, the emphasis on the Latin American and Caribbean elements of Cuban culture, the veneration of key cultural figures and the emphasis on the artist as *guerrillero*.

In 1986, a month before the Tercer Congreso del PCC, MINCULT produced a report clarifying its structure, role, and goals (MinCult 1986). MINCULT reaffirmed its commitment to the promotion and protection of high quality art and culture, and explained that this occurred on two distinct but inextricably linked planes, the artistic-cultural and the social-cultural. It also synthesised ideas about the importance of national patrimony, cultural diffusion, debate, education, and reiterated the internationalist aims of the development of a Cuban culture (MinCult 1986: 3-4). The report articulated the Ministry's commitment to a sustained and systematic dialogue between artists, intellectuals as collectives and individuals (MinCult 1986: 11). In a deeply egalitarian move, the report significantly broadened the term *aficionado* to include both those who generate artistic activity and those

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<sup>48</sup> These ideas are discussed in more detail by Ivashkin (2014) and Dobrenko (2007).

who enjoy the art, thereby giving cultural ownership to the majority of the Cuban population.<sup>49</sup> The *aficionado* movement was celebrated as the embodiment of direct public creation, and its inherent reflexive educational capabilities (MinCult 1986: 4). In many ways, the report set the tone for the cultural policy for the forthcoming *quinquenio*, particularly as there was no resolution on artistic and literary culture in the Third Congress in December.

The second half of the period that this research encompasses demonstrates a changing approach towards the USSR. At the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s, the gaze of the cultural authorities had turned inwards in a defensive bid. However, from the mid-1970s onwards, the focus began to shift outwards, yet perhaps paradoxically, also remained steadfastly focussed inwards as defence remained a priority. The revolutionary government began to inscribe Cuba more fully into socialist internationalism through the rescue of national and regional folklore and tradition. Concurrently, an increased focus on the development of the Cuban economy and a utopian phase that saw a drive for total equality and equal opportunity began to be felt in the cultural world. This was manifested in areas such as the re-structuring and refining of cultural organisation in a bid for unity, educational excellence, mass participation and efficiency, the emphasising of *aficionado* and *instructores de arte* activities, in order to give as many Cubans as possible ownership of the Revolution, the privileging of criticism as a means of ensuring quality, the weight given to technical mastery and high quality output; the

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<sup>49</sup> To some extent the broadening of the *aficionado* movement parallels the drive to encourage *samodeiatel'nost'* [amateur creation] in the postwar USSR (Tsipursky 2016; White 1990).

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linking of culture and economy, and the focus on interdisciplinarity. However, the defensive element of the dominant ideology privileged different aspects of cultural organisation and different, occasionally conflicting, approaches. Strong anti-imperialist and anti-colonialist sentiments still persisted, which affected the way that cultural forms and works were viewed and discussed. Moreover, the emphasis on clarity, unity, and the continuing call for culture to reflect the Revolution's reality gave rise to different perceptions of art within the Revolution, resulting in the presence of organisational socialist realism and the beginnings of the aesthetics of a distinctly Cuban socialist realism. Puñalez-Alpízar considers this period to have been the period when socialist realism naturalised (2012: 355). These co-existing currents of thought and application of cultural policy meant that in Cuba the USSR was viewed as a legitimate source of education and inspiration. But, at the same time, it was also regarded as a potentially imperial force focussed on subordinating Cuba within the hierarchy of the international socialist movement. This led to the pragmatic — and sanctioned — adoption of elements of the Soviet culture and policy, the rejection of others, and the development of a performative element regarding the public relationship between the two countries (Image 22). The public performance of the alliance between the two countries ultimately allowed each to reaffirm their legitimacy, but also ensured a degree of separation that permitted the Cuban leadership to pursue their own path of socialism (Image 23-39). This is to some degree evidenced by the significant increase in the frequency with which interaction with the USSR occurred at an official level (state visits, exchanges, collaborations, exhibitions) from the early 1970s

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through to the mid-1980s, contrasted with the gradual move away from Soviet culture towards Latin American and Caribbean culture.

**Figures and Images**



**Image 19 The Mossel'prom building in Moscow, an example of Constructivist advertising.**

Copyright: the author



**Image 20 Casa de las Américas cover celebrating the 60th anniversary of the October Revolution**

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Image 21 The inauguration of the Monumento a Lenin in Lenin Park in 1982, *Verde Olivo*



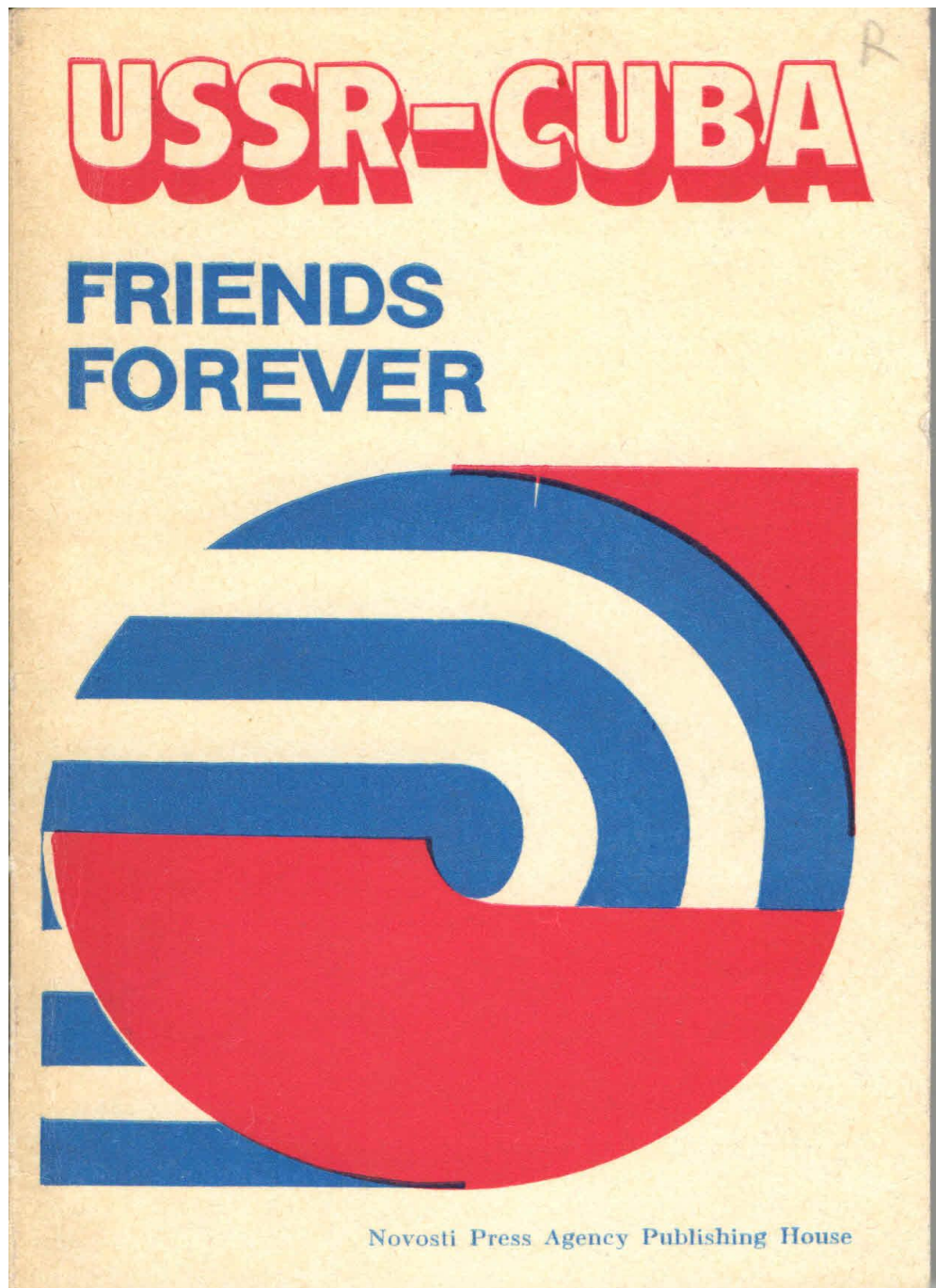


Image 22 1977 Novosti-Prensa Latina Publication



**Image 23 Bohemia cover, November 1970**

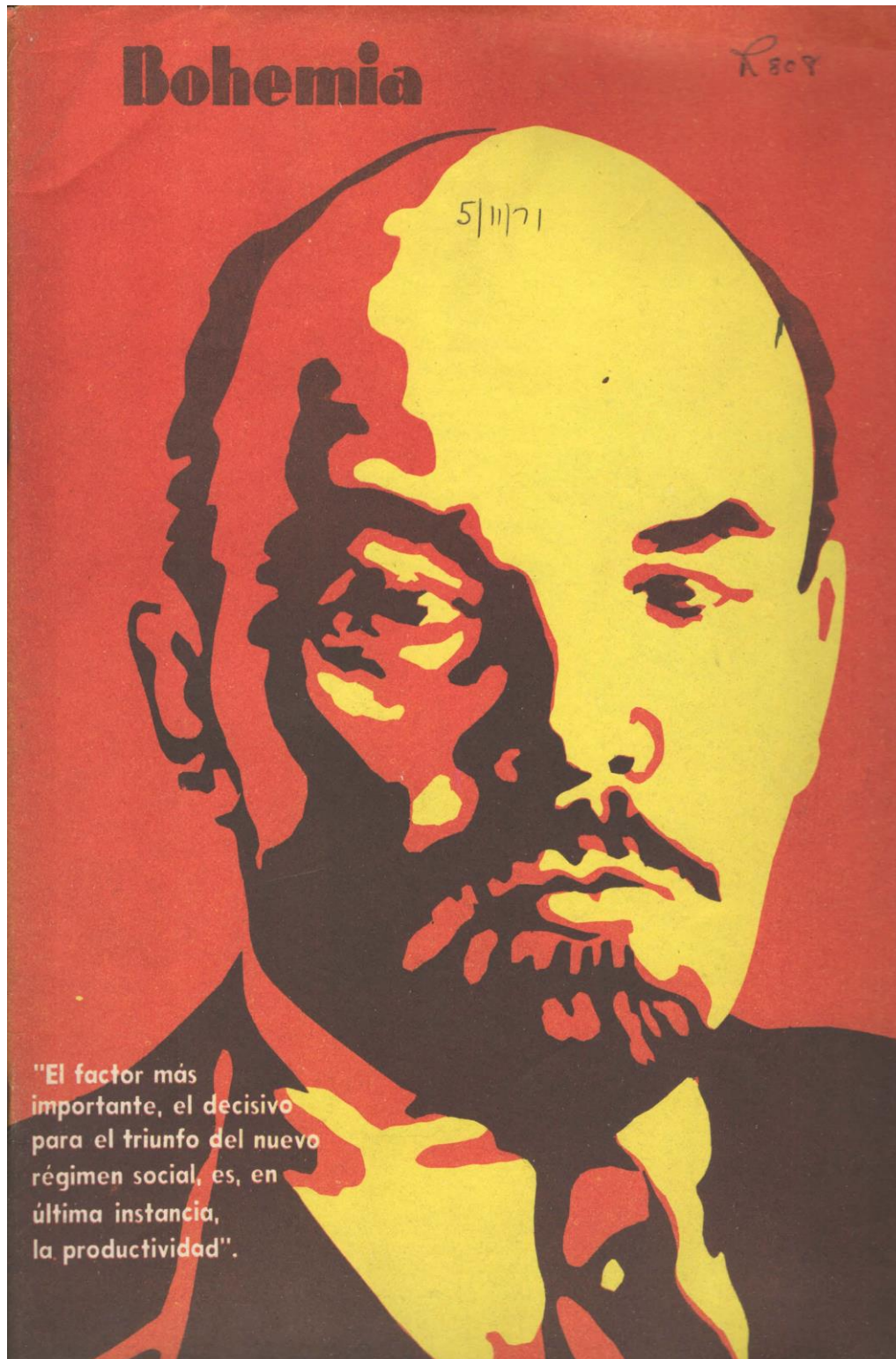


Image 24 Bohemia cover, November 1971



Image 25 Bohemia cover, November 1972

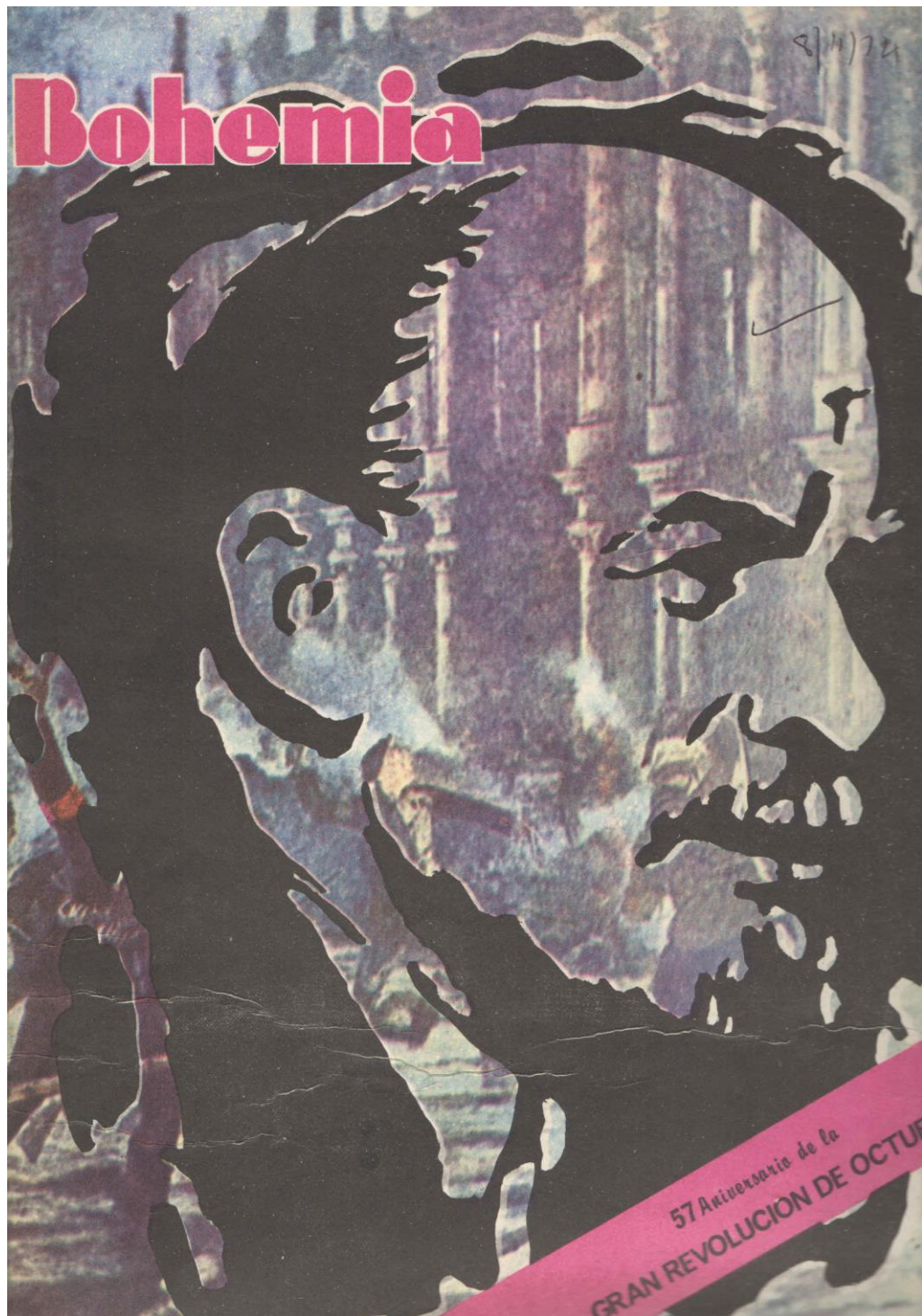


Image 26 Bohemia cover, November 1974



Image 27 Bohemia cover, November 1973

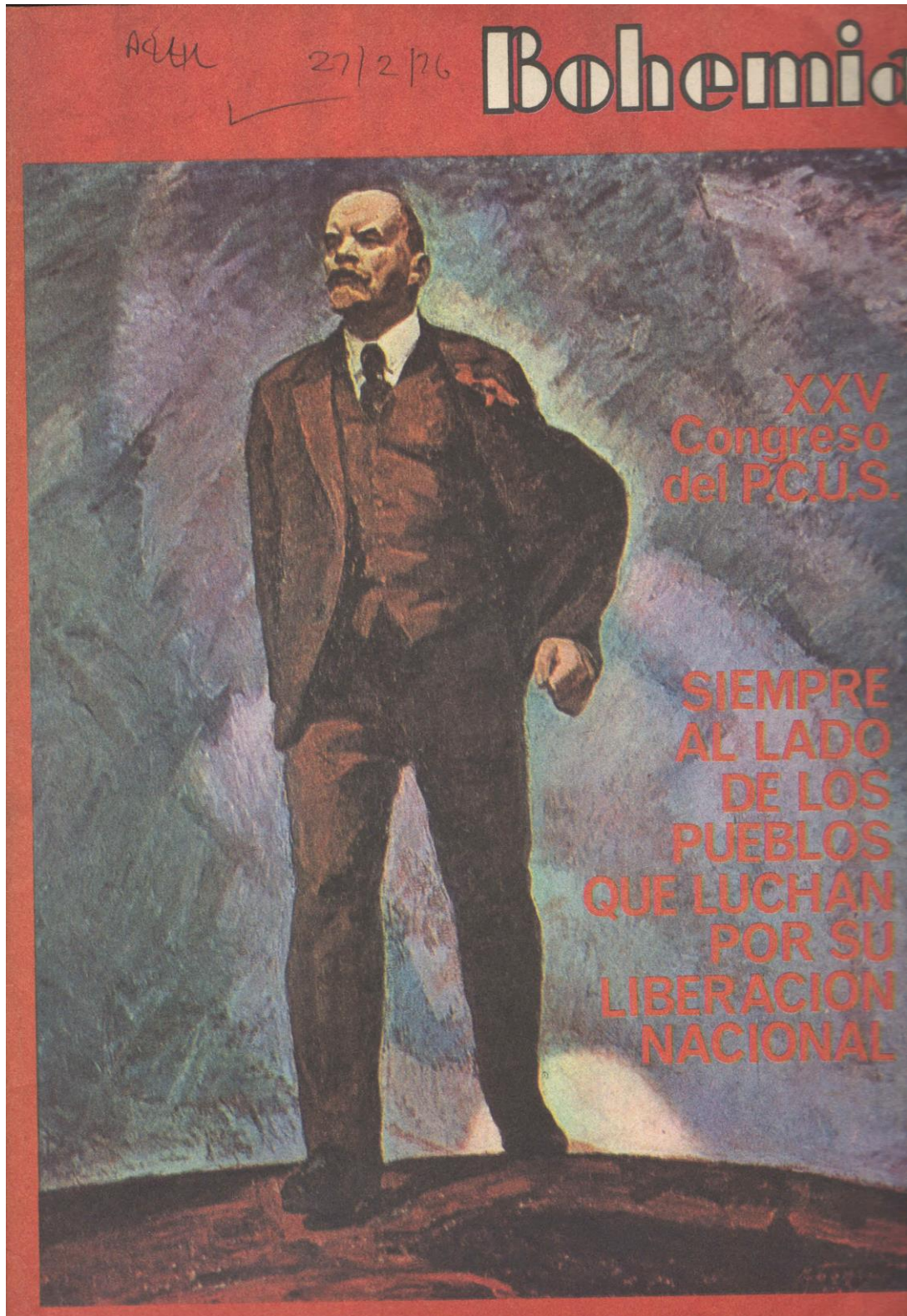


Image 28 Bohemia cover, February 1976

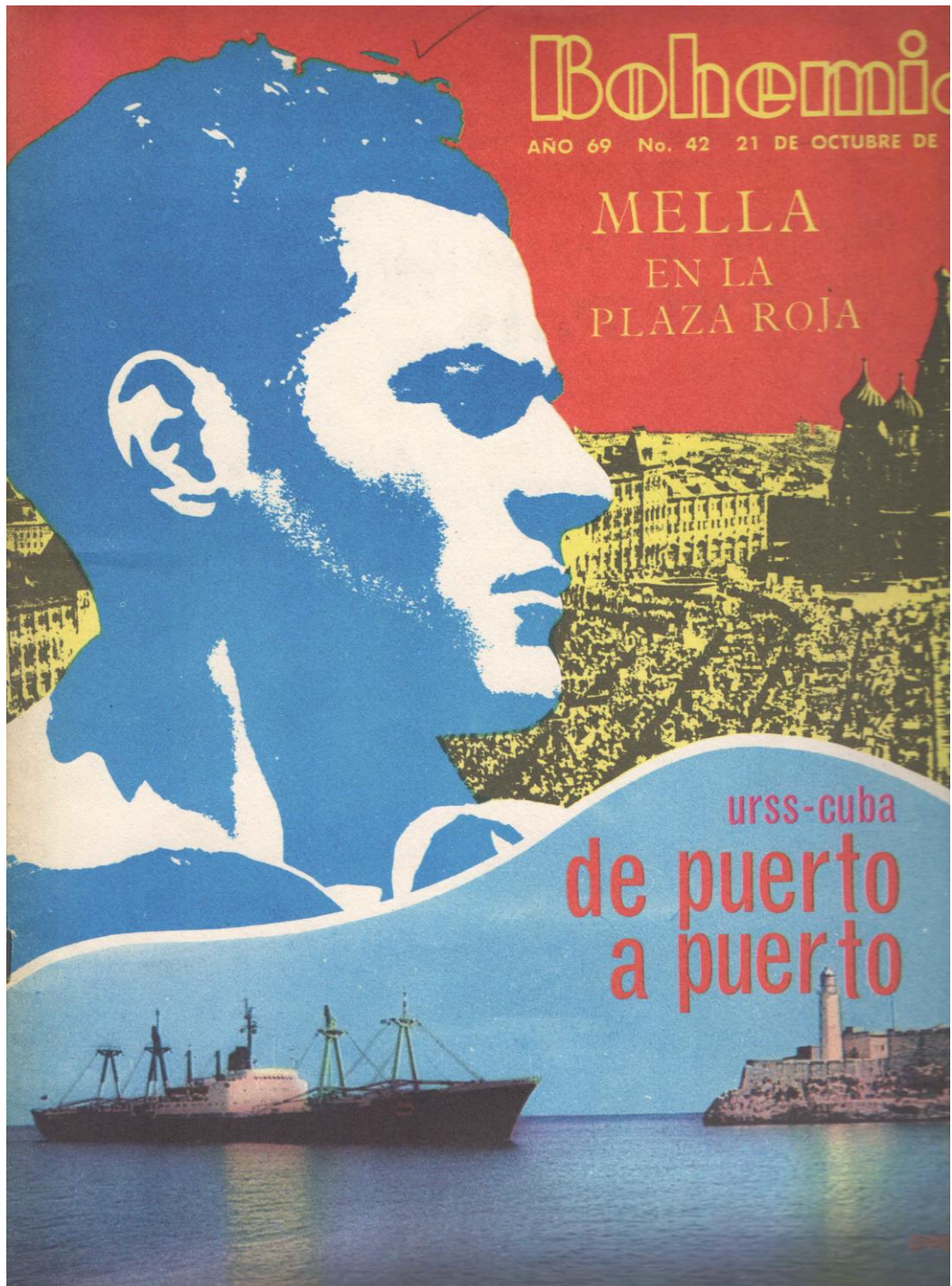


Image 29 Bohemia cover, November 1977



Image 30 Bohemia cover, November 1977

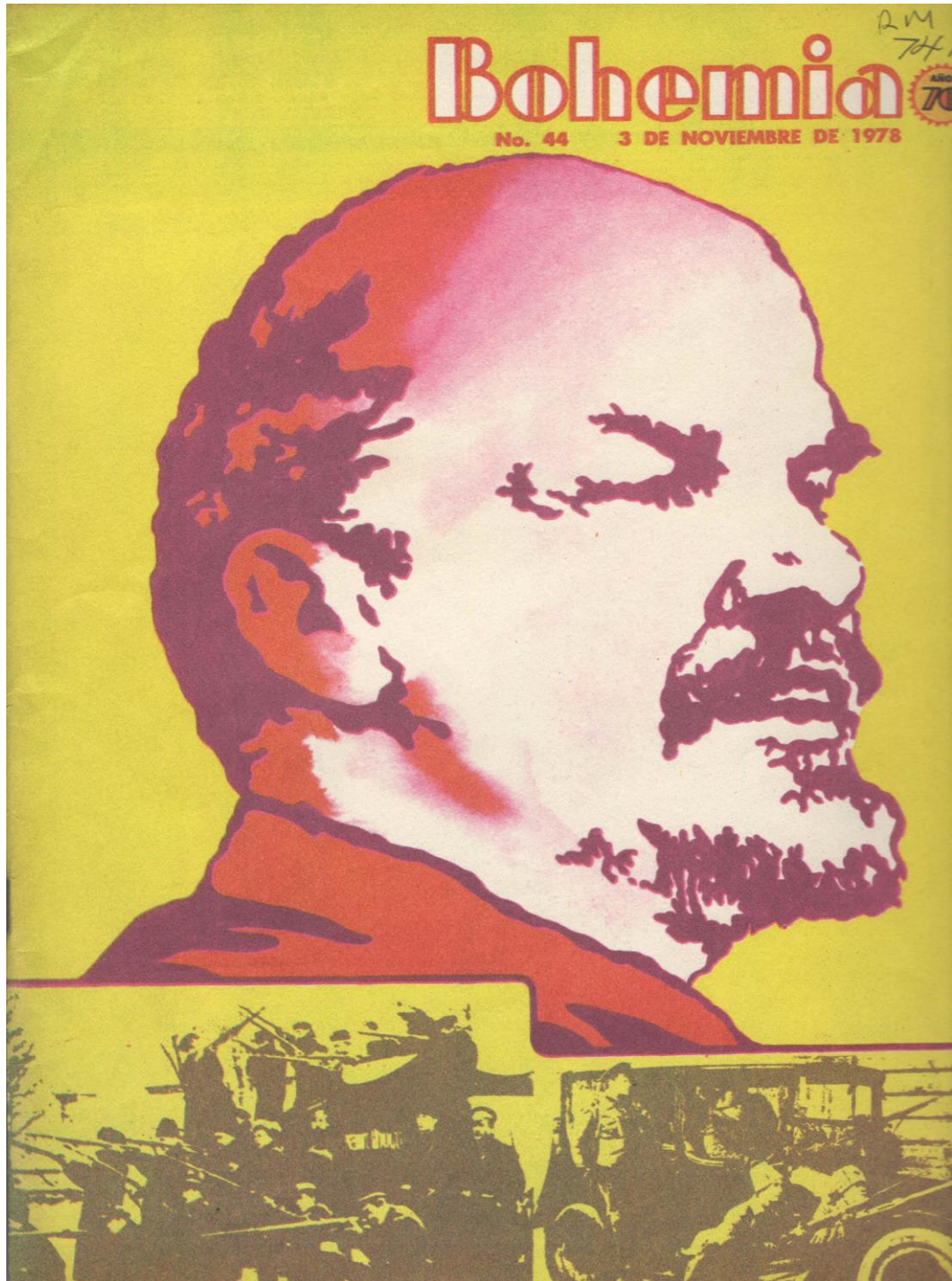


Image 31 Bohemia cover, November 1978



Image 32 Bohemia cover, November 1979



Image 33 Bohemia cover, November 1979

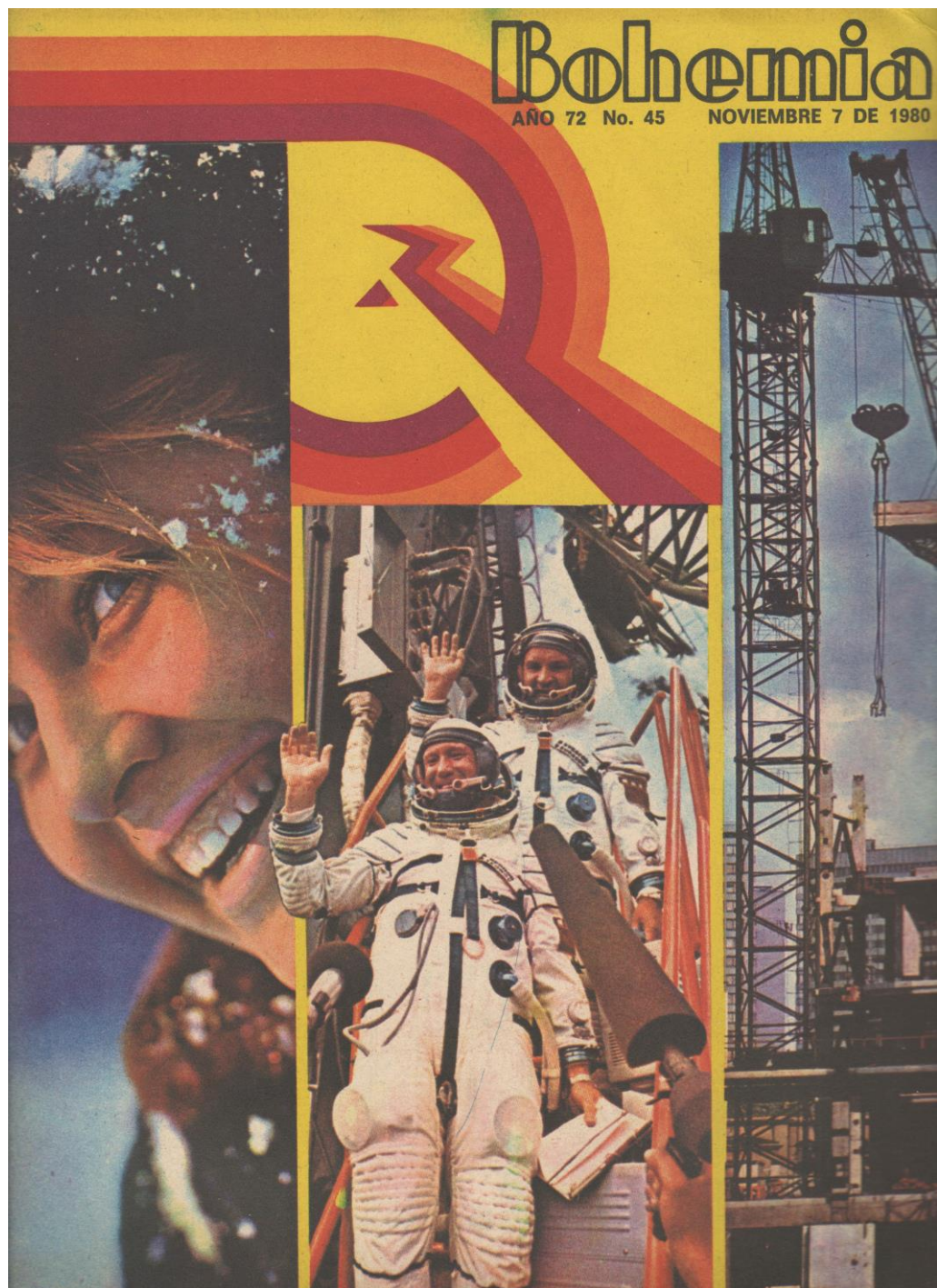


Image 34 Bohemia cover, November 1980



Image 35 Bohemia cover, November 1981



Image 36 Bohemia cover, December 1982

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Image 37 Bohemia cover, November 1983

