# On the Edge of the Screen:
# Film Culture and Practices of Noncommercial Cinema in Cuba
# (1948-1966)

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# Abstract

**On the Edge of the Screen:**
**Film Culture and Practices of Noncommercial Cinema in Cuba (1948-1966)**

**Irene Rozsa, Ph.D.**
**Concordia University, 2019**

The place of Cuban cinema in the film-historical canon is limited to the history of the Cuban film institute (ICAIC) founded in the early days of the Cuban Revolution, in 1959. This dissertation investigates the island's film culture in the years prior, commonly referred to as the republican period, to establish its contributions to post-revolutionary developments. I examine the practices of film culture and noncommercial cinema in Cuba, tracing their evolution from 1948 to 1966. I research the development of the film course offered at the University of Havana and explain the formative impact of film education on future film promoters, film critics, and filmmakers. I also document the distinct cine club communities constituted around non-theatrical film exhibition, elucidating their role in the diversification of the 1950s film public and on the configuration of an identifiable art cinema audience. In addition, I provide background on the history of amateur filmmaking on the island. Furthermore, I analyze the elements that contributed to ICAIC's hegemonic position within the country's cultural landscape, including their acquisition of material assets, their privileged access to mediated forms of public discourse, and their concerted strategies for transforming popular taste. I argue that post-revolutionary institutionalized film culture was built upon its pre-revolutionary antecedents, and that the process of audience diversification that started in the 1950s persisted despite the policies implemented in the 1960s to centralize film exhibition and programming, to emphasize ideological interpretation in film criticism, and to restrict amateur filmmaking. My investigation demonstrates the gradual formation of a new two-tier system in which both elite and unsophisticated inclinations continued to coexist, and resourceful amateurs found clandestine ways to make films outside of institutional channels.

This study contributes to Cuban film historiography by restoring continuity to the island's cinematic past. I challenge perspectives that ignore the transnational exchanges and the

modernizing forces at play during the late republican period. In adopting a more expansive conception of film history – one that is not strictly concerned with film production and the filmic text, but integrates exhibition, distribution, promotion, and knowledge dissemination – I establish multiple threads that connect pre-revolutionary and post-revolutionary developments.

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I dedicate this dissertation to Eduardo and our children, for the love that empowered me to take this journey.

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## List of Abbreviations

**ACL**: Amateur Cinema League

**CCH-CC:** Cine Club de La Habana/Cinemateca de Cuba (1948-1956)

**CCOC:** Centro Católico de Orientación Cinematográfica (Catholic Center for Cinematographic Orientation)

**CEU:** Comisión de Extensión Universitaria (University Extension Commission)

**CFC:** Club Fotográfico de Cuba (Cuba Photography Club)

**CNC:** Consejo Nacional de Cultura (National Council of Culture)

**FIAF:** International Federation of Film Archives

**ICAIC:** Instituto Cubano de Arte e Industria Cinematográficos (Cuban Institute of Cinematographic Art and Industry)

**INC:** Instituto Nacional de Cultura (National Institute of Culture)

**PSP**: Partido Socialista Popular (Popular Socialist Party)

# Introduction

Joris Ivens' symbolic film letter to Charles Chaplin opens with footage of the reconstruction of Cuba's largest movie theater in 1960. As we watch images of construction workers carrying out their job, we hear the offscreen first-person narrator:

> Dear Chaplin,
> I will send you a copy of these travel notes. I am sure you will be happy to hear that the first and largest cine club in Havana bears your name. Six thousand seats. This lavish palace was built some time ago. Today it is a cultural center stripped of absurd glitter, light and simple as it should be.[1]

The film closes with these final words:

> I will depart from Cuba. The Charlie Chaplin Cine Club has been finished.
> Dear Chaplin,
> So often you have called for liberty and justice in your films… It is thrilling to find your name associated with that of Cuba, with the image of hope and of joy. The always-exciting joy of building the future.

Building and reconstruction are recurring tropes in the discourse and imagery of the early years of the 1959 Cuban Revolution, not only in reference to Cuban cinema specifically, but to Cuban society more broadly. This focus on rebuilding what is presented as having been impractical or inoperable is evident in Ivens' short documentary *Travel Notebook* (1961), and it finds echoes in the work of other European filmmakers invited to visit the island during the early years of post-revolutionary fervor. However, the assertion that Cuba's first cine club was founded by the Revolution is incorrect, and the enthusiasm for a six-thousand-seat movie theater gives the inaccurate impression that screening spaces were otherwise scarce. Similarly, many of the accepted assumptions about Cuban cinema, the Revolution, and the social impact of post-revolutionary policies suffer from overly optimistic distortions.

Ivens' decision to frame his Cuba travelogue as epistolar contact with Charles Chaplin, a cinema personality widely recognized as a symbol of inconformity with capitalism, speaks to the leading role of cinema in the configuration of the Cuban Revolution's identity and export value. Cinema occupied a central place in the process of enlisting a sympathetic attitude towards the

[1] *Carnet de viaje* (*Travel Notebook,* Joris Ivens, 1961). All translations from Spanish are mine.

Cuban Revolution. Filmmakers like Ivens, Chris Marker, or Agnès Varda portrayed "tropical socialism" as an attractive alternative to Cuba's colonial heritage.[2] As the decade progressed, Cubans themselves produced these images, which reached out across the world, with great impact in what was then commonly named the "Third World." Cuban documentaries like those of Santiago Álvarez traveled to international film festivals, publicizing the hefty ideals of anticolonialism and antimperialism, in consonance with the rising liberation and post-colonial movements in Asia, Africa, and Latin America.[3] Cuba's message of radicalism was also well received across North American colleges and universities, in tune with the anti-establishment sentiment of the 1960s and 1970s. The imagery produced by Cuban cinema held so much iconic potential, that Cuban movie posters hung on the walls of radical youth group spaces.[4]

The unbounded enthusiasm of sympathetic foreigners for the rapid developments taking place in the early years of the Revolution opened the door for erroneous information and led to the dissipation of many facts of the past. For instance, the cultural center referred to in the opening words of *Travel Notebook* was not actually the first Havana cine club. Actually, the first formalized cine club in Havana started functioning in 1948 in the minuscule screening space of a newsreel company. The massive theater shown at the beginning of Ivens' film was the Teatro Blanquita, built in 1948 and named after a senator's wife. It was renamed Charles Chaplin for a brief period, during which it was used as part of the ideological training of thousands of workers and students through a project called "Cine-club Obrero Chaplin" ("Workers' Cine Club Chaplin"). This same space has been known as Karl Marx Theatre since 1975, when it hosted the

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[2] For example, *Pueblo armado (A People in Arms,* Joris Ivens, 1961*)*, *Cuba Sí* (Chris Marker, 1961), and *Salut les cubains* (Agnès Varda, 1963).

[3] For insight on the political and critical reception of the Cuban Revolution amongst the international intellectual community, see Iván de la Nuez, *Fantasía Roja: Los intelectuales de izquierdas y la Revolución Cubana* (Barcelona: Debate, 2006); Rafael Rojas, "Anatomía del entusiasmo: La revolución como espectáculo de ideas," *América Latina Hoy*, 2007, 39-53; Kepa Artaraz, *Cuba and Western Intellectuals since 1959* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009). For the impact of Cuban cinema across the Third World, see Mariano Mestman, "From Algiers to Buenos Aires: The Third World Cinema Committee (1973-74)," *New Cinemas: Journal of Contemporary Film* 1, no. 1 (2002): 40–53; Masha Salazkina, "Transnational Genealogies of Institutional Film Culture of Cuba, 1960s-1970s," in *The Routledge Companion to Latin American Cinema*, eds. Marvin D'Lugo, Ana M. López, and Laura Podalsky, (Abingdon, Oxon; New York, NY: Routledge, 2018), 192-203.

[4] I recognized an identifiable Cuban movie poster in one of the shots of the film *Underground* (Emile de Antonio, 1976).

first congress of the Communist Party of Cuba. In a way, this screening and performance site embodies the trajectory of many post-revolutionary policies, in that they turned a grandiloquent and decaying structure into a short-lived utopian trance, only to become an outmoded construction once again.

The reconstruction and repurposing of the deteriorating Blanquita theater into the Cine-club Obrero Chaplin is consistent with the egalitarian measures and the redistribution of wealth that are essential to the narrative of the Revolution. On the other hand, the effects of these policies on business owners and the professional class are seldom explored. The focus on rebuilding present in Ivens' documentary went hand in hand with a destructive impetus. Indeed, while made-for-export images emphasized construction, thosed aimed at the national public placed a greater emphasis on the destruction of foreign and large-scale ownership. This balancing act between construction and destruction is particularly evident in the earliest newsreels produced by the Instituto Cubano de Arte e Industria Cinematográficos (ICAIC). This weekly periodical became an effective tool of audiovisual communication, with the double advantage of immediacy and regularity. The power of moving images was essential. In this respect, *Newsreel 49* (May 15, 1961), offers a particularly telling example of ICAIC's attitude towards the existing business of film, and its projection towards a fiercely national vision for Cuban cinema. In a short segment called "Distribuidores de veneno" ("Distributors of Poison"), we find documentary evidence of the physical destruction announcing the changes to come. We see people who, performing for the camera, hold hammers and tear apart the signs of United Artists and Warner Brothers, which crash to the floor.

The construction-destruction dynamic is also evident in the discursive forms of historicizing and analyzing Cuban cinema that prevailed for several decades. If, as shown in the newsreel, the stroke of a hammer could destroy the physical signs of the offices of the American movie distributors, it took many more strokes of pens and typewriters to destroy the evidence and the reputation of pre-revolutionary cinema and film culture. ICAIC's founders considered it necessary to bury and discredit all evidence of pre-revolutionary cinematic activity that did not show a natural path towards their newfound place of privilege. Yet, through scrutiny of ICAIC's formative period, between 1959 and 1966, I have found that this legacy was still very palpable during those years. Between 1959 and 1961 ICAIC promptly appropriated the means for professional audiovisual production and excluded all the members of the film business circuit.

Yet, they owed a great debt to the practices of film culture and noncommercial cinema that had been building on the island, especially since 1948.