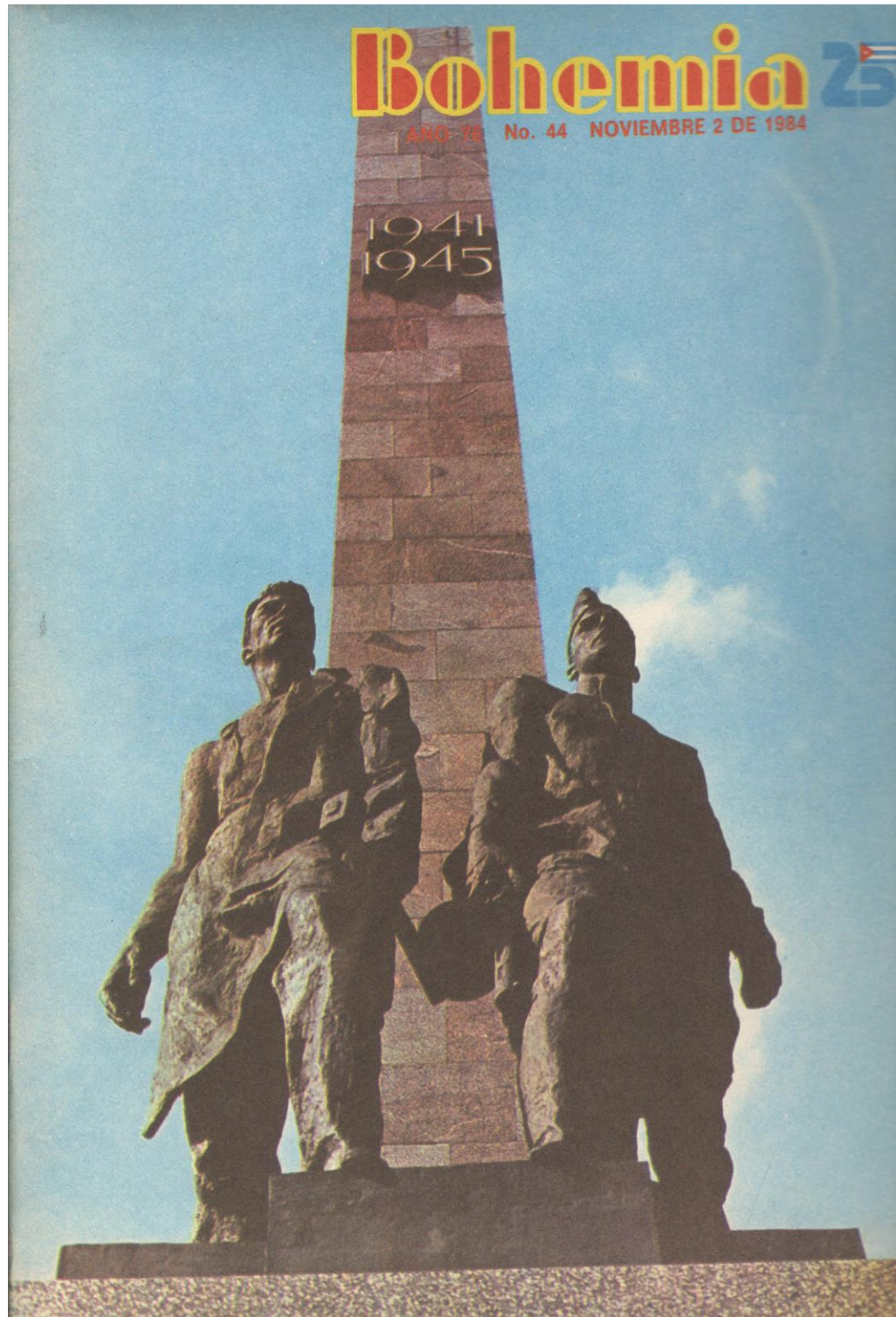


Image 38 Bohemia cover, November 1984



Image 39 Bohemia cover, November 1985

## 4 The Theatre

### Introduction

Theatre occupied a conflicted position within the Cuban Revolution in the period under investigation here. Its immediate and participatory nature was both an advantage and a disadvantage: theatre helped viewers re-contextualise meanings and aims within the goals of the Revolution, but, because of its inherent instability, theatre was also considered a potentially subversive form (Kapcia 2005: 141). Because of its underdeveloped status — the relative lack of Cuban playwrights and established theatre groups — and the fact that it was a ‘ground zero’ for revolutionary culture, theatre had the potential to become a flagship revolutionary art form. However, because of the predominance of foreign models and foreign styles, its bourgeois roots, the initial prevalence of pre-revolutionary intellectuals, its popularity, and the stereotypes surrounding its practitioners, theatre increasingly became an arena where different interpretations of the role of culture and implementation of cultural policy were contested.

Theatre was an indispensable component in the creation and diffusion of a culture that genuinely reflected the needs and the interests of a large sector of the population. Moreover, as an effective vehicle which facilitated the propagation of new values and cultural perspectives in the rest of Latin America (Cole 2002: 42), it lent itself easily to the international aspirations of the revolutionary government. This inherent internationalist character further augmented the importance that theatre held for all currents of political thought within the Revolution. Theatre became a site of

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experimentation for emerging articulations of a national narrative that was sensitive to the needs and demands of the Revolution and its people. This was particularly true of approaches to past cultures and the idea of the new socialist citizen.

However, unlike the plastic arts, Cuban theatre was not able to capitalise on its international prestige and push the boundaries of cultural policy. Inextricably linked with the economy and ideas of 'Cubanness' and ideas about the *hombre nuevo*, a distinction, and value judgement, was increasingly made between professional and *aficionado* theatre, and their perceived role models, as the Cuban authorities turned their backs on accepted cultural centres. Theatre's history in Cuba also began to work against itself. To begin with, the presence of these pre-revolutionary professionals helped the rapid dissemination and development of theatre as a revolutionary art form, but it also set the stage for later reactions against perceived cultural imperialism and colonialist mind-sets. Therefore, theatre was always closely monitored by cultural institutions and figures, and never granted the autonomy that other institutions such as ICAIC or Casa were. Precisely because of this, theatre provides an interesting insight into how culture interacted with politics and how different cultural impetuses were reconciled with cultural policy and production.

#### **Pre-rebellion theatre.**

By the 1940s, increasing economic stability in Latin America and rising development levels created a sense of optimism that formed the basis of new cultural expression, from which theatre (and eventually film) sprang

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(Matas 1971: 427-28). The Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) and WW2 also contributed to the development of Cuban theatre, as a number of Spanish intellectuals and artists emigrated to Cuba (such as director and writer Cipriano Rivas Cherif, actress Margarita Xirgu, writer Rubia Barcia, actor Francisco Martínez Allende, and architect Rafael Marquina). Rivas Cherif and Xirgu founded the Academia Municipal de Artes Dramáticas in 1941, which became an experimental theatre in 1953 (Matas 1971: 429). In 1944 Teatro Popular (TP) was created, directed by Paco Alonso. Closely linked to the Partido Socialista Popular, TP encouraged the writing of more socially committed drama and held performances in factories, theatres and public plazas. It also staged the first works by Soviet authors in Cuba: Leonid Leonov and Konstantin Simonov. TP's existence was, however, short lived and it closed down in 1945 as part of the wave repressing communism and associated entities (Anon 1996: 219).

During this period, which has come to be known as the era of the *salitas*, theatre flourished, and a taste for something 'more ambitious and durable' than previous theatrical experimentation developed (Matas 1971: 430). The net result was that between 1954 and 1958, a range of small, but permanent, theatres proliferated (Matas 1971: 430). The artistic ferment of the 1950s was also reflected in the provinces, particularly in Camagüey and Oriente (Matas 1971: 431).<sup>50</sup> Throughout the 1950s, the theatre section of the cultural society Nuestro Tiempo supported these achievements and was also engaged in a programme of research aimed at broadening theatre (Matas 1971: 431). The theatre section was under the

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<sup>50</sup> Camagüey had a long tradition of theatre: in the early nineteenth century theatres had been founded in Puerto Príncipe, and also in the province of Santiago de Cuba (Matas 1971: 428).

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guidance of actor and director Vicente Revuelta, who was also one of the founding members of the seminal theatre group Teatro Estudio, now a theatrical institution.

The limitations that characterised pre-revolutionary theatre ultimately turned out to be an advantage. The advent of radio, able to reach isolated audiences in their homes, dealt a blow to the popularity of theatre in institutional spaces. Economic concerns also hindered the growth of independent theatres: venues were small and admission prices, given the disposable income of the average spectator, could not exceed a dollar (Matas 1971: 431). As a result, theatres could not pay adequate salaries to their actors or technicians, so many sought employment in radio or television, only participating in theatrical productions in their spare time (Matas 1971: 431-32). However, these restrictions helped create a space and dynamic that allowed for more experimental and political theatre to develop in theatre halls. Theatre groups had little support from producers, the government, and even the theatre-going public (Tunberg 1970: 43). Theatrical repertoires had, since at least the 1930s, a strong focus on European drama and eschewed Cuban playwrights (Woodyard 1983: 57). The privileging of European theatre had occurred because European productions were profitable and the majority of the Cuban artists who took on the task of developing theatre in the 1950s were either members of the first dramatic schools in Cuba, or had trained abroad.

These factors notwithstanding, theatre within the Cuban Republic planted a number of new ideas in the cultural consciousness of the island, which would become more strongly articulated during the Revolution (Kapcia 2005: 102). One of these dormant ideas was the beginning of an

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articulation of a national narrative through the appropriation of a colonial era theatre style: *Teatro Bufo* [theatre of the buffoon]. *Bufo* developed in the middle of the nineteenth century, at the peak of the slave trade and when the island had its highest percentage of black inhabitants. As part of the performance of *Bufo*, white actors blackened their faces and painted their lips white. *Bufo* was similar to minstrels in the USA, but also differentiated itself, as its scripts had more developed storylines and the content reflected and reacted to Cuban history and contemporary social issues (Frederik 2012: 43). The three stock characters, *el negrito*, *la mulata*, and *el gallego*, ultimately came to be seen as the three distinct social and ethnic groups of the new Cuban nation, and therefore an early articulation of a sense of national identity (Frederik 2012: 43). Because of this, and the fact that audiences were taking the opportunity to celebrate their nationalism during performances, *Bufo* was banned during the internal conflict known as the Ten Years' War in Cuba (1868-1878). Once Cuba separated from Spain in 1898, and became the property of the USA (from which it did not become independent until 1906), *Bufo* theatre incorporated the US citizen as the new enemy and in performances the three national Cuban types were seen to act more collaboratively (Frederik 2012: 46). In this way *Bufo* clearly laid the basis for a demonstratively Cuban theatre during the late nineteenth century (Kapcia 2005: 56). Moreover, although the pre-revolutionary archetypes in *Bufo* were forcibly erased after 1959, they actually persisted in twenty-first century perceptions of the Cuban character, which looked back to images of pre-revolution society (Frederik 2012: 43).

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By 1958, theatre had gone from being deeply traditional to 'Havana's most innovative and avant-garde artistic form', exemplified by experimental theatre locales such as the Talía, Hubert de Blanck, Atelier, Sótano, Arlequín, Idal and Arcoiris (Kapcia 2005: 101-02). A key group of the cultural vanguard was Teatro Estudio. This group, formed in February 1958 by eight actors, sought to produce more clearly 'revolutionary' work. One of the founding members was Vicente Revuelta, who, after returning from Europe in 1954, brought a more systematic approach to acting, inspired by the Stanislavskii system (Kolin 1995: 91-92). The theatre group had strong links to *Nuestro Tiempo*, and prior to the Revolution received clandestine lessons in dialectical Marxism from Mirta Aguirre (Santana 1983: 15). Teatro Estudio can be traced back as the principal source of Cuban revolutionary theatre and, for the first decade of the Revolution, it remained the central theatrical institution in the country (Martin 1990: 42-46).

#### **(Amateur) Theatre: a key tool of social and political change.**

As the Revolution rapidly fused art and politics, theatre responded particularly quickly to the new society (González Rodríguez and Winks 1996: 104). 216 productions were staged in Havana alone during 1959, and 264 in 1960, in marked contrast to 172 in 1958 (González 2003). Unlike in cinema, which saw the emigration of nearly all pre-revolutionary figures involved in the industry, the majority of playwrights and directors active prior to the Revolution remained in Cuba (Matas 1971: 433). Until its closure on 6 November 1961, *Lunes de Revolución*, the cultural

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supplement of the newspaper *Revolución*, was 'un amigo fiel y persistente' to theatre (Leal 1961), providing the main forum for discussion about this form of expression. It focussed on theatre nationally and internationally, with dedicated issues on cultural practitioners such as Bertolt Brecht (issue 13), Emilio Ballagas (26) Pablo de la Torriente-Brau (42) Jean-Paul Sartre and his visit to Cuba (51), Pablo Neruda (88), Chekhov (91), Juan Marinello (113), Ernest Hemingway (118), García Lorca (119) and Pablo Picasso (129). Issue 101 'lunes va al teatro' was entirely dedicated to theatre (Luis 2003) and number 125 dealt with the MkhAT (Moscow Art Theatre). *Lunes* also briefly boasted its own theatre group, Teatro Experimental de Lunes, which showed *La Leçon* [*The Lesson*] and *Les Chaises* [*The Chairs*], both by Romanian-French playwright Eugène Ionesco and directed by Rubén Vigón in Sala Arlequín on 12 January 1959 and again on 2 February (González 2003: 335-39). The USSR also featured in *Lunes*' pages. Issue 46, which had contorted typography to spell out 'URSS' ('nUmeRo eSpecial de luneS') dealt with Soviet culture in the broadest sense, in celebration of the Soviet Exhibition in the Palacio de Bellas Artes, which showcased the best achievements of the USSR in the fields of science, technology and culture (Image 40). The magazine celebrated the USSR's achievements but did so in a way that also asserted Cuba's right to cultural independence and rejected perceived assumptions about small nations and underdevelopment:

la presentación de este evento es un acto de reafirmación nacional, de nuestra soberanía y de nuestra libre determinación como pueblo. Hasta ahora se ha entendido que sólo las grandes

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potencias eran capaces de establecer intercambios entre sí a pesar de sus contradicciones políticas. Esta actitud forma parte también del patrón discriminatorio de los países pequeños, a los que no solamente se les somete, sino que hasta se les quiere imponer prohibiciones internacionales, porque tienen el propósito de limitarnos también relaciones económicas libres de intervenciones metropolitanas (Cabrera Infante 1960).

In January 1961, theatre was subordinated to the former-PSP dominated CNC. The CNC's role in theatre was myriad. It coordinated cultural events throughout the country, approved or rejected proposed projects from artists and writers, gathered information about foreign culture and disseminated it, controlled bookings on a national and regional basis, and allocated the budget (Tunberg 1970: 44). The choice of which plays and productions to stage fell to the theatre group, and the group's director would then present these choices to the CNC's theatre section for approval. If approval was not forthcoming, the director could ask for feedback and then appeal the decision. However, concert readings by professional groups and amateur productions did not need approval from the CNC (Tunberg 1970: 43). In his analysis of the development of Cuban theatre, Tunberg asserts that by 1970, the date his work was published, no proposal had been rejected or censored (1970: 43).

Once a script was approved, a group's director could then go to the *almacén* (the national costume and scenery workshop) and borrow existing costumes and scenery. If new costumes or scenery were required, the group was billed for it. Production costs did not include rent, as each

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official theatre group had its own theatre and the government absorbed the utility costs (Tunberg 1970: 44). Dramatic artists were granted secure financial backing in the form of a salary and professional status, thereby allowing them to dedicate themselves entirely to their creative endeavours. A professional was considered to be any individual who either drew a salary from the CNC, or who had a job that was closely related to their artistic field. To become a professional it was necessary either to have a contract from the CNC for a particular project, or to be a member of a theatre group which had a general contract with the CNC. These (renewable) contracts were generally granted annually, but were not particularly binding. Individuals could switch groups, change projects, or leave theatre altogether (Palls 1975: 68).<sup>51</sup>

It is worth noting that there has been little further research conducted regarding the system of organisation and valorisation of theatre, plays, and theatre practitioners. In part, this stems from the historiographic legacy created by the *quinquenio gris* that still contributes to a general unwillingness among theatre specialists in particular to discuss the specificities of the period today. This is particularly the case with regard to researching the system with which the CNC approved and graded plays, actors and troupes, which is generally known as the *sistema de valorización*. This is because the *sistema de valorización* was, and still is, perceived to be intimately linked to what was called, in the furore of 2007 when Pavón appeared on the programme *Impronta* on Cubavisión, the

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<sup>51</sup> For example the playwright, Abelardo Estorino joined Teatro Estudio in 1960 and was contracted by the government as a professional writer in 1961 (Martin 1990: 42).

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*parametrización* of actors which was so destructive to theatre during the *quinquenio gris* and immediately after.

Theatre's immediacy made it a particularly powerful tool for incorporating working men and women into cultural activities. This was arguably capitalised upon by the EIA which had a dedicated theatre section. Part of the duties of the *instructores de arte* was to help with performing groups of *aficionados*' organisation and activities (Matas 1971: 433). These *aficionado* groups were organised in labour centres all over the island with the aim of attracting and educating large audiences, so that professional theatre groups would have a popular foundation (Matas 1971: 433). Amateurs also had a number of options available to them if they wished to try to become professional playwrights. They could submit a work to the theatre section of the CNC or directly to a theatre for criticism. Alternatively, they could send a work to Casa for one of its literary prizes, or to UNEAC for publication or consideration for the David Prize for unknown, unpublished, and unproduced writers. They could also arrange an amateur production and hope that it would be picked up by a professional group (Woodyard 1983: 58). Regional amateur theatre competitions, open to all theatre groups, were held annually in renovated theatres throughout the provinces (Tunberg 1970: 45).

The *aficionado* movement in Cuba has parallels with the early Soviet concept of *samodeiatel'nost'*, that emerged during the Russian civil war and early years of the USSR. The state defined *samodeiatel'nost'* as amateur artistic creation in the fields of theatre, choral music, dance, fine and decorative arts and classed this type of production as a form of folk art, which was separate from the professional sphere (Anon 1955b). When

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discussing the phenomenon, Mally translates it as ‘amateur theatre’ and argues that it ‘came to stand for a new Soviet approach that would foster collective interaction and bring about productive social results’ (Mally 2000: 23). The paradoxes inherent in theatre, but particularly within the *aficionado* and *samodeiatel’nost’* movements, were also the same in each country: amateur theatre was a powerful form of cultural expression in the democratisation of culture and by extension the Revolution; however, given its mass participatory nature, it was also a potentially destabilising force if improperly managed.

Different styles of theatre proliferated in Havana; in 1962 the Teatro Lírico and the Teatro Musical de la Habana were founded. The Teatro Lírico focussed on operas, operettas and *zarzuelas* — Spanish lyrical theatre that includes spoken and sung text —, and the Teatro Musical focussed on foreign or national contemporary musical plays. Both theatres had their own orchestras and were allocated particularly high budgets on account of the demands of the form (Matas 1971: 433-34). The CNC created another theatre group, the short-lived Conjunto Dramático Nacional (CDN) in 1962, which ran until 1966. The CDN had three general directors, Eduardo Manet, Mario Rodríguez Alemán, and the Uruguayan Amanecer Dota. It staged twenty five different works, including two co-productions with Teatro Estudio. These works spanned thirteen different nationalities: Cuba (6); Czechoslovakia (3); the USSR (2); Brazil (2); UK (2); Argentina (2) and the GDR, France, Mexico, Norway, Japan, Italy and the USA each (1). The number of works it presented in each year fluctuated: 1962 (4); 1963 (3); 1964 (5); 1965 (2) and 1966 (1) (González 1985: 64).

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Although still predominantly Havana-centric, revolutionary theatre began to take hold in Cuba's provinces, with the development of groups which incorporated local cultural and historical traditions, such as Cabildo Teatral de Santiago which was created in 1961 in the eastern province of Oriente (Manzor-Coats and Martiatu Terry 1995: 45; Tunberg 1970: 52). By 1963 professional groups were established in the provinces in an effort to decentralise theatre (Martin 1994: 155). Despite the new organisational structure and coordination of efforts, theatre activities began to decrease significantly in 1962. This was in part because a large section of the traditional theatre audience, the middle class, had left or was in the process of leaving the country, and also because Havana audiences still preferred 'light' amusement such as musical comedy and vernacular variety shows (Matas 1971: 434-35). Possibly in response to the decline of audiences at cultural events, the CNC began to seek to further coordinate cultural activities and, between 14 and 16 December 1962, it held the Primer Congreso Nacional de la Cultura. The focus of this congress was on mobilisation and the promotion of cultural exchange between different mass organisations (Gallardo Saborido 2009: 89). Each province outlined its programme of work in the cultural field, with the aim of encouraging direct participation in cultural activities (Gordon-Nesbitt 2012: 290-91). However, theatrical production stalled after theatre was amalgamated into the CNC and was then further affected by the move towards insular introspection, and indigenous cultural codes (rather than a focus on the formation of new cultural narratives) slowly began to take hold, in the face of increasing international hostility and isolation (Fay 2011: 413-14).

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After the first Escalante affair of March 1962, which ended the 'inevitable phase of sectarianism',<sup>52</sup> theatre gained its own official journal (Benedetti 1971: 8). *Conjunto* was a Casa publication, and therefore unaffiliated to any one group, with an office in Havana, where the significant majority of theatre was still focussed. The publication, whose name paid homage to the collective nature of theatre, began production in mid-1964. It appeared relatively regularly and involved a wide range of Cuban and Latin American researchers and *dramaturgos* (Tunberg 1970: 44-45). The journal's form remained relatively constant but the editorial board experimented with different approaches. David Fernández was the editor for the first three editions, then critic Rine Leal was in charge until the tenth edition. From 1972 the journal was under the control of Galich, a Guatemalan *dramaturgo* and researcher. The regular sections included a page of editorial, a complete text of an unedited, often unpublished, theatre work, commentary and critical analysis of works on diverse aspects of Latin American theatre. From issue five of 1968, 'Entreactos' was a

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<sup>52</sup> Aníbal Escalante had been entrusted with the construction of the Organizaciones Integradas Revolucionarias (ORI), but also initially dominated the EIRs, providing them the perfect base from which to rapidly politically educate the rebel soldiers. By March 1962, the ORI had been converted into a potent organisation which controlled diverse aspects of Cuba's politics and economics (Gallardo Saborido 2009: 87). Because of the fears raised by the prevalence of the PSP in positions of power within the Revolution's institutions, intensified by some members' rigid interpretations of socialism and communism, tensions with other groups and individuals swiftly developed. As a result, in 1962 the EIRs were removed from the PSP's instruction, and the ORI ceased activity, pending complete reorganisation into the Partido Unido de la Revolución Socialista de Cuba (PURS). On 26 March 1963, Fidel Castro publicly accused Escalante of having 'forced Cuba into a sectarian straitjacket' (Karol 1971: 247), and he was denounced as having organised an apparatus which was predisposed towards following his (rather than the government's) orders, and of having created a niche of privileges and a system of favours (Gallardo Saborido 2009: 87). Escalante temporarily left the country for Czechoslovakia.

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regular feature, with short, but pertinent, information regarding theatre activities throughout Latin America (Tunberg 1970: 44).

The first issue, July-August 1964, included an interview with the Czechoslovakian director Otomar Kreycha, head of the National Theatre of Prague, and Josef Svoboda, his scenographer (Layera 1983: 35). Kreycha had been invited by the CNC as part of the celebrations of Shakespeare's fourth centenary (Image 41). He had originally planned to direct Vsevolod Vishnevskii's *Optimisticheskaia tragediia* [Optimistic Tragedy] but then changed to *Romeo and Juliet* (Fernández 1964: 9-10). *Romeo and Juliet* was popular in Central and Eastern Europe during the Cold War and had become politicised (Loehlin 2002: 65). Kreycha and Svoboda had staged the play in 1963 with a particularly innovative set design and clear political undercurrents as Czechoslovakia was 'struggling to find an alternative to both Western capitalism and Soviet totalitarianism' (Loehlin 2002: 65).

By 1965, attendance in Cuban theatres had surpassed one million annually, an increase of 1,000 percent from 1958 (Martin 1994: 154). Around the same time, the first wave of students from the Revolution's educational institutions had begun to graduate and form their own theatre groups, such as Teatro Joven, which sought to relate theatre to the revolution. It was a collective of four actors, six actresses, and five technicians, with playwright Raul Macías serving as literary advisor and 'big brother'. The group operated as a collective, majority decisions were the rule, and members usually shared the directorial chores from production to production. The group became professional in November 1969, when their two-year obligatory social work, in lieu of military service, which had consisted of rural theatrical tours, was completed. In 1968, their

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repertoire included: Slawomir Mrozek's *Na pełnym morzu* [*On the High Sea*], Eugene Ionesco's *La Leçon* [*The Lesson*], Anton Chekhov's *Predlozhenie* [*The Proposal*] and *O vrede tabaka* [*The Evils of Tobacco*], and José Triana's *El mayor general hablará de teogonía* (Tunberg 1970: 47). Two other seminal groups appeared at the same time as Teatro Joven: Grupo Jorge Anckermann (GJA) and Taller Dramático (TD). GJA was founded on 1 April 1965 and existed until 1972. It focussed on musical comedy and the vernacular. It staged 36 different pieces, all Cuban (Espígul González and Antonio González 1986). TD was created in 1966 by artists from the defunct CDN and was directed by Gilda Hernández. During its short existence (until March 1968) it staged twelve works, half of the works were Cuban and the remaining pieces came from: USA (2); Czechoslovakia (2); Mexico (1); Chile (1) (Nodal 1985).

Theatre attendance was to become affected by the deteriorating relationship between Cuba and the USSR as the direction of the Revolution began to shift towards intense (grass-roots) radicalisation from 1962 onwards (Kapcia 2005: 121). By the end of 1965, a cultural Revolution that encouraged and supported numerous creative currents and differing ideologies was 'anomalous in a country for which the conclusion of the rite of passage had become a national imperative' (Fay 2011: 418-19). The new political infrastructure 'and the doctrinal impetus that drove it, moved towards absolute definition' both in the field of politics and culture (Fay 2011: 419). The articulation of unity, a coherent national identity, and the mobilisation of resources became privileged characteristics. Moreover, artists' interaction with external cultural currents, even if conducted with the aim of adapting these currents, 'was now

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tainted with the stain of potential treachery' (Fay 2011: 417). Theatre, which had not produced a clearly Cuban revolutionary art form was particularly susceptible. As the cultural world became increasingly polarised, some high-profile figures emigrated: Guillermo Cabrera Infante in 1965, and Carlos Franqui in 1968 (Fay 2011: 418-19). Moreover, pre-revolutionary prejudices, despite the profound social, cultural, and political transformations within Cuba, 'lingered malignantly on' (Fay 2011: 416).

Homosexuality became an obvious point of confrontation and issues regarding the lifestyle, perceived or real, of certain individuals became increasingly evident, with the Unidades Militares de Ayuda a la Producción (UMAP) beginning to be used for purposes other than 'disciplining' wayward youth in 1965 (Gallardo Saborido 2009: 106). This concern with sexual orientation was to become particularly pernicious within theatre, which also had to contend with actions based on the stereotypes that surrounded not only the artistic form but also the characteristics and sexual preferences of practitioners. These prejudices, and the suspicion of cultural professionals with pre-revolutionary ties, would become more pronounced towards the end of the 1960s and in the early 1970s. I consider that these prejudices and stereotypes led to a hypermacho and chauvinist expression of national identity which led to further regulation of theatre.

**1968 - 'después de todo un escritor o un artista no es un hombre de acción'**

(Fornet 1971: 34)

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Towards the end of the 1960s, the Revolution's direction and priorities were beginning to shift, from outward-looking perspectives to more internally-focussed ideas. Guerrilla movements within Latin America were failing, the death of Che in Bolivia in 1967 had profoundly affected the perceptions regarding the viability of Guevara's idea of a moral economy based on and influenced by ideas of social justice. Cuba's economy was floundering, and concerns about defence were increasing (Lévesque 1978: 147). In January 1968, Cuba hosted the Congreso Cultural de La Habana, which, as discussed in Chapter Two, heralded the beginning of a strong focus on anti-colonialism, the Third World, and the more active societal role required of the artist. The UNEAC's congress held at the end of the same year signalled a greater emphasis on active contribution of the intellectual to the revolution, the active political role of art, and a focus on national identity (Casal 1971: 460). The net result was that artistic production and cultural development necessarily became an indispensable component of the mobilisation to both defend, and advance, the Revolution (Weppeler-Grogan 2010: 144). These cultural priorities meant that there were competing demands on cultural practitioners who sought to combat the residual effects of colonialism in culture, but also borrowed from Western cultural traditions. Reconciling these demands with the need to create authentically Cuban intellectual spaces to foster organic discourses was particularly difficult because of their seemingly contradictory nature. The previous year, one of the main pre-rebellion theatre groups, Patronato del Teatro (PdT), which placed a heavy emphasis on international theatre, was closed down. PdT was established on 29 May 1942 by the director Ramón Antonio Crusellas, and staged 217

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plays over the twenty-five years of its existence (Anon 1996: 218). The conscious deconstruction of pre-existing discourses further fused art and politics once more:

En todo caso, hoy damos por sentada la responsabilidad política del escritor en el acto mismo de reconocer su responsabilidad artística: nos parecen las dos caras de una misma moneda (Fornet 1971: 33).

By the time of the Congreso Cultural de La Habana, theatre had become increasingly stratified and, between 1968 and 1970, individuals in theatrical groups began to divide into new subgroups (Benedetti 1971: 21). Artists felt increasingly stifled by the government's prescribed, specialised, theatre groups and felt a growing disjunction between living the Revolution as citizens and as artists (Martin 1990: 42). As a result of these preoccupations, there was a fundamental redefinition of theatre regarding the changing direction of the revolutionary process. This 'mediation of 1968', sought to resolve some of tensions within Teatro Estudio between different interpretations of formal innovations and the search for revolutionary culture (and differing geographical focuses) (Pianca 1989: 519). As a result, two different theatre groups were formed in the conscious search for a greater cohesion between theory and practice (Pianca 1989: 519). These two groups were the Havana-focussed Los Doce, which focussed on closed experimentation in the capital, and Teatro Escambray, which looked to the countryside and greater interaction with the historically marginalised and impoverished peasants. Los Doce,

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headed by Vicente Revuelta, was an experimental group which sought to challenge the limits of what was accepted as theatre (Martin 1990: 42). The group experimented with Jerzy Grotowski's ideas of 'Poor Theatre' and did not give public performances for a year. Grotowski was highly influential in experimental theatre. His concept of 'Poor Theatre' emphasised an actor's connection with the audience, and the audience's participation in a production (Wiles 1980: 142). Los Doce embodied one of two important goals of the cultural authorities — collectivity. However, in keeping its experimentations in theatre confined within the group, albeit with the aim of improving future performances for the public, the group in some ways fell short of ideas regarding widening participation in culture.