This dissertation examines the practices of film culture and noncommercial cinema in Cuba, tracing their evolution from 1948 to 1966. I research the development of the film course offered at the University of Havana and explain the formative impact of film education on future film promoters, film critics, and filmmakers. I also document the distinct cine-club communities constituted around non-theatrical film exhibition, elucidating their role in the diversification of the 1950s film public and on the configuration of an identifiable art cinema audience. In addition, I provide background on the little-known history of amateur filmmaking on the island, showing that in its beginnings, ICAIC preferred to train amateurs rather than employing experienced professionals who were not ideologically compatible with the institution's outlook. Furthermore, I analyze the elements that contributed to ICAIC's hegemonic position within the country's cultural landscape, including their acquisition of material assets, their privileged access to mediated forms of public discourse, and their concerted strategies for transforming popular taste by means of film criticism, large-scale film viewing events, and centralized film programming. I argue that post-revolutionary institutionalized film culture was built upon its pre-revolutionary antecedents, and that the process of audience diversification that started in the 1950s persisted despite the policies implemented in the 1960s to centralize film exhibition and programming, to emphasize ideological interpretation in film criticism, and to restrict amateur filmmaking. My investigation demonstrates the gradual formation of a new two-tier system in which both elite and unsophisticated inclinations continued to coexist, and resourceful amateurs found clandestine ways to make films outside of institutional channels.

My overall purpose is to incorporate an updated historical narrative on Cuban cinema into expanded forms of film historiography that look beyond the filmic text. In adopting a more expansive conception of film history – one that is not strictly concerned with film production, but integrates exhibition, distribution, promotion, and knowledge dissemination – I establish the lines of continuity in Cuba's cinematic history throughout the twentieth century. I focus mainly on the 1950s and 1960s because this is the historical period that is more problematically presented in English-language scholarship. For the most part, scholarly research has focused on ICAIC film production, and has been based on the testimonies and the documentation provided

directly by ICAIC representatives.[5] In consequence, the conspicuous presence of cinema during Cuba's republican period (1902-1958) has been relegated to a secondary position, laden with incomplete and erroneous information. Similarly, archival research and the testimonies of exiled intellectuals shed new light on the convoluted realignments of power and influence that characterized the first decade of the Revolution.

In the following pages I provide additional background on the historical and scholarly context for this project. I start with a review of the historical moment that enabled the creation of ICAIC, highlighting the missing elements that motivated my approach to the historical reconstruction of the preceding period. Next, I introduce the notion of "revolutionarity," which is essential for understanding the shifting levels of individual and institutional power, and the constitution of ICAIC as the arbiters of film taste on the island. Finally, I outline the contributions my research makes to the field of Film Studies and to the study of Cuban cinema.

## Historical Context

It is important to contextualize the historical circumstances that intensified the Cuban state's interest in cinema.[6] In the immediate aftermath of the 1959 Cuban Revolution, the new government formed by Fidel Castro, then a law graduate turned guerrilla leader, undertook a large number of economic and social measures. These were welcomed by a large portion of the population, who saw them as first steps against the prevailing corruption of previous

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[5] Julianne Burton, "Cuba," in *Les Cinémas de L'Amérique Latine: pays par pays, l'histoire, l''économie, les structures, les auteurs, les oeuvres*, eds. Guy Hennebelle and Dagron A. Gumucio (Paris: Lherminier, 1981), 259-307; Julianne Burton, "Film and Revolution in Cuba. The First Twenty-Five Years," in *New Latin American Cinema. Studies of National Cinemas*, ed. Michael T. Martin, vol. 2, 2 vols. (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1997), 123–42; Michael Chanan, *The Cuban image: Cinema and Cultural Politics in Cuba* (London: BFI Pub.; Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1985); Michael Chanan, *Cuban Cinema* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004).

[6] For comprehensive accounts of Cuban history see Hugh Thomas, *Cuba or the Pursuit of Freedom* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1998); Richard Gott, *Cuba: A New History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004); Louis A. Pérez Jr., *Cuba: Between Reform and Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006); Marifeli Pérez-Stable, *The Cuban Revolution: Origins, Course and Legacy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); Consuelo Naranjo Orovio, Ana Crespo Solana, and María Dolores González-Ripoll Navarro, eds., *Historia de las Antillas: Historia de Cuba*, vol. 1, 5 vols. (Madrid, Spain; Aranjuez, Spain: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas; Doce Calles, 2009).

governments, and toward economic independence from the United States. The overthrow of Fulgencio Batista, an army man who had taken power through a military coup in 1952 and who had become increasingly ruthless against his opponents, was perceived as a necessary leap forward towards democracy and prosperity on the island. For the intellectual and artistic class, this was a long-awaited opportunity for intellectual and creative activity to flourish without the constraints of censorship and political persecution.

However, between 1959 and 1961, the implementation of nationalist policies in all economic, social and political realms provided the state with larger prescriptive powers than early supporters of the Revolution had anticipated. The nationalization of the major industries controlled by foreign interests was followed by the expropriation of large, medium, and small businesses successively. Cuba replaced its strong trade links with the United States with an increasingly close commercial relationship with the Soviet Union and the Socialist Bloc. Concurrently, in the cultural field, state institutions were endowed with greater influence to regulate the creative and promotional resources involved in cultural production. In consequence, many writers, artists, and intellectuals who had been initially involved in the revolutionary project, expressed concerns and disappointment. Those whose worldview was perceived to either oppose or fit uncomfortably within the ruling ideological parameters, found their voices silenced, and their participation in the cultural sphere restricted. Throughout the 1960s, the majority of them chose to live in exile, prompting national institutions to expunge them from Cuban intellectual history.

The first official cultural institution created by the Cuban Revolution was the Cuban Institute for Cinematographic Art and Industry (Instituto Cubano del Arte e Industria Cinematográficos, ICAIC), in March 1959. Within a decade, the film institute invigorated the national film industry, producing internationally celebrated documentaries and fiction films. Moreover, throughout the fervent 1960s and 1970s, ICAIC became a key site of intellectual and creative exchange that had great impact on militant forms of cinematic modernism across Latin America and the Global South. Internationally, ICAIC representatives functioned as *de facto* cultural diplomats, bringing Cuban films along with the message of antimperialism and positive testimonies about the Revolution to a myriad festivals and congresses. Cuban films accomplished the political task of bearing witness to a political process.

ICAIC's immediate impact on Cuban film production has been well recognized across the film-historical literature. Many studies have been devoted to the social message and aesthetics of post-revolutionary Cuban films. But the Cuban case also offers a good space for reflecting on the long term impact of institutionalization. ICAIC was not only responsible for building a film industry based on a renewed vision of national culture, but also for developing film culture as an educational vehicle with the top priority of advancing government ideology. The institutional mission was not only focused on cinema's artistic aspect, but was intrinsically linked to social processes that demanded unconditional citizen support for the government. These priorities placed ICAIC in a hegemonic position, making it part and parcel of a concerted effort to suppress unwanted voices from public discourse. The high degree of centralization had consequences because it eliminated all possibility of autonomous cultural action, making count every act and utterance as a matter of the state.

Fidel Castro founded ICAIC by decree only three months after overthrowing the previous regime. Alfredo Guevara Valdés (no relation to Ernesto "Ché" Guevara), a reliable friend from his university years, conceived the organization's outlook and scope. He presided over ICAIC from 1959 to 1982, and again from 1991 to 2000. Guevara sat at the top of ICAIC's hierarchical structure, acting as both effective bureaucrat and authoritarian manager. His ideological and personal preferences had a direct effect on the film institute's hiring policies, on the greenlighting or shelving of projects, and on the status and opportunities for advancement for the staff. His decision-making power also extended beyond ICAIC walls, putting him in the advantaged position for influencing the larger cultural field through unrestricted access to state media in print, radio, and television.

For ICAIC, one of the advantages of arriving early to the distribution of cultural assets, was that it started with a sizeable budget and government commitment to continued sponsorship. From this comfortable starting point, Guevara dreamed big and delivered results. Within a relatively short period of time, Cuban films were garnering accolades around the world and earning a deserving place in the history of cinema. For instance, *Now!* (Santiago Álvarez, 1965) and *Memories of Underdevelopment* (Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, 1968), are essential titles in any film history syllabus. Notwithstanding their individual talents, the untold part of this story is the preferential treatment that put Álvarez and Gutiérrez Alea in the directing chair. As I make clear in this dissertation, many others could have been given the same chance. Yet, only those who

were ideologically aligned with Guevara in the 1950s, through their participation in the Sociedad Cultural Nuestro Tiempo (Cultural Society Our Times), could partake in ICAIC's promising future. The early contours of "revolutionarity" determined their professional fate.

## Film Culture and the Acquisition of Revolutionarity

Contrary to ICAIC's official narrative, Cuban film culture did not emerge exclusively from radicalized societies like Nuestro Tiempo, but from a constellation of practices that coexisted throughout the 1950s. Looking at pre-revolutionary film courses, film criticism, cine-club screenings, and amateur filmmaking I reframe the genesis of ICAIC to account for these diverse elements. In addition to the historical reconstruction of pre-revolutionary film culture, I also pay attention to the sociopolitical aspects that conditioned post-revolutionary developments. In this respect, I pay particular attention to the ways in which "revolutionarity" became a constitutive part of institutionalized film culture.[7] I am using this term to refer to a prevalent tendency in the public identity taken on by Cuban cultural figures during the early years of the Revolution. By "revolutionarity" I mean an individual's ability to be perceived as a revolutionary in public. For the regular citizen, it is achieved through specific utterances and behaviour, as well as through participation in government-organized mass demonstrations, and active membership in mass organizations.[8] For the cultural worker, this involves a delicate balance of making specific verbal and written statements, adopting the "correct" rhetoric in their publications, combined with more uncontrolled variables regarding how one is perceived.

The perception of revolutionarity is mediated by state and institutional power. A person who was known to have a close relationship to Fidel Castro was automatically considered to be

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[7] Although the term "revolutionarity" can be considered a neologism, it has been used in some English-language texts from 1887 to 2009. See https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/Citations:revolutionarity#English. The Spanish equivalent, "revolucionareidad" is equally absent from Spanish-language dictionaries, but an Internet search reveals that a variation of the word, spelled "revolucionariedad" has already been used in direct relation to the Cuban context. See Rogelio Manuel Díaz Moreno, "¿Por qué hay ahora esta discusión sobre la revolucionariedad?," *Havana Times en Español*, November 16, 2016, https://havanatimesenespanol.org/opinion/por-que-hay-ahora-esta-discusion-sobre-la-revolucionariedad/.

[8] For a thorough documentation of these practices see the book Lillian Guerra, *Visions of Power in Cuba: Revolution, Redemption, and Resistance, 1959-1971* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), Kobo.

above suspicion, regardless of reality. Other connections with the top leadership through family, friendship, or shared history worked in a similar way, with descending degrees of effectiveness depending on their relative level of importance within the government hierarchy. Revolutionarity could also be ascribed according to the institutional shelter one received. Thus, someone whose bourgeois background was considered problematic could gain the protective shield of revolutionarity by being housed in a secure post-revolutionary institution like ICAIC. This is what happened to the 1960s generation of singer-songwriters known as "la Nueva Trova," who were sheltered by the Grupo de Experimentación Sonora (Sonic Experimentation Group) at ICAIC.

At the same time, revolutionarity was a temporary condition. The most effective way to keep one's revolutionary status intact was by being well connected to revolutionary personalities who were close to the top in the leadership scale. The level of suitability for a person to be deemed revolutionary depended not only on the content of their work (films, books, articles, paintings, plays, music), but also on how those cultural products were mobilized by others, including those in the diaspora.[9] Furthermore, specific actions could enhance or diminish one's revolutionarity. Making remarks that could be interpreted as counter-revolutionary by the foreign press, having amicable relationships with people considered "enemies of the Revolution", or publicly supporting the work or personal choices of people who had fallen out of favour for the powers that be, all had a negative impact on a person's revolutionary status.

The notion of revolutionarity is essential to make sense of the Cuban cultural field after 1959. The publicness of film culture practices makes them particularly responsive to the sociopolitical processes in which they take place. For cultural critics and intellectuals, the realignment of the forces of political power represented an updated system of privilege that had direct effects on their access to print and audiovisual media. Those who did not conform with the official rhetoric were removed from public discourse and had to remain silent or go into exile. Film promoters and cine-club organizers faced a new reality in which cultural activity independent of state institutions became virtually impossible. Entrepreneurs in the film business

[9] For example, interactions between friends and former colleagues Guillermo Cabrera Infante and Heberto Padilla fueled a political crisis in the cultural sector. See Lourdes Casal, *El caso Padilla: Literatura y revolución en Cuba; documentos* (Miami: Ediciones Universal, 1971).

sector and amateurs alike witnessed ICAIC emerge as the one and only safe harbor for film-related work, on the condition that they fit the ideological parameters of revolutionarity.

Throughout the dissertation I unveil several examples of revolutionarity. I identify the first articulations of revolutionarity in film education approaches and in the changes in tone and emphasis in film criticism. For instance, at a time when anything that had to do with American culture was subject to scrutiny, the general tendency of film reviews was to show a condemnatory attitude towards Hollywood cinema. The celebration of Soviet and Eastern European cinema was more desirable, and constituted one of the ways in which film critics performed their revolutionarity. However, praising the "wrong" movies from the Socialist Bloc carried its own pitfalls. The boundaries of revolutionarity were often redrawn, making film critics' positions unstable.

I also bring to the surface the politicization of cinemagoing. In her book *Visions of Power* (2012) Lillian Guerra has thoroughly documented the ways in which the early years of the Revolution were a time of conversion through action.[10] Citizens turned into revolutionaries through shows of support that amounted to political performance, whether they be assisting to marches, chanting slogans, or participating in government-designed massive projects like the literacy campaign or the sugar cane-cutting volunteer workforce. In this environment, cinemagoing was also mobilized as more than individual entertainment. This is especially evident in the implementation of large film-viewing sessions known as cine-debates, designed to guide film interpretation towards ideological correctness.

ICAIC employees were expected to perform revolutionarity by attending events, signing declarations (both public and institutional), and by contributing written pieces that highlighted the institution's position. The only way to develop a professional career in the Cuban film industry was to adopt the preferred rhetoric and behavior of revolutionarity, something that was out of the question for the 1950s entrepreneurial class, as well as for many amateur filmmakers. Several filmmakers who started working at the film institute in the early 1960s resisted these requirements as well as Guevara's autocratic personality. They gave up their employment at ICAIC for an uncertain future abroad, whether in Spain, France, or the United States.

[10] Guerra, *Visions of Power.*

The expression of revolutionarity was expected and necessary to maintain one's position in the cultural field. But the acquisition of revolutionarity predates the Revolution. Those who were involved with the anti-Batista movement, such as the members of left-oriented cine-clubs and cultural organizations, accrued the social capital necessary to occupy desired positions in the post-revolutionary institutional landscape. First and foremost, the Nuestro Tiempo cluster gained a reputation as radical society in the 1950s due to the persecution of some of its members, as well as the confiscation of their film *El Mégano.* Firmly positioned as anti-establishment during the last decade of the Republic, it was them, as well as the youngsters from the Cine Club Visión, which in many ways followed Nuestro Tiempo's model, who made the most seamless transition into employment at ICAIC. This is not to say that other less visible members of the film and television workforce did not apply their skillset in this new institutional setting. But the opportunities for quick advancement were very much defined by the social capital acquired through direct or indirect association with insurgent action or with the Communist Party. For instance, the renowned documentarian Santiago Álvarez did not possess any previous experience in film, but he was summoned to oversee one of the first and better funded of ICAIC projects, the Noticiero Latinoamericano ICAIC (ICAIC Latin American Newsreel).

In contrast, those who had carved a professional space in the pre-revolutionary cultural field had accumulated plenty of cultural capital, just not the right type of social capital. Working in the market-driven journalistic field ensured close contact with editors, advertising executives and business owners, leading to a solid network that could generate different types of jobs. However, the entrepreneurial class linked to the publication sector lost all its clout within the first two transitional years (1959 and 1960). This area was completely restructured to respond exclusively to state interests. Even those who seemed to occupy a secure place during that short span in which the limits of revolutionarity were still malleable, were actually standing on unstable terrain. One telling example is that of Guillermo Cabrera Infante. He had been the chief editor of the Cinema section in the wide-circulation magazine *Carteles* for several years. During this transitional period he had the unique opportunity to become the director of an influential cultural magazine, *Lunes de Revolución* (Monday of the Revolution). He gathered an eclectic

group of writers, artists, and intellectuals eager to truly revolutionize the stakes of intellectual discourse on the island.[11]

For the *Lunes* group, the protective presence of Carlos Franqui was essential. Franqui joined Fidel Castro's Rebel Army during the armed struggle against Batista in the second half of the 1950s. From the easternmost mountains of the country he founded the newspaper *Revolución* and the guerrilla radio station *Radio Rebelde*. Once the rebel forces took power, both the newspaper and the radio station became the official voice of the new government. In his unfading role as cultural promoter, he founded the cultural supplement of the newspaper: *Lunes de Revolución*. Franqui asked his close friend Cabrera Infante to run this weekly magazine, and it quickly became "the most widely read literary supplement in the history of Cuban and Latin American literatures".[12] As a personal collaborator of Fidel Castro, Franqui was also able to secure a television program for *Lunes*. This default revolutionarity initially provided *Lunes* with a high degree of freedom to tackle the most current topics circulating internationally, and to experiment with the magazine's format. However, Franqui's mounting disagreements with the top leadership gradually demoted him from close advisor to uncomfortable ally. Like many others who opposed the country's increasing alliance with the Soviet Union, he was gradually weeded out from the circle of influence and from the public eye. His indispensable role during the guerrilla days at the Sierra Maestra mountains and during the early days of on-the-spot decision-making, was removed from Cuba's official history, and famously erased from its visual record through photographic manipulation.[13]

In the dissertation I discuss some of the ways in which the shifting boundaries of revolutionarity were drawn. I make reference to the main polemics that led to the dissolution of the *Lunes* group in early 1961, and to ICAIC's defensive stance towards another powerful organization, the National Council of Culture (Consejo Nacional de Cultura, CNC). Historian

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[11] For a succinct biography of Guillermo Cabrera Infante see Antoni Munné, "Prólogo. Retrato del crítico como ente de ficción," in *El cronista de cine*: *escritos cinematográficos,* ed. Antoni Munné (Barcelona: Galaxia Gutenberg, 2012), 9-36.
[12] William Luis, *Lunes de Revolución: literatura y cultura en los primeros años de la Revolución Cubana* (Madrid: Editorial Verbum, 2003).
[13] Carlos Franqui, *Diary of the Cuban Revolution*, trans. Georgette Felix et al. (New York: The Viking Press, 1980); Carlos Franqui, *Family Portrait with Fidel: A Memoir*, trans. Alfred MacAdam (New York: Random House, 1984).

Rafael Rojas has characterized the institutional forces vying for power during this period as representative of two distinct camps: the "nationalist revolutionary intellectual," versus the "communist revolutionary intellectual."[14] In the first half of the 1960s, they stood in direct opposition regarding the role of art and culture in society. The first group included figures like the already mentioned Franqui, Cabrera Infante, and Guevara. The second group consisted of long-time members of the Communist Party, who defended the aesthetic principles of socialist realism. These two groups defined the intellectual field during this period. They were in charge of deciding future directions in cultural practice and appreciation. While the Stalinists occupied powerful positions that allowed them to exert their influence on literature and theater creation, Guevara and the ICAIC cluster defended the territory of cinematic production, allowing for more heterodox approaches to film aesthetics. These power struggles determined institutional positions and generated new arbiters of taste.

## New Arbiters of Film Taste

The process of redefinition of taste manifested at the institutional level first, and at the audience level second. At the institutional level, the founding generation of ICAIC shared ideological and aesthetic inclinations. As I detail throughout the dissertation, their approach to cinema was formed by similar experiential circumstances. Born in the mid-to-late 1920s, as children they had grown up with Hollywood movies. They discovered neorealism in the 1940s, expanded their knowledge of film history through the film appreciation course offered by the university, participated in cine-club organization in the 1950s, and experienced first-hand the new cinematic tendencies through travel abroad. Their increasing exposure to the film-historical canon and to the newest trends in European cinema led them in different directions from the preceding generation of taste-makers.

The ICAIC cluster swiftly moved from the fringes to the core of Cuba's cultural life. Revolutionarity granted them permission to emit opinions and set policy. They enjoyed *carte blanche* as long as they demonstrated adherence to certain principles of Marxist critical thinking, and did not declare anything negative about the Revolution or its leaders. The magazine *Cine*

[14] Rafael Rojas, "Apuntes para una historia intelectual," in *Historia de las Antillas: Historia de Cuba*, 407.