Teatro Escambray was firmly focussed on Cuba's provinces and the role that theatre could play in the development of the Revolution. Teatro Escambray moved to the Escambray Mountains with a mandate to 'develop and perform theatre based on regional issues and driven by local concerns' (Rudakoff 1996: 78). This was an isolated, impoverished region with a history of violence (Rudakoff 1996: 79). The choice of location was significant in another way: the Escambray Mountains were a particularly strong symbol of the Revolution. There had been two National Fronts that fought in the 1959 rebellion, the ex-Directorio Revolucionario Estudiantil group of 1958 split over whether to join Che's group and attack Santa Clara (one group, under Faure Chomón did) or to remain apart (as did the other section, the Segundo Frente Nacional de Escambray, under Eloy Gutiérrez Menoyo). Gutiérrez Menoyo's men became the anti-Revolution guerrillas of 1960-66 and remained in the mountains and fought against the Revolution's forces until 1965. Teatro Escambray used sociological

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techniques to research social problems of development in the countryside and then converted the findings into theatrical performances for those who had been the subject of research. The first topic, chosen by the Escambray people, was husband-wife relations and local society (Rudakoff 1996: 81-82). Members of Teatro Escambray talked with local residents at their homes and in the cane fields, where performances were then held, which, because of the relevance of and familiarity with subject matter, sometimes drew the viewers in, resulting in interruptions and interventions from the viewers (Rudakoff 1996: 77-78). Teatro Escambray's first investigation was conducted between 5 November 1968 and 6 December 1968. It was planned in conjunction with the regional Party and, to maximise any potential effect, the group was divided into three committees which traversed the region's municipalities of Trinidad, Topes de Collantes, Condado, Caracusey, Cumanayagua, La Sierrita, Manicaragua, Mataguá, Jimbacoa, Güinía de Miranda, Fomento and Báez (Corrieri et al. 1978: 35). On its tours, the group stayed in each location for one week and would then perform two different plays — one at the beginning of the week and one at the end. Teatro Escambray used farce as a basic form and this style shifted the focus in Cuban popular theatre from 'dialectic and formalised structure to aesthetic concerns and highly theatrical, imagistic performance' (Martin 1990: 42). Every three months, the group would make a circuit and return to the first village to begin the tour again and to see what social and cultural progress had been made (Tunberg 1970: 55). Members of Teatro Escambray eventually formed groups elsewhere, such as Flora Lauten and Teatro La YaYa based in the

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Santa Clara Mountains, and Albio Paz who founded Teatro Acero, based in a steel factory in Havana (Martin 1994: 130).

Practically, Teatro Escambray's relocation to the regions also solved a problem of over-crowding. By 1970 Havana boasted nineteen official theatre groups, comprising of thirteen theatre companies and six dance troupes (Anon 1970a: 18), in comparison to the six that had existed in 1958 (1970: 44).<sup>53</sup> Between them these groups had staged 1,042 works: 788 premieres and 254 revivals (Anon 1970a: 24-25). By 1970 the problem of a surplus of theatre professionals had become twofold: there were not enough theatres in Cuba to keep all professionals in regular work and there were no immediate plans to create more professionals until the CNC could demonstrate the need for them. Moreover, budget troubles also meant that the CNC had frozen all new contracts (Martin 1990: 46). Contracts represented the majority of the CNC's theatre budget: in 1969, of the 16 million pesos assigned to the CNC, 15 million of them were spent on salaries (Martin 1990: 42-46). This created a real problem for unestablished theatre professionals seeking to break into the market. Teatro Escambray's high-profile relocation to an impoverished rural setting paved the way for other groups to follow suit, thereby helping to combat the saturation of the Havana theatre world, and further cementing the close relationship between culture and politics as the group actively sought to become an 'agent in the Cuban revolution' (Tunberg 1970: 48). The group's move reflected the revolutionary government's aims for the further

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<sup>53</sup> Tunberg (1970: 44) argues that by summer 1969, Havana boasted thirty, largely homogenous, professional theatre groups, compared to the six that there had been in 1958.

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democratisation of culture through the widening of participation and the importance placed on the idea of the collective.

What was left of Teatro Estudio after the split also changed; in October 1968 Raquel Revuelta, a leading film actress and a founding member of the group, became its director (Tunberg 1970: 44). She considered Teatro Estudio's fundamental purpose to be the creation of a national theatre and attempted to transform the group's theatre into a cultural centre which included music, dance, painting, and poetry. A number of new programmes were established, including a cycle of classical theatre, plastic art exhibitions, poetry readings, concerts of contemporary music, and production of new plays (Tunberg 1970: 47). An emphasis was placed on Teatro Estudio's collectivity; every theatre artist or craftsman was expected to make an individual contribution to the whole of the production (Tunberg 1970: 48).

Towards the end of the 1960s, theatre groups with more explicitly militant or Third World focusses also began to proliferate, such as Teatro Tercer Mundo (T3M), which combined a clear focus on the axis of underdevelopment — Asia, Africa, and Latin America — and a more orthodox approach towards revolutionary commitment and social behaviour. Many of T3M's actors had toured Mexico in the summer of 1968 with TD and some of those involved had decided that, in order for Cuban theatre to properly relate to the Revolution, an element of the range of theatre being practiced in Cuba should be overtly political. The CNC supported this idea and T3M was formed in February 1969 (Tunberg 1970: 49-52). For unclear reasons, it was the only professional theatre group in Cuba that did not need to have its script approved by the CNC for

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proposed productions, but it did require budgetary approval. The group had two guiding principles, that theatre must be taken to the people — which saw free productions, staged outside to audiences averaging about 1,500 in size — and that the drama they stage must be revolutionary (in form, and in content), and should relate to T3M's commitment to world-wide socialist Revolution. The group operated strict social, personal, and professional criteria for potential members, and applicants had to prove their commitment to the Revolution, with evidence such as a consistent record of voluntary labour. Nor did the group accept drug users, those considered sexually promiscuous, or homosexuals (Tunberg 1970: 49-52). According to Tunberg's research on theatre during this period, the group had made a conscious decision, taking into account the Marxist argument that an artist cannot be viewed separately from their work, or society, not to accept homosexual actors in a bid to broaden the reach of their theatre:

Tercer Mundo feels that homosexuality is a manifestation of how economic and cultural imperialism has affected Cuba and that to call one a homosexual in any country would be to call him alienated; thus, to eliminate alienation between Cuban culture and the people one must insist on a "normal" life-style on the part of its actors (Tunberg 1970: 53).

The strictures of T3M are evidence of two currents that had begun to emerge in the cultural arena. In one sense, the group's entrance requirements reflected the increasingly hypermacho atmosphere that was developing due to the increasing presence of ex-guerrillas, and associated

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publications, in the cultural and political apparatus (such as Pavón and *Verde Olivo*). However, the focus on combatting erroneously perceived alienation caused by homosexuality was paradoxically also demonstrative of the desire to further democratise culture and to involve new audiences, as seen in other groups such as Teatro Escambray. This seemingly inconsistent stance is an example of the multiple currents of thought regarding culture's role in the Revolution. These currents continued to exist well past 1965, and at times coexisted and others contradicted each other. Furthermore, the change in key figures within cultural administration, could also explain the privileging of certain ideas and creative demands that led to the beginning of the circulation of a certain type of narrative socialist realism in Cuba, which demanded didacticism and clarity.

These nascent hypermacho, nationalist and regulatory tendencies were further exacerbated by the increasing suspicion with which intellectuals active prior to the Revolution were viewed, as the revolutionary government increasingly felt under attack from external forces. The expulsion of Cabrera Infante from the UNEAC in August 1968, and the simultaneous departure of Carlos Franqui, added to the increasing suspicion with which pre-revolutionary intellectuals were being viewed, particularly if they did not have explicitly revolutionary stances or were linked to these ideologically difficult figures. These more regulatory and exclusionary sentiments had already been growing in strength on a more grass-roots level, due to the increased pace of post-1965 radicalisation, but would become more aggressively articulated in the early 1970s when 'the promises of the Cuban Revolution met the realities of governing [and] the government pushed to put forth one unifying definition of what it meant

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to be revolutionary' (Ford 2010: 367). In doing so they emphasised the importance of the *aficionado* movement, cultural democratisation and mass participation, in place of the cultural 'elite'.

#### **Quinquenio Gris (1971-1975/6)**

By the 1970s, partly as a result of closer economic collaboration with the USSR, and the shift in policy that this seemed to imply, there was a change in cultural administration. A new, different set of debates and struggles emerged, to be played out over the next decade. This change occurred mainly within the institutions of the CNC and the UNEAC, and more orthodox ideas and a more prescriptive approach to culture began to gain ascendancy, for a time (Weppler-Grogan 2010: 146-54). These regulatory tendencies were intensified by the 1971 Congreso Nacional de Educación y Cultura which highlighted the drive to eliminate foreign tendencies and signs of cultural imperialism in the creative world (Casal 1971: 463), thereby formalising, to some extent, the hypermacho focus of the following years:

Los medios culturales no pueden servir de marco a la proliferación de falsos intelectuales que pretenden convertir el esnobismo, la extravagancia, la homosexualidad y demás aberraciones sociales, en expresiones del arte revolucionario, alejados de las masas y del espíritu de nuestra Revolución (Documentos 1977: 52).

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With the promotion of new cultural figures, such as Armando Quesada and Jorge Serguera, along with some, such as Pavón, from the military, the constituent roles of culture began to be (unofficially) separated out through the privileging of different currents and approaches. I suggest that, within theatre, its intrinsic educational value became its most prized element. The prizing of this educative potential fostered didactic approaches towards the art form which increased as the revolutionary government strove towards cultural democratisation. However, this was by no means a monolithic approach and alternative attitudes to culture in socialism persisted.

In the early 1970s a system of international scholarships that would further help the development of Cuban theatre began to be implemented. These scholarships formed part of the educational drive that was linked to the process of reassessment and focus on raising the quality of production after the failure of the 1970 *zafra*. It was planned that the awards would be offered between 1973 and 1980. In 1972 there were twenty-one approved individuals for the scholarships, and it was hoped that this number would rise to thirty the following years.

More generally, the cultural authorities placed the emphasis on assimilating universal cultural elements, and synthesising a national culture that confronted Cuba's colonised past (Documentos 1977: 51-56). Artists and intellectuals had their religious beliefs, sexual orientation, relations with acquaintances and colleagues abroad, and other aspects of their personal lives, scrutinised (Weppeler-Grogan 2010: 147).<sup>54</sup> Theatre, which was still valued for its educational and agitational capacity, had

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<sup>54</sup> One casualty of the period was the playwright Virgilio Piñera, who fell from grace during the *quinquenio* because of his open homosexuality (Martin 1990: 54).

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initially enjoyed a high degree of freedom. However, it began to face a greater degree of censorship and limitation (Ford 2010: 367). The playwright and poet Antón Arrufat came under intense attack for his most recent collection of poetry, *Escrito en las puertas*, accused of having a 'expresión poética vencida por su propia falta de consistencia y veracidad' (Avila 1969: 13). He was marginalised for the following fourteen years, when none of his existing or new work was published, and, although his work was gradually accepted again, his theatrical work was not (Gallardo Saborido 2009: 186). Other artists found that they could not find a public forum for their work, some were unable to take trips abroad, and others, like Arrufat, received jobs in which they were unable to constantly pursue their creative interests (Weppeler-Grogan 2010: 147). For the same reasons that theatre ensembles had been seen as didactic vehicles as an important feature of the socialist Revolution, theatre was now considered particularly dangerous (Layera 1983: 42):

Todos éramos culpables, en efecto, pero algunos eran más culpables que otros, como pudo verse en el caso de los homosexuales. [...] Por increíble que hoy pueda parecernos [...] no es descabellado pensar que ese fue el fundamento, llamémosle teórico, que sirvió en el 71-72 para establecer los «parámetros» aplicados en los sectores laborales de alto riesgo, como lo eran el magisterio y, sobre todo, el teatro. Se había llegado a la conclusión de que la simple influencia del maestro o del actor sobre el alumno o el espectador adolescente podía resultar riesgosa (Fornet 2009: 16).

As part of this greater regulation of theatre and the effort to further educate the Cuban population in cultural matters, the official theatrical organ, *Conjunto*, which had remained unpublished between 1968 and 1971, was resurrected. It began circulation again in 1972, under the permanent editorship of Galich, with a more militant line that was clearly committed to the Third World and to art as a service to social causes (Martin 1990: 44).

This educative focus changed the priorities within theatre. Historically, the idea of a 'sophisticated' theatre audience traditionally referred to an audience familiar with the codes and techniques within the Western classical tradition (Villegas 1989: 507). Therefore, the cultivation of new theoretical models for discourse and the understanding of works in their own historical context meant that there was a concerted move towards amateur movements and theatrical works which incorporated 'the people', either through giving voice to their concerns or encouraging their participation. *Aficionado* theatre proved to be a source of redemption, or escape, for some individuals who had fallen foul of the *quinquenio gris* in other artistic areas. One such example is Antonia Eiriz, a visual artist and member of *Los Once*, who came under scrutiny from the CNC, possibly through her prior association with the cultural supplement *Lunes*. Eiriz faced much public criticism for her controversial work *Una tribuna para la paz democrática* (1968), particularly from some of the more dogmatic cultural figures, some of whom advocated stereotypical socialist realism (what I term high Stalinist socialist realism) (Anreus 2004: 13). In particular Anreus identifies printmaker Carmelo González as an advocate of socialist realism. By the end of the year, Eiriz had stopped painting, in protest, and

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in 1969 she resigned from teaching art in Cubanacán (Anreus 2004: 13). She eventually began to teach children and adults from the Comités de Defensa de la Revolución (CDRs), in her native municipality, Juanelo, to make figures from papier-mâché. These efforts gradually developed into a movement of amateur art practitioners that gained national recognition, and the papier-mâché puppets were used in plays, whose theatrical sets, as well as writing, were created by members of the CDRs (Weppler-Grogan 2010: 152).

The more didactic approach towards culture was also reflected in the types of work that won Casa's theatre prize between 1970 and 1975.<sup>55</sup> Winning works dealt with explicitly revolutionary themes, focussed on Latin America's history or culture, or adapted European culture to the Cuban setting and reconfigured it for a Latin American context. In 1970 no prize was awarded while in 1971, Raúl Macías (the 'big brother' figure to Teatro Joven) won the award for *Girón: historia verdadera de la Brigada 2506*, which dealt with the events surrounding Playa Girón, presented a strong critique of the USA, and looked outwards at the achievements of the Revolution (Ford 2010: 364-67). Macías had spent time abroad, including studying in Moscow in the early 1960s (he later served as a translator of Soviet Russian-language works) and in Libya and Angola, (Ford 2010,

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<sup>55</sup> Between the beginning of the Casa de las Américas system of prizes and the break-up of the USSR there were only seven Soviet judges, many of whom were frequent contributors to the Soviet journal *Latinskaia Amerika*. They were; Pavel Grushko (Poetry prize, 1973), Vera Kuteischikova (Artistic-literary essay prize, 1979), Valentina Schiskina (Historical-social essay prize, 1980), Inna Terterian (Story prize, 1978), Venedicto Vinogradov (Essay prize, 1975), Victor Volsky (Essay prize and also extraordinary prize for Bolivar in Our America, both 1977) and finally Valeri Zemskov (Artistic-literary prize, 1987) (Casañas and Fornet 1999). The only Eastern European or Soviet individual to judge a theatre competition was María Sten, from Poland for the 1978 award (Casañas and Fornet 1999: 117).

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364). In 1972, the Uruguayan playwright Antonio Larreta won, with *Juan Palmierei*. The piece shows, from the perspective of his mother, the political awakening of her son, a young student who is deeply affected by the death of Che in 1967. It guides the audience through the political events between 1967 and 1969, beginning with the death of Líber Arce, the first student shot during a protest in Montevideo on 14 August 1967. Reminiscent of the perceived tenets of late Stalinist socialist realism, the play was commended for its simplicity, maturity, accuracy of the political commitment made and the historical setting, and its successful appropriation of structures from bourgeois theatre (Casañas and Fernet 1999: 80). In 1973, Víctor Torres, part of the amateur theatre movement in Chile, won with *Una casa en Lota Alto*, a dramatic representation of ideological and generational conflicts within a coal-mining family. The piece also highlighted the artificiality of theatre, with the actors explaining that they were representing factual events, drawing on data compiled by social scientists, in order to motivate the audience into action (Layera 1978: 40). The play's use of dramatic forms imported from Europe and the United States was singled out (Layera 1978: 39), and the piece was hailed by the jury as the work which most clearly reflected the 'open form of experimental theatre of [the Latin American] continent, which includes the pueblo not only as a consumer but also as a dynamic protagonist in this aesthetic phenomenon' (Casañas and Fernet 1999: 86). In 1974 there were no winners, by consensus, and in 1975 there were three: Jorge Goldenberg, *Revelo 1923* (Argentina); Guillermo Maldonado Pérez, *Por Estos Santos Latifundios* (Colombia); Alejandro Sieveking, *Pequeños Animales Abatidos* (Chile), all of which were singled out for their clear

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ideological stance, historical focus, audacious use of theatrical conventions and balanced structures (Casañas and Fornet 1999: 97). Towards the mid to late 1970s, an increasing emphasis was placed on 'collectivity' and the interaction between government and people. These two trends, in theory, served to further demonstrate the emancipatory power of the Revolution. In this sense the focus on, and subsequent privileging of, collective-style production and dialogue between the government and people, was similar to theatre production during the early Russian Revolution (1917-1924), and the concept of *samodeiatel'nost'* (previously discussed) (Mally 2000: 17-46). When discussing the Russian revolutionary case, Mally identifies this approach as what Victor Turner termed social drama, when groups try to occupy a new space in the (changed) social system (Mally 2000: 19). Though acting, these participants found a way to enter the public sphere — 'and thus to lay claim to a new community in which they could have a voice' (Mally 2000: 18). While Mally is specifically discussing the rise of amateur theatre in this instance, I would argue that the description also applies to professionals adopting the new art forms of the new society.

The 1976 Casa theatre prize demonstrates this argument, in addition to evidencing the internationalist aspirations of the Cuban revolutionary government. The prize was awarded to the Colombian Grupo de Teatro La Candelaria for their piece *Guadalupe años sin cuenta*, which was hailed for taking a collective approach towards the creative process, as 'la creación colectiva, forma genuina de nuestro teatro latinoamericano' (Casañas and Fornet 1999: 103). The collective nature of the Cuban Revolution was also demonstrated through a series of strategically

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important co-productions between 1972 and 1978. These co-productions began with the GDR and Bulgaria, however, the majority were with the USSR.

The increased focus on co-productions flagged up by the 1976 PCC manifested in two further theatrical co-productions with the USSR in 1977. The year 1977 was a symbolic year, being the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the October Revolution, and the co-productions formed part of wider celebrations taking place. The 1977 co-productions were *Kremlevskie kuranty* [*El Carillón del Kremlin*] by Nikolai Pogodin in 1940 and Iuri Liubimov's adaptation of *Desiat' dnei, kotorye potriasli mir* [*Diez Días que Estremecieron al Mundo*] adapted from John Reed's 1919 book of the same name.<sup>56</sup> *Kremlevskie kuranty* is the second play in a trilogy dealing with the life of Lenin and the Bolshevik Revolution; in the play, Lenin and an old Jewish watchmaker repair the Kremlin chimes so that they can play the *Internationale*. The play was the second time that the directors Evgenii Radomyslenski (then rector of the Shkola-studia MKhAT, the theatre school attached to the MKhAT) and Miriam Lezcano had worked together with Teatro Político Bertolt Brecht. Their first venture, staged in 1975, was Boris Vasilev's *A zori zdes' tikhie* [*Los Amaneceres Aquí son Apacibles*] — a tale about a heroic Soviet attack on German paratroopers by five female soldiers and their male senior sergeant, set in Karelia in 1942. In 1977 the same duo directed Nikolai Pogodin's *El Carrillón del Kremlin* again

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<sup>56</sup> Iuri Liubimov and Jan Kopecky had been present at the 1966 Theatre Festival which ran from 21 November until 5 December 1966. The Festival coincided with the II Encuentro de Teatristas, a theoretical and practical event that brought together 29 delegates from 19 countries over four continents. The countries were: Spain, France, UK, UEA, USSR, Italy, Czechoslovakia, RDA, Vietnam, Argentina, Mexico, Chile, Peru, Uruguay, Venezuela, Colombia, Brazil and Cuba (Beltrán 1967: 166).

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performed by Teatro Político Bertolt Brecht (Anon 1978c). The staging of *El Carrillón del Kremlin* was then repeated by the troupe in 1978 in the Mella Theatre for the celebration of Lenin's 108<sup>th</sup> birthday (Anon 1978b).

Politically these co-productions served a number of purposes: they helped to fill the gap created by the hangover of fear from the *quinquenio gris*, they were a public symbol of friendship between the two countries, and promised not to upset the status-quo, as they were all on 'safe' topics – Lenin and, separately, the fight against fascism. Both plays deal with the October Revolution and ideas about international socialist revolution. By staging them in 1977, and linking them to the celebrations of the October Revolution, the Cuban cultural apparatus was able to focus on celebrating the work of the Bolsheviks and Lenin, to emphasise the focus on internationalism, and to underline the emancipatory and inclusive nature of socialism. This meant that Cuban-Soviet solidarity could be celebrated, while more difficult topics that did not perhaps sit so well with the emerging Cuban ideology (such as Stalinism, peaceful coexistence, détente) did not necessarily have to be addressed in a public forum – in Cuba or in the USSR. But they also helped to contribute to the continuing development of a politically committed, genuine Cuban art. This was clearly articulated by Radomyslenskii, in an interview for the general magazine *Bohemia*; Radomyslenskii emphasised that his aim was to create an authentically Cuban spectacle that took the best of the Soviet piece but adapted it to Cuba's circumstances, languages, and daily life:

la tarea que nos propone la puesta cubana contiene sus peculiaridades, teniendo en cuenta que nos interesa mantener la

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calidad rusa de la pieza, pero también resaltar su actualidad en las circunstancias del país [...] en fin, estamos trabajando estrechamente, cubanos y soviéticos, por crear un espectáculo para cubanos, cuyo lenguaje sea habitual a su vida y todo lo que suceda en la escena le sea comprensible (González Freire 1977: 28).

I would therefore argue that these co-productions are demonstrative of the wider desire to create a national culture, with a universal appeal, but also the belief that socialist culture should be ‘proletarian in its content, national in its form’ (Abashin 2011; Stalin 1952). This approach sat neatly with Cuban priorities, and was also compatible with different Soviet ideas of Socialist Realism — both traditional and avant-garde.

Radomyslenskii was interviewed by the Russian-language press, along with Aleksandr Okun’ who was a Soviet Artist who appears to have also gone to Cuba to spend some time with Teatro Escambray.<sup>57</sup> Radomyslenskii spent over four months in Cuba (Anon, Radomyslenskii, and Okun’ 1977: 134). He and Okun’ were aided during their stay by Miriam Lescano, who had already studied theatre direction in the USSR by the time of the artists’ visit (Anon, Radomyslenskii, and Okun 1977: 135). In discussing the work of Teatro Escambray Okun’ drew parallels with the ROSTA’s living newspapers — in response to the scarcity of paper — and the early revolutionary theatrical experiments that were linked to this:

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<sup>57</sup> Aleksandr Okun’ exhibited in the Klutchnick Museum and the the Kipniger Gallery both in Washington D.C, and the Skirball Museum in Los Angeles in 1977. Okun’ appears to have been heavily involved in the Leningrad underground art scene and emigrated to Israel in 1979 (Okun’ 2017).

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‘Артисты создают своеобразный сценический плакат-острый, лаконичный, направленный (как в свое время наши «ОКНА РОСТА» против врагов революции)’ [Artists create original theatre posters: sharp, laconic, direct (like in the time of our “ROSTA WINDOWS”, against enemies of the Revolution)] (Anon, Radomyslenskii, and Okun’ 1977: 137).

The flagship of these Soviet productions in Cuba was undoubtedly *Desiat’ dnei, kotorye potriasil mir* [Diez Días que Estremecieron al Mundo] staged by Iuri Liubimov at Teatro Estudio. *Desiat’ dnei* was a loose adaptation of the book of the same name by American journalist John Reed, about the October Revolution and his first-hand experience of the event. Liubimov was a deeply influential director in the USSR, responsible for a demonstrable shift in the style of Soviet theatrical production, and *Desiat’ dnei*, first staged in 1965, was one of his landmark productions. He shunned ‘dogmatic’ approaches and uniformity of expression, embraced Brecht’s ideas of alienation, and disliked the excessive use of props. At the time of his Cuban production, he was facing criticism in the USSR for his style, as were other directors, such as Anatoli Efros (Beumers 1999: 370-80). For unknown reasons, unlike in the other Cuban-Soviet co-productions, Liubimov did not have a Cuban co-director.

*Desiat’ dnei* had been the Taganka Theatre’s second production and was a loose adaption, incorporating a range of theatrical forms and songs based on works by Brecht, Aleksandr Blok, Fedor Tiutchev, David Samoilov, Nadezhda Maltseva, and Vladimir Vysotskii (Beumers 1997: 25). Additional material had been added such as references to the suffering of those imprisoned during the uprisings, the fall of the Romanovs and thus the tsarist system, speeches from Lenin, the presence

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of the character of John Reed in the production, and a discussion of the reception of this book in the USA (Beumers 1997: 26). Only two incidents were taken from the book, and the play was divided into two parts (Beumers 1997: 26). In her detailed examination and analysis of the play, Beumers notes that the play's use of theatrical devices was spread evenly between the two opposing forces, so no one device became stereotyped to a particular type of expression (Beumers 1997: 27). The Taganka's stage adaption also included an element of 'total art' as it began outside the theatre – revolutionary songs were broadcast, Red Guards checked the tickets and then placed them on bayonets. Women wearing red kerchiefs sold the tickets, spectators had red bows pinned on them and banners were pinned around the foyer. Musicians forayed into the auditorium before the performance and eventually led the audience into the auditorium. Finally, the audience was asked to vote for or against the production upon leaving (Beumers 1997: 31). In this way the audience was an integral part of the event. However, it is unclear if the production was reproduced exactly in Cuba. In 1978, the Colombian troupe La Candelaria won the Casa theatre prize, with *Los diez días que estremecieron al mundo*. The jury which awarded the prize unanimously, commented that the work stood out for its

importancia temática en el contexto actual de América Latina. Porque predominan en ella sus valores teatrales, ofreciendo excelentes posibilidades para desarrollarse como espectáculo. Por ser la obra el resultado riguroso, serio y de un profesionalismo

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entendido como adecuado manejo del lenguaje dramático (Casañas and Fornet 1999: 117).

In conversation with the Soviet state newspaper *Izvestiia* regarding the celebrations of Soviet culture, Hart confirmed that the sixtieth anniversary co-productions were linked to the PCC's 1976 *Thesis and Resolution* on artistic culture, underscoring their educative potential:

Обе пьесы были исключительно тепло приняты публикой. Мы имели возможность обменяться опытом с советскими деятелями искусства, приехавшими на проведение Дней культуры, и убедиться, что формы сотрудничества могут быть гораздо шире, чем до сих пор. Мы глубже ознакомились с культурной политикой СССР и, исходя из решений 1 съезда нашей партии, сделаем все для широкого ознакомления кубинского народа с замечательными достижениями советского искусства [Both plays were exceptionally warmly received by the audience. We had the opportunity to exchange experiences with the Soviet artists who had come to attend the Days of Culture, and to see for ourselves that forms of cooperation could be much wider than before. We became more deeply acquainted with the cultural policy of the USSR and, based on the decisions of the First Congress of our Party, will do everything to facilitate the Cuban people's wider acquaintance with the remarkable achievements of Soviet art] (Vernikov 1977).

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These co-productions therefore fulfilled a number of purposes. They fulfilled an educative and informative role, they demonstrated the power of collective work and they helped the development of Cuban theatre. Finally, they adhered to the cultural agreement signed in 1969 that stipulated that cultural work undertaken between the two countries would take place around the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Lenin's birth (Image 11, Image 20), the anniversary of the Cuban Revolution and the Great October Revolution (Anon 1969b).

#### **1976: redefining the Soviet-Cuban relationship and institutionalising post-*quinquenio gris***

Fundamental to the idea of collectivity was the effort to institutionalise, and in doing so streamline, the cultural apparatus. The institutionalising drive of the 1970s drew heavily on the ideas expressed by Che in 'El socialismo y el hombre en Cuba':

Todo esto entraña, para su éxito total, la necesidad de una serie de mecanismos, las instituciones revolucionarias. [...] Esta institucionalidad de la revolución todavía no se ha logrado. Buscamos algo nuevo que permita la perfecta identificación entre el gobierno y la comunidad en su conjunto, ajustada a las condiciones peculiares de la construcción del socialismo y huyendo al máximo de los lugares comunes de la democracia burguesa, trasplantados a la sociedad en formación (Guevara 2006: 58).

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In 1976, this drive reached the cultural world with the formation of the MINCULT, headed by Hart, together with an administrative reform of key cultural institutions (such as ICAIC, Casa and UNEAC), and a reorganisation of regional divisions. New theatres opened and a large cohort of professional playwrights was created — including pre-1959 survivors, such as Carlos Felipe and Rolando Ferrer, and newer artists such as Matías Montes Huidobro, José Triana, Manuel Reguera Samuell, José Brene, Arrufat, José Ignacio Gutiérrez, Nicolás Dorr and Héctor Quintera. Despite these new provisions, experimentation in theatre remained limited, in part due to the self-censorship associated with the memory of the regulation of previous years (although, during the *quinquenio gris* theatrical experimentation had never disappeared entirely, as groups such as *Los Doce* trialled Jerzy Grotowski's ideas) (Kapcia 2005: 161-62). MINCULT sought to encourage artistic experimentation and innovation within theatre, as continued creativity was at the core of both the articulation of a revolutionary national identity and 'the very essence of socialism' (Martínez Heredia 1991: 21).

In an effort to ensure that training met the demands of professionalised actors and to better coordinate the number of aspiring actors with the spaces available for them in pre-existing groups, a university-level arts school, ISA, which opened in 1976, became part of MINCULT's programme. Graduation from the ISA guaranteed a career as a professional, once the artist was qualified as such, job security was assured and promotion made possible. By the mid-1980s, there were over 50 groups fully funded by MINCULT (Pianca 1989: 521). Martin reports that audience numbers in 1985 had increased by a factor of ten since

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1958, from 120,000 a year to 1,239,333 in a country of almost ten and a half million and that the majority of theatre goers were between sixteen and thirty years of age (Martin 1994: 162). The number of productions (staged in formal and informal venues) had also increased from 7,121 in 1975 to 9,617 in 1985 (Martin 1994: 162). Moreover, 70 percent of the plays performed were written by Cubans (Martin 1994: 162).