*Cubano,* launched in 1960, gave them a platform to express their ideas even before their films gained any significance. This publication became available around the same time that other specialized magazines like *Cine Guía* were facing disappearance. The *Cine Cubano* editorial team was indistinguishable from ICAIC staff. This allowed ICAIC representatives, whether employed in bureaucratic positions, as film directors, creative personnel, or in a film critic capacity, to air their opinions, describe their preferences, and explain their ideas.

ICAIC representatives replaced the association of film and theater reporters that had been responsible for setting the standards of value in the public's mind since the 1930s. The Agrupación de Reporters Teatrales y Cinematográficos (Theater and Film Reporters Association, ARTYC) was dissolved in 1962. With *Cine Cubano* as a direct outlet for communication, and through easy access to other media channels, the new arbiters of film taste took a dual approach to film criticism. *Cine Cubano* was principally aimed at the cultured audience equivalent to the people who attended cinematheque screenings. This publication enriched their understanding of key film history classics and unconventional forms of filmic expression like animation and nonfiction. At the same time, it brought new international cinematic currents such as the European new waves to the readers' attention. The magazine regularly included reports on film festivals, accounts of foreign visitors' contributions, and production news. Thus, *Cine Cubano* provided the ICAIC cluster with a platform to continue the conversation they had started in *Nuestro Tiempo* magazine, but this time expanding their readership to the wider art cinema audience that coincided with cinematheque regulars. On the other hand, film reviewers publishing in periodical publications were speaking directly to working-class audiences looking for movie entertainment. They offered their readers ideologically-dependent interpretations and recommendations, and the increasingly fixed vocabulary of revolutionarity.

Although a thorough sociological approach to the taste hierarchies prevalent during this transitional period lies beyond the scope of this dissertation, it is useful to keep in mind four broad categories of films, and to identify what counted as legitimate taste in the eyes of ICAIC. First, comedies and melodramas imported from Spanish-speaking countries like Mexico, Argentina, or Spain, were considered to be in very bad taste, and ideologically harmful.[15] ICAIC

[15] Enrique Colina and Daniel Díaz Torres, "Ideología del melodrama en el viejo cine latinoamericano," *Cine Cubano*, 1971.

cast a negative light over these highly popular genres, preferred by the lower-income sectors of society, who were drawn to music and humour, and in many cases could not read subtitled Hollywood movies. A second category corresponds to Hollywood movies, which were widely enjoyed by the middle and upper classes as the default form of cinematic entertainment. Film critics writing in post-revolutionary publications demonized Hollywood as a whole, equating its production and distribution model with American imperialistic tendencies.[16] However, in the 1940s and 1950s, the great diversity of American movies enabled distinct taste subcultures to be formed depending on people's preference for westerns and adventure movies, melodramas, or social problem films. After 1959, Cuban film critics only recommended Hollywood films that illustrated situations of social injustice, basing their value on content over form. Third, the set of films commonly identified as European art cinema were mostly appreciated by the intellectual and creative class. For the ICAIC cluster these films broke away from formal conventions and occupied a special place in the ranking. However, the singularity of the characters, the unconventional narrative strategies, and the open-ended nature of many of those films, rendered them illegible to the majority of the audience, accustomed to star-centered and plot-driven movies. Finally, the large number of films that were imported from the Soviet Union and the Socialist Bloc presented an unreadable cinematic vocabulary and iconography for most. While the first and second categories of film roughly correspond to lowbrow and middlebrow taste, the last two paradoxically represent the more elite and highbrow preferences of the cultural agents ascending in power and influence during this time.

ICAIC founders felt they had a responsibility to broaden and revolutionize popular taste by controlling theatrical film exhibition and mediating film interpretation. As the newly-appointed taste-making entity, they watched over the work of film critics working in other periodicals and magazines. Their attitude towards transforming lowbrow taste was elitist. They often labeled genre films "damaging" and "poisonous". To confront their harmful effects, they collaborated in the organization of large film viewing gatherings, sometimes referred to as cine-debates, and other times called worker cine-clubs. As I document in the dissertation, these screenings were widespread during the early 1960s, and they were meant to impart this large segment of movie

[16] Enrique Pineda Barnet, "La colonización del gusto y algunos asuntos a analizar para una descolonización y culturalización adecuada," *Cine Cubano*, 1968.

audiences with clear pointers as to what the desired film interpretation and taste definitions should be. Attending these events and learning these criteria were markers of revolutionarity. However, these strategies did not have the expected long-lasting effect. Cuban audiences learned to perform revolutionarity in the public contexts that demanded it, while at the same time keeping a penchant for comedy and emotion, and displaying a boisterous, undisciplined, and irreverent attitude towards film viewing when they were not being watched.[17]

## Incorporating Cuban Cinema into New Approaches to Film Historiography

Besides making an intervention into the history of Cuban cinema, this dissertation participates in the shift away from traditional histories that focus on film texts and the creative conditions for their production, to new modes of inquiry into how films intersect with intellectual currents, noncommercial channels of exhibition, and the constitution of specific types of audiences. For the past two decades, scholars have uncovered the substantial importance of the non-theatrical circuit in the first half of the twentieth century. These analyses focus on the great variety of films that do not conform to the standard format of commercial features, and were instead created to perform specific functions within contexts distinct from the entertainment industry.[18] New directions also take into consideration a more sophisticated understanding of how the transnational circulation of ideas about the cinema, through print-based media or first-hand contact, impact national and regional contexts.[19] Current approaches such as the work

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[17] See, for example, Nicholas Balaisis, "Cuba, Cinema and the Post-Revolutionary Public Sphere," *Canadian Journal of Film Studies* 19, no. 2 (2010): 26–42.

[18] For early considerations on the non-theatrical film, see Anthony Slide, *Before Video: A History of the Non-Theatrical Film* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1992); Dan Streible, Martina Roepke, and Anke Mebold, eds. "Nontheatrical Film." Special issue, *Film History* 19, no. 4 (2007). For an approach that puts the usefulness of nontheatrical modalities at the center of the analysis, see Charles R. Acland and Haidee Wasson, eds., *Useful cinema* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011).

[19] For exemplary studies on the transnational circulation of ideas concerning the cinema, see Masha Salazkina, "Moscow-Rome-Havana: A Film-Theory Road Map," *October*, no. 139 (Winter 2012): 97–116, https://doi.org/10.1162/OCTO_a_00082; *The Emergence of Film Culture: Knowledge Production, Institution Building, and the Fate of the Avant-Garde in Europe, 1919-1945* (New York, NY: Berghahn Books, 2014); Rielle Navitski and Nicolas Poppe, eds., *Cosmopolitan Film Cultures in Latin America, 1896-1960* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2017).

produced as part of the New Cinema History movement have also worked towards a better understanding of audiences, placing the focus on the cinemagoing experience.[20]

These new approaches rescue the academic discipline of Film Studies from outdated notions of audience passivity. In English-language scholarship, outdated perspectives on Cuban cinema have emphasized an ideologically charged interpretation of the island's cinematic history by considering the reality of media and cinema production and reception before 1959 mainly through the lens of cultural imperialism.[21] This view is based on assumptions about the harmful impact of Hollywood hegemony on the worldwide cinemagoing periphery. Richard Maltby and Melvyn Stokes have addressed this problem by presenting a series of case studies that explore Hollywood audiences outside of the American domestic market.[22] Their scholarship demonstrates that only through engagement with locally specific evidence can the researcher arrive to any conclusions about the potential meanings that audiences may extract from Hollywood films. They show that it is incorrect to ascribe to Hollywood cinema any universally valid power to indoctrinate. Instead, research must be attentive to the multiple layers of polysemy and critical viewing that play a role in this process.

I challenge the idea that pre-revolutionary Cuban film audiences were homogeneous and uncritical. As more reception studies come to light, it is very clear that audiences everywhere in the world have always been able to apply locally specific interpretations to foreign cultural forms, whether in print or audiovisual media. For the study of 20th century audiences, one of the ways we can judge this is through the written record left by intellectuals and film reviewers, as Jason Borge and Megan Feeney have done.[23] In both cases, the focus is on the mediating role of journalists and cultural critics in relation to Hollywood movies as a prominent influence on Latin American popular culture. My work enters in direct dialogue with Borge's and Feeney's analyses of Cuban film criticism, but I investigate the transformation of the intellectual field that they

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[20] Richard Maltby, Daniël Biltereyst, and Philippe Meers, *Explorations in New Cinema History: Approaches and Case Studies* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011).
[21] Burton, "Film and Revolution in Cuba"; Chanan, *Cuban Cinema.*
[22] Richard Maltby and Melvyn Stokes, *Hollywood Abroad: Audiences and Cultural Exchange* (London: BFI Publishing, 2004).
[23] Jason Borge, *Latin American Writers and the Rise of Hollywood Cinema* (New York: Routledge, 2008); Megan J. Feeney, "Hollywood in Havana: Film Reception and Revolutionary Nationalism in Cuba before 1959" (PhD diss., University of Minnesota, 2008).

describe, taking into consideration other forms of film culture spanning the pre-revolutionary and the early post-revolutionary period.

I understand film culture as a variety of practices related to the cinema that are mostly carried out by the type of film spectators who identify themselves as cinephiles. These practices include watching films, organizing film screenings, producing and circulating film commentary through writing or other forms of public discourse and knowledge dissemination, and making films without the express motivation of financial gain. This dissertation examines the history of these practices in Cuba, with special emphasis on film education, film criticism, cine-clubs, and amateur filmmaking.

The notion of film culture has been explored in depth by Malte Hagener in connection to how the generative force of the European avant-garde of the 1920s evolved into institutional formations such as film festivals and film archives from the 1930s onwards.[24] He points out that "far from disappearing without a trace or failing in its goals, as traditional historiography would have it, the ciné-clubs had a strong impact over the long term. In the course of the 1930s, the activities led to (self-) employment in various educational, governmental and filmmaking bodies, but more importantly, also in film archives."[25] Throughout my dissertation I demonstrate that in Cuba a similar process whereby cine-clubs laid the groundwork for institutionalized film culture, occurred three decades later, in the transition from the 1950s to 1960s.

For Hagener, three crucial factors converged in Europe in the 1930s: a defined set of ideas that reinforced cinema's value as articulated by the avant-garde, the interest of the state in maximizing cinema's potential for nation-building, and the support of the film industry. If we compare the Cuban case to the European one, we find that it follows a similar path that starts from clusters of creative and organizational energy, later deriving into fully formed institutions. In this sense, the crucial role of the state in Europe in the early 1930s, is also key in the Cuban context of the early 1960s. However, besides the temporal incongruity, the most significant difference between these two contexts is that in Western Europe, regardless of strategic movements and alliances between the private and the public sector, the film industry worked

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[24] Malte Hagener, *Moving Forward, Looking Back: The European Avant-Garde and the Invention of Film Culture, 1919-1939* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2007); Hagener, *The Emergence of Film Culture*.
[25] Hagener, *The European Avant-Garde and the Invention of Film Culture*, 78.

alongside the state, while in Cuba the state became the sole provider and enabler of industrial production, criticism, acquisition, circulation, and exhibition of films.

North American film societies (the term "cine-club" comes from the European context) gained momentum slightly later than in Europe, but by the 1950s they were a strongly felt presence.[26] The creation of the Film Library of the Museum of Modern Art in 1935 played an essential role in the exhibition and circulation of classic and noncommercial films.[27] The existence of this lending library of moving image materials enabled the emergence of more film societies outside of the main urban centers, and contributed to the cinephile culture that grew only stronger in the Unites States during the 1960s in colleges and universities across the country. In pre-revolutionary Cuba, practices of film culture lacked the type of state support or private sponsorship available in metropolitan centers. Still, as I document in the second chapter, Cuban cinephiles were aware of the need and importance of film archives. They eagerly watched programs borrowed from the Cinemathèque Française and the MOMA film library, which laid the basis for the canon of film history that circulated across the world as the must-see list of film history.

While it is important to keep in mind the sociopolitical and economic differences that shape the dynamics of center versus periphery, we also need to account for the internal specificities that have shaped local histories.[28] For a long time English-language Latin American film historiography failed to account for the heterogeneity of Latin American film audiences, as it tended to ignore popular taste in favour of avant-garde manifestos and radical statements. However, more recent scholarship has addressed these shortcomings. Key contributions in Latin American cultural studies have provided a new understanding of popular cultures and of the emergence and evolution of mass culture in the region.[29] Furthermore, edited collections like

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[26] Cecile Starr, ed., *Film Society Primer, A Compilation of Twenty-Two Articles about and for Film Societies* (Forest Hills, N.Y.: American Federation of Film Societies, 1956).
[27] Haidee Wasson, *Museum Movies: The Museum of Modern Art and the Birth of Art Cinema* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).
[28] Ahmet Gürata and Louise Spence, "Introduction: Non-Western Historiography? A Polemic," *Cinema Journal* 50, no. 1 (Fall 2010): 131–35.
[29] Two influential books, which have been translated from Spanish are Néstor García Canclini, *Hybrid Cultures: Strategies for Entering and Leaving Modernity*, trans. Christopher L Chiappari and Silvia L López (Minneapolis, Minn.: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), and Jesús Martín

*Cosmopolitan Film Cultures in Latin America, 1896-1960* (2017) and *The Routledge Companion to Latin American Cinema* (2018) constitute momentous interventions into the historiography of Latin American cinema.[30]

My dissertation is in dialogue with these new directions, as I gather evidence of a rich film culture tradition on the island that unquestionably predates ICAIC. Havana, like many Latin American capital cities, witnessed the rise of film culture and an increasing diversification of audiences in the 1950s. In spite of their limited access to world classics, cinephiles in the urban centres of Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay created and enjoyed cine clubs as early as 1925. They wrote about film, participated in film courses, started film archives and founded cinematheques, often rallying around a magnetic personality, and in connection with museums, universities, and sometimes the support from the local bourgeoisie.[31]

I approach the history of Latin American cinemas from a wide-ranging perspective that takes into consideration non-professional filmmaking and non-theatrical contexts of film exhibition. Through the process of unearthing the many practices that connected Cuban audiences to films in the years preceding cinema's institutionalization, I have found abundant evidence of non-professional filmmaking. In national and regional situations where film entertainment was mostly imported and commercial filmmaking was very limited or non-existent, amateur filmmaking performs multiple functions, serving as leisurely activity, experimental terrain, training ground, and path to professionalization. In contrast to Mexico and Argentina, the island lacked a sustainable and exportable model of commercial film production

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Barbero, *Communication, Culture and Hegemony: From the Media to Mediations*, trans. Elizabeth Fox and Robert A. White (London; Newbury Park: SAGE Publications, 1993).

[30] Navitski and Poppe, *Cosmopolitan Film Cultures;* Marvin D'Lugo, Ana M. López, and Laura Podalsky, eds., *The Routledge Companion to Latin American Cinema* (Abingdon, Oxon; New York, NY: Routledge, 2018).

[31] Ruda Andrade, "Film Societies in Seven Latin American Countries," *Écrans du monde/World Screen*, April/September 1961; Ana M. López, "Cine clubs," in *Encyclopedia of Contemporary Latin American and Caribbean Cultures*, eds. Daniel Balderston, Mike Gonzalez, and Ana M. López (London; New York: Routledge, 2000), 363-364; Maria Rita Galvão, "La situación del patrimonio fílmico en Iberoamérica," *Journal of Film Preservation* 71 (July 2006): 42–62; Rielle Navitski, "The Cine Club de Colombia and Postwar Cinephilia in Latin America: Forging Transnational Networks, Schooling Local Audiences," *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 2018, DOI: 10.1080/01439685.2018.1453993.

and distribution. For this reason, as I make clear in the third chapter, a rigorous history of Cuban (and Latin American) cinema needs to take amateur cinema into account.

This outlook opens the field of analysis to consider the types of films often grouped under the all-encompassing term of non-theatrical film.[32] On the basis of their relative marginality to the entertainment industry, the list can include newsreels, scientific, ethnographic, educational, philantropic, amateur, corporate, and experimental films. It can therefore accommodate multiple film formats and reel lengths, dispensing with the privileged place of 35 mm feature films. An in-depth understanding of the cross-pollination between the non-theatrical and the theatrical sectors can potentially redraw the contours of pre-revolutionary Cuban cinema as an object of study, shifting the assumption of inadequacy to a multidimensional examination of the proto-industrial forces at play.

## Contribution to Cuban Cinema Scholarship

My dissertation contributes to Cuban film historiography by restoring continuity to the island's cinematic past. I challenge long-held perspectives that ignore or minimize the modernizing forces at play during the late republican period, and that single out the Nuestro Tiempo-ICAIC connection as the starting point of Cuban cinema. Instead, I examine multiple threads that connect pre-revolutionary and post-revolutionary developments. As a Cuban-born Canadian academic, I approach historical research with an equally inquisitive stance towards the official versions generated within the hegemonic structures of the Cuban state, the counter-narratives produced by Cuban diasporic communities, located mostly in the United States and Spain, and the academic inscriptions of this history in English-language scholarship. In so doing, I am acutely aware of the polarizing nature of Cuban historical knowledge, but I choose to participate in new broad-minded directions that foster dialogue and collaboration within the larger field of Cuban historiography.[33]

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[32] The seminar "Non-theatrical Film: Hispanic American Perspectives" organized by Laura Isabel Serna and Julián Étienne for the Society of Cinema and Media Studies conference in Toronto, March 2018, generated thought-provoking discussions in this respect.
[33] Michael J. Bustamante and Jennifer L. Lambe, eds., *The Revolution from within: Cuba, 1959-1980 (*Durham: Duke University Press, 2019).

In his comparative historiography of Latin American cinemas, Paulo Antonio Paranaguá, one of the foremost historians of Latin American cinema, exposed the issues that hindered the development of historical research in the Cuban context.[34] As he explains, ICAIC's policy of suppressing information related to the pre-revolutionary past, created a 30-year gap in the production of an uninterrupted film-historical vision of national cinema. During the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, this restrictive strategy had a direct effect on the histories of Cuban cinema written by foreign academics, who relied on the tight-knit ICAIC bureaucracy for access to information and materials. As Paranaguá puts it, "ICAIC adopted the most commonplace Stalinist notion of crossing off from their filmographies the forbidden titles and the names of disgraced collaborators. How many foreign authors adapted to these blacklists? How many foreign publications espoused this incomplete and biased point of view, identifying Cuban cinema with ICAIC alone?"[35]

Paranaguá's assertions are best contextualized by looking back at the opening remarks of the first issue of the magazine *Cine Cubano.* As founder of ICAIC, Guevara stated that the film institute was established "not to remedy an existing situation, nor to deliver the industry to the filmmakers, but to start creating from scratch."[36] His point of view was that the lack of talent and vision that characterized the sporadic filmmaking attempts of the past, simply did not count. This attitude of acknowledging "no precursors", gave Cuban filmmaking of the 1960s a degree of freshness that has its own merits. However, this denial of the past has resulted in an impoverished understanding of Cuba's cultural history.

My interest in Cuban film culture and noncommercial cinema grew out of increasing frustration with the English-language literature dealing with Cuban media history. The standard textbook reference on this national context, Michael Chanan's *Cuban Cinema* (2004), is an essential resource for reference and study, but it glosses over the pre-revolutionary era.[37] For a long time, the tendency to emphasize the outsized importance of ICAIC left out the aspects of Cuban audiovisual production that were not mediated by post-revolutionary institutions. In this

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[34] Paulo Antonio Paranaguá, *Le cinéma en Amérique Latine: le miroir éclaté. Historiographie et comparatisme* (Paris; Montréal: L'Harmattan, 2000), 36-42, 196-200.
[35] Paranaguá, *Le cinéma en Amérique Latine*, 40. The translation from French is my own.
[36] Alfredo Guevara, "Realidades y perspectivas de un nuevo cine," *Cine Cubano*, 1960.
[37] Chanan, *Cuban Cinema*.

respect, stand-alone chapters and articles by Ana M. López and Laura Podalsky helped move the conversation forward. For instance, López looked at the links between cultural production on the island and the diasporic communities that have informed it since the early 1960s.[38] Podalksy also made an important contribution by examining pre-revolutionary Cuban cinema in relation to other forms of popular culture, such as music, radio, and theatre.[39] More recently, Jason Borge, Megan Feeney, and Hector Amaya have studied the role of film criticism in Cuba, providing much needed background on the engagement of Cuban intellectuals with cinema's aesthetic and social dimensions.[40] Cristina Venegas and Anne Marie Stock extended academic attention to how the access to new media technologies and the transformations in the institutional landscape of the 1990s, impacted ICAIC's monolithic presence.[41] As part of a new stage of in-depth historical investigation, new work by Alejandra Bronfman and Yeidy Rivero on the broadcasting industries of radio and television respectively, have filled a long-standing gap in the history of twentieth-century Cuban cultural industries.[42]

The 1990s marked a decisive turning point in the construction of Cuban film histories. Since then, access to testimonial and archival information has opened the way for critical investigations that adopt a wider vision regarding the country's past. Published mostly in Spanish and French, several articles and books gradually started giving proper consideration to all cultural agents, irrespective of their ideological or political position vis-à-vis Cuban power

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[38] Ana M. López, "Greater Cuba," in *The Ethnic Eye: Latino Media Arts*, eds. Chon A. Noriega and Ana M. López (Minneapolis, Minn: University of Minnesota Press: 1996), 38-58. Previously published as "Cuban Cinema in Exile. The "other" island," *Jump Cut* no. 38 (June 1993), https://www.ejumpcut.org/archive/onlinessays/JC38folder/ExileCubanCinema.html.