It was during this period that a number of Cuban theatre students began to pursue funded postgraduate study in the USSR. As with those postgraduate students from the plastic arts, upon returning to Cuba some found themselves unable to complete their social service at ISA due to their perceived 'Sovietness', and fears that they would impose the doctrine of high Stalinist socialist realism. In interviews uncorroborated sources suggest that this was particularly true for those who had studied at Gosudarstvennyi institut teatral'nogo iskusstvo [State Institute of Theatre Arts, GITIS] in Moscow and exacerbated by erroneous interim reports from Cuban cultural figures visiting the USSR [Anon, 2015]. Clearly, by the early-mid 1980s ISA was undergoing an anti-Soviet phase. Graziella Pogolotti, the Dean of the theatre section at that time, had chosen not to renew the contracts of the Soviet teachers at ISA who had been there since 1980. When discussing the Soviet teachers in interviews it was felt by some that they did not understand the Cuban students, nor the emotional element of theatre [Pogolotti, 2015]. The removal of these Soviet figures was also part of the solution to the ongoing preoccupation that foreign teachers were teaching Cubans to appreciate and propagate foreign theatre rather than concentrate on the development of a genuine national theatre [Cano, 2015].

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However, there was still a divide between theatre inside and outside Havana and the problem of providing space for new professionals to enter the theatrical market. To this end a new 'umbrella' style, like the original concept of socialist realism, was also created: *Teatro Nuevo*. Within this term Teatro Escambray could be incorporated along with other newly-created groups, particularly those that sought to integrate rural or traditionally peripheral audiences. *Teatro Nuevo* 'became an active model of utopia for the socialist system itself – a productive and indisputably positive movement to bring theatre and art to the most marginalised rural populations in the country' (Martin 1990: 44). This aspect of theatre was considered particularly important, as the education of these rural populations was thought to 'be the key to uniting the island's population into one cooperative *pueblo*, or national community' (Frederik 2012: 42-49). While this may have had some initial success by the early 1980s, as Martin observes, the groups, which were formed with actors based in Havana, had ceased to exist (Martin 1994: 163).

A further major motive of the decision to further institutionalise culture was greater economic efficiency as the authorities sought to address Cuba's ailing economy and break away from a cycle of dependence. As discussed in Chapter Three, cultural production had become tied with economic development, and specifically using Cuba's culture internationally as a means of earning hard currency. The government's commitment to raising Cuba's international cultural capital was reflected in the government's organisation of large-scale public events at home, tours abroad and new foreign co-productions. Throughout 1979, Ulf Keyn toured around the island with Teatro Político Bertolt Brecht

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performing Alexander Guelman's *El Premio* (EcuRed 2016), *El Premio* was particularly popular in Cuba and frequently appeared in the repertoires of Cuban theatre groups.<sup>58</sup> Just a month after the inaugural December 1979 Festival del Nuevo Cine, the Festival de Teatro de la Habana was held. The event functioned as a bridge-building exercise, attempting to break down the barrier between the *Teatro Nuevo* movement and other theatre groups, and provincial and international theatre groups were well represented at the festival (del Pino 2013). The Festival also dealt with the problem of attending cultural festivals in countries unsympathetic to the Revolution, which might aim to mediate Cuba's cultural hegemony in Latin America. Such events included the Second Festival of Popular Latin American Theatre (New York 14-23 August 1980) or the First Festival of the Theatre in Latin America, organised by Theatre of Latin America (TOLA) in June-July 1979 in Washington D.C. and Waterford, Connecticut (Gallardo Saborido 2009: 153). The first Cuban festival had 352 creative collectives apply of which twenty were chosen to participate in the festival, in total 39 pieces were performed (Anon 1981b: 116).

However, despite the conciliatory idea behind the Festival de Teatro de Habana, the Primer Festival del Teatro Nuevo was held in the same month, clearly competing with the Havana festival. The *Teatro Nuevo* event was held outside the capital, in Villa Clara, between 9 and 17 December 1979, cementing *Teatro Nuevo*'s status as a style that belonged to the countryside and asserting its independence from Havana's theatrical

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<sup>58</sup> By this time Keyn was a regular figure in Cuban theatre. In 1972 Keyn had taught the theoretical bases of Brecht's theatre — the first time this had been done in Cuba (Quesada 1972: 26). He had also staged *Galileo Galilei* and *La Madre* in 1974 and 1975 respectively at the Teatro Hubert de Blanck (CTDA 2017).

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scene. The second Festival de Teatro de Habana was held in January 1982 and attracted over 43,000 spectators showcasing 59 works from twenty nine different theatre collectives (Anon 1982a). The festival saw playwrights, theatre collectives, and plastic artists reconsidering the relationship between theatrical language and content (Woodyard 1983: 57). The festivals were then held biannually until 1987, when the combination of developments in Europe and the deterioration of Cuba's economy made the festival an impossibility (del Pino 2013).

As in the plastic arts in the 1980s, and invariably in part due to the economically driven reassessment of Cuban culture, there was a turn towards analysing the culture produced in the Revolution. By the 1980s, Cuba's economy was still struggling and subsequent experimentations with market mechanisms were felt within theatre, which was now viewed as a potentially exportable commodity. Towards the middle of the decade, a system for increasing the productivity of theatre groups was created, which pegged salaries to the number of performances an actor gave each month (Manzor-Coats and Martiatu Terry 1995: 46). Prior to this, a survey had been conducted on the productivity of the main theatre groups in Havana. The survey concluded that the existing quotas which had 'apparently' been copied from the USSR were unattainable and suggested alternatives:

Aunque la dispersión en cuanto al número de actuaciones es semejante a la que se presenta en relación con los tiempos dedicados a ensayos y a funciones en estos actores, sí resultaba aclarada la cuestión en torno a la viabilidad de las normas de

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actuaciones planteadas por la Comisión de Normas de Tiempo y formas de Pago de 1979. Esta al parecer se había guiado para fijar su normación por las normas fijadas a los actores soviéticos, las cuales sin embargo, se revelaban excesivamente altas incluso para actores de estos colectivos habaneros con las mejores condiciones de trabajo y repertorio respecto a otros grupos del país (Sánchez León 1985: 46).

The focus in theatre moved towards consolidating the quality of existing theatrical groups and opening up opportunities to individuals without university training. A new funding system, *proyectos*, was intended to address the criticism that innovation was stifled when young energy was channelled exclusively into existing groups without the prospect of building on new ideas encountered during training at the ISA. These *proyectos* would also allow for the formation of projects by actors without university preparation. They would not curtail funding for existing groups but rather aimed to make these groups more receptive to the use of their resources (Layera 1983: 42). This decentralising approach did not eliminate the need for planning altogether, but shifted the emphasis from building theatrical institutions to making the resources for creating theatre available (Martin 1990: 45). The national budget of eleven million pesos from 1980 to 1985 supported twenty five permanent theatre houses, eight open-air theatres, twenty four cultural centres, two schools of art and a school of ballet (Martin 1990: 56). Martin notes that, despite the limitations placed on theatre and cultural mobilisation in the late 1980s due to economic restrictions, more Cubans attended theatrical events than in the early

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1980s when these economic problems were not so pronounced (Martin 1994). This suggests the crisis in theatre in the 1980s was more related to perceived opportunities and creative possibilities than purely economic concerns.

Possibly in response to the crisis in theatre, *Tablas*, a quarterly theatre magazine, was founded in 1982. The publication, which discussed the problems and possibilities of contemporary Cuban theatre, was edited by the Centre for Research and Development of the Scenic Arts, and led by critic and writer Rosa Ileana Boudet and edited by Juan Carlos Martínez. Within the cultural arena attempts were also made to identify emerging trends and new directions. Between 19 and 22 July 1981, Casa hosted the *Encuentro de Teatristas Latinoamericanos y del Caribe* (Salado 1981; Anon 1981a). In February 1983 the Primer Taller Internacional de Nuevo Teatro was held (Elvira Peláez 1983). The following month, *Tablas* held a round-table analysing Cuban theatre during the Revolution, and in 1984 – Via Telex – a new critical section was created. Other academic works, such as Ileana Azor's *Origen y Presencia del Teatro en Nuestra América* (1988) highlighted theatre's responsivity to politics. Particular styles, such as *Bufo*, were also reassessed and their particularly valued characteristics (close links to the *pueblo* and their capacity to assimilate) were highlighted. *Bufo* was hailed as a clear example of the assimilation of a foreign culture and its subsequent re-elaboration into something distinctly national. It was also part of a wider Latin American movement of assimilation of European culture. *Bufo*, and specifically its acting style, was also highlighted for the way in which the actors 'developed a capacity for improvisation and for establishing a dialogue with the public which is the

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root of their popularity' (Vázquez Pérez 1984: 5). Sociological studies were also conducted trying to establish the ten best *puestas en escena* (Sala Santos and Sánchez Leon 1986) and analyse the productivity of theatre.

This tendency towards a more systematic reassessment of theatre and its development throughout the Cuban Revolution also occurred in the Soviet press. *El Gran Octubre y la Revolución Cubana* (discussed in Chapter Three) offers an interesting insight into the Soviet perception of Cuba's cultural development, and the Cuban nation's focus on realism.

El teatro nacional, la música, la pintura y la creación popular adquirieron nueva vida después de la Revolución. El teatro se convirtió en patrimonio popular y obtuvo una audiencia masiva [...] El realismo ocupa un puesto cada vez más importante en el repertorio de los teatros. En los teatros se ponen en escena piezas de la dramaturgia clásica mundial y de autores Cubanos en las que encuentra reflejo una nueva temática (Bekarevich et al. 1982: 266).

Towards the end of 1983, Hart and the Soviet Minister of Culture, Petr Demichev, met at the Intergovernmental Commission for Cuban-Soviet cooperation. *Latinskaia Amerika* reported on the meeting, including Hart's opinions on national culture, which clearly asserted the country's independence and leadership within the international socialist movement.

Наша политика во всем, что касается культуры направлена от национального к латиноамериканскому и карибскому

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горизонтам, и далее - к общечеловеческому. А

общечеловеческое для нас - это социализм

[Our policy in all matters relating to culture is directed from the national to the Latin American and Caribbean horizons, and then to the universal. For us, the universal is socialism] (Hart Dávalos 1983: 42).

The Revolution's internationalist nature was explored both within and without Cuba. In 1982, Teatro Escambray, the theatre group which had come to embody revolutionary Cuban theatre, toured the USA (Acosta 1982). Within Cuba, the country's links with other socialist countries, particularly the RDA, were explored, with a co-production between the RDA and Cuba in 1983, *Humboldt y Bolívar* by Claus Hammel which was directed by Hanns Perten and Mario Balmaseda of the Volkstheatre Rostock and Teatro Político Bertolt Brecht respectively. Hammel, president of the Dramatic Arts Section of the GDR's Writers' Union, reported that he had had the idea of writing a piece that would link the GDR and Latin America back in 1964, when he first came to Cuba, but had not written the piece until 1976, when he undertook a new tour around the Latin American continent, which included stops in Venezuela, Mexico and Cuba (Espinosa Domínguez 1983: 37). In *Humboldt y Bolívar*, Hammel explored the relationship between Simón Bolívar, the leading figure in the Latin American independence movement, and Alexander Von Humboldt, the Prussian geographer, explorer, and naturalist (Image 42). Humboldt is often credited as the 'second discoverer' of Cuba due to the detailed anthropological texts he produced about Cuba (Image 43). However, in

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*Humboldt y Bolívar* Humboldt is presented not as a conquistador, but instead as a 'friend' (Espinosa Domínguez 1983: 38). The play highlighted the contrast between Humboldt, a humanist scientist who does not consider himself a man of action, and Bolívar, patriotic, transformative politician who is a man of action (Espinosa Domínguez 1983: 38). The play did this by focusing on the reported meetings of Humboldt and Bolívar in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century (Hammel 1983: 43). The work also explored themes of solidarity and internationalism (Espinosa Domínguez 1983: 38). The entirety of the script was reproduced in *Conjunto*, and the play ends with the liberators of Latin America joining Bolívar on stage as Humboldt leaves (Hammel 1983: 43-104). Thus, Latin America is united once more in its fight for liberation and homage is paid to the enduring and central nature of the *pueblo* (Image 44):

Bolívar: ¡Humboldt! — !Humboldt! — ¡Humboldt! (*De la ardiente lluvia de cenizas que brota del volcán surgen los libertadores de Latinoamérica. A Bolívar se unen Miranda, San Martín, O'Higgins, Artigas, Hidalgo, Morelos, Martí, Pancho Villa, Zapata, Sandino, Che Guevara, Allende, campesinos, obreros y soldados del pueblo. Blancos, negros e indios. También Bonpland, Montúfar, y Rodríguez. También el estudiante y la Desconocida.*)

Desconocida:            Por un lago  
                                 Escabroso  
                                 Azaroso camino  
                                 De encrucijadas y desesperación

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Bajo muchas banderas  
Con harapos colgando  
Vestidos de uniformes  
Armado de palos  
Horquillas de heno y metralletas  
Descalzo  
En alpargatas y con botas  
Está en movimiento  
A pesar de los contratiempos  
Incontenible  
Esperanzado  
Inmortal  
El pueblo  
(Hammel 1983: 104).

**Theatre and nation building.**

As this chapter has explored, the trajectory and treatment of theatre in revolutionary Cuba reveals the centrality of the idea of a coherent national identity for the Revolution, and the power attributed to culture, particularly participatory culture, in the synthesis and articulation of said identity. One of Cuba's most durable national pastimes has proved to be the 'textual reflection on the contours of collective identity' (Fay 2012: 13-14). Theatre's discursive nature made it ideally suited to helping to articulate,

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refine, and combine concepts of national narrative and identity. As a result, theatre was one of the first cultural forms to visibly respond to the Revolution, was greatly encouraged, and was quickly subsumed into the emerging cultural apparatus. However, theatre's mobilising and participatory potential also meant that, as differences between cultural practitioners became increasingly pronounced, it was viewed with mounting suspicion, particularly as a clearly revolutionary form in such a responsive artistic form failed to arise. As ideas of hypermacho behaviour and nationalism became more pronounced this further contributed to greater regulation and the privileging of certain types of theatre.

The approach towards theatre taken by the CNC and then MINCULT also reveals the depth of the initial rift between (wo)men of action (guerrillas) and (wo)men of words ('traditional' intellectuals) and the eventual economic impetus that ultimately led to the reconciliation of the two sides. As Cuba's cultural practitioners attempted to reconcile a colonial past with the development of an indigenous, revolutionary culture, questions of collectivity and participation were raised. A fissure formed between groups with different attitudes towards foreign cultures. On one side of the rift were the 'professionals' who had links to culture prior to the Revolution which, given Cuba's increasing isolation, suggested potentially skewed political alliances. On the other side were the individuals who had begun their creative work in the *aficionado* movement, or within the Revolution's cultural framework and therefore had an unquestionable commitment to the Revolution, even if they used imported cultural forms. This opposition between the perceived sectarian tendencies of early professionals of theatre and the more collective approaches of amateurs

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was also deeply rooted in the articulation of a national narrative, and therefore affected by the ever-present concept of 'history'.

Fay has argued that history, its explanation of Cuba's past humiliations and failings, and its insights into the essence of Cuban identity and Cuba's future, 'became the ontogenetic key' to the synthesis of a coherent revolutionary national identity (Fay 2012: 11). I would argue that within theatre, the conflicts engendered by the codes of *cubanía* were most prevalent in the division between professionals and amateurs, or what García Canclini terms as the 'art versus crafts' dichotomy.

The oppositions between the cultured and the popular and between the modern and the traditional are condensed in the distinction established by modern aesthetics between art and crafts [...] Art corresponds to the interests and tastes of the bourgeoisie and cultivated sectors of the petit bourgeoisie; it is developed in cities, speaks of them, and when it represents landscapes from the countryside it does so with an urban perspective [...] Crafts, on the other hand, are seen as products of Indians and peasants in accord with their rusticity, the myths that inhabit their decoration, and the popular sectors that traditionally make and use them (García Canclini 1995: 173).

However, as the codes of internationalism gained increasing currency within Cuba, and the synthesis of its national identity, 'art's' assumed affinities and grounding in the global, capitalist, Eurocentric market came to be seen as a means of pursuing a national cultural 'self-sufficiency'.

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Artistic forms that had previously implied an allegiance to this economic structure, could, as with Antonio Larreta's *Juan Palmierei*, be expropriated and reconfigured to a more appropriate cultural, artisan, and historical setting in the fight against cultural dependency, be that on the global capitalist market, or the reigning socialist superpower. This economic impetus helped to reconcile the professional and amateur theatrical movements and channel them into the continued development of the Revolution, and the fight for Cuba's autonomy.

Regarding the 'Soviet' presence in Cuban revolutionary theatre, from 1965 onwards the overlap of different cultural approaches from different periods of Soviet development and the cultural practices of Cuba began to become apparent. As discussed in Chapter One, debate was inherent to the emergent doctrine of socialist realism and the years leading up to the 1934 meeting, where the name began to be used as an umbrella phrase. These polemics were among different cultural groups regarding the best path for the creation of a revolutionary culture and what to do with pre-revolutionary culture. Generally these polemics were grouped around literary journals associated with different movements such as *Krasnaia nov'* [Red virgin soil], *LEF* and *Na postu* [The post], which all sought to be the organising centre of Russian literature (Maguire 1968: 155-57).

For example, on one hand there was the implementation of practices that would appear to run closer to one strand of thinking on the debates regarding the fostering and implementation of a culture that was both socialist and realist of the first two decades of the Russian Revolution. The USSR at the tail end of the Thaw, was characterised by a series of shifting open spaces and was seeing a revival of the practices

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and preoccupations of the early Soviet avant-garde as part of a conscious effort by cultural practitioners to broaden the term 'socialist realist' into something that was multi-faceted and encompassed a range of styles (and genres), as long as its core principles were revolutionary (Gardiner 2014; Jones 2006; Beumers 1999; Clark 2000). The social and cultural mobilization campaigns of Khrushchev's administration were modelled on those of the 1930s and were implemented as part of a drive to recapture the energy and faith of the younger generations (Stites 1992: 144). Some of these campaigns used the Cuban Revolution as a source of inspiration both implicitly and explicitly (Gorsuch 2015: 505-06). Concurrently, key figures in Cuba's cultural arena were seeking to establish a cultural system that was broadly inclusive and encouraging of many different currents and approaches.

However, as Cuban-Soviet relations began to deteriorate, the direction of the Revolution began to shift towards intense radicalisation (Kapcia 2005: 121). Subsequently, practices that seemed to have parallels with the cultural policy of the USSR more contemporaneous to revolutionary Cuba began to emerge. In the same month that the PCC was founded, there was a more overt linking of theatre to ideas of communism with a training course inspired by Bertolt Brecht's methods and theory (Grutter 1965: 16). New theatre groups sought to relate culture to the reality of the revolution and to make culture more inclusive. The Conjunto de Arte Teatral 'La Rueda', focussed on the need to make productions from periods that potentially had little resonance with contemporary Cuban life more applicable (Hurtado 1966: 76). Meanwhile, Taller Dramático searched for an appropriate form of national expression in a number of

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ways, through the updating of foreign works; though paying particular attention to Cuban authors; and through commitment to experimentation that was ever closer to the needs of the people and the revolutionary objectives (González Freire 1966b: 33). As the Cuban Revolution moved towards clearer definition, a more regulatory current began to emerge. This was in part linked to the unexpected death of Che and persistent economic problems which gave rise to the desire to gain some form of economic independence and the ascendancy of more orthodox ideas. These practices include privileging of certain topics and styles through the introduction of prizes, which provided concrete guidance to Cuban playwrights, who might be eager to seek out 'safe ground' amid increasing hostility.<sup>59</sup> The continued dominance of Brechtian models and the emphasis on work with an explicit revolutionary bent could also be interpreted as reminiscent of the priorities of Soviet theatre in the 1950s (Gardiner 2015).

These tendencies, however, can also be read as a reflection of the shifting preoccupations of the Cuban government, and I would argue that they resonate with the preoccupations of the Soviet avant-garde, in particular the ideas shared by *Proletkul't* and *LEF* that art should organise the psyche of the masses, that the artist was an individual within a collective and that art should be directly relevant to daily life (Maguire 1968: 153-85). For example Brecht, while aesthetically problematic in the USSR, was known for his stance against American imperialism, a fact that was highlighted in the Soviet press surrounding his receipt of the Stalin

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<sup>59</sup> It was not actually until 1967 that an award was actually given for a theatrical work — René Ariza won the prize with his piece *La vuelta a la manzana* (Anon 1967a: 6).

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Prize in 1954 (Gardiner 2014). A focus on clear revolutionary commitment, the importance of participation and collective work, and the role of aficionados can also be interpreted as symptomatic of the Cuban government's wider interest in, and affiliation with, Latin America as the Cuban government sought to move away from traditional (colonial) cultural poles. One manifestation of this increased Latin-American focus was in the popularity of *Teatro Nuevo*, embodied in Cuba by Teatro Escambray, a popular form in Latin America and particularly Colombia, that enabled collective creation and popular participation (Padura Fuentes, Kirk, and Estorino 2002: 122).

By the early 1970s it would seem that, as Damaris Puñales-Alpizar argues (2012), one particular approach to realist, socialist art — that of high socialist realism — had gained ascendancy in Cuba as culture became more increasingly regulated and seemed to move closer to the narrow interpretation of socialist realist art. However, I argue that cultural practices had become complicated because the discursive atmosphere which had characterised the 1960s had ended with the privileging of certain production styles. Despite this, the preoccupation with supporting and developing different forms of art that was both socialist, and also realist (in the sense that it related to the everyday reality of the average revolutionary Cuban) continued. A particularly bellicose expression of nationalism, which in turn gave rise to hypermacho ideas (as explored earlier) further complicated matters.

The drive to foster an art that was simultaneously socialist and realist, but not 'socialist realism' became clearer after the 1975 Primer Congreso del PCC when it was made abundantly clear that the art of the

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Cuban Revolution needed to assimilate the best traditions of national culture, appropriate criticism, develop a universal culture and use the most varied and creative forms of expression to fully reflect the world the population lived in (Anon 1975d: 25).

Ultimately, periods of liberalisation in the USSR, when, as discussed in Chapter One, some sectors of the cultural world were striving to make socialist realism into something more open and inclusive, converge with open processes of debate in Cuba. Within theatre, the adoption of models that would seem to look to the Soviet experience became more pronounced as the political course of the Revolution became clearer from 1965 onwards and moved definitively towards socialism. As Cuba's relationship with the USSR developed and the Cuban government increasingly sought independence the emphasis in culture began to shift, bringing with it different aims and forms of expression. While on the surface it may seem that the 1970s, and in particular 1971 to 1975, brought an approach that was distinctly Soviet, it actually reveals a deeper preoccupation with the development of a national socialist culture that sought to incorporate as many practitioners and styles as possible while maintaining a clear political and social goal. This is more evident in the late 1970s when Cuban and Soviet cultural authorities undertook a number of theatrical co-productions of classic revolutionary plays, seeking to relate them to Cuban reality. Underlying preoccupations of cultural programmes and productions suggest that there was a real desire for a national art that was socialist and realist, suggesting that there could have been socialist realism in Cuba, but not in the sense that the term socialist realism – denoting the Stalinist variant – is popularly understood in Cuba

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or outside of academic circles. This variant, or variants, allowed Cuba to reassert its independence and vie for leadership of the international socialist movement.

**Figures and Images**



**LUNES de revolución**

FEBRERO 8 DE 1960

No. 46

Image 40 back matter of nUmeRo eSpecial de luneS

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Image 41 the front and back matter of the first issues of *Conjunto*



**Image 42 Bust of Alexander Von Humboldt in the University of Havana**  
Copyright: the author



**Image 43 Statue of Alexander von Humboldt, by Reinhold Begas, in front of the Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin's main building.**

Copyright: the author

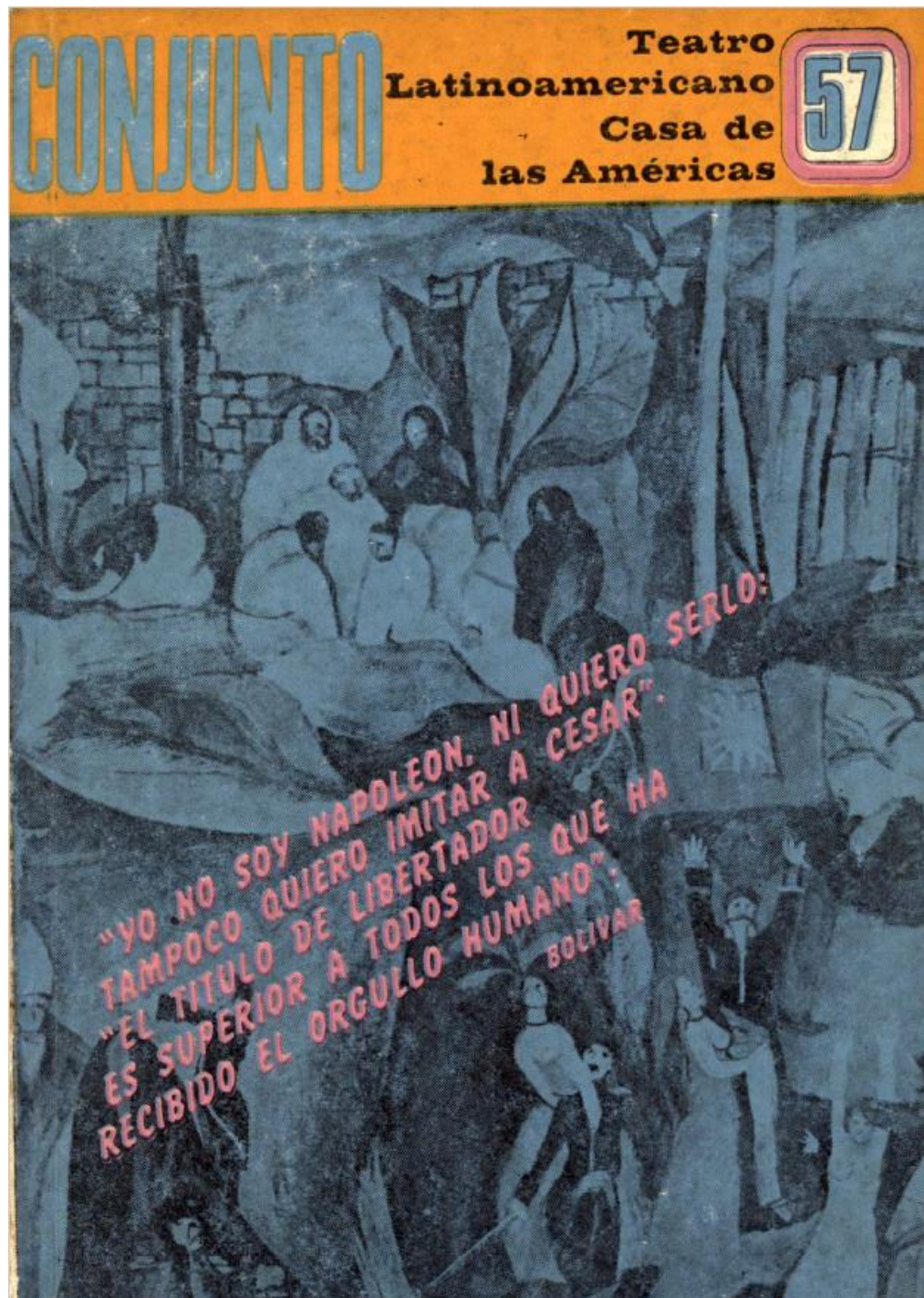


Image 44 Front matter of *Conjunto* No. 57, which reproduced *Humboldt y Bolívar*

## 5 The Plastic Arts

### **Adelante el arte: the plastic arts in Cuba**

'Una revolución puede ser semejante a otra, pero jamás igual' (Serguera 1967: 15)

The inherent discursive nature of the plastic arts meant that they were able to continually push the bounds of interpretations of cultural policy in a way that theatre could not. As a result, the plastic arts, and their new forms that emerged, occupied a special position, acting as a sounding board for the country's cultural policy both inside the Revolution through a process of cultural democratisation, and in fighting internal and external colonialism. This was because the form proved particularly adept at generating mobility in Cuban society, both within the confines of the expressly political, but also in the everyday realities (Weiss 2011b: xiv). However, as priorities changed within the Revolution, the roles assigned to the plastic arts began to diverge. This led to the tactical adoption and promotion, or rejection, of certain tendencies by different groups, leading to what could be termed multiple socialist realisms. This was, arguably, further complicated by the self-reflexive nature of the plastic arts, which saw the selective assimilation and re-elaboration of trends that were open to numerous interpretations. A particularly clear example of this can be found in the emergence of the photorealism movement, which seemed to parody both US hyperrealism and the socialist realism of the 1940s simultaneously. Ultimately the discursiveness of the plastic arts led to the development of a distinctively

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Cuban approach to art, which helped to assert Cuba's independence whilst maintaining its socialist credentials.

#### **Pre-revolutionary plastic arts**

Prior to the 1959 rebellion, the plastic arts in Cuba already had an established international reputation thanks to artists such as Amelia Peláez, Wilfredo Lam, Mariano (Rodríguez), Mario Carreño, and René Portocarrero. This reputation was built on these artists' expressive reflections, within an international framework, on their country's rich and complex history and the imprints each of its cultures had left in the national imaginary. Thus the plastic arts were always linked with independence struggles and underdevelopment but also remained connected to Western modernism (Camnitzer 2003: 4). This 'connectivity' contributed to the artistic form's global promotion as the Revolution's flagship cultural output by the revolutionary cultural authorities. The assimilation of multiple trends ensured a balance of the national and international, which made the plastic arts particularly exportable. The plastic arts in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century were thus inherently suited to the internationalist aspirations of the Cuban revolution and this quality was at the heart of the form's development and promotion. Due to the notably diverse historical influx of cultural and ideological influences in the country, artists had a wide heritage upon which to draw.

A distinctly Cuban approach to the plastic arts was consolidated during the period 1930 to 1959, in which insurrectional struggles were also evolving. Two distinct characteristics developed during this period:

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political/social commitment and a belief in the power of art. These elements had begun with the cultural magazines *Revista de Avance* and *Orígenes* and had been continued by the work of cultural societies such as *Nuestro Tiempo*. In 1927 the *Revista de Avance* sponsored an exhibition which aimed to 'place Cuban art in the context of the new European modernist trends without giving up [its] identity' (Camnitzer 2003: 103). The *Exposición de Arte Nuevo* was accompanied by a manifesto to this effect, seeking to walk the line between nationalism and internationalism (Camnitzer 2003: 103). *Orígenes*, the successor to *Revista de Avance*, also fostered a close relationship between art and literature. *Orígenes* was particularly significant for its artistic covers, a position that *Casa de las América's* would come to occupy thanks to the work of Umberto Peña. At its time of publication, *Orígenes's* cover designers were not usually artists; however, the artist Mariano who formed part of the publication's editorial team during the time Lezama Lima played a central role in the magazine was very involved in the publication's visual presentation (de Juan 2007: 139). National and international artists from across the generations contributed to the magazine's covers, and art from the group became notably more Latin Americanist (Camnitzer 2003: 107).