[39] Laura Podalsky, "Negotiating Differences: National Cinemas and Co-Productions in Prerevolutionary Cuba," *Velvet Light Trap: A Critical Journal of Film & Television* 34 (1994): 59-70.

[40] Jason Borge, "High Anxiety: Guillermo Cabrera Infante and Pre-Revolutionary Film Criticism in Cuba," *Revista de Estudios Hispanicos* 40, no. 2 (May 2006): 341–60; Feeney, "Hollywood in Havana"; Hector Amaya, *Screening Cuba: Film Criticism as Political Performance during the Cold War* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010).

[41] Cristina Venegas, *Digital Dilemmas: The State, the Individual, and Digital Media in Cuba* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2010); Ann Marie Stock, *On Location in Cuba: Street Filmmaking during Times of Transition* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009).

[42] Alejandra Bronfman, "Batista is Dead: Media, Violence and Politics in 1950s Cuba," *Caribbean Studies* 40, no. 1 (2012): 37-58; Yeidy M. Rivero, *Broadcasting Modernity: Cuban Commercial Television, 1950-1960* (Durham; London: Duke University Press, 2015).

structures. The first steps in this direction first circulated outside the island with the publication in France of *Le cinéma cubain* (1990). This collection of essays, spearheaded by Paranaguá, compiled the first set of historical research on the full extent of Cuban film history carried out by Cubans until that moment.[43] Also significant, the book *Mirada al cine cubano* (1999), published in Belgium, tackled little known aspects such as amateur production.

Within Cuba, Guevara's attitude towards pre-revolutionary cinema kept references to the cinema that existed before ICAIC in tight control and out of the public eye. However, those who were witnesses to the commercial and noncommercial film practices of their youth remained living archives who kept alive the memory of the old film business sector and of the alternative circuits built around it. While most emigrated, people like Arturo Agramonte and Walfredo Piñera, who remained on the island, shared their historical knowledge with peers and cinephiles through oral exchanges, even though their insight was not part of public discourse from the 1960s through the 1990s. In Agramonte's case, his book, *Cronología del cine cubano* (1966), became a precious, sought-after resource difficult to access except for specialists. By the mid-1990s, a relatively more open attitude towards documenting the past led to the publication of *La tienda negra: el cine en Cuba, 1897-1990* (1996). This book, also in limited print, did not pursue a comprehensive historical narrative, but it offered a necessary chronological synthesis that has become an essential point of departure for many researchers.

The transnational reach of diasporic magazines and online platforms inaugurated an epoch characterized by more fluid exchanges of information and perspectives. In particular, the magazine *Encuentro de la Cultura Cubana,* published in Spain from 1996 to 2009 functioned as an active laboratory for the true encounter of Cuban intellectuals working in the diaspora and within the island. Founded by notable Cuban intellectual Jesús Díaz (1941-2002), several articles and dossiers published in *Encuentro* revisited Cuban cinema, giving voice to testimonials and producing novel analyses that were otherwise suppressed in the national sphere. The magazine's later incarnations in the online spaces of *cubaencuentro.com* and *diariodecuba.com* continue to bring important historical research conducted by Manuel Zayas, Emmanuel Vincenot, and Carlos Espinosa Domínguez to a wide Cuban readership. Other digital platforms that contributed to the vitality of the dialogue concerning the lesser known aspects of Cuban cinema and media, include

[43] Paulo Antonio Paranaguá, ed., *Le cinéma cubain* (Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou, 1990).

the blogs *Penúltimos Días* (now defunct)*,* created by Ernesto Hernández Busto, and *Cine cubano, la pupila insomne*, by film historian Juan Antonio García Borrero.

Cuban publishing houses started a more active period in the 2000s, leading to a significant increase of published research. A new generation of researchers, led by Luciano Castillo and García Borrero, brought to light previously underexplored areas of study in the two-volume collection *Coordenadas del Cine Cubano* (2001, 2005).[44] Furthermore, the availability of previously unpublished materials pertaining to the early post-revolutionary period marked a key transition in Cuban film historiography. For example, *Polémicas culturales de los 60* (2006) provided access to essential documents from the 1960s, opening a window into the complex dynamics that dominated that decade.[45] Guevara's epistolary compilations, published in Cuba and Spain, arrived in quick succession from 1998 to 2008, allowing for a rare glimpse into ICAIC's internal processes.[46]

García Borrero was the first to take into consideration all the available documentation, including letters and testimonials, to offer an incisive analysis of the first decade of ICAIC in his book, *Cine cubano de los sesenta: mito y realidad* (2007).[47] Yet again, most of García Borrero's prolific work was published in Spain, and therefore mostly unavailable to Cuban readers. The same is true of his substantial intervention with *Rehenes de la sombra* (2002), where he incisively put into question the official history of Cuban cinema, which he termed "icaicentrismo," and challenged the rigid periodization with which the ICAIC-centric approach

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[44] Reynaldo González, ed., *Coordenadas del cine cubano*, vol. 1, 2 vols. (Santiago de Cuba: Editorial Oriente, 2001); Mario Naito López, ed., *Coordenadas del cine cubano*, vol. 2, 2 vols. (Santiago de Cuba: Oriente, 2005).
[45] Graziella Pogolotti, ed., *Polémicas culturales de los 60* (La Habana: Editorial Letras Cubanas, 2007).
[46] Alfredo Guevara, *Revolución es lucidez* (La Habana: Ediciones ICAIC, 1998); Alfredo Guevara and Glauber Rocha, *Un sueño compartido: Alfredo Guevara - Glauber Rocha*, ed. Luis Ernesto Flores González (Madrid: Sociedad General de Autores de España, 2002); Alfredo Guevara et al., *Ese diamantino corazón de la verdad: Alfredo Guevara - Cesare Zavattini*, ed. Camilo Pérez Casal and Mayerín Bello Valdés (Madrid: Iberautor: Festival Internacional del Nuevo Cine Latinoamericano, 2002); Alfredo Guevara, *Tiempo de fundación*, ed. Camilo Pérez Casal and Alfredo Guevara (Madrid, España: Iberautor Promociones Culturales, 2003); Alfredo Guevara, *¿Y si fuera una huella?: epistolario*, ed. Yaíma García and Alfredo Guevara (La Habana; Madrid: Editorial Nuevo Cine Latinoamericano; Ediciones Autor S.R.L, 2009).
[47] Juan Antonio García Borrero, *Cine cubano de los sesenta: mito y realidad* (Huelva: Festival de Cine Iberoamericano de Huelva; Madrid: Ocho y Medio, Libros de Cine, 2007).

divides Cuban film history.[48] More accessible than printed material, his blog *Cine cubano, la pupila insomne,* created in 2007, became an active digital space for interventions, corrections, and controversy that in many occasions compels the actual protagonists of particular stories to add their recollections, or contradict the way their story or contributions are presented by official film histories.

Without making it explicit, ICAIC's own publishing house, Ediciones ICAIC, has taken a corrective path since 2010. Recent publications by Marta Díaz, Joel del Río, Pedro Noa Romero, Elizabeth Mirabal, Jorge Luis Sánchez, and Carlos Velazco, indicate a newfound will to make known the historical work carried out by these researchers, whom, in many cases, carry out their research outside of institutional channels.[49] In particular, the four-volume *Cronología del Cine Cubano* (2011, 2012, 2013, 2016) written by Castillo in collaboration with Agramonte, is an encyclopedic work that fills an enormous void in Cuban film historiography.[50] Along with Vincenot, whose multiple articles and book chapters have brought key aspects of Cuban cultural history from the first part of the twentieth century to the attention of the international academic community, this research rescues pre-revolutionary Cuban cinema from its long-term obscurity.

## Methodology and Thematic Structure

My object of study comprises the critical discourses, educational practices, and exhibition initiatives constituting film culture, as well as evidence of amateur audiovisual production during the 1950s and 1960s in Cuba. Although I make some reference to the film business sector, I don't address the inner-workings of the entertainment industry, nor do I deal with the

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[48] Juan Antonio García Borrero, *Rehenes de la sombra: Ensayos sobre el cine cubano que no se ve* (Huesca: Festival de Cine de Huesca, 2002), 15-19.

[49] José Manuel Valdés-Rodríguez, *Ojeada al cine cubano*, ed. Pedro R. Noa Romero (La Habana: Ediciones ICAIC, 2010); Jorge Luis Sánchez, *Romper la tensión del arco: movimiento cubano de cine documental* (La Habana: Ediciones ICAIC, 2010); Marta Díaz and Joel del Río, *Los cien caminos del cine cubano* (La Habana: Ediciones ICAIC, 2010); Elizabeth Mirabal and Carlos Velazco, *Buscando a Caín* (La Habana: Ediciones ICAIC, 2012).