Thus from an early stage the plastic arts were imbued with a strong sense of moral duty and a belief in their transformative abilities. The form's commitment to, and engagement with, politics and the various trends that had left their imprint on the cultural imaginary, contributed to a wide range of aesthetic styles and personal understandings of the 'common good'. As already seen in Chapters Two, Three and Four, these different stances generally sat neatly within the loose framework of ideas provided by the

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Revolution in seminal speeches and congresses which demarcated the (outer) boundaries within cultural policy.

By 1959, artistic education had been well established in Cuba for over a century. The Escuela de San Alejandro, which followed the French-Italian school of teaching (focusing on realism and technical mastery), was created in 1817, receiving official recognition the following year (de Juan 1968: 65). The French painter Juan Bautista Vermay, who had decorated the interior of the Temple in Habana Vieja, was the founder (de Juan 1968: 48). In her book *Introducción a Cuba, las artes plasticas*, de Juan stressed that unlike other foreign artists in Cuba, Vermay adapted to the country's mixed atmosphere, but that neither he nor the subsequent directors of the Escuela 'supieron apresar el ambiente de cubanidad, ingenuo si se quiere, que traslucían los grabadores y pintores populares' (de Juan 1968: 64). The Escuela offered classes principally in drawing, due to the lack of appropriate materials for other techniques. The first Cuban director, Alejandro Melero, took up the role in 1878 but kept the curriculum focussed on the French school, which concentrated on historical paintings and drawings. Melero did introduce access for female students (Camnitzer 2003: 153), thereby helping to break down gendered perceptions of artists. Students of the Escuela included Wilfredo Lam, Amelia Peláez and René Portocarrero.

In spite of the Escuela's ground-breaking role in the establishment of the plastic arts in Cuba, not all students felt that the tuition allowed them sufficient means of self-expression. Camnitzer comments that the Escuela principally educated through a 'negative process', causing students who were uninspired by the methods or focusses of the school to seek

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alternative, more experimental, spaces, that reflected the creativity, internationalism, and experimentation of the post-war Paris School. One such institution was the Asociación de Pintores y Escultores, founded in 1915 (Camnitzer 2003: 153). Other attempts included following the Mexican Revolution's models, and, on the initiative of the Spanish painter Gabriel García Maroto, creating open-air schools in rural Cuba (Camnitzer 2003: 154).<sup>60</sup> In 1930 the Asociación de Pintores y Escultores was merged with the Club Cubano de Bellas Artes to form the Círculo de Bellas Artes. The Círculo was divided into sections: literature, painting, music, sculpture and architecture, with later additions of graphic arts (1935), sumptuary art (metalwork), scenic arts (both 1945) and printmaking (1954). The Círculo held regular events with the aim of promoting the development of the plastic arts, and these events included the *Salón Anual de Bellas Artes*. Concurrently, the Escuela Libre de Artes Plásticas, which later became the Estudio Libre, was created by Eduardo Abela in 1936. The Estudio Libre remained operational until 1967, under the new name of the Taller de Artes Plásticas Camilo Cienfuegos (Anon 1980a: 215). The Estudio Libre did not charge for tuition and was inundated with applications. Moreover, as San Alejandro forbade its staff from participating in the events of the new institution, Abela used young artists who worked outside of San Alejandro, such as Portocarrero and Mariano Rodríguez as a guiding faculty (Camnitzer 2003: 155). A more subtle and lasting result of this early

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<sup>60</sup> However, Camnitzer also points out that *Orígenes* regionalism (which involved the search for an authentic American expression rather than the adoption of European abstractionism and consequently bridged the gap between realism and abstractionism) acted as an alternative to the influence of Mexican muralism (2003: 107).

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promotion of newer artists was the demonstration of the power and value of youth through the popularity and success of the project.

Pogolotti considers that the divisions between the artistic establishment and the newcomers went far deeper than the transformation, under the influence of the Paris School, of the Cuban artistic idiom. Instead, she suggests that the transformation of artistic language and political struggle were elements in the wider project to modernise Cuban society. The intelligentsia were united in the design of Cuban nationhood and, reform of the plastic arts aside, the vanguard never had any explicit programme (Pogolotti 1997: 171-72). This unity, even if superficial, set the plastic arts aside from other modes of artistic expression, and Kaptcia notes that, unlike literature, in the fine arts the ‘*vanguardismo*, political commitment and the search for *lo Cubano* fused easily, continuing patterns evident from the 1920s’ (2005: 99-100). The generation that emerged in the 1920s, which began to demonstrate the trends Kaptcia mentions, including names such as Víctor Manuel, Carlos Enríquez and Eduardo Abela, belonged to the Asociación de Pintores y Escultores and was staunchly defended by the *Revista de Avance*. De Juan (2007: 132-33) considers that this generation posited a new way of seeing Cuba, of accurately reflecting Cuban life, rejected the art of the Academy and focussed on assimilating contemporary trends. The following generation, that of the 1930s, continued the search for national values but did so in a more private manner, in part due to the political circumstances of the time (de Juan 2007: 134). On the global stage, the French and US Schools of art had begun the internationalisation of informalism (*art informel*), and this had been further bolstered by the high

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prices that art works could command in the post-WW2 market (de Juan 2007: 132). New York had become the centre of the art trade and was also a hotbed of cultural activism. Moreover, Latin American artists, lacking national art scenes, were attracted to New York and the opportunities to sell their work presented by US organisations, such as Pan-American Union, the agency of the Organisation of American States (de Juan 2007: 132). Once Batista gained power in the 1952 coup, the search for traditional, national elements lost its significance, and abstractionism became a way to either resist or opt out of the Batista regime (de Juan 2007: 134-35).

Thus, by the 1950s, art had become clearly politicised and artists had played an active role in political resistance in Cuba. A group that was of particular cultural and political importance during this period was *Nuestro Tiempo*. The society was initially formed, without a clearly defined political aim, by musicians from the Amadeo Roldán (Municipal) Conservatory. *Nuestro Tiempo* swiftly attracted attention from other culturally engaged individuals from the musical world, and it was decided by its founders that it should become a society that was concerned with the diffusion of art that was more Cuban (*del pueblo*) — a society with a mass involvement but within an element of exclusivity, based on quality and talent (Gramatges 2002: 282). Although the group was created in 1951, its president, Harold Gramatges, considered the real beginning of the group to be the exhibition it held of the work of twenty contemporary Cuban artists in the society's headquarters, in Calle Reina 314 — previously the base of the PSP-run Radio Emisora 1010 (Gramatges 2002: 286). *Nuestro Tiempo* was not radical; it was interested in quality, was

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particularly committed to plastic arts and film, was pro-independence, anti-imperialist, anti-cosmopolitanist, and universalist (Hernández Otero 2002: 286; Gordon-Nesbitt 2015: 42). The Cuban artistic avant-garde was close to the political avant-garde, the two linked by their rejection of established values and their rebellion against situations they found intolerable (de Juan 2007: 133). Thus, some members of the society were also members of the PSP such as Nicolás Guillén, Mirta Aguirre, Carlos Rafael Rodríguez, and José Antonio Portuondo.<sup>61</sup> PSP members in charge of ideology and cultural questions showed particular interest in the society and it was Luis Más Martín, the director of Radio Rebelde, who suggested to the society that they should undertake all their activities with a clearly defined political purpose (Gramatges 2002: 282). In 1953 *Nuestro Tiempo* was restructured and filmmakers took a prominent role; from the end of that year, the link with the PSP deepened. The PSP's Comisión del Trabajo Intelectual moved to occupy a building on Calle 23, and the corner of four in Vedado, where it also established a permanent art gallery in which works could be exhibited and sold (Gramatges 2002: 294). De Juan also considers 1953 to be a milestone year for two reasons. First, it 'marked the opening of a cycle of impoverishment of Cuban art' (de Juan 2007: 138) secondly, it was the 'only instance of a coming together of artists in order to confront an official imposition' (de Juan 2007: 138). This coming together began with the first exhibition of a group known as *Los Once*. De Juan (2007: 137) argues that the group's name was abstractly symbolic as there were rarely eleven participants in their exhibitions.

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<sup>61</sup> Members of the society also had close links to other people such as Jorge Mañach, Francisco Ichaso, Gastón Baquero, with whom they then fell out due to ideological differences and disagreements about the direction of the society's work (Gramatges 1989: 387).

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The search for *lo cubano* had thus not ended but had begun to move in a different direction, and Los Once ‘rejected *tropicalismo* in favour of a more-internationalised abstraction’ (Weiss 2011b: 3-4). Los Once’s style has been classified as generation-specific and therefore reflective of the generational shift occurring at this time — the group had all been born around 1930, coinciding with the beginning of abstractionism. Their work was characterised by the production of pieces that had no reference to the surrounding world, i.e. contemporary Cuban reality — and its artists actively rejected government initiatives aimed at producing an official culture (de Juan 1968: 93).

Throughout the 1950s the visual and plastic arts continued to be sites of resistance and dissidence. In 1954 Los Once organised an Anti-Biennale in protest against the promotion of the Franco-sponsored Spanish-American Art Biennale, which was to be held in the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes (MNBA) to project art as an activity that the Batista administration promoted and fostered. Sculptors, painters and ceramicists participated in the Anti-Biennale, actively boycotting the official Biennale and organising an activity to run in parallel (de Juan 2007: 135-36). The Anti-Biennale was held in January 1954, in the cities of Havana, Santiago de Cuba and Camagüey. It ended in the Primer Festival de Arte Cubano Contemporáneo, which had been organised by the Federación Estudiantil Universitaria de La Habana. De Juan notes that the aesthetic rebelliousness of the event was limited to new ways of seeing, rather than the incorporation of themes that directly addressed the national crisis (de Juan 2007: 136-37). Los Once then boycotted an event held in Venezuela under the authoritarian Pérez Jiménez regime, and finally dissolved itself

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in 1955, hoping to avoid retaliation from the Batista administration. In 1957, they resurrected the group and protested against Batista and his planned 'Salón Nacional'.

Aesthetically, by 1959 the visual and plastic arts in Cuba had a well-established range of surrealist, expressionist, abstract and figurative styles (de Juan 1968: 94-95). As discussed, they also had a clear tradition of political engagement and activism, coupled with national and international aspirations. The groups, societies and movements of the 1920s through to the 1950s prefigured many of the Revolution's subsequent aims and values: the democratisation of culture (Anon 1989), education of the population to create an informed audience (Linares et al. 1989), development of a national culture and identity (Hernández Otero 2002), art and culture's engagement with society, and the creative power and value of youth.

### **Making the difficulties a virtue**

After 1959 the relationship between artists and public fundamentally changed. Traditional elitist concepts of art and artists were dismantled and culture occupied a central role in the rebuilding of the nation. The plastic arts, and their new forms of expression that emerged within the Revolution, would prove consistently able to respond to and grow with the difficulties faced by revolutionary Cuba. ICAIC and Casa became important promoters of the plastic arts and sites of artistic innovation. Under their auspices established forms of artistic expression thrived and new forms of production emerged, such as graphic design and particularly ICAIC's

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specific approach towards the film poster, which dismantled the traditions of the Hollywood film poster (Chanan 1985: 133). These two institutions championed cultural dialogue with other countries and also within Cuba (de Juan 2011: 197). Indeed, UNEAC's Artes Plásticas section was under the leadership of Mariano Rodríguez (de Juan 2011: 197) until 1963 when he went to work at Casa de las Américas, becoming vice-president of the institution in 1970. However, progress in the plastic arts was not limited solely to Casa and ICAIC. The MNBA also experienced a renaissance, and many exhibition galleries — temporary and permanent — were established in the capital and across the country (de Juan 2011: 197).

During this early revolutionary period, the wider population became increasingly involved in culture. This was done through the establishment of initiatives such as the *aficionado* movement and the *instructores de arte* movement, along with movements related to specific artistic forms, such as the mobile cinema initiative or the *escuela de brigadistas de artes plásticas*. Culture, and the plastic arts in particular, was rapidly mobilised for international dissemination. On 20 May 1962 an exhibition of twenty-four Cuban painters (and members of UNEAC), organized by Pogolotti, Servando Cabrera Moreno and Raúl Oliva, opened in Prague. It then moved on to seven other socialist countries, 'in accordance with cultural agreements signed between the CNC and the Ministries of Culture of the respective countries' (Pogolotti 1962: 16).<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Painters included: Angel Acosta León, Adigio Benítez, Servando Cabrera Moreno, Hugo Consuegra, Salvador Corratgé, Sandú Darié, Antonia Eiriz, Carmelo González, Fayad Jamis, Guido Llinás, Raúl Martínez, Luis Martínez Pedro, Raúl Milián, José Mijares, Pedro de Oraá, Amelia Peláez, Umberto Peña, René Portocarrero, Mariano Rodríguez, Loló Soldevilla, Juan Tapia Ruano, Antonio Vidal, and Orlando Yanes (Pogolotti 1962: 16).

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Servando Cabrera Moreno was quickly hailed as an artist who had excelled in responding to the Revolution and reflecting the new reality of the country.<sup>63</sup> His cycle of *campesinos y milicianos* attracted particular praise for the 'epic conception' given to the way the figures were sculpted and the mural-style nature of the compositions (Catá 1962: 165). In 1962 the CNC held an exhibition of Cabrera Moreno's work in the Palacio de Bellas Artes. *Unión* described the exhibition as dealing with the themes of the Revolution and celebrated Cabrera Moreno's high-quality contribution to Cuban art, citing the national character present in his work that was helping to build the new Cuba (de la Torriente 1962: 150). In the same issue of *Unión* Edmundo Desnoes reflected on the importance and value of the plastic arts in raising consciousness through ensuring a healthy, questioning relationship with reality (Desnoes 1962: 152).

At the same time as established Cuban plastic artists were being promoted abroad and at home, the art education system was being revised in 1962 (and would be again in 1974). Construction of the flagship ENA began in the appropriated site of the former elite country club, Cubanacán, in a very public display of the revolutionary government's commitment to the democratisation of culture. Work began on the school in 1962, and classes started immediately, even before the renovations were complete. However, the school, in a still incomplete state, was not formally inaugurated until 1965 on the symbolic date of 26 July. By then the political climate in Cuba, and the public view of art, had begun to change (Loomis 1999: 35). Loomis, in his history of this ambitious project,

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<sup>63</sup> De Juan hails Servando Cabrera Moreno as the first artist demonstrating this shift, but that it is also visible in the works of Adigio Benítez and Orlando Yanes (de Juan: 95-96).

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argues that the purpose of Cubanacán was to train artists from Latin America and the Third World in order to give socialism its aesthetic representation, and that its architecture was to be as innovative as the idea behind the school (Loomis 1999: 19-20). Loomis views the changing attitude towards the ENA as analogous to the period of Soviet history when society began to move away from the architectural and cultural experimentation of the first years of Soviet power to the repression of the avant-garde under Stalin. He locates this tendency within the wider international move towards industrialised systems (such as prefabricated housing systems) which also implied a criticism of traditional systems (Loomis 1999: 118). Loomis also suggests that the ENA's architectural homage to Cuba's African roots — arguably most evident in Ricardo Porro's design — was another significant reason for their criticism, reflective of the contradictory cultural and political policy of the Cuban Revolution (Loomis 1999: 120-21). Porro based his design for the School of Plastic Arts — the most visible of all the schools — on a "typical" African village and addressed issues of gender by combining elements of Spanish patriarchal and African matriarchal cultural expressions (Image 45-46). He incorporated domed cupolas, using a Catalan vault technique that allowed architects and builders to overcome the limitations placed on them by the US embargo and take advantage of the naturally occurring terracotta. A journey from the building's entrance led to a main plaza in which a papaya-shaped fountain, a fruit with a strong female sexual connotation in Cuba, is fed by drains resembling limp phalluses (Loomis 1999: 56-69).

Before the ENA was founded, prominent Cuban artists had tended to be absent from the classrooms, limiting their influence on the younger,

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emerging generations. However, this changed as the ENA tried to bring practices from Abela's Estudio Libre and the Bauhaus into the classroom, principally focussed on content and the creation of a Marxist-Leninist frame of reference (Camnitzer 2003: 156). The ENA initially taught ballet, music, drama, and the plastic arts. Three years later, modern and folk dance were also added to the curriculum (Puñales-Alpízar 2012: 56). Puñales-Alpízar has established that the ENA, and later the ISA, benefited from significant support and encouragement from the USSR, and that in these educational establishments a new aesthetic was developed in which the social and didactic values of art prevailed. This, she argues, was partially due to the fact that there were a number of active Soviet co-workers and specialists in these institutions (Puñales-Alpízar 2012: 56).

As construction continued apace on Cuba's emblematic architectural and educational project, Cuba hosted the Congress of the International Union of Architects (de Juan 2011: 197), with the theme of 'Architecture in Underdeveloped Countries' (UIA 2016). For the Congress, the Pabellón Cuba, situated on La Rampa (the main street that leads down from Copelia to the Malecón in the Vedado area of Havana) was built and the pavements of this area were repaired. The pavement on La Rampa showcased slabs that had been designed by some of the most important Cuban artists that were active at the time, including Wilfredo Lam, Amelia Peláez, Mariano, Portocarrero, Luis Martínez Pedro, and Sandú Darié (de Juan 2011: 197). Here the plastic arts showed some of the elements that would become so sought after in the 1970s: the crossover of art and design, the integration of art with production, and previously elite art forms being brought into the public space.

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In the midst of the debates surrounding the role of art, its practitioners, and the inappropriateness of approaches such as socialist realism that characterised the 1960s, a landmark exhibition was held. The exhibition, *expresionismo abstracto*, included the works of artists such as Eiriz, Rafael Blanco, Mayito, Francisco Antigua, Agustín Cardenas and Tomás Oliva (de Juan 1968: 94). The exhibition was held between 11 January and 3 February 1963 in the Galería Habana and is considered to have marked the beginning of a new phase in Cuban art that incorporated elements such as pop (EnCaribe 2016). As the Cuban abstractionism period drew to a close, there were two important developments. First, the plastic arts became a continental-wide meeting point: in 1964 Casa held the Primer Encuentro de Grabado Latinoamericano, an event that ran annually until 1971 when it was replaced by the Encuentro de Plástica Latinoamerica (de Juan 2011: 197). Second, the CNC became autonomous from the MINED: its authority was advanced, giving it control over the organisation, coordination and direction of cultural activities (Kapcia 2005: 134).

Already by 1965, a clear revolutionary art form had begun to emerge within the Revolution: graphic design. Its vehicle of choice was the poster.<sup>64</sup> This art form was particularly supported due to the poster's rapid ability to respond (de Juan 1968: 99-100). De Juan hails the posters, produced in the first half of the 1960s, which used geometrical elements and short texts, and were generally limited to two colours as important developments in Cuban graphic design. In her opinion they acted as

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<sup>64</sup> Raúl Martínez, Umberto Peña, Tony Evora, Frémez (José Gómez Fresquet), Rostgaard, Korda, Mayito and Ernesto Fernández are all artists who stood out in the early years of the Revolution for their work in the area of the industrial arts (de Juan 1968: 99-100).

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'antiseptic' and paved the way for new innovation and experimentation, converting the challenges posted by lack of resources and equipment into design virtues, such as the (Bauhaus-esque) valuing of white spaces. De Juan also considers that the austerity of the 1960s helped to force artists to rethink images and prevented quick recourse to stereotyped images (de Juan 2007: 155-56). In particular Umberto Peña's work at Casa from 1963 (Camnitzer 2003: 82), and the work of ICAIC which eschewed the use of advertising images that were imported with the film, are both hailed as fundamental in the development of Cuban graphics and of its international reputation (de Juan 2011: 206-07).

The rise of Cuban graphic design and poster art demonstrated another trait that became increasingly valued in Cuban revolutionary culture: assimilation and re-elaboration. Cuban artists assimilated international trends — the personal styles of American poster-makers, such as Saul Bass and Milton Glazer, the style of the 1960s' Czech film posters by Josef Flejar and Zdenek Chotenovsky, the *images d'Epinal*, the neo-Art Nouveau style popularised by the Fillmore and Avalon posters of the mid-1960s, the pop art of Andy Warhol, Roy Lichtenstein, and Tom Wesselman, re-elaborated into a distinctly Cuban setting (Sontag 1970: xv). Polish poster art in particular was an enduring influence on Cuban poster art, demonstrating that political work did not have to be bullish and devoid of beauty (Camnitzer 2003: 109). Moreover, the poster artists' perpetuation of the theatrical poster (Sontag 1970: xiv) demonstrated another desirable characteristic — interdisciplinarity.

Graphic design and poster art were in some ways a particularly privileged mode of artistic expression in that they did not suffer from the

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same limitations as other, more established, forms, such as literature, because they had no serious precedent in Cuba. They were also a mode of expression inherently suited to the government's focus on taking art to a wider audience because, as Sontag argues, 'good posters cannot be an object of consumption by an elite [...] the space within which the genuine poster is shown is not elitist, but a public — communal — space' (Sontag 1970: xv). The needs of the Revolution could also be easily integrated into artists' identities and the medium provided an excellent platform on which to bring together two opposing views of art: that of art as an individual practice and that of art as a politically or ethically engaged service (Sontag 1970: xv - xvi). The range of styles among leading poster artists and with their individual bodies of work reflected Cuba's rich cultural history whilst echoing the raging contemporary cultural debates and the cultural practitioners' rejection of a single unitary style. Given that problems of aesthetics were considered to be problems of politics (Garaudy 1965: 100), the Cuban Revolution's central tenet of internationalism takes on a new significance within the plastic arts. The continual rejection of cultural chauvinism and of the appropriation of Cuba's cultural heritage in the drive for internationalism was 'Cuba's indigenous path to cultural revolution' (Sontag 1970: xix). This approach was particularly useful for an inherently cannibalistic medium such as graphic design, which easily fed off other cultures, assimilated them and produced something new and 'Cuban'. Finally, posters were an early example of the crossover of high and popular art; they created a system of mutual feedback with popular art which was subsequently used by 'high culture' — epitomised by the works

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of Raúl Martínez, Alberto Jorge Carol and Juan García Miló's work in Teatro Escambray, and Leandro Soto (Camnitzer 2003: 112).

OSPAAAL reaffirmed Cuban art's politically engaged nature and provided one of the most public forums within which to exhibit Cuban poster art. The organisation was founded in January 1966 during the midst of the Sino-Soviet split. Posters produced for the event spoke of the various liberation struggles that were taking place in the underdeveloped regions of Asia, Africa, and Latin America. The posters, which were in a smaller format so that they could be folded into the associated publication *tricontinental* were of high quality and deeply original. They combined 'dissimilar elements from Third World cultures, particularly those with the most authentic indigenous traditions', and re-contextualised symbolic images (Dopico 2009: 290). The plastic arts' connection to Latin America, and the symbolic linking of the M-26-7 to artistic promotion and diversity of expression, continued with the 1966 Moncada celebrations. The students from the ENA, under the direction of Chilean abstract painter Roberto Matta, attempted a group mural in Casa (de Juan 1968: 97). With the founding of the PCC in 1965, there was a move towards an increasingly systematic promotion of culture and cultural education. Several educational events were held to improve the country's cultural offerings. These included a round-table on the teaching of plastic arts (8-11 September 1966) (Anon 1966d), the first national congress of the *instructores de arte* (July 1967) (Rassi 1967a, 1967c, 1967b), national plans for students' cultural education, and the introduction of competitions such as the biannual Salón Nacional de Dibujo (Anon 1969a), and later the complementary Salón Nacional de Carteles 26 de Julio (Anon 1972b).

### **An educated struggle**

From the mid-1960s, a more systematic diffusion of culture from Cuba's socialist allies began to be developed, and from the second issue of 1966 *Unión* began introducing its readers to contemporary literature from 'brother socialist countries' (Anon 1966e: 5). As part of this organisation and 'harnessing' of the power of culture, new cultural organs also began to proliferate to fill perceived needs. These newer publications were focussed on transforming the normally passive reader into a social and historical subject and active participant in the nation's cultural construction. In 1966 *Caimán Barbudo* was founded, initially as a monthly cultural supplement to *Juventud Rebelde*, the publication of the Unión de Jovenes Comunistas. *Caimán Barbudo* was very politically committed and believed in the championing of high quality art. From the outset *Caimán* played an important role in informing its readership about the plastic arts through interview, criticism, commentaries and reviews (Montero Méndez 2006: 16). The journal argued that genuine art was never counterrevolutionary (Anon 1966b: 1). In explaining its position, the editors pledged the journal's commitment to the development of an authentic culture for the Revolution and its fight against underdevelopment (Anon 1966b: 1-2). It also considered knowledge of previous cultures. The opening issue addressed Cuba's situation as an underdeveloped country and linked its fight for development to the development of an authentic national culture (Aloma et

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al. 1966). *RC*, the precursor to *Revolución y Cultura*,<sup>65</sup> was founded the year after *Caimán Barbudo*. *RC* sought to build links between the artist and the *conjunto* from which they had historically been removed, and was international in its approach.

[RyC] aspira a analizar e informar sobre los problemas de nuestro tiempo y esclarecer qué papel desempeña el intelectual en esta confrontación. Al mismo tiempo desea ser un vehículo de las actuales tendencias del arte y la literatura dentro y fuera de nuestro país. Creemos, con Martí, que luchar por la cultura es, en primeralugar, luchar por la liberación de la nación. Pero no creemos que con la liberación de la nación se detiene la lucha y sabemos que el debate ideológico debe mantenerse abierto a la etapa de conquistada soberanía para superar los lastres dejados por la ideología colonial. Esta revista aspira también a ser un medio para esos fines (Rodríguez 1967: 5)

Both *RC* and *Caimán Barbudo* (*Caimán*) were more overtly militant than existing cultural magazines. *Caimán* rejected cultural production that did not deal with ‘social themes’, that avoided conflicts, and that hid behind words imbued with ‘una metafísica de segunda mano’ (Aloma et al. 1966). *RC* took this a step further and actively rejected ‘decorative’ typography. *RC* paid less attention to typography because the board — Otero in particular — felt that if the magazine continued the path of ‘sensualidad

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<sup>65</sup> The first issue of *RC* referred to itself as *Revolución y Cultura* but was subsequently known only as *RC*. After the entire editorial board resigned in protest the magazine was in essence reformed as the magazine which continues to exist today as *Revolución y Cultura*.

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visual', they would fall into the trap of formalism, thereby neglecting the real product of the magazine (Otero 1967: 95). In an interview about *RC*, Otero unequivocally linked the magazine to armed struggle, describing it as a combative space 'ésta es una revista para pelear, no para recrearse hojeándola [...] Es una revista para romper castillos mentales (Otero 1967: 95).

Otero positioned *RC* apart from established magazines such as: *Unión*, which was focussed on artistic-literary problems; *Casa*, which was focussed on the socio-economic and political problems of Latin America; *Gaceta*, which as an official organ of UNEAC had to reflect the range of opinions of its members. Otero also set *RC* apart from *Caimán*, which he claimed had a unified generational approach, but, *Caimán*, like the other magazines paid very little attention to works which had already been published abroad. *RC* was designed to fill the gaps that was left by these other magazines. Otero considered that this meant that *Pensamiento Crítico* was therefore *RC*'s closest competitor. It was planned that, like *Pensamiento Crítico*, *RC* would publish work that focussed on socio-economics and politics. However, *RC* hoped to distinguish itself by publishing the most representative texts of the key currents of contemporary thinking in art, literature, economics, and politics. Initially issued as a monthly or bimonthly publication, it was planned that it would increase its frequency. Finally, *RC* demonstrated the closer linking of art with industry and education as Otero emphasised that the magazine was not just for writers and artists but also for technicians and teachers in the fields that would be discussed (Otero 1967: 94-95). In 1972 *RC* became *Revolución y Cultura*, the official organ of the CNC. As with its previous

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iterations (*Pueblo y Cultura*, RC) *Revolución y Cultura* constantly engaged with the official cultural policy, and dedicated a substantial amount of space to the plastic arts.

RC's stridently combative tone fitted with the increasingly radicalised atmosphere and the ongoing, mounting sense that Cuba was under siege. The cultural arena's response to this was twofold. First, the focus turned increasingly inwards to the rediscovery of national forms and traditions. Second, existing cultural tropes and poles began to be questioned in the search for new centres of non-alignment. The remaining structures that reflected the systems of artistic production under capitalism were abolished and it was decided by the government that the Revolution should provide for artists rather than leave them to live off the proceeds of their work. Royalties for authors were abolished in 1967, ensuring that authors had to be employed by, and thus dependent upon, the state (Casal 1971, 457). Cultural practitioners were paid to work within the existing cultural apparatus, educational systems, media and the diplomatic services and often the more 'problematic' cultural figures found themselves posted abroad (Kumaraswami and Kapcia 2012: 26).

The plastic arts were at the forefront of the shift in cultural orientation, and its international projection. The 1967 M-26-7 celebrations were centred on the visit of the *Salón de Mayo* [Salon du Mai]. The Salón had begun in 1944 and had its roots in opposition to Nazi fascism and the Nazi regime's rejection of abstract art. The 1967 visit involved 150 artists and intellectuals producing, or reporting on, cultural work based around the idea of collectiveness. Cuba was the first country in Latin America to host the event, which had previously been held in Sweden, Switzerland,

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Yugoslavia and Japan (Schütz 2009: 276). The event was held on La Rampa in July, having been transferred, on the initiative of Lam, from Paris to Havana (de Juan 2011: 198). There was widespread interest in the Cuban Revolution in France, in part due to the French anti-Stalinist sentiment and subsequent search for a new socialist model, but also in part due to the positive reports of the Revolution from intellectuals, including Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir (Schütz 2009: 276). A significant number of French and international critics and artists had accompanied the works to the city.

In a move that emphasised the international, interdisciplinary nature of the plastic arts, a collective art work, *Cuba colectiva*, was planned. The piece was a large collective mural, in the shape of a spiral drawn by Eduardo Arroyo and Gilles Aillaud which divided the 55m<sup>2</sup> canvas into equal sections and all participating artists were allocated a space by lot. There were two exceptions: the centre was reserved for Lam and lot number twenty-six was reserved for Fidel. Lisandro Otero's square read 'La Revolución es la creatividad de todos, la responsabilidad de todos' (Schütz 2009: 277). Lam was in charge of the central segment of the spiral and designed the rhomboid shapes that were reminiscent of the *íremes* masked dancer who carries out specific functions during the liturgy of Afro-Cuban religions (de Juan 2011: 198).

The delegates were aided and entertained in their efforts by dancers from the Tropicana cabaret, popular musicians and the general public. Close to dawn the finished mural was taken to the nearby Pabellón Cuba, where it was exhibited together with the works of the *Salón de Mayo* (de Juan 2011: 198-99). The exhibition was also a chance to celebrate the

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prowess of the emergent young Cuban painters (particularly those from Cubanacán), who were lauded for their ability to hold their own, 'hombro con hombro, con maestros de reconocida fama internacional' (Vidal 1968). At the end of the *Salón de Mayo*, the exhibition went to the Museo Bacardí in Santiago de Cuba (Schütz 2009: 276). In his analysis of the event, Schütz points out that all significant currents of contemporary art were represented: classic modernism, surrealism, new figuration, lettrism, situationists such as the COBRA group, neo-realists, pop art, op art, and action painting. Socialist realism was the only contemporary style not represented (Schütz 2009: 279).

The event, and particularly the 'total art' element of the collective mural, profoundly affected all participants (Schütz 2009: 279), and was a shining example to the international community of the value of culture in revolutionary Cuba. Gallardo Saborido considers that the *Salón de Mayo* and Congreso Cultural the following year clearly corresponded to the revolutionary government's propagandistic interests. The events contributed to Cuba's prestige among the New Left at a time when Cuban-Soviet relations were on rocky ground (2009: 148). They were also fundamental in articulating the active participation of the cultural sector in the development, and defence of the nation and its cultural expression.

### **Changing roles, changing institutions**

The mounting sense of siege that came to characterise the late 1960s and early 1970s was partially reflected in the drive to create greater organisational coherence. This was manifested by a focus on organisation

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at an institutional level, to allow greater contribution to the Revolution, and the search for a national identity and its constituent parts. Within these new and existing institutions, sub-groups within institutions continued to propagate, in what Kumaraswami and Kapcia see as a response to the individual and collective need for group identity. Such proliferation was aided by the formal institutional spaces that allowed individuals to develop their own way of contributing to the Revolution (2012: 101). The 1968 Congreso Cultural de La Habana further developed ideas on the ways in which the artist and intellectual could contribute to the Cuban Revolution and other liberation movements. It also further married the idea of culture and national defence, and, due to the split in thinking between European Marxists and Latin American Marxists that became apparent at the Congress, added further impetus to culture's development. Shortly after the Congreso Cultural, the Revolutionary Offensive was launched on 13 March. The Offensive was part of the government's attempts to achieve economic independence, which culminated in the 1970 *zafra*. It involved the nationalisation of remaining non-agricultural enterprises, giving rise to a period of 'consolidation and radicalisation' of the Cuban Revolution (Anon 1968d).

The Offensive marked a move away from material to moral incentives, reminiscent of approaches adopted in 1917 by the Bolsheviks, and sharing some features with the Chinese Great Leap Forward, including centralisation (Mesa-Lago 1969). Carmelo Mesa Lago sees the Offensive as indicative of the desire to achieve rapid development and as an acceleration of the process that began when the leadership aligned itself with more orthodox Marxism-Leninism (Mesa-Lago 1969: 22-24). In

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the arts, the Revolutionary Offensive helped to consolidate Cuba's increasing international renown and build closer links between popular culture and 'revolutionary' culture.

Artistic innovation and diversity continued to be linked to the M-26-7 celebrations, an organisational feat that also served to confirm art's inherently revolutionary capacity. For the 1968 celebrations, one interdisciplinary team worked to organise the Third World Exhibition at the Pabellón Cuba, while another team of designers, sculptors, musicians and lighting technicians showcased artworks that dealt with the 'hundred years of struggle' (alluding to the ongoing fight for independence since the Ten Year's War in 1868) along the pavement between the Pabellón Cuba and Plaza de la Revolución in Havana. At the Plaza large-scale designs provided the backdrops to music and lighting effects. Santa Clara's Revolution Square hosted another event that involved numerous artistic disciplines, taking place near the armoured train captured by Che in the fight against Batista (de Juan 2011: 198). Culture's militant status was cemented with the beginning of the FAR's annual competitions in literature and the plastic arts.

The Primer Encuentro Nacional de Escritores y Artistas Plásticos in the wake of Che's death confirmed culture's status as a form of social production, and as a defensive weapon (Isidron del Valle 1968). As the international community began to fear the rise of high Stalinist socialist realism in Cuba in the wake of the controversy surrounding the treatment of Padilla and Arrufat, a new generation of Cuban artists was beginning to emerge. The first cohort of students graduated from the ENA on 2 December 1968, which also happened to be the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the

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landing of the yacht Granma.<sup>66</sup> At the ceremony, the Minister of Education, José Llanusa Gobel, described the students as the individuals who would go out and begin a revolution in the arts (Anon 1968c). He also stressed the link between culture and society, asserting that the Revolution's defining characteristic was to fight against old attitudes. Therefore the graduates had the task to make this a reality within culture, and remedy the "difficult" label that the older generation had assigned to culture. Llanusa Gobel also took the opportunity to reiterate that artistic freedom within the Revolution and that all forms of art were welcome, on the condition that they contributed to cultural development:

Nuestra Revolución define una línea. No se discute sobre forma de expresión estética, sino de cómo sirve el arte al pueblo, a su felicidad, a su desarrollo cultural. Para esto hay toda la libertad (Anon 1968c).

1968 was a turning point for Cuba: relations with the USSR were strained, the European left had failed to appreciate Cuba's exceptionalism, the Latin American Communist Parties were beginning to distance themselves from the Revolution, Cuba's organic revolutionary model had failed, and geopolitical pressures were increasingly hostile. By the beginning of 1969 a period of reassessment had begun which was centred on different ideas of modernity and on the nature of becoming a modern nation. This was almost by definition a contradictory period: modernity often implies simultaneously an inward and outward looking discourse. Weiss considers

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<sup>66</sup> 78 students in total, twenty seven in the plastic arts, twenty eight in the dramatic arts, twenty one in ballet, and two in music (Anon 1968c).

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that the anti-imperialism and national cultural identification of the 1970s were insular, while the internationalist position was outward-looking but also chauvinist. The inward gaze acted as a type of quarantine while the outward focus helped to assert Cuba as a leader of the periphery — a concrete position rather than a nebulous ‘other’ (Weiss 2011b: 4). The period can also be read in terms of García Canclini’s four projects of modernity: emancipation, expansion, renovation, and democratisation (García Canclini 1995: 265). Each of these projects had internal tensions as well as contradictions in relation to the other projects. By the late 1970s (as alluded to by Hart in the closing speech of the Segundo Congreso de la UNEAC), the project of emancipation was widely considered to have been completed. However, in the early and mid-1970s this project was still in full swing, complete with the discrepancies between modernism and modernity. This process — including that of the *quinquenio gris* — demonstrates what García Canclini terms ‘hybridity’ and ‘hybridisation’: strategies that enable adoption, assimilation and re-elaboration, thereby mitigating the tensions between the modern, the traditional, the internal, and the external, and that separates culture from the socio-economic (García Canclini 1995: 1-11).

The late 1960s and early 1970s were thus both national and international. Both of these currents had always been present in the cultural imaginary, and had been expressed in the government’s ten-point plan in 1961, the 1940 constitution, and the ideas of José Martí. Each of these areas of focus fed off the others. Without a strong national identity Cuba could not forcefully articulate its leadership of the international anti-imperialist movement, and yet internationalism formed the core of Cuba’s

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emergent national identity. The contradictions that are inherent in debates about modernity also permeated other areas of life in Cuba, and to some extent resurrected the debates around the different interpretations of the role of culture in socialism. These debates continued, but were internalised during the 1970s as part of the attempt for more institutional and organisational clarity for greater efficiency. This drive was also, in part, intended to help project a unified front in the face of external aggression. However, the debates still persisted, and particularly in the plastic arts which were less affected by the regulatory currents of the *quinquenio gris*.

The contradictions of these debates and the institutionalising drive were reflected in the plastic arts which turned their focus inwards to an exploration of Cuba's history and cultures whilst simultaneously embracing international styles and asserting its position at the international vanguard. The *Salón 70*, held in the MNBA was emblematic of the preoccupations of the 1970s. The event was a group exhibition that showed the work of some of the 'most prominent artists of the previous ten years and a significant number of young artists' (Montero Méndez 2009: 259). The exhibition served as a point of confrontation between artistic, historic and aesthetic values within the development and evolution of Cuban painting (Montero Méndez 2006: 76) and as an expression of the impact of the social achievements that had occurred over the decade (Montero Méndez 2006: 8). The contradictory nature of debates about modernism was further heightened by the implicit promotion of a certain dogmatic interpretation of socialist culture that Cuba's entry to COMECON seemed to suggest, supported by the edicts of the Primer Congreso Nacional de Educación y Cultura, in the wake of the *Caso Padilla*. Art was

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subordinated, to some extent, to the perceived political needs of the Revolution, and a more exclusive reading of *Palabras* gained influence: this interpretation of *Palabras* did not necessarily lie in the increasingly selective interpretation of the infamous ‘dentro de la Revolución, todo, contra la Revolución ningún derecho’ (Castro 1961a). Rather, it was in the primacy of the Revolution’s need to exist and the artists’ commitment to this need before their own needs as creative individuals. A result of this harder line, and the subjugation of art to politics that this entailed, there was a greater focus on the historical context in art; a focus which led to the production of art that helped to consolidate the Revolution’s aims.

The drive for the country to gain economic independence was behind a reassessment of Cuba’s resources, one of which was the inherent creative capacity of the people, demonstrated by the success of the *instructores de arte* and *aficionado* programmes. In order to make the quantitative leap forwards in terms of the quality of production, cultural levels had to be raised and the democratisation of culture demanded the inculcation of popular culture into the Revolution’s cultural canons. The view of art as a defensive weapon and inherently educational tool further bolstered the focus on populism. Socio-historical themes, portraiture and landscape emerged as dominant trends during this period. However, they were expressed in playful, self-reflective manners in various styles, pop art, neo-expressionism, photorealism, abstraction (Montero Méndez 2009: 258). The turn inwards to the rediscovery of national themes and patriotism reflected the emergent codes of *cubanía* and the drive to rediscover national traditions and heritage. Yet, the reassessment of the country’s history and the focus on historical context also functioned as a

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conduit for the continued expression of the Revolution's intrinsic internationalism. New international styles were assimilated and used in the emerging socio-historical and pastoral focus in art. This ultimately created a stylistic rupture with previous forms of expression that cleared the way for a 'regeneration of thought based on individual creativity and the enrichment of the spectrum of conceptual interests' (Montero Méndez 2006: 9).

1970 was also the beginning of a period of significant international recognition for the emergent generation of Cuban artists. A particularly clear example of this was Manuel Mendive (1944-). Mendive graduated from San Alejandro in 1963 and in 1970 won an award at the second Cagnes-sur-Mer International Painting Festival in France (Ojeda Jequin 2009: 230). Mendive's work was based on his Afro-Cuban belief system and the nation's history (de Juan 2011: 207). He thus exhibited some of the central preoccupations of culture in the 1970s: the exploration of Afro-Cuban traditions and the country's past. Mendive also took art beyond the traditional confines of the gallery and encouraged popular participation in his performances (Montero Méndez 2009: 258). Thus he involved the *pueblo* in the creative process and further democratised culture. He brought new styles from Latin America into a Cuban, and subsequently international, setting (Montero Méndez 2009: 258). Mendive was fundamental to the development in Cuban art in another way — he was a "bridge" artist who marked the beginning of the transition from the internationally established older artists and the rise of younger artists, who ascended in the 1970s, in various waves while the older artists, such as Eiriz, Peña, Chago, Martínez and Cabrera Moreno, gradually withdrew

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from the scene. These younger artists were 'often isolated from rural areas, they were the first to be educated in a network of art schools founded, or radically transformed, by the Revolution' (Eligio 2001: 31).

The plastic arts in the 1970s were, therefore, a point of confluence for a number of different ideas about national identity, cultural history, the relationship between art and economy, and the role of art in socialism. The form was also afforded a certain level of protection against more dogmatic ideological currents, particularly during the *quinquenio gris*. This was due to several reasons: their development and democratisation under the Revolution, their politicised nature, the emergence of new art forms native to the Revolution, significant international recognition, and the fact that Casa was their natural home. The plastic arts, therefore became a particularly suitable platform from which to publicly engage with cultural policy, and to pursue alternative interpretations of socialism, such as those in Latin America and the Third World. Perhaps most importantly, particularly given the focus on anti-imperialism, decolonialisation and becoming a modern nation, the plastic arts were an area in which Cuba could position itself as the leader of the socialist camp.

Throughout the 1970s, the plastic arts remained a firmly established site of collectivity and internationalism, and demonstrated considerable progress in the development of an authentically Cuban art form. They remained inherently political and valued for their mobilisation capacity.<sup>67</sup> The cultural engagement and orientation programmes of the

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<sup>67</sup> Evidence of both of collectivity and internationalism can be found in the construction of Alamar in Habana del Este, which incorporated work in collectives and the work of plastic artists in the construction and individualisation of the construction. The development also demonstrated the adaptation and re-elaboration that had come to characterise Cuban

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1960s had begun to be translated into a significant number of students studying the arts. In 1970 the ENA boasted 782 students in total (328 of them women), who, in addition to their artistic education received 'regular' educational classes until the end of middle school (Anon 1970b: 9). The ENA had established six provincial schools in ballet, music, and plastic arts, and twenty four art schools with forty specialities, eighteen in music, eighteen in plastic arts, eleven in ballet, nine in modern dance and just one in drama (Anon 1970b: 10). These twenty four art schools had a total of 3,647 students (Anon 1970b: 10). The plastic arts had become an important mobilisation tool in other, diverse areas such as health, heritage, education and production (such as the 10 million-tonne *zafra* and the posters created for it by Raúl Martínez). Sculpture was particularly praised for the way sculptors linked their work to that of the community (Anon 1970b: 20).

The 1971 Primer Congreso Nacional de Educación y Cultura, like the 1968 Congreso Cultural de la Habana, responded to emergent trends in the cultural and political arenas. Culture was celebrated in terms of its offensive/defensive qualities and its educational capacity. Camnitzer sees the conference as an event that was used to emphasise some points at the cost of others, and which blurred the interpretation of 'ideological rigour' (Camnitzer 2003: 127). During this time Moisei Kagan remained a significant influence, and many institutions did not change their approach and openness, yet the primacy of different tendencies did shift (Camnitzer 2003: 127-28). As part of this move, many new cultural officials with a military background subtly favoured politically-oriented artists for promotion

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cultural production (Loomis 1999: 124; Anon 1965) (Segre 1982: 46) (Scarpaci, Segre, and Coyula 2002; Herrera Ysla 1978; Anon 1970b).

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and facilitated the availability of dogmatic publications in book shops. These lower level changes occurred without a shift in the beliefs of the government (Camnitzer 2003: 127).

During this more regulatory phase of the Revolution, the plastic arts took centre stage in the development of an engaged culture geared towards the continental struggle for freedom. More specifically, the plastic arts responded to the process of consolidating the democratisation of culture that had begun to develop concurrently with the more systematic institutionalisation of the Revolution. This drive became particularly pronounced from the latter half of the 1970s. Again, the plastic arts demonstrated their inherent agitational capacity and interdisciplinarity when, in 1971 and 1972, painters joined the model of revolutionary theatre: Teatro Escambray (Camnitzer 2003: 156). Painters and ENA graduates, Carol and Miló, joined the ensemble in 1971 and 1972 respectively with the aim of expanding the activities of the group to encompass the plastic arts. Carol had submitted this idea to the ensemble's leader, Corrieri, in 1971, who then invited him to join the group (Carol 1974: 24). In 1973 they began Cuadrodebate, a programme that encouraged debates and political discussions from the audience. They organized mobile exhibits of modern figurative painting with expressive distortions that addressed specific regional problems (Camnitzer 2003: 156). The exhibits were presented with a structure that encouraged debates with the audience (Camnitzer 2003: 156). Moreover, in order to achieve the goal of political discussion, their paintings were 'high in literary content' (Camnitzer 2003: 159). A painting was left behind in each

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community visited, to be used by the local revolutionary organisations in the way they judged to be most productive (Carol 1974: 28).

Cuadrodebate toured with Teatro Escambray and in the nights on which they were not holding the debate the painters would attend the theatre ensemble's performances. During the day they would paint in their lodgings and in public, and would frequently help out with the Teatro Escambray's tasks. In April 1973, after Teatro Escambray's second seminar, Cuadrodebate carried out an independent tour around areas that had been preselected with the municipal PCC. This tour involved a stay of two days in each area. The first day was spent unpacking and then, conditions permitting, painting in public or visits and conversations with the *campesinos* and then Cuadrodebate during the evening. The following day was spent conducting interviews in houses deemed to be 'representative' of the area. The group moved on to the next spot on the morning of the third day and began the cycle again (Carol 1974: 28).

Political engagement and debate at a continental level were also encouraged with the Encuentros de Plástica Latinoamericana. In August 1972, the Primer Encuentro de Plástica Latinoamericana, which replaced the Encuentro de Grabado Latinoamericano, was held. As Gordon-Nesbitt points out, the meetings provided an alternative to the more regulatory and increasingly dogmatic application of cultural policy during the *quinquenio gris*, but also fitted with the focus of the 1971 Primer Congreso Nacional de Educación y Cultura (2012: 347). It was anticipated that meetings would 'provide a forum for defining a role that all artists with a revolutionary *consciencia* could assume, emphasising the necessity of creating new values in configuring an art that would be the patrimony of all and an

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intimate expression of Our America' (Gordon-Nesbitt 2012: 347-48). Purely aesthetic discussions were ruled out and leading artists situated themselves within the (armed, if necessary) revolutionary struggle against cultural infiltration (Gordon-Nesbitt 2012: 349). The cultural strategies of imperialism were analysed, and attending artists agreed upon concrete measures with which to combat its isolating mechanisms (Gordon-Nesbitt 2012: 348). These measures included the creation of a continent-wide network of information, associated coordinated information centres, and symbols that could be used in the continental struggle (Gordon-Nesbitt 2012: 349). The event was organised in collaboration with the Institute of Latin American Art at the University of Chile and culminated in an exhibition of artworks from participating countries, which featured 240 works from 147 artists (Gordon-Nesbitt 2012: 348). The second Encuentro de Plástica Latinoamericana held in October 1973, was attended by 37 artists from nine countries. The meeting discussed the work undertaken in line with the 1972 agreements and later plans, which included acts of solidarity with those fighting the Chilean coup, the incorporation of visual images into the daily struggle and the promotion of artistic activities among the working class. A complementary exhibition of 150 works was held in the MNBA and delegates also participated by painting art works on the museum patio (Gordon-Nesbitt 2012: 351-52). The Tercer Encuentro de Plástica Latinoamericana did not take place until 1976, and with participation limited to Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic. However, there were plans for a subsequent Encuentro which included the whole Caribbean in order to help combat the fragmentation that the region had historically been subjected to (Anon 1976a).

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The *aficionado* movement, which already shared many of the concerns expressed in the Encuentros de Plástica Latinoamericana became an ideal outlet for the focus of Cuban (and indeed other Latin American) plastic artists. The *aficionado* movement had long been focussed on the development of revolutionary cultural forms and values, and the education that, it was anticipated, participation in the movement would provide. Vigilance against imperialist penetration of the cultural world was also closely linked to the *aficionado* movement, where the assimilation of the best of universal culture had been highlighted as a priority area, to avoid having it being imposed on Cuba from outside (Reyes and Anon 1972). Finally, by its very nature the community-based *aficionado* movement implied a creative collective.

1973 marked the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the storming of the Moncada barracks. To celebrate, an exhibition — *Pasado y Presente, tránsito hacia un presente definitivo* — was organised at Casa (de Juan 2007: 144). The exhibition was deliberately organised around a common theme and had the aim of ‘transcend[ing] the collection of individual works in order to give shape to a common endeavour and a common work from its inception to its conclusion’ (de Juan 2007: 144). Initial work sessions were held to discuss the exhibition’s goals, its ideological content and its artistic form. Once a blueprint for the exhibition’s display and the visual form to be used had been decided upon, artists discussed the work in progress among themselves; thus, all participated in the overall plan and each of the individual sections (de Juan 2007: 144). Art works were made by individuals, collaborations and collectives and therefore produced something that had both a common foundation that belonged to everyone:

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the Revolution (de Juan 2007: 148). De Juan also considers the exhibition important in demonstrating that high quality art could be produced from few resources and — primarily because it demonstrated a unitary character (rather than style) — asserting and defining the personality of a people and a culture (de Juan 2007: 145-48). The exhibition demonstrated the value of motivated collective work and of constructive criticism and analysis in achieving goals — in this case a cohesive, engaging exhibition which involved people at all levels (de Juan 2007: 147). It also demonstrated the ongoing process of democratisation of culture, which saw a shift from painting, a private activity, to design, a public activity (de Juan 2007: 153). Thus design, or cultural forms that crossed over with design, were particularly valuable.

In 1974, the CNC's annual work plan reflected the ongoing desire to equalise cultural inequalities and to continue developing culture's ability to be mobilised in the defence of the nation. The critical assimilation of world culture, study of Cuban cultural roots, promotion and mobilisation of particular modes of cultural creation — each one according to their impact —, and emphasis on the promotion of young artists, were all points of action in the CNC's plan (Anon 1974e). The improvement of the quality of cultural production was closely linked to these drives, which in turn was linked to the Revolution's ongoing quest for independence. This focus on quality meant that the plastic arts were subject to the same drive to fill technical gaps, which had permeated other areas of Cuban life as part of the bid to achieve economic independence. Art students who were considered outstanding in some way were awarded scholarships and sent to the USSR to complete postgraduate study. Upon the completion of their

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postgraduate study, it was envisaged, they would return to ISA and replace the Soviet teaching staff, thereby ending another form of dependency brought about by technical shortcomings.

It was at this time that the curriculum of the ENA was changed, along with the planned curriculum for the ISA. Camnitzer sees the curriculum change as a reflection of the combination of the embargo, the 10-million tonne *zafra* failure, isolationist tendencies, the rise of dogmatism and consequently Soviet sectors, and the nationwide attempt to unify the country's curricula (Camnitzer 2003: 159). Camnitzer also considers the 1970s to be particularly 'sovietophile' and suggests that a particular Soviet advisor, Anatole Tishenko, had input into the curricular planning of the ENA. He argues that the majority of supposedly 'Soviet' contributions actually came from the Cuban artists who had already studied in the USSR, and that these 'Soviet' changes were promoted by Carlos Suárez, who was in charge of art education at the time (Camnitzer 2003: 168). Educational programmes of study to the USSR had been in place since the early 1960s, probably 1961 (Anon 1963b; Quesada 1972), though uptake had been limited (Quesada 1972: 26). However, children of high-ranking PSP members had also been given the opportunity to study in the USSR before the Revolution [López Oliva, 2015; Pogolotti, 2015]. If what Camnitzer argues is true, then it goes some way towards explaining the difficulty that the later generation of Cuban artists who had studied in the USSR reportedly experienced in finding jobs and recognition upon their return to Cuba in the 1980s.

In a 1974 report outlining the new directives for the teaching of Art in Cuba, with the aim of creating ISA, it was observed that the system was

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to be restructured following the recommendations of Soviet advisors. Marxism-Leninism became a mandatory topic on the curriculum; MINED was made responsible for art teaching, at the basic/elementary level and had to approve the study plans for general teaching, while the CNC was put in charge of teaching methodology, technical skills and artistic specialities (Anon 1974b). The timetable at ISA was to include theoretical training in Marxism-Leninism, history, language and literature, Marxist-Leninist aesthetic principles, and Spanish language, alongside specific creative training and individual practice time (Figure 2). Camnitzer, in discussing the content of the planned curricula, asserts that one aim was 'an application of Marxist-Leninist economic theory to the interpretation of practical problems derived from the construction of socialism' (Camnitzer 2003: 169). Such an approach fits in with the greater integration of culture into the economy and production that had gained traction since the failure of the 1970 *zafra*.

The CNC's cultural aims for 1975 also demonstrated an increased focus on the Soviet input into cultural education and the exchange with socialist countries. In many respects the CNC's work plan was, as with previous years, a continuation of the revolutionary government's 1961 ten-point cultural plan. However, there was now more focus on exchange with the USSR, and particular emphasis was placed on the need to make the most of the advice from Soviet specialists, and the centrality of Marxism-Leninism to the creative process was stressed (Anon 1975b). Given this apparent shift towards the USSR's experiences and recommendations — seemingly confirmed by the Primer Congreso del PCC's call to also look to the experiences of the USSR, now in a period of stagnation and

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reactionism that has come to characterise the Brezhnev era — it would, at first sight, seem logical that a didactic, reductive approach towards the plastic arts, typified by the socialist realism of late Stalinism, was inevitable. However, my argument, in line with that of Camnitzer, is that the Congress actually endorsed the opposite approach (Camnitzer 2003: 126). The PCC's 1975 *Thesis and Resolution* on literary and artistic culture affirmed the importance of artistic innovation and experimentation, particularly regarding the assimilation and re-elaboration of cultural heritage rather than its 'servile imitation' (Anon 1975c: 21). The document acknowledged the necessity for art that contributed to the education of the population but simultaneously stressed that art and literature could not be reduced to a purely didactic role. The nexus between socialist art and reality, the document argued, lay in art's comprehension of the essences of its reality and the aesthetic expression of this understanding through the most appropriate formal structures. The faithful copying of reality was not the desired result; rather, it was the recognition that the dynamic and vivid reflection of knowledge can, in art, lead to the unravelling of the inherent truth of objective processes through their specific aesthetic languages. As Camnitzer argues (2003: 10-11), this stance was far removed from the ossified approach to art that engendered the socialist realism of Late Stalinism. Instead, it sits much more comfortably with the approaches of Lenin, but particularly of Anatolii Lunacharskii during the early 1920s (Fitzpatrick 1970) — a period of great significance to the Cuban Revolution more generally.

In addition to confirming the value of multiple aesthetic approaches the focus of the Primer Congreso del PCC on criticism and the

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involvement of youth sat neatly with the tendencies already developing in the plastic arts. It was during the first half of the 1970s that criticism in the plastic arts began to occupy an increasingly important role, and in *Caimán Barbudo* in particular. From its inception, the magazine had played an important role in keeping readers informed about the developments in the plastic arts and, thanks to the work of art critic Ángel Tomás González in the 1970s, it became an important organ which addressed polemics regarding artistic creation (Montero Méndez 2006: 16). The work of Tomás González (*Caimán Barbudo*), Alejandro G Alonso (*Juventud Rebelde*) José Veigas and Aldo Menéndez (*Revolución y Cultura*), and Leonel López Nussa (*Bohemia*), were fundamental in shaping the artistic criticism of the 1970s (Montero Méndez 2006: 16). Their work helped to overcome the void left by the tendency to focus on the *aficionado* movement in the early 1970s, as part of the move to further democratise culture (Montero Méndez 2006: 16). Effective criticism demanded the complete and active participation of the critic and therefore complemented the emerging tendency within the plastic arts, embodied by the exhibition celebrating the Moncada attack. These two tendencies — criticism and the promotion of youth — were formally institutionalised the following year with the inauguration of the Salón Permanente de Jóvenes (SJP) in the MNBA and the parallel creation of channels for criticism in the press coverage surrounding the SJP. Montero Méndez (2006: 17) observes that the criticism of the 1970s was predominantly focussed on briefs, reviews and commentaries on exhibitions, in which the critics focussed on artistic production, trends and individual exhibitions. These elements were generally discussed and analysed without questioning their validity within

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the emergent revolutionary canon of plastic arts. Photorealism was the exception to this rule, for which it was criticised by Ángel Tomás, as an art form 'que no defendía los postulados de un arte revolucionario, léasje bajo los lineamientos marxista-leninistas' (Montero Méndez 2006: 17).

This general characteristic of criticism in the 1970s has several possible interpretations that are not entirely contradictory. First is the notion that only artists who were somehow deemed 'acceptable' or already firmly established were given the opportunity to present at exhibitions, hence the lack of questioning of their position in the Cuban canon to which Montero Méndez alludes. The exhibition of established artists in traditional spaces also left room for younger artists to take up the 'public art' mantle, however they saw fit. A second interpretation is that the art world was comparatively silent, compared to the heyday of public art/art in public in the 1960s (Kapcia 2005: 160), due to the focus on the *aficionado* movement and the drive to involve more and more of the population in cultural creation: younger artists were studying at the ENA or 'out in the field', participating in projects such as Cuadrodebate, that blended art, productivity, and mobilisation, thereby promoting a crossover between 'high' art and 'popular' art. Third, given the plastic art's international prestige, the successful development of the artistic mode in the 1960s and the determined application of an open interpretation of *Palabras* in some fields, there was little questioning of the validity of a body of work. Criticism was therefore an indispensable developmental tool, as it allowed for the neutralisation of ideologies hostile to the Revolution, and the subsequent assimilation of the best of universal culture. With these neutralised, assimilated elements could then be channelled into the nation's

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production. The ever-deeper merging of culture and economy in the fight against underdevelopment, and the clarification of the nature of Cuba's relationship with the USSR in the new constitution, led to a very pragmatic period of appropriation in culture.

Mosquera saw the Cuban national tendency for appropriation, assimilation and re-elaboration as indicative of its underdeveloped state, and, as such, characteristic of all underdeveloped countries with aspirations of development:

Naturalmente, éste no es un fenómeno exclusivo de Cuba. Por lo general han sido los pueblos que luchan contra el subdesarrollo quienes, en un proceso que no se limita al terreno de la cultura, han sabido apropiarse de recursos foráneos para, transformándolos, ponerlos al servicio de su realidad política y social, siempre tan dramática en el mundo subdesarrollado (Mosquera 1983: 359).

The SJP then, in addition to formally institutionalising the promotion of youth and consolidating the value of criticism, also demonstrated this tendency for appropriation, assimilation and re-elaboration. The first SJP was particularly significant in that, by bringing together work produced between 1970 and 1975 for the first time, it allowed emergent trends among the new generations of artists 'collectively erupting' into the art scene to be identified (Montero Méndez 2006: 63). Among the wide variety of styles two clear tendencies were identified: neo-expressionism and photorealism (Montero Méndez 2006: 63).

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There are conflicting views surrounding the emergence of the photorealist trend, which has previously been interpreted as proof of Cuba's cultural dependency on the USSR (Camnitzer 2003: 9). Camnitzer considers the trend (and its name), which existed between 1973 and 1979, to have a 'vague ideological reason', potentially resulting from the vogue for the testimonial in literature (itself a class of cultural production specific to the Revolution) which emphasised the 'direct documentary contact with reality' (Camnitzer 2003: 9). The testimonial, which embraced the author's immediacy to the historic events of the Revolution, offered 'a lively and functional alternative to socialist realism, effectively responding to some of the needs of the revolutionary process of the time' and, as an aesthetic, developed an idiosyncratic form of expression (Camnitzer 2003: 9). However, that is not to say there was no crossover between photorealism and socialist realism as direct documentary contact with reality, and the author's immediacy to revolutionary events, was central to socialist realism as it developed (Von Geldern and Stites 1995: xviii). Weiss develops Camnitzer's argument further and considers photorealism as a site of potential protest (and parody) (Weiss 2011b: 35-37).<sup>68</sup> Montero Méndez concurs with Weiss' and Camnitzer's arguments but also highlights the 'Cubanisation' of the approach after its critical appropriation and assimilation. She argues that photorealism became a 'societal blueprint'

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<sup>68</sup> The tendency towards parody in the plastic arts became more pronounced in the late 1980s, for example in the work of artists such as Glexis Nova and his *Etapas Prácticas*. He used 'supermacho' installations that seemed to be the embodiment of communist monumentalism. His work poked fun at the system, taking advantage of the promotion of Cuban art abroad, the criticism levelled at his friends and contemporaries, and the canons of 'good' art in Cuba. Thus he was able to say what other artists had not been able to, in a body of work that was deeply confrontational but completely sanctioned and beyond criticism (Weiss 2011b: 74-76).