[50] Arturo Agramonte and Luciano Castillo, *Cronología del cine cubano I (1897-1936)*, vol. 1, 4 vols. (La Habana: Ediciones ICAIC, 2011); Arturo Agramonte and Luciano Castillo, *Cronología del cine cubano II (1937-1944)*, vol. 2, 4 vols. (La Habana: Ediciones ICAIC, 2012); Arturo Agramonte and Luciano Castillo, *Cronología del cine cubano III (1945-1952)*, vol. 3, 4 vols. (La Habana: Ediciones ICAIC, 2013); Arturo Agramonte and Luciano Castillo, *Cronología del cine cubano IV (1953-1959)*, vol. 4, 4 vols. (La Habana: Ediciones ICAIC, 2016).

engagement of Cuban audiences with international popular culture through fan magazines and other instances of star-worship that were completely phased out. Given the close links between radio, cinema, and television, a thorough analysis of those aspects of Cuban audiences would be better framed as part of a larger study on the history of Cuban popular culture during the Republic. Instead, my focus here has been on gathering evidence for the practices that continued to have a presence in the post-revolutionary period, albeit in altered form.

In order to properly analyze the two decades in question, I examine a wide range of published and unpublished material pertaining to both the republican and the post-revolutionary period. This entailed moving beyond locally-based research, making ample use of interlibrary loans, and traveling to find archival sources situated in the two cities that have come to symbolize two politically opposed poles, Havana and Miami. In both locations I found people passionate about keeping records of the past. Their combined labour has produced the complementary sets of information that I have used in this dissertation.

I have carefully examined the books, film chronologies, and compilations of film commentary published and updated at various points of Cuba's six-decade post-revolutionary historiography, along with academic work on Cuban cinema published in the United States, Canada, Great Britain, France, and Spain. In addition to these secondary sources, I have reviewed and analyzed a wide range of primary sources. At the Cuban Heritage Collection housed in the University of Miami, I had access to a wealth of newspapers, magazines, cultural bulletins, pamphlets, movie guides, film industry trade publications, and original documents from specific cultural and religious organizations. Complementing this set of resources, I found press clippings, advertisements, announcements, entertainment industry reports, film programs, and periodicals at the Cinemateca de Cuba, the University of Havana library, and the International Film School in Havana. I have also made ample use of digital resources, such as the Media History Digital Library, and the Digital Library of the Caribbean. Through them, I was able to consult previously inaccessible newspapers and magazines. Together, all these resources allowed me to identify, describe, and investigate the main artistic and political networks that competed for cultural prevalence, and to gain insight into the noncommercial film practices taking place in the timeframe under consideration.

Personal testimonies have undoubtedly been a vital component of my interest in the transition from pre-revolutionary to post-revolutionary film culture. Given the impossibility of

interviewing most of the cultural figures active in the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s, I have relied on letters, revealing autobiographies, and published interviews. I have also profited greatly from the insight and perspective of Cubans who lived through the early post-revolutionary period. Throughout the years, they have shared their recollections with me through personal interactions, telephone conversations, and email communications taking place in different parts of the globe. Without losing sight of the highly subjective quality of those memories, I have strived to make justice to their lived experience.

For each of the chapters I follow the same historical arch, from pre-revolutionary developments starting in the 1940s or earlier, to the adaptation, condemnation or rejection of those antecedents in the early years of the Revolution. Thus, rather than dedicating a chapter to each separate moment, I focus on building a unifying narrative that can help visualize the complexity of several transitional processes. While this results in very long chapters, this approach is an essential component of my project. Tracing the particular ways in which individuals navigated the dissolution of their professional and social networks, and how they positioned themselves within the new institutional structures, allows me to identify the personal, cultural and political forces that intervened in these processes.

In Chapter 1, I describe the film course offered by film critic and educator José Manuel Valdés-Rodríguez at the University of Havana. He was integral to how film culture developed on the island, and I provide an in-depth assessment of his role, from the 1920s to the mid-1960s.[51] I explain the historical conditions that guaranteed the existence and longevity of his course, its methodology, and its immediate importance in the Cuban context. I scrutinized the articles and books he published in university publications and in the regular press, as well as original materials pertaining to his work at the university. Through close attention to his personal and professional trajectory I was also able to identify lesser known cultural associations active during the republican era, including the Lyceum and Lawn Tennis Club and the Catholic Center for Cinematographic Orientation. The chapter is oriented towards the film education initiative at the

[51] I have previously published an analysis of his impact on pre-revolutionary film culture and education: Irene Rozsa, "Film Culture and Education in Republican Cuba: The Legacy of José Manuel Valdés-Rodríguez," in *Cosmopolitan Film Cultures in Latin America, 1896-1960*, eds. Rielle Navitski and Nicolas Poppe (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2017), 298-323. Reused with permission.

university, but I envision undertaking future research that will fully explore those other associations.

As the narrative thread of the chapter, the figure of Valdés-Rodríguez serves as a useful bridge for exploring the close links between film education and early post-revolutionary film criticism. This first chapter sets the stage for understanding the loss of autonomy in the journalistic and intellectual fields. It discusses how revolutionarity was first introduced into film discourses through film criticism, and also offers a detailed account of the main events and debates that cemented the position of post-revolutionary cultural institutions and their policies. Based on primary and secondary sources, I provide evidence of the removal of key cultural figures from public discourse, and of ICAIC's gradual ownership over the discursive stakes of film criticism.

The second chapter looks at how the process of cultural institutionalization impacted upon film culture practices related to public screenings. I provide a history of the cine club movement on the island, contextualizing their practices vis-à-vis the collectivities from which they originated. Departing from the work of scholars who have studied these projects independently from each other, I use information from interviews, personal archives, periodicals, and my own investigation into Valdés-Rodríguez, to take a global approach to these initiatives and analyze how they interacted with one another. I explain the different versions of art cinema that they advanced and contextualize them in relation to the formation of a transnational film-historical canon.

Chapter 2 adds further insight into the short but highly complex period of 1959 to 1961, which typically lends itself to partial and distorted accounts, depending on the point of origin of the historical research being conducted. Rather than considering the foundational date of ICAIC in March 1959 as a breaking point, I bring forth a nuanced appraisal that gives equal relevance to the multiple positions voiced in publications as distinct as *Cine Guía, Cinema, Lunes de Revolución, and Cine Cubano.* A close examination of these sources has enabled me to explain the close links between the rapid process of expropriation and nationalization of private property, and the quick ascension of ICAIC in the cultural field of the 1960s. This has also allowed to determine ICAIC's role as arbiter of film taste in relation to the strategies for commercial film programming and exhibition they adopted. Furthermore, I discuss in detail the processes that rendered pre-revolutionary cine-clubs obsolete, and I bring visibility to the little known

phenomenon of post-revolutionary cine-debates and cine clubs, which accomplished different functions than the Cuban cinematheque founded in 1960.[52]

The third chapter provides a history of amateur filmmaking in Cuba during the 1940s and 1950s, as a prelude to explaining the reasons why these nonprofessional practices disappeared in the 1960s. I was able to review the technical and practical conditions available to aspiring filmmakers during this timeframe, through a combined analysis of film chronologies, books, articles, and personal testimonies from biographies and interviews. I offer concrete examples of their local activities and of their interactions with the international amateur movement. I also describe and distinguish between the distinct communities of access and audience that formed around amateur filmmaking, differentiating between their goals, political positions, and aesthetic referents. Furthermore, I investigate the reasons behind the sudden disappearance of amateur filmmaking on the island, contextualizing this understudied topic in relation to ICAIC's ascendance.

My analysis of amateurism exemplifies the fundamental paradox observed throughout the dissertation. The proto-industrial stage of film activity on the island coexisted with the presence of the alternative associations that so fundamentally defined a new epoch in Cuban cinema. Yet, ICAIC's attitude towards the future was to guarantee its own survival by retaining full control over the material, intellectual, and creative forces of its time. The independent spirit that, against all odds, created a noncommercial film culture in the 1950s, found less opportunities to express itself in the post-revolutionary context that had purportedly been created to eliminate access issues. Amateur filmmaking defied those restraints, functioning as a form of resistance to the values imposed by the state through the film institute. Amateur outsiders represented a minuscule possibility of autonomy in an otherwise hegemonic industry.

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[52] I have previously published an article dealing with these issues: Irene Rozsa, "The Institutionalization of Film Exhibition in Cuba (1959-64)," *Studies in Spanish & Latin American Cinemas* 14, no. 2 (June 2017): 153–70, DOI:10.1386/slac.14.2.153_1.

# Chapter 1. From Film Appreciation to Education through Film

I imagine my hand moving though a dusty shelf full of ignored film cans. I pick one up because of its compelling label: "Cine: Industria y Arte de Nuestro Tiempo." Inside this small storage canister at the University of Havana's film library I find original 16 mm footage of a class taught by professor José Manuel Valdés-Rodríguez (1896-1971).[53] He offered the film appreciation course "Cinema, Industry and Art of Our Times" every summer from 1942 to 1956, and proudly asserted that it was the first of its kind in Latin America.[54] If it were 1966, I would be able to locate a film projector and swiftly arrange for a screening. As I watched those surviving 10 minutes of a 14-year endeavour, I would perhaps recognize a very young Guillermo Cabrera Infante, outstanding film critic turned writer under suspicion.[55] In another fantasy scenario, it is 30 years later, and the unbearable heat of the Special Period makes it hard to breath in the formerly air-conditioned film vault. I witness how each and every one of the film reels dormant in those old frail racks are disposed of. In 1996 I would wonder what the university film theater looked like when it was first inaugurated, and above all, I would be intrigued by the notion of a film education program in pre-revolutionary Cuba.

Today, absent celluloid objects and perished vestiges of Cuban intellectual and cultural life animate my research. Like many scholars, I am interested in the complex dynamic of progressive potential and political frustration that characterized the historical period that lasted from 1902 to 1958, commonly known as the republican period.[56] During that time, cultural life

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[53] As of 1966, the list of 16 mm film holdings at the University of Havana Filmoteca included a 10-minute silent film titled "Cine: Industria y Arte de Nuestro Tiempo," with the description "1949 film course". José Manuel Valdés-Rodríguez, *El cine en la Universidad de La Habana (1942-1965)* (La Habana: Empresa de Publicaciones MINED, 1966), 378.
[54] Valdés-Rodríguez, *El cine en la Universidad*, xiv.
[55] Guillermo Cabrera Infante (1929-2005) was a renowned Cuban film critic and novelist. In 1949 he won a scholarship and took the film appreciation course. By 1966, he was exiled in London. For a succinct biography, see Antoni Munné, "Prólogo. Retrato del crítico como ente de ficción," in *El cronista de cine*: *escritos cinematográficos,* ed. Antoni Munné (Barcelona: Galaxia Gutenberg, 2012), 9-36.
[56] For historical accounts of this period, see Hugh Thomas, *Cuba or the Pursuit of Freedom* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1998); Richard Gott, *Cuba: A New History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004); Louis A. Pérez Jr., *Cuba: Between Reform and Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006). For English language examples of new approaches to the cultural history of this period, see Juan A Martínez, *Cuban Art and National Identity: The*

depended on individual initiative, private patronage, and institutional support, the latter being, for the most part, short-lived. In this context, the longevity of Valdés-Rodríguez's film course, offered over fourteen consecutive years, and his ability to secure a stable university position as director of the Department of Cinematography since 1949, are remarkable. This chapter reveals the factors that contributed to that favourable situation, and demonstrates that the film education initiatives that he initiated in the 1940s had a significant impact on the diversification of film audiences in the 1950s, and on the formation of a new generation of film critics and filmmakers whose work matured in the 1960s.