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because of what the style stood for: a move away from the 'ethical function of art as an assertion of universal values' to the reaffirmation of identity 'from a humanist, lyrical and intimate standpoint' (Montero Méndez 2009: 259). The approach allowed artists to remain true to history, criticise the enemy and develop a new form of revolutionary iconography that continued in the tradition of Cuban art (Montero Méndez 2009: 259).

Photography had played an important role in the early years of the Revolution, its immediate representation of reality and easy reproduction proving important tools in the dissemination of images of the victorious Revolution and its key figures in the nation's imaginary (Weiss 2011b: 36). The medium had also played an important role in the liberation movements in Latin America and Africa, and the subsequent creation of identities based around these movements (Weiss 2011b: 36). However, it also reflected the determined focus on the "faithful" representation of reality, demanded by the socialist realism of the late 1930s and 1940s, or indeed the early focus on photo documentary and photo montage in Soviet international propaganda magazines such as *SSSR na stroike* [The USSR in Construction]. Finally, the style was very close (and for some, too close) to the photorealism movement that emerged in the USA towards the end of the 1960s. The medium therefore potentially assimilated the tools and techniques of socialist realism, the heroic photography of the 1960s and US photorealism and then re-elaborated them to serve the cultural expression of Cuban revolutionary society.

The movement's figurehead work, Flavio Garciandía's *Todo lo que Ud. necesita es amor* (All You Need Is Love), can be read as a product of this approach and the competing elements within it. In the painting a young

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Cuban woman lies on the vibrant green grass and smilingly gazes out at the viewer who is situated close to her. She is painted in high focus and the background blurs into a sea of green behind her, creating an intensely realist but also highly lyrical portrait. The work can be read in a multitude of ways and context is key in this paradigmatic work, demonstrating the enduring pragmatic and multifaceted approach towards external cultures and politics within Cuban cultural production. On the one hand, the title is a famous Beatles' lyric from the 1967 song, perhaps aligning the painting, and the artist, with the West and therefore supporting the US tactic of beaming in Western rock music to the island to foster dissent. On the other hand, the painting took ownership of the sentiment expressed in the song. Garciandía combines the title with the 'fabulous, soft focus parfait' (Weiss 2011b: 35) of his coursemate, Zaída del Río, in the context of a society that had eschewed the capitalist system (exemplified by the USA), and embraced the humanist, lyrical, and intimate aspect of art (in opposition to the USSR). In doing so the artist affirmed that happiness and success could not be measured solely in terms of capital and reasserted the value of the individual in society. Moreover, the song was performed in the first live satellite broadcast, suggesting that the painting could also be paying a tribute to the truly international. Thus, the work can be interpreted in multiple ways to suit multiple viewpoints and/or agendas. Therefore, I would argue that photorealism in Cuba was the product of multiple influences. Its varied reception was demonstrative of the ongoing debates about modernity within Cuba and ideas about the different ways in which work could be appropriated and re-elaborated (and indeed about who was the enemy).

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In her analysis of the photorealism movement, Weiss highlights the discursive nature of the plastic arts in Cuba and the gradual return to public debate in the second half of the 1970s. Form, Weiss argues, had become separated from content in the 1976 Constitution, with suspicion firmly falling on content (Weiss 2011b). She considers this split to mirror the 'split between political and cultural avant-gardes, and an increasingly contentious relation between them' (Weiss 2011b: xiii). The photorealists questioned this separation of form and content, making it clear that they considered the two to be inseparable. By using the objective techniques of journalism in the subjective style of the documentarists, the artists made the familiar seem strange, thereby questioning the constitution's ruling. They used photorealism as a tautology, separating the technique from the use of photography in the 1960s to establish a revolutionary hall of images in the national narrative. The polemic caused by *Todo lo que Ud. necesita es amor* marked the first time that plastic artists were able to question the official critics' interpretations (Weiss 2011b: 37; Mosquera 2003: 219).

The new developments in the plastic arts of the Revolution, polemics included, seemed to provide conclusive evidence that the *quinquenio gris* was coming to an end, with a return to a more open cultural atmosphere akin to that of the 1960s. This was seemingly confirmed by the inauguration of two cultural institutions that promised a more tolerant atmosphere in 1976. The first was MINCULT, which 'caused a significant change within the institutional landscape' and created the national system of *casas de cultura* in response to the growing demand for cultural participation thanks to the rise in education levels (Gordon-Nesbitt 2012: 81). MINCULT offered a new open cultural space for the promotion,

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organisation and discussion of culture. The second important cultural institution was the ISA, a financially independent unit of MINCULT (MinCult 1981: 7). ISA offered, for the first time in Cuba, the opportunity for the study of art at a higher level whilst the system of scholarships for graduate and postgraduate study abroad remained in place (Anon 1975a: 2). The institute considered students who studied there to be professionals who were perfecting their technique – an approach that remains today. The students had access to exhibition spaces before they graduated, in particular during their final year of studies (Camnitzer 2003: 160). ENA graduates were ISA teachers and/or graduates, along with Soviet assessors in some technical areas where Cuban knowledge was considered lacking. From the 1980s, ISA was the ‘workshop where the change in Cuban [plastic] arts was forged’ (Montero Méndez 2009: 259). Montero Méndez attributes this to the combination of intellectual curiosity with other aspects of spiritual and social elements, such as science, religion, politics and philosophy (Montero Méndez 2009: 259).

ISA encouraged the individual in art but also had a potentially more negative effect. In theory ISA, and the ENA, ensured employment once a student had graduated, providing a sense of security and stability to the local and national art scene. On the other hand, it also set the parameters of art produced, though its system of prizes, spaces, and training opportunities which, essentially, clarified the bounds of acceptability, — particularly in the wake of the *quinquenio gris*. The relative shortage of middle art schools across the country — four in total, one in Santiago de Cuba, one in Holguín, and two in Havana — reinforced conformity among those wishing to pursue higher art education (Kapcia 2005: 160-61). ISA

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was also evidence that the more dogmatic interpretations of culture, and art, were not restricted to the *quinquenio gris* and did in fact rumble on until the end of the decade. A number of individuals who were perceived by some to be very pro-Soviet were put in positions of power within the new institute.<sup>69</sup> These individuals were alleged by some interviewees to have promoted a more 'Soviet', i.e. dogmatic, approach towards art.

There were also, reportedly, tensions among the teaching staff with regard to technique. This division was roughly between the Soviet advisors and the established Cuban artists, with recognised works, who formed part of the teaching body. In some of the interviews conducted the Soviet advisors are reported to have considered the Cuban students — and the practicing artists on the teaching staff — technically deficient. The veracity of this was confirmed by interviews with some of the Cuban artists who pursued postgraduate studies in the USSR when later recalling their experiences. This attitude was opposed to the ideas and styles of the majority of Cuban artists who were active in ISA, but was reportedly adopted by some groups within the institute — as it had been within the ENA curriculum when Mario Rodríguez Alemán was the general director of Artistic Education in the CNC (Castellanos León 2010: 34). The consensus among those interviewed is that the artists who adopted Soviet methodology were mediocre and used it as a means of social mobility and professional advancement. There is also the suggestion that the Soviet approach, and by extension socialist realism, was considered by some to be an effective antidote to the influence of the USA, in particular its

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<sup>69</sup> in ISA three very pro-Soviet individuals (Enrique Moreto, Orlando Suárez, Orlando Yanis) were put in power who were very close to the Soviet model and who promoted a more Soviet approach just as the *quinquenio* ended [López Oliva 2015].

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movements of abstract expressionism and action painting— in the Cuban art scene (Castellanos León 2010: 34). However, the perceived net result was that some plastic artists who were against Soviet pedagogical approaches were refused posts in ISA during this perceived “pro Soviet” phase.

Attitudes had come full circle by the late 1970s/early 1980s and this in turn negatively affected some of the students returning from the USSR during this period who found themselves unable to complete their social service in the ISA due to their perceived ‘Sovietness’. Those who were unable to fulfil their social service at ISA either went to San Alejandro (which traditionally has been considered to be more open than ISA in the late 1970s/early 1980s) or established schools outside of the capital. By the time of the first Biennale, a ‘revolution in teaching’ at ISA in the plastic arts was under way (Montero Méndez 2009: 259). Flavio Garcíandía was elected the head of the department of painting at ISA. He established educational practices that reflected his convictions as an artist (Montero Méndez 2009: 259). He embraced cosmopolitanism, a ‘thirst for information and a discriminating view of local and universal culture’ (Montero Méndez 2009: 259).

The ‘sin’ of these ‘Soviet’ artists aside, the generation that had emerged by the 1970s was the first generation that had been completely shaped by the Revolution and was therefore ‘without a pre-revolutionary burden’ (Camnitzer 2003: 4). This was the generation of ‘cierta esperanza’ that was promoted by cultural activities and the emergent cultural policy, and which forms the focus of Hortensia Montero Méndez’s study. The generation was at the fore of cultural developments and activities,

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particularly from 1977, when its name was coined by Juan Marinello at the opening of the Third SJP (Montero Méndez 2006). The promotion of this generation, and the return of public debate was reflected at all levels of society, with the founding of the *Casa de Cultura* network in 1978 which worked in parallel with the *aficionado* movement. Evening courses were provided at middle schools and ISA to allow workers to continue their art education after beginning within the system of the *casas*.

The aim of these movements was to allow the largest possible number of Cubans access to spaces that would allow them to enjoy art, to be artistically educated, and to form part of the nation's cultural production. They were the practical manifestation of the government's desire to further democratise culture, and to further integrate culture into the economy. Hart's 1978 speech at the Meeting of the Ministers of Culture of the Socialist Countries, explaining the Cuban government's view of culture as an economic stimulant and product, marked the beginning of a new phase of the relationship between art and the economy. Design became a key area of focus: it implied an element of collectivity, interdisciplinarity, technical mastery, and the ability to respond in a pragmatic and profitable way to the needs of the Revolution. Quality remained a key feature of art's incorporation into industry and there was a view that design had to be aesthetically pleasing in order to perform its functional role of promotion (de Juan 2007: 153).

### **Redefining the possibilities of art**

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The net result of the reassessment and recasting of the relationship between art and industry and of the new approach to culture heralded by MINCULT was a flourishing of the plastic arts. A new aesthetic began to emerge at the end of the 1970s in what Mosquera argues was the artists' attempts to break free from the bureaucratic and ideological impositions of the government — in part at the Soviet government's request to curtail artistic freedom — that had ended the discursive atmosphere of the 1960s (2001: 13). These artists of the 1970s 'adopted the new concepts and visuality of the Cuban renaissance that would mark the 1980s' (Montero Méndez 2009: 259). Parody, popular culture, symbols, the Americas and their constituent civilisations, Afro-Cuban religions, European cultures and the transcultural nature of Caribbean heritage were all factors of influence for artists that were active in the 1980s. Many of them also embraced multimedia and interdisciplinary practices in their art (Montero Méndez 2009: 259).

The exhibition *Volumen Uno*, held at the Centro de Arte Internacional in January 1981, marked the beginning of a new flourishing of the plastic arts. The exhibition featured eleven artists, and was seen by 8,000 visitors in just two weeks (Camnitzer 2003: 3). The exhibition is generally the point at which new Cuban art is understood to have begun (Weiss 2011b: xiii; Camnitzer 2003: 1). The new Cuban art was broad-based, appealed to a wide sector of the population, and marked both the resurgence of old trends and the beginning of new ones. The exhibition was a reaction to the 'anathematising of culture and especially of its critical vocation by the Cuban leadership' (Weiss 2011b: xiii). It also marked a foray into the public sphere of a cohort of artists who had been raised

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entirely within the Revolution and its contradictions. As such, whilst it marked a rupture in some ways, it was, in others, the continuation of Cuban cultural traditions, and their contradictions. This art, like that of the 1960s and of the Cuban vanguard in the 1920s and 1930s, was both politically committed and critical of contemporary politics. It also reflected its generation's belief in the Revolution's utopian project in independence, and in the far-reaching possibilities of art (Weiss 2011b: xiv-xv). Similarly, the art of the 1980s, including *Volumen Uno*, which seemed to be such a break with what had gone before, was, in many ways, the continuation of Cuban cultural traditions. These included assimilation, debate and the commitment to the fight against underdevelopment and dependency. The latter two of these Mosquera attributed to the range of styles that Cuban artists developed (Mosquera 1983: 358). Internationalism, albeit expressed differently than it had been in the 1970s, was at the heart of art of the 1980s as artists explored the country's identity (even if it was done through the prism of the individual) and communicated their desire to inscribe Cuba into the international narrative.

However, the new Cuban art also seemed to break with cultural traditions, and this led to a mixed reception from the viewing public, whilst also demonstrating the plastic arts' ability to act as a litmus test for cultural policy. The sheer range of styles and proliferation of exhibitions, which tended to be restricted to small circles, in some cases created a distance between artists and audience. This was a departure from the customary responsive relationship that had developed between artists, the public and the demands of the Revolution (Kapcia 2005: 161). Cultural democratisation and the search for cultural identity seemed to have been

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replaced by group and individual identities and eclecticism. This was both a conscious choice of a carefully curated eclectic and a chaotic mix of individualism (Kapcia 2005: 161). Artists of the new Cuban art put forth work that expressed the complex and interrelated cultural heritages of the nation and that was in contact with global contemporary art practices (Weiss 2011a: 25). They also viewed art's revolutionary capacity in a different light, arguing that art was revolutionary in its independence of thought and its ethical foundation. Throughout the 1980s, their work became a space of struggle that firmly believed in the power of art but was aggressive and caustic at times (Weiss 2011a: 25). Parody was an important element of much of the reflexive work produced, which often alluded to political and social problems (Pogolotti 1997: 169). In this new art there was also a focus on 'immediate effects, in creative forms that reflected the contingency of the moment and therefore showed a predilection for the ephemeral over the durable' (Pogolotti 1997: 170). This was a further departure from earlier art, which had focussed on producing long-term results.

By the late 1980s, a marked process of self-censorship had begun. This self-censorship was partially a response to polemics, occasionally initiated by the lower ranks of officials within the art world 'which showed an excess of paternalism toward the public combined with a lack of artistic sophistication and an excess of dogmatic revolutionary zeal', surrounding the work produced by this younger generation (Camnitzer 2003: xxix). The work produced celebrated the new openness of cultural policy and creation, but was not always particularly accomplished in terms of communication or sufficiently tactful in addressing the myths of the

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Revolution, and instead focussed on formal artistic accomplishment (Camnitzer 2003: xxix). This reaction to the work of the young artists — resulting in the cycles of exhibitions organised in the Castillo de la Real Fuerza in 1988 — aimed at encouraging more rigorous artistic public expression from these artists. The events surrounding the Cuarto Congreso de la UNEAC demonstrate the disjunction between cultural policy and cultural education (cadres, *instructores de arte*, advisors). This disjunction had begun in the early 1970s and subsequently became institutionalised. This was because individuals who had been trained to administer art at a time when more ‘dogmatic’ cultural figures were in charge of art education at a popular level had, by the late 1980s, risen to occupy more prominent positions.

In a manner analogous to the increasing division between cultural bureaucrats and cultural practitioners in the exhibition of plastic artists, sculptures became a site of debate between opposing views of culture and its role(s). The treatment of sculpture was symptomatic of the different perceptions of art’s roles, and the different spheres of art that it was unofficially believed best suited each of these unofficial constituent roles. Among cultural officials with differing views regarding culture and socialism, art was unofficially divided into sections which included art as education, art as commemoration, and art as design. Art’s different roles were catered to by different institutions and different political sub-groups, which, much as in the 1960s, resulted in the propagation of different artistic styles and approaches. I therefore argue that far from being a monolithic period with the imposition of doctrine from the top down, the late 1970s and the 1980s were a period of many competing, and occasionally

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conflicting, views regarding cultural policy and the intellectual and cultural production in a socialist nation. Whilst socialist realism did not become an official aesthetic language in Cuba at any stage during this period (or indeed ever), some of the practices adopted suggest that the style was unofficially favoured for educational and informative purposes due to its clarity of message, leading to its self-imposition on artists who wished to succeed or who were unsure of the practical application of cultural policy. This uncertainty and mimesis in aesthetics and attitudes led to the circulation of multiple strains of socialist realism.

Other plastic art produced in the 1980s caused polemics in different ways to *Volumen Uno*. One emergent trend in the 1980s, which sat easily with the cultural aims of the PCC's 1980 congress, and also with any lingering dogmatic interpretations of socialist art, was the proliferation of monuments and environmental sculptural projects and the idea that art should be public. Monuments, environmental sculpture and murals were a very public linking of the work of the artist with the concerns of the people, reminiscent of the function of poster art and graphic design in the 1960s. For example, Orlando Suárez produced an informative mural in the Havana omnibus terminal in 1979, which some, such as López Olivia, consider to be emblematic of didactic socialist realism in Cuba but also the paradoxical nature of cultural production in Cuba in the 1970s [López Olivia, 2015a]. Suárez, who had founded the Taller Experimental de Gráfica in 1962, introduced and popularised Mexican muralism as a scheme in Cuba, and in the 1970s occupied a position of influence at ISA [López Olivia et al. 2015]. Similarly, the earlier murals of Carmelo González Iglesias, who had particularly strong links with Bulgaria, were

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considered by some artists to be reminiscent of a type of socialist realism in Cuba [López Olivia et al., 2015]. Sculptures produced during this period demonstrated a range of styles, such as Sergio Martínez's *Quijote de América*, Sandú Darié's *árbol rojo*, and José Villa's monument to Che Guevara (de Juan 2011: 214). Alonso González argues that other works seemed to draw more obvious parallels with what he considered to be negative Soviet tendencies (i.e the monumentalism and didacticism seen in high Stalinist socialist realism), such as Thevia Marín's sculpture to independence fighter Serafín Sánchez in the Sancti Spiritus Revolution Square (Alonso González 2015: 147). Alonso González describes the sculpture as 'a freestanding socialist realist sculpture' (Alonso González 2015: 147), which may in part be a result of the greater restrictions placed on public monuments (Alonso González 2015: 140). Alonso González argues that Cuba's focus on the recovery and construction of national traditions, themes and figures caused it to avoid replicating the Stalinist Soviet model (2017: 55). The Revolution Squares planned across the country were, however, a particular site of combat between different interpretations of the roles of art:

The large amount of resources and time invested in the Squares turned them into contested spaces and the focus of public interest, prompting a heated debate among the cultural workers and artists, and between them and different political actors. This was because this monumental typology was new and distinctively Cuban. Although other socialist countries emphasised the construction of

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new civic centres, these lacked the heritage and commemorative component of Cuban Squares (Alonso González 2017: 143).

The net result of the *plazas de la revolución* and their ideological importance was that the leadership commissioned low-profile artists to complete the tasks. These artists were unproblematic and conforming to the monumental, socialist realist mould, which meant that the government avoided public competitions or the relinquishing of power to CODEMA (Alonso González 2017: 143).

The plastic arts and monuments in particular became a battlefield for conflicting approaches towards revolutionary culture that included ideas about aesthetic freedom and continuity, breaking with the past and orthodox approaches to culture. The 1982 Tercer Congreso de la UNEAC did not end these divisions. However, it did confirm that the heart of Cuban cultural policy was to promote a widespread, diverse popular movement around culture which would help the creation of high quality art. Thus, different strains of thought and approaches towards culture were united by a common goal. UNEAC and the PCC's assurances of inclusivity, the focus on public debate, public contact, and constructive criticism meant that 'revolutionary art form(s)' functioned as a useful umbrella term that allowed cultural practitioners to pursue their own aesthetics safely within the Revolution. This approach was similar to the way that, in the USSR of the 1930s, "socialist realism" had functioned as a convenient (empty) term that would help to unify the factionalised cultural community and provide a democratic style that would ensure that culture was understood by all sectors of society, regardless of their class origin or educational level. So,

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by the beginning of the mid-1980s, a cultural policy that was open to multiple interpretations, the hangover of fear created by the *quinquenio gris*, the emerging canons of “good” art (thanks to the systems of prizes that had begun to emerge from the mid-1960s), the multiple roles that art could potentially now occupy, and the prevalence of different interpretations of socialism that still abounded led to the renewed circulation of different manifestations of, and attitudes towards, “official” culture.

Ever since the failed *zafra* of 1970 and the subsequent reassessment of the island’s possible paths to independence, culture had become progressively linked to the economy. During this time the plastic arts had become increasingly integrated into the economy and productivity. One example is Alberto Lescay's *Figura Ecuestre de Antonio Maceo* which, having won the FAR’s sculpture competition for a monument to Antonio Maceo in Santiago de Cuba’s plaza in 1982, was finally inaugurated in 1991 after much delay. The project — an offshoot of Lescay’s final piece during his studies in the USSR — also had a clear economic focus. The piece ultimately included the creation of a permanent workshop in Santiago de Cuba which would produce the materials needed for the sculpture in addition to providing training for sculptural technicians [Lescay, 2015].

Another, more public, experiment in linking art and economy was the TELARTE project that began in 1983. TELARTE was an experiment in mass art distribution, and plastic artists contributed designs for textile painting: these were then printed on runs of ten thousand metres with the fabric, which was appropriate for hot climates, being used to make

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dressess, shirts, and banners, among other things. The event was run by MINCULT and printing was principally done in the textile factories Combinado Textil 'Desembarco del Granma', with four thousand workers, and the Textilera Ariguanabo, with five thousand workers (Camnitzer 2003: 114-15, 351). According to Camnitzer's figures, in 1983, there were sixteen designs; in 1984, twenty; in 1985, twenty one; in 1986, thirty one; in 1987, thirty two; in 1989, thirty three; and, in 1989, the production of Cuban and international artists was combined, making two distinct programmes (Camnitzer 2003: 351). The path had been laid for initiatives such as TELARTE in the 1960s, as school and university students participated in initiatives that gave them 'first-hand experience of the productive structure of the island in all its difficulties and all the responsibilities' (Rodríguez 1967: 10). They also echo the early Cuban revolutionary projects in theatre and cultural education conducted in the 1960s, as well as the integration of art and productivity, and the focus on collectivity exemplified by Teatro Escambray.

Art and economy fused in another way, with the Biennale de Habana, which began in 1984. The Biennale acted as a platform that reasserted Cuba's place in the international arena and attempted to establish a new order (Weiss 2011a: 17). The event was organised by the Centro Wilfredo Lam (now the Centro de Arte Contemporáneo Wilfredo Lam), which was also inaugurated in 1984, two years after the artist's death. The Centro had the aim of investigating and promoting the contemporary plastic arts from the areas of Africa, Asia, Middle East, Latin America and the Caribbean. It also encouraged the study and promotion of the works of Lam (CACWilfredoLam 2016). The Biennale was the

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institution's signature event, and was a fundamental initiative in MINCULT's new political strategy and a 'banner under which Cuba would broadcast the diversity of its cultural landscape to the world and, in that, its re-conquest of its own identity' (Weiss 2011a: 17). The Biennale complemented the already-established Cuban festivals for cinema, dance, jazz and the *Feria del Libro*, and was part of the drive — similar to that of the 1968 Congreso Cultural de La Habana — to establish Cuba as the centre of the Third World (Weiss 2011a: 17). The event was notable for its ambition, and brought a forum that was taken for granted in Europe and North America into the Latin American and Caribbean domain, providing a collective space for countries that did not traditionally have such forums. In creating this space the Biennale 'aimed at nothing less than creating, for the art and artists of the entire Third World, a space of respect and stature equal to that granted artists in the developed West' (Weiss 2011a: 17). The ambition and scope of the Biennale was a reflection of the Revolution's resolute internationalism and anti-imperialism: cultural dependency would be replaced by a new international cultural order. In this way, the Biennale 'raised important questions not only about the nature of art made outside the Western market system, but also about its relationship with that system — these are, inevitably, questions about culture and power' (Weiss 2011a: 18).

The 1984 event focussed on the regions of José Martí's 'Nuestra América' (Weiss 2011a: 18), and, although it came at a time of significant transformation of contemporary art in Cuba, Weiss considers the Biennale's initial ideology and rhetoric to have come from the perspective of the older generations, being 'in both political and aesthetic terms,

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defined by an old-fashioned identity politics mixed with the strident cadences of early revolutionary rhetoric' (Weiss 2011a: 19). The event was organised by formal artistic and aesthetic criteria rather than by country and was housed in the Pabellón Cuba and the MNBA (Weiss 2011a: 20). The Biennale's director, architectural historian Lillian Llanes Godoy, considered the Biennale a meeting place not only for artists and artists, but also for artists and life of the city and built links between the Biennale and the CDRs and governmental agencies (Weiss 2011a: 20-21). Conceiving of the Biennale as a social space also complemented the continuing focus on cultural democratisation and the close relationship between artists and the people. The Biennale enjoyed political benefits and produced a space in which cultural exchange was valued as much as the display of art (Weiss 2011a: 21). Perhaps because of the way the event was conceived, it had an unusual degree of independence and a direct relationship with government (Weiss 2011a: 23-27). The second Biennale (1986) expanded the geographical scope of the project and also included a special exhibition on the works of Latin American masters, acting as a type of 'primer' on the plastic arts of the region — once more emphasising art's educational capacity. This primer was supported by another, in the form of the Biennale's catalogue, which included short texts about the art and art history of each of the participating shows (Weiss 2011a: 22)

Year	Works	Artists	Participating countries	Visitors
1984	2,200	835	21	200,000
1986	2,400+	690	57	300,000

Figures taken from (Weiss 2011a: 18-21).

### **International(ist) culture**

As we have seen, in addition to the international prestige and established educational system that the plastic arts had developed prior to the Revolution, they also had a tradition of political engagement and a long-standing preoccupation with the search for, and expression of, a coherent national identity. This led to a hybrid approach to the plastic arts throughout the period analysed which eventually resulted in a more complete separation of the perceived roles of art in the late 1970s and 1980s.

The plastic arts quickly demonstrated an ability to respond to the political and social needs of the Revolution, whilst skilfully navigating the problems faced by the Revolution. As a result, a form of expression specific to Cuba quickly emerged, providing hope for the embedding of a much sought-after national cultural expression. The plastic arts, and these new forms of expression, were also particularly well suited to the Revolution's internationalist aims. They transcended linguistic and cultural barriers and demonstrated the value of the conscious assimilation of foreign styles and tendencies and their re-elaboration within a clearly defined national context that then resonated with national and international audiences. Early revolutionary art projects and events, the *Salón de Mayo* included, also served to demonstrate to the international community the value of culture in the fights for national liberation, and its value in Cuba. As the nation's gaze shifted inwards, international art projects such as the *Encuentro de Plástica Latinoamericana* served as a way of continuing to

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contribute to the Revolution, whilst avoiding the more dogmatic tendencies.

The plastic arts' privileged position — maintained due to their supporting institutions, international prestige, and variety of potential interpretations, and responsiveness — ensured they were able to constantly push the boundaries of applications of cultural policy, and, to some extent, to forge their own path in exploring alternative ideas of socialism. Concurrently a new generation of artists emerged and brought with it new approaches towards the role of art within the Revolution and new styles of assimilation — such as photorealism — which could be promoted or condemned by the different approaches towards art. However, the demarcation of this new generation and these new approaches was further complicated by the simultaneous emergence of a new generation of cultural cadres and officials. Different approaches to art had co-existed from the beginning of the Revolution, in part due to the division of labour between the CNC and UNEAC and the public nature of debates in the 1960s. However, in the 1970s they found themselves pitched against one another, as art and culture were fused with education (1971 Congreso) and economy (failed 1970 *zafra*). Each of these approaches was validated by the PCC's 1975 Congress *Thesis and Resolution* on artistic and literary culture. Over the next decade this led to the circulation of multiple approaches, each of which could be classed as socialist realism. Different approaches were promoted among the constituent roles of 'art' assigned by the Revolution: didacticism and verisimilitude in public educational and commemorative projects; utility and practical solutions to problems within the economy; politically engaged,

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high quality, and multiple aesthetic styles within what might be considered the more institutionalised art spaces such as galleries, universities, and (inter)national exhibitions. Concomitantly, the emphasis on clarity and unity, and the continuing call for culture to reflect the Revolution's reality gave rise to different perceptions of art within the Revolution, resulting in the presence of organisational socialist realism and the beginnings of the aesthetics of a distinctly Cuban socialist realism. Such multiple, coterminous currents meant that the USSR was both a model to be emulated and a hostile force. The pragmatic assimilation of the most useful elements of Soviet culture was encouraged by the new articulations of cultural policy, as was the rejection of other Soviet cultural approaches. The plastic arts were at the forefront of this practical approach towards the culture of the USSR and the multiple interpretations of which elements to assimilate that it engendered. Thus, the plastic arts in Cuba occupied multiple roles, as a site of resistance, a means of escape, and as an essential vehicle in a deeply utopian, international project.

**Figures and Images**



**Image 45 Porro's section of ISA**

Copyright: the author



**Image 46 the courtyard of Porro's section of ISA**

Copyright: the author

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<i>Proposed ISA timetable</i>					
	Cursos y horas por semana				
<i>Asignaturas generales</i>	1	2	3	4	Total horas por curso
<i>Marxismo-Leninismo</i>	-	2	2	2	210
<i>Historia</i>	3	2	2		280
<i>Español y literatura</i>	4	3	3	3	550
<i>Principio de estética Marxista-Leninista</i>				1	35
<i>Elementos de Pedagogía</i>				1	35
<i>Idioma</i>	2	2	2	2	280
<i>Sub total</i>	9	9	10	9	
<i>Volumen total semanal de formación especial</i>	27	27	26	27	3745
<i>Sub total</i>	36	36	36	36	5050
<i>Horas semanales para el trabajo individual</i>	12	12	12	12	1500
<i>total</i>	48	48	48	48	6550
<i>These work schemes were for Music, Plastic Arts, Ballet, Modern Dance and Popular Dance. (Anon 1974a: 8-9)</i>					

**Figure 2 Proposed ISA Timetable**

## 6 Conclusion

In January 1990, the Restaurante Moscú on Calle P between Humboldt and 23 in Vedado burned down. The restaurant had opened in 1974 shortly after Cuba's full admission to COMECON and swiftly became an enduring feature in Cuban popular culture, known for its offering of Slavic foods.

Previously the Moscú had been the Montmartre Cabaret, one of the most famous cabaret venues of pre-revolutionary Havana, along with the Tropicana and the Sans Souci. It had been a lavish, expensive venue, run by Americans, with (frequently foreign) name acts and also large-scale shows: Edith Piaf, Nat King Cole and Olga Guillot are all reported to have performed there. The Moscú's former location today remains derelict, identifiable only through the restaurant's distinctive tiled façade on Calle P. The culinary gap left by the demise of the Moscú is today filled by two restaurants, one which claims to be Russian: TaBARish (20 between 5th and 7th, Miramar) and the other which claims to be Soviet: Nazdorovie (Malecón between Prado and Carcel, Centro Habana).

The Moscú and the history of the space it occupied reflects the enduring approach towards the way the Cuban-Soviet alliance is viewed. The restaurant appeared during a period that is sometimes interpreted as a particularly 'Soviet' phase of the Cuban Revolution and when the USSR was a frequent point of discussion and investigation in the popular mass Cuban press. It replaced a symbol of the previous dominant foreign presence, the American-run Montmartre, which in turn drew on the cultural cachet of the dominant cultural hub of the time: Paris. Once established,

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the Moscú swiftly became a permanent fixture in Cuban everyday popular culture and is remembered with affection by Cubans who grew up while it existed. The site has been left untouched since the restaurant was destroyed by a fire. Instead it stands as a forlorn monument to an era that remains relatively examined by Cuban historians and has come to be viewed as a firmly closed darker chapter of the Revolution's history. Arguably, even this is reflected in the remains of the building: on the street corner that meets the perennially busy street of 23 (La Rampa), there is a graffiti stencil 'sic semper tyrannis' [thus always to tyrants] (Image ).

However, the former restaurant's cultural geography also speaks to other elements of the Cuban Revolution that are sometimes eclipsed by the spectre of the 'Soviet'. It sits between the Habana Libre, and the Pabellón Cuba, two reminders of the revolutionary government's commitment to the country's independence and cultural internationalism. One block away the Casa Museo Abel Santamaría is a testament to the roots of the Revolution and its enduring ideological foundation, and Calle P eventually intersects with the street 10 de Octubre, named after the date on which the Ten Years' War began in 1868 (8).

The rebellion that began the Cuban Revolution was popularly supported, and broadly nationalistic; it sought to redress societal inequalities, and achieve economic independence and national sovereignty. The role of culture in society was particularly valued within the conceptual framework of the type of socialism eventually adopted by the Cuban revolutionaries. As a result, artists were presented with the opportunity to occupy a central role in the construction of a new

revolutionary society, and the fight against imperialism. In this way, the links between politics and culture were re-prioritised.

Culture was at the heart of the unique nature of the Cuban Revolution and fundamental in the government's approach towards nation building (Image ). It was an important site of debate that had the discursive space that was not routinely available to other areas which made up the Revolution's infrastructure, such as the economy or the political apparatus. Peregrinations on these areas were restricted by the pressing demands of the Revolution and dogma. In this way culture became an increasingly important focus of debate and an important means by which the Cuban Revolution was able to assert its sovereignty on a national level, project the legitimacy of the Revolution on an international level, and provide as much of the population as possible with ownership of the revolutionary process. It was also an outlet of resistance to the normative culture propagated by the USA and CIA-funded cultural programmes, publications and events, which sought to promote pro-American cultural freedom movements. Artistic production and cultural development became indispensable components of the mobilisation to defend and advance revolutionary aims. Resultantly, artists were viewed as militants and their production considered a means of resisting and subverting the damaging forces of imperialism. Cuba's colonial past was reassessed and dominant critical discourses were ideologically deconstructed in the conscious reconfiguration of cultural poles. The Revolutionary government's focus shifted towards the Third World, underdevelopment and the role of the artist and intellectual in liberation movements.

Cultural policy was never a monolithic entity that was articulated and applied in a top-down manner. It was an ongoing, multi-layered, discursive process. It was formulated to include as many Cubans as possible at all levels and in all related sectors. The objective was to evolve a cultural policy that reflected the cultural needs of the Revolution and with which Cuban people could identify. This was achieved through debate on what and how cultural policy should be delivered and, importantly, how it could remain relevant and influential in a fast changing political, economic and social environment. Cultural policy, therefore, was constantly evolving and constantly being redefined in response to landmark political, social, and economic events, and was never evenly applied.

The non-uniform nature of Cuban cultural policy was most evident in the first decade of the Revolution, when emergent cultural institutions were erratically formed and in a constant state of flux. Practitioners struggled to identify the most pressing tasks of culturally (re)constructing the nation. This led to a succession of short-term experiments and artistic licence to explore new forms of delivery. Early in this era institutions were formed around particular personalities who had been active in the pre-1959 revolutionary struggle, such as Alfredo Guevara and ICAIC or Haydeé Santamaría and Casa, and their specific commitment to the development of a Cuban revolutionary culture. Other, broader, umbrella institutions, such as the CNC and the UNEAC, were created in response to the need to organise culture more generally and to recognise the quality of cultural output. Their roles were clarified in response to a perceived moment of crisis - the PM affair - and the ensuing public debate which

culminated in *Palabras a los intelectuales*. Palabras remained the loadstone of cultural policy until the Special Period.

The emergence of these organisations marked the beginning of the heterogeneous interpretation and application of cultural policy. When it first existed as such, cultural policy was roughly grouped around ten central ideas that reflected the historical roots of the 1959 rebellion and assumed a certain level of support for the Revolution from practitioners unless explicitly stated otherwise. The frenetic and erratic atmosphere of the 1960s allowed for the development of multiple interpretations and applications of cultural policy based around each of the different cultural institutions and their subgroups. The multiplicity of approaches and outputs were publicly debated in the emerging cultural publications. These debates were always intimately linked to ideas about the direction, priorities, and ideology of the Cuban Revolution and were therefore also linked to ideas about which sub-group within the revolutionary apparatus was best qualified to take control of the cultural tasks facing the revolutionary government. The divisions and debates were further complicated by the need to mobilise educational programmes and cultural efforts and the pre-existing structures — of the PSP — that this favoured, particularly given the recent establishment of the alliance with the USSR. The grass-roots radicalisation of the population in response to events such as the Bay of Pigs and the Cuban Missile Crisis accelerated the development of a widespread political consciousness, which did not necessarily agree with Soviet ideology. Reflecting the government's focus on national sovereignty and independence, a distinctly 'Cuban' interpretation of socialism began to

develop. This ideological strain was codified by the creation of the PCC in which members of the guerrilla M-26-7, rather than the PSP, dominated.

Key issues for the revolutionaries were perceived in response to external threats, disillusionment with existing theoretical models, and an ever-more urgent desire to coherently articulate a national identity. Paramount to the response required was a clearer organisational structure in the Revolution's institutional apparatus and the external projection of unity. This led to the beginning of a period of institutionalisation and reassessment of Cuba's past and possible alternative paths to independence. Such cultural introspection was once again complicated by the ongoing process of defining what the Revolution stood for, and the integration of culture to ideas about education, economy and development. There was a further layer of complication added to the ongoing debates about education, which was the most enduring gateway to Soviet-style ideology and attitudes. From the mid-1960s onwards generations raised, within the Revolution, on Soviet manuals of Marxism emerged. Members of these generations, such as Lisandro Otero, began to occupy positions of power within revolutionary institutions towards the mid-late 1970s and early 1980s, reflecting, to some extent, the wider population's education, and their expectations of culture. The merging of these ideological currents and the focus on economic development ultimately led to the separation of the components which constituted ideas about revolutionary 'art' and 'culture'.

As the two case studies on theatre and the plastic arts have thrown into sharp relief, culture, or cultural policy, was a conduit for examining the nation's diverse past within the framework of the new nation, which

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permitted for the salvaging of any element considered useful and its re-elaboration into the new national setting. The way different media were treated demonstrated attitudes towards different aspects of Cuba's past. Theatre paid particular attention to the damaging effects of the country's colonial past and its resultant underdeveloped status. This meant that it became a forum in which to combat the country's history of excluding certain sectors and enduring or subsequent real and perceived isolation that may have been caused by the assimilation of an undesirable cultural element. In doing this it also became a crucible for experimentations in the creation of a new, revolutionary, inclusive, accessible and educational art form with a rich diversity of styles. The plastic arts had attention paid to their history of independent creation and political commitment. Their diversity and originality which lay in the successful assimilation of the nation's myriad of historical cultural currents was celebrated and the artistic form became a focus for investigation into how to raise the cultural level of the population, and expressing the 'Cuban' in the international. Due to its non-verbal nature it also became a valued conduit for experimenting with different approaches to educating the population. The calculated varying treatment of the different media also speaks to which different elements of the emergent national identity the government and cultural practitioners wished to emphasise. Theatre was particularly suited to demonstrate the move from alienation and the individual to collectivity, while the plastic arts lent themselves to demonstrating the nation's history of resistance that had now become commitment to continental Revolution.

In the same way that cultural policy was not monolithic, nor was the Cuban perception of, and relationship with, the USSR. Culture was a key

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medium in which the Cuban differences with the USSR were negotiated. Ideologically the two countries had little in common, for the same reasons that some of the more orthodox members of the PSP did not support the rebellion: the country was theoretically unready for socialist Revolution. Cuba's enduring connection with the USSR was born of a pragmatic response from both parties. In an increasingly polarised geopolitical climate the rapid deterioration of Cuban-US relations made it imperative for Cuba to find a trading ally and secure military protection capable of rivalling the force of the USA: the USSR was the only viable alternative. The USSR initially turned to Cuba out of economic and then ideological practicality: it needed large amounts of sugar which it was unable to produce, and Cuba presented an unparalleled opportunity for the USSR to gain prestige on the international stage and demonstrate the vitality of the Soviet socialist movement. However, the prolonged focus on sugar production meant that the USSR came to be seen by Cubans as another imperial force, and alternative ways of developing the Cuban economy were explored.

This shifting of the Cuban government's priorities meant that the nation's richest resource, its people and their inherent creative talents, was reappraised and efforts made to harness this potentially liberating force. The perception of the USSR as another imperial power had ramifications across all aspects of the Cuban Revolution as the focus moved to maintaining the nation's independence in all spheres, including ideologically. This renewed sense of siege caused the nation's gaze to turn inwards in a bid to identify and rescue the elements of the nation's history that could be used as a protective barrier against external threats.

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At the same time, internationalism became the Cuban government's path to independence as the two countries had a fundamentally different opinion of the global political situation and the best method to pursue socialism at an international level. Ultimately the two countries adopted a more pragmatic approach towards each other, working together to achieve mutually beneficial goals, and the balance of influence shifted as Cuba cemented its reputation as the vanguard of Third World socialism. However, there were always multiple currents of political thought in existence within the Cuban Revolution. These currents co-existed throughout the period examined, which meant that the USSR was constantly viewed as anathema, inspiration and everything in between. Such complexity is reflected in the ongoing ambiguity about how the term 'Soviet' is understood and what it actually stood for among Cubans during the period analysed and stands for today.

The October Revolution and the early years of Bolshevik rule held a significant place in Latin American revolutionary thought, as did the early efforts to educate the Russian, and then Soviet, population and widen the boundaries of culture. Equally, the rapid industrialisation of the Stalin regime was a model that spoke to individuals in countries seeking to lift themselves out of underdevelopment. However, the errors and the human cost of the USSR's variant of socialism, not least those of the Stalin regime which came to light from the mid-1950s onwards, were also equally known and used to warn of the dangers of collaboration with the USSR or as impetus to search for alternative interpretations of socialism.

The international perception of the USSR became inextricably linked with the rule of Stalin and remained shaped by the legacy of this

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period. The events and lasting impact of this administration were slow to be addressed publicly nationally or internationally. Perhaps because of this the period in which culture in Cuba was most heavily regulated, the *quinquenio gris*, has often been described as the most 'Soviet' period in Cuba's history. This label is to some extent explained by the institutionalisation which took place during this period which saw the introduction of some Soviet structures, such as *Poder Popular*, which mirrored the Soviet experience in preparation for Cuba's full induction into COMECON. This was also the first peak in the discussion about the USSR and the popular press.

However, as this research has demonstrated, the 1970s, and particularly the period of 1971 to 1976, was not necessarily a 'Soviet' period of the Cuban Revolution which saw the wholesale imposition of Soviet ideas about cultural organisation and aesthetic styles onto the cultural production of the Cuban Revolution. Indeed, the force of the debates of the 1960s, and Ambrosio Fornet's discussion of the *quinquenio gris*, regarding revolutionary culture (of which socialist realism formed only a part) reflect the overwhelming rejection of the imposition of any model or approach. Rather, the decade of the 1970s, and the period of the *quinquenio gris* in particular, is better understood as a period of bellicose expression of emergent ideas of nationalism in response to a mounting sense of isolation and siege. From 1968 onwards, as Cuba moved away from European ideas of socialism and opposition to the Revolution mounted, artists were viewed as soldiers. Cultural administration and cultural practitioners were mobilised to defend against overt external threats, but also perceived internal threats such as alienation. The

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reclassification of cultural practitioners in the national imaginary gave primacy to a certain set of behavioural expectations, which coalesced with orthodox Marxist ideas about the creation and promotion of an educative culture.

As a by-product of the new emphasis on the fostering of a coherent national expression and the artist as soldier, foreign culture occupied a contentious position. From the late 1960s until the mid-1970s there was an ambiguous approach towards 'good' and 'bad' foreign influences, with no concrete canon against which such influence could be measured. The USSR, as the most consistent foreign presence, occupied an equally contentious position within the Cuban cultural imaginary at this stage. The continuing local power struggles and discussion about economic and political approaches further complicated the perception of the Soviet superpower.

The USSR formed part of Cuba's 'Imaginary West': the perception of practices, knowledge and aesthetics that belonged to products of imperialism. It simultaneously also formed part of Cuba's everyday reality, as the most immediate, functioning example of popular socialist culture. Such an approach is reflected in the treatment of the idea of the USSR in Cuba during this period. The move towards full membership of COMECON seemed to imply the primacy of a particular ideological approach was confirmed by the promotion of orthodox individuals, often with military background, to positions of power in culture. The proliferation of articles about the USSR in the popular mass publications and cultural publications reinforced this idea.

However, the latter phenomenon also demonstrates the ongoing focus on education, informing the population (particularly in the cultural press) about the country's closest ally and its cultural practices and history. The ambiguity regarding the Cuban relationship with the USSR, the interpretative spaces that it left for the application of policy, and the power struggles it enabled, were arguably one of the greatest contributors to the general perception of the early 1970s as 'Soviet'. Such uncertainty permitted multiple strains of cultural practices concerning the 'Soviet', with each instance equally open to interpretation. The polemical position that the USSR, and its ill-defined presence in Cuban society, continued to occupy in revolutionary society contributed to varying perceptions of the superpower's role in the Revolution that was not clarified until the 1976 Constitution.

The period 1968 to 1976 does not represent an overwhelmingly 'Soviet' period. Rather, as this thesis has revealed, it was a period of intense re-evaluation of notions of culture and internationalism in a society in the throes of a second phase of revolutionary change as the nation attempted to modernise. Moreover, in its drive for modernisation, the Cuban Revolution in the 1968 to 1976 period demonstrates the contradictory and unequal way in which the journey to modernity unfolded in Latin America. Caught between international isolation and subordination, expressions of emergent Cuban nationalism took on a particularly strident tone as the government strove to maintain its path to independence.

The new Constitution codified Cuba's commitment to internationalism and clarified the nature of Cuba's relationship with the

USSR. It also clarified the contentious position of 'foreign' culture, which was deemed acceptable if it was properly critiqued, assimilated and re-elaborated in a way that was clearly Cuban. However, with the creation of MINCULT the cultural infrastructure began to resemble that of the USSR more closely, a reflection of the increasingly streamlined, and controlled, interaction of the two countries. There was a renewed drive to nurture the latent creative talent in the Cuban population, as part of the linking of culture and education to the economy. This meant that the USSR was viewed as an education source that would help train Cubans in areas where a lack of technical knowledge was holding back the development of the Cuban economy and cultural expression.

Thus, the perceived best of the USSR was appropriated (at different times, and by different groups) and reinterpreted into a Cuban setting. Co-operation and collaboration with the USSR was once more embedded into cultural policy, but in terms that emphasised the equality of the relationship and the ways in which it would benefit Cuba. Within culture, Cubans were sent to study in the USSR, and Soviet advice was taken on the structuring of ISA. Even there, though, the Soviet influence was carefully controlled: ISA was located in Cubanacán, an internationally acclaimed architectural testament to the unique nature, and aesthetics, of Cuba and the Revolution, Soviet advisors were employed in the technical, skills-based classes, and the Cuban artists sent to the USSR had all already excelled in their fields and had distinctive styles.

Simultaneously, institutions that were distinctly Cuban, such as the Centro de Estudios Martianos, began to proliferate, demonstrating the ongoing commitment to the exploration and rescue of national heritage in

the construction of the new national image. During this period the Cuban-Soviet alliance began to take on a performative element, as cooperation was focussed around significant dates in the history of each country. In these symbolic celebrations of solidarity and cooperation the focus was placed on the period that spanned the October Revolution until the death of Lenin, the fight against fascism, cultural traditions and folklore. For example, *Bohemia* sported an image of Lenin on its cover for the issue of the first week of November every year. Such demarcation of the alliance helped to create internal space for cultural creation and the exploration of national identity. In the 1970s, cultural history (folklore and traditions) had been used as a gateway for potential further cooperation with the 'brother socialist' countries. By the 1980s it had come to be used as a protective barrier that allowed for the public affirmation of friendship and cooperation, but also performed a protective role due to its historic quality. This shift also fitted with the changing Soviet perception of the Cuban Revolution: as the revolutionary government positioned itself at the vanguard of alternative interpretations of socialism, Soviet discussion of Cuba increasingly presented the Revolution as a national liberation movement, rather than a socialist revolution, slowly following the Soviet developmental model.

In examining the multiple currents of cultural production, organisation and revolutionary thought, this thesis has revealed that the 1980s were actually the most 'Soviet' period particularly in terms of organisation, the demands placed on public culture and the promotion of a certain type of artistic production. This was in part because of the ongoing dominance of Soviet-trained Cubans in institutional administration but also

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because some of the different currents of thought within the Revolution combined around ideas of the coalescence of education, culture and economy. These commonly shared ideas involved assisting the crossover of elite and mass culture for educational purposes and the use of culture for international agitation. Both of these necessarily included the clear inscription of coherent national and regional identity into cultural production.

In the mid and late 1970s inspiration was taken from the October Revolution's early linking of culture to economic production, through movements such as constructivism. However, given the heterogeneous nature of interpretations of socialism within the Revolution that continued to exist, and the ongoing perceptions of the demands placed on culture, the application of the emergent cultural policy in some spheres continued to be contradictory and at times regulatory. This led to a type of organisational socialist realism though the practices of certain institutions, which was arguably then promoted by the subsequent overt rejection of Soviet ideas and models and styles in the bid for national independence.

However, the drive to further integrate culture into economic production caused the culture's educational and informative qualities to become separated from its artistic and innovative qualities as certain elements of each form of cultural expression were promoted. This selective advancement and support of certain types of cultural production led to a separation of culture into public and private. 'Public' culture — murals, statues, posters, theatre performances — informed and educated. 'Private' culture that focussed on artistic innovation — such as sculpture, painting and installations — was confined to increasingly closed artistic

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circles. In some cases this separation ended up alienating the artist from revolutionary society, such as the New Art of Cuba that emerged in the 1980s.

Internationalism remained the way in which cultural practitioners, and cultural institutes, were able to question this separation of culture's roles and to propose alternative interpretations of socialist culture. Cultural events aimed at an international audience, such as the Biennale and the Festival de Teatro Nuevo, helped to begin recreating the discursive atmosphere of the 1960s. New emphasis was placed on the search for the cultural expression of a national identity but more fully inscribing Cuban culture within the Latin American and Caribbean tradition. The renewed focus on cultural internationalism was complemented by a systematic analysis of Cuban revolutionary culture to date to search for trends and ways in which to improve cultural output and its efficiency. Such analysis of cultural production included the questioning of Soviet ideas and approaches that had found a place in Cuban culture. In some areas, such as informative or performative culture, an element of 'Soviet' culture remained. However, in artistic higher education institutes, particularly ISA, there was an increasing rejection of Soviet influence and presence (now seen as cultural imperialism), which also included protecting against future influence: theatre quotas were restructured, artists who had studied in the USSR were not employed in the capital's landmark artistic centres, and Soviet assessors did not have their contracts renewed.

My research has revealed that culture, and the evolving cultural policy in Cuba, frequently acted as spaces in which the revolutionary government and cultural practitioners could define their differences and

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articulate their own definitions of Revolution and socialism and debate the developing national identity. It has highlighted the ambivalences of the Cuban-Soviet relationship within Cuba's domestic cultural policy. In doing so it has evidenced how internationalism formed the core of Cuba's emergent national identity, and how this narrative allowed revolutionary practitioners to assimilate a wide range of cultural trends whilst maintaining a clear political commitment. Among its original contributions, this thesis offers a careful re-reading of the meanings and contradictions of socialist realism in the context of the post-1959 Cuban experience, drawing on my identification of the inherent internationalist qualities of the doctrine.

This study has revealed that throughout the period 1961 to 1987 there were many different perceptions of the USSR within the cultural spaces of the Cuban Revolution, and indeed of what 'Soviet' actually meant. These impressions were constantly in flux, reacting to the needs of the Revolution and the perceived distribution of power within cultural administration. Regarding the concept of socialist realism in the Cuban context this study has demonstrated that in the same way there was never a unitary idea of 'Revolution' and 'Socialism' in Cuba, there was never a single notion of socialist realism. The concept was open and mutable and contingent on the individual's conception of the role of culture in a socialist society and the envisioned task of either the specific art form.

This diversity of the constantly shifting interpretations of key concepts and their impact on the role of culture, along with the tendency of cultural policy to react rather than anticipate, led to multiple strains of approaches that could be termed socialist realism. These approaches both coexisted and conflicted at times. Such strains were born out of the

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ongoing commitment to the creation of a socialist culture that reflected its people to a national, and international audience, and the different paths towards this goal that were considered viable.

In particular, the plastic arts were key in the revolutionary authorities' navigation of international Cold War binaries as was the theatre in the exploration of Cuba's national and regional cultural traditions. The detailed analysis of these two cultural modes in Chapters Four and Five has revealed how ideas about internationalism and traditional cultural forms were able to be harnessed by different artistic media, practitioners, and institutions to help negotiate the Cuban government's path towards a distinctly Cuban form of socialism. This socialism drew on the best of other models, including those from the USSR, but also from Latin America and the Caribbean. In the selective assimilation of Soviet elements and the skilful manoeuvring around Soviet priorities, cultural policy, production and organisation was always tempered by the Revolution's enduring ideological roots.

**Figures and Images**



**Image 47 graffiti on site of the former *Moscú***

Copyright: the author



**Image 48 Map of area surrounding  
former Moscú, Vedado**

Clockwise from top left:  
Pabellón Cuba,  
Restaurante Moscú, Casa  
Museo Abel Santamaría,  
Habana Libre

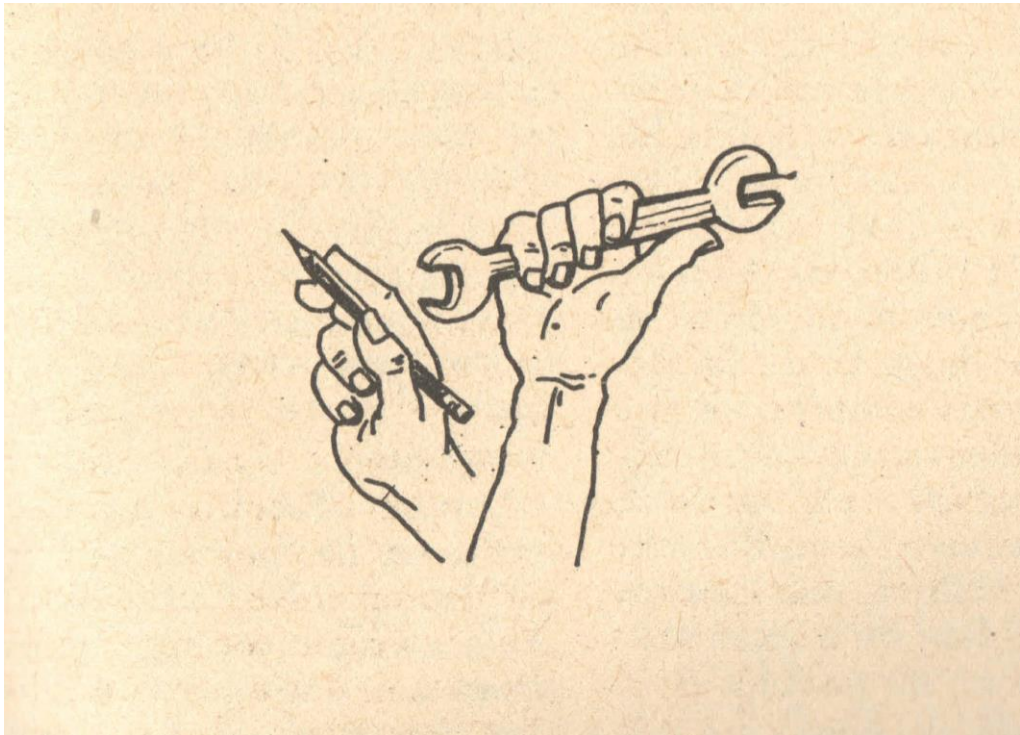


Image 49 Insert in *Cuba Socialista*, Volume 1, Issue 2, October 1961

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### **Interviews**

1. Aurelio Alonso, 2015
2. Loipa Araújo, 2015
3. Osvaldo Cano, 2015
4. Sergio Chaple, 2015
5. Enrique Colina, 2015
6. Ambrosio Fornet, 2015
7. Rocio García, 2015
8. Eduardo Heras León, 2015
9. Roberto Hernandez, 2015
10. Nelson Herrera-Ysla, 2015
11. Aisar Jalil, 2015
12. Alberto Lescay, 2015
13. Manuel López Olivia, Ileana Zaida García and Gecer López, 2015
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19. Enrique Pineda Barnet, 2015
20. Graziella Pogolotti, 2015
21. Guillermo Rafael Rodríguez, 2015
22. Eduardo Roca (Choco), 2015
23. Rolando Rodriguez, 2015
24. Serio Roque, 2015
25. Juan Valdés Paz, 2015
26. Anna Lidia Vega Serova, 2015
27. Anonymised source, 2015

## 8 Glossary of Terms

BNJM — Biblioteca Nacional José Martí

CDR — Comités de Defensa de la Revolución

CODEMA — Consejo Asesor para el Desarrollo de la Escultura Monumentaria

COMECON — Council for Mutual Economic Assistance

COMINTERN — Communist International

CNC — Consejo Nacional de Cultura

DRE — Directorio Revolucionario Estudiantil

EIR — Escuelas de Instrucción Revolucionaria

ENA — Escuela nacional de Arte

FAR — Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias

ISA — Instituto Superior de Arte

M-26-7 — Movimiento 26 de Julio

MINCULT — Ministerio de Cultura

MINED — Ministerio de Educación

MNBA — Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes

Nuestro Tiempo — Sociedad Cultural Nuestro Tiempo

ORI — Organizaciones Integradas Revolucionarias

PCC — Partido Comunista de Cuba

PSP — Partido Socialista Popular

PURS — Partido Unido de la Revolución Socialista

UNEAC — Unión Nacional de Escritores y Artistas de Cuba

## 9 Timelines

### Soviet Timeline

1917	February Revolution October Revolution takes power Proletkul't founded
1918	First National Conference of Proletkul't
1918 – 1921	Civil War
1919	State publishing house, Gosizdat, founded The Comintern (Communist International) founded
1920	All Russian Association of Proletarian Writers (VAPP) founded. Proletkul't merged into Narkompros
1921 – 1928	New Economic Policy
1922	Association of Artists of Revolutionary Russia (AKhRR) founded
1923	Rossiiskaia Assotsiatsiia Proletarskikh Muzykantov, Russian Association of Proletarian Musicians (RAPM) founded
1924	Lenin dies
1925	Central committee resolution <i>On the Policy of the Party in the Sphere of Artistic Literature</i>
1928	Cultural Revolution begins Gor'kii returns to the USSR First Five Year Plan ( <i>piatiletka</i> )
1929	The Cooperative of Artists, <i>Vsekhudozhnik</i> , founded
1931	End of Cultural Revolution
1932	Dissolution of RAPP and other proletarian artists' associations
1934	Establishment of Union of Soviet Writers First Congress of the Union of Soviet Writers Socialist Realism proclaimed
1936	Campaign against <i>formalizm</i>
1938	Committee on Artistic Affairs established
1939	The Stalin Prize (in art and literature) established
1943	Dissolution of Comintern
1944	Bek, <i>Volokolamskoe shosse</i> [Volokolamsk Highway]
1946	Beginning of <i>Zhdanovshchina</i>
1947	Academy of Arts of the USSR (re)founded in Moscow Il'ia Repin Institute for Painting, Sculpture and Architecture founded
1948	Campaign against <i>kosmopolitizm</i>
1949	(Second) campaign against <i>formalizm</i>

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1952	Campaign against <i>beskonfliktnost'</i>
1953	Death of Stalin Liquidation of <i>Vsekhudozhnik</i> Liquidation of All-Union Committee on Artistic Affairs of the Government of the USSR Ministry of Culture founded
1954	Il'ia Erenburg, <i>Ottepel'</i>
1956	Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party Khrushchev's Secret Speech
1961	Aleksandr Bek, <i>Panfilovtsi na p"rva liniia</i> [General Panfilov's Reserve]
1961	Stalin's body removed from Lenin Mausoleum Evgeni Evtushenko, <i>Babii Iar</i>
1964	Khrushchev's removal from power
1966	Trial of Andrei Siniavsky and Daniel
1968	Soviet intervention in 'Prague Spring'
1974	Brezhnev visits Cuba
1982	Brezhnev dies. Succeeded by Andropov
1984	Andropov dies. Succeeded by Chernenko
1985	Chernenko dies. Succeeded by Gorbachev
1985 – 1991	<i>Perestroika</i> and <i>glasnost'</i>

### Cuban Timeline

1945	Instituto de Intercambio Cultural Cubano-Soviético (IICCS) created. Beginning of publication of <i>Cuba-URSS</i>
1952	IICCS closed down and <i>Cuba-URSS</i> ceases publication
1959	ICAIC founded Casa de las Américas founded
1960	Primer Encuentro Nacional de Poetas y Artistas
1961	CNC founded UNEAC founded
1962	Primer Plenaria Nacional de Coordinadores Culturales Primer Congreso Nacional de Cultura
1965	Founding of the PCC ENA Inaugurated
1966	Tricontinental Conference
1967	Visit of the Salón de Mayo Establishment of ISA
1968	Congreso Cultural de La Habana Primer Congreso de la UNEAC
1969	Cuban-Soviet Friendship Society established
1970	Failure of ten million tonne <i>zafra</i> Salón 70
1971	Primer Congreso Nacional de Educación y Cultura Primer Encuentro de Plástica Latinoamerica
1972	Cuba becomes full member of COMECON Days of Soviet culture begin in Cuba
1974	VI Meeting of the Ministers of Culture of the Socialist Countries held in Havana
1975	Primer Congreso del PCC
1976	MINCULT founded ISA inaugurated New Constitution Ratified
1977	Instituto del Libro dismantled Segundo Congreso de la UNEAC
1979	Sixth Summit of the Non-Aligned conference hosted in Havana
1980	Primer Festival del Teatro de La Habana Segundo Congreso del PCC
1981	Volumen Uno Primer Encuentro de Teatristas Latinoamericanos y del Caribe
1982	Tercer Congreso de la UNEAC UNESCO declared Habana Vieja a World Heritage Site

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1983	Primer Taller Internacional de Nuevo Teatro
1984	Primer Biennale de La Habana TELARTE I
1985	Tercer Congreso del PCC TELARTE II
1986	Cuarto Congreso de la UNEAC