The decade of the 1960s in Cuba has received abundant academic attention, but it is generally discussed only in terms of post-revolutionary rupture, leaving out essential elements of continuity and gradual transformation.[57] This tendency has created a historical narrative that fails to account for the intricate processes involved in the transition from pre-revolutionary to post-revolutionary culture. I will address these blind spots in order to reveal how the practices of film education and film criticism evolved after the creation of the Cuban Institute for Cinematographic Art and Industry (Instituto Cubano de Arte e Industria Cinematográficos, ICAIC) in March 1959. In the ensuing decade, ICAIC was able to gain a high degree of autonomy despite a complex power dynamic amongst various cultural institutions. At that point the importance of cinema as an educational vehicle prevailed over the interest in promoting film as an object of study. As a result, the study of film appreciation in an adult education environment, exemplified by the university summer course, lost the institutional support it had once received. Instead, the post-revolutionary university administration focused on film's functionality as a visual aid for instruction in higher education. For the general population, and

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*Vanguardia Painters, 1927-1950* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1994); Timothy Hyde, *Constitutional Modernism: Architecture and Civil Society in Cuba, 1933-1959* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012); Steven Paul Palmer, José A Piqueras Arenas, and Amparo Sanchez Cobos, eds., *State of Ambiguity: Civic Life and Culture in Cuba's First Republic* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014); Yeidy M. Rivero, *Broadcasting Modernity: Cuban Commercial Television, 1950-1960* (Durham; London: Duke University Press, 2015).

[57] Michael Myerson, *Memories of Underdevelopment; the Revolutionary Films of Cuba* (New York: Grossman Publishers, 1973); Julianne Burton, "Film and Revolution in Cuba. The First Twenty-Five Years," in *New Latin American Cinema. Studies of National Cinemas*, ed. Michael T. Martin, vol. 2, 2 vols. (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1997); Michael Chanan, *Cuban Cinema* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004).

more specifically for rural workers receiving training in various technical fields, ICAIC financed the production of a large number or didactic films on various subject matters.[58] More importantly, post-revolutionary cultural organizations took advantage of cinema as a powerful method for ideological indoctrination, and redefined the role of the film critic accordingly.

In the first section of this chapter I describe the first instances of film education in Cuba through the work of Valdés-Rodríguez, who provided at least two generations of cinephiles with their first comprehensive approach to film appreciation and the history of cinema. The second segment documents the activities of the Department of Cinematography, from its creation in 1949, to its decline and ultimate transformation during the post-revolutionary period. In the early 1960s, with ICAIC as the main institution responsible for cinematographic matters at a national level, the University of Havana lost its previous relevance in this regard, and knowledge about the cinema became secondary to the emphasis on educating audiences through film. The third part analyzes how post-revolutionary changes in the organization of the press and the cultural sector impacted the expectations set upon film critics. In the fourth section I contextualize these developments further, explaining the relationship between ICAIC's position, relative power and autonomy, and the increasing importance of cinema as an educational instrument in the following decade.

## 1. First Instances of Film Education in Cuba

The crucial importance of Valdés-Rodríguez's course has been recognized in Cuban film histories, but more attention has been devoted to his film criticism than to the context in which his teaching took place.[59] Two book collections have been published in Cuba compiling a selection of his writings. The first, prepared in 1982 and published in 1989, covered a three-decade span with a small sample of his commentary on international films, chosen from many thousands of reviews.[60] These film reviews, like those of other Latin American intellectuals,

[58] The first didactic films produced by ICAIC were for the series Enciclopedia Popular (Popular Encyclopedia), and later for the Department of Scientific-Popular Documentaries.
[59] Chanan, *Cuban Cinema,* 99-100, 104-105.
[60] José Manuel Valdés-Rodríguez, *El cine: industria y arte de nuestro tiempo*, ed. Romualdo Santos (La Habana: Editorial Letras Cubanas, 1989), 16.

worked as local reinterpretations of foreign cultural products.[61] In 2010, a new compilation focused on the texts in which Valdés-Rodríguez discussed Cuban cinema, thus salvaging from oblivion a crucial part of the critic's legacy.[62] This body of work, which until recently has been mostly ignored, offers important clues to interpreting the challenges and achievements of Cuban filmmakers and film enthusiasts of the first half of the twentieth century.

The story of how Cuba's most important institution of higher learning accommodated the study of cinema provides evidence of the increasing heterogeneity of Latin American film publics. Through his initiative and perseverance, Valdés-Rodríguez contributed to the formation of a sophisticated film audience, cognizant of the landmarks of film history, and aware of the artistic and social characteristics of film. He played an essential role in guiding the young cinephiles of the 1950s, many of whom became key figures of the celebrated Cuban cinema of the 1960s, and had further impact in the formation of the New Latin American Cinema.[63] For that generation, cinephilia and the desire to write about or make films were closely interconnected. Its encounter with cinema in the late 1940s and throughout the 1950s took place in an environment where the possibility of creating a national film industry seemed remote. At

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[61] For an illuminating analysis of the role of writers and intellectuals in negotiating the influence of Hollywood cinema in Latin America see Jason Borge, *Latin American Writers and the Rise of Hollywood Cinema* (New York: Routledge, 2008).

[62] José Manuel Valdés-Rodríguez, *Ojeada al cine cubano*, ed. Pedro R. Noa Romero (La Habana: Ediciones ICAIC, 2010).

[63] His students included Néstor Almendros, Guillermo Cabrera Infante, Fausto Canel, Julio García Espinosa, Alfredo Guevara, Orlando Jiménez Leal, Eduardo Manet, José Massip, Walfredo Piñera, Germán Puig, Mario Rodríguez Alemán, Ricardo Vigón, and several others whose names are intrinsically linked to the history of Cuban cinema. Many of them wrote film criticism during the 1950s and early 1960s, while others became filmmakers in Cuba but pursued their later careers in exile. Throughout this dissertation I contextualize their early participation in Cuban film culture. The work of García Espinosa and Guevara is better known due to their long-term contributions to ICAIC. For instance, under Guevara's leadership, ICAIC became a crucial nexus in the transnational network of collaboration between filmmakers of the New Latin American Cinema by sponsoring publications, documentaries, co-productions, and film festivals. García Espinosa's 1969 essay "Por un cine imperfecto" ("For an Imperfect Cinema") is a key example of the revolutionary ideals that resonated throughout Third World filmmaking in the 1960s and 1970s. For the prevailing history of ICAIC see Chanan, *Cuban Cinema*. For a translation of the text mentioned, see Julio García Espinosa, "For an Imperfect Cinema," in *New Latin American Cinema. Theory, Practices, and Transcontinental Articulations*, ed. Michael T. Martin, trans. Julianne Burton, vol. 1, 2 vols. (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1997), 71–82.

the same time, the constant circulation of people, texts, and artworks made Cuban artists, writers and intellectuals see themselves as part of a world of innovation and modernization. The creative and intellectual effervescence of that period shaped many of their views and aspirations in important ways.[64]

I will discuss Valdés-Rodríguez's early contact with progressive pedagogical theories and with the avant-garde projects of the 1920s as a preamble to his ideological and intellectual commitment to a Marxist view of art and society. Throughout the 1930s, his connections to the international Left helped shape his views about cinema and created unusual opportunities for film instruction. In particular, his familiarity with Harry Alan Potamkin's 1932 course, his meeting with Sergei Eisenstein in 1934 and his collaboration with exiled Spanish Republicans in 1939 all played an important role in his outlook towards film education. These transnational links crucially contributed to his knowledge and prestige, facilitating the institutional credentials that made him an essential figure of Cuban and Latin American film culture.

**Valdés-Rodríguez and the Intellectual Community of the 1920s and 1930s**

Valdés-Rodríguez's family background indicates that he was introduced to innovative ideas about pedagogy from an early age. His father, Manuel Valdés Rodríguez (1849-1914), was a prominent teacher and education reformer, and one of the first proponents of a scientific approach to education. From 1877 onwards, he worked as an educator and director at various schools linked to the Sociedad Económica de Amigos del País. On more than one occasion, he traveled to the United States as a representative of that institution in order to learn about the most advanced educational theories of his time. In 1885 he visited the public school system in New York, later translating their teacher's manual into Spanish. His approach to teaching revealed an understanding of the latest developments in experimental psychology, as well as a progressive attitude towards education. For instance, he was the first Cuban teacher to advocate for a racially integrated classroom. He published the sum of his pedagogical insights in 1898, and continued to

[64] For an essential overview of intellectual activity during the republican period, see Rafael Rojas, *Essays in Cuban Intellectual History* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008). Other approaches to different aspects of 1950s cultural history can be found in Rivero, *Broadcasting Modernity*; Hyde, *Constitutional Modernism*.

campaign for professional teacher training until his death.[65] His revolutionary contributions to Cuban pedagogical practice and theory were recognized on the centenary of his birth in 1949 through a series of conferences, publications, and events.[66]

Both by virtue of his family background and through his own accomplishments, Valdés-Rodríguez was in close contact with the learned circles of 1920s Havana. From 1927 onwards, he published social chronicles, translations of North American writers, critical essays, as well as theater, film and literary reviews for various publications.[67] He was close to the new generation of writers, artists, and essayists who converged around the creation of *Revista de Avance* (1927-1930). The editors of this noteworthy avant-garde magazine conceived of their collective project as an expression of their intellectual and political inconformity with the status quo.[68] The focus and main interest of this publication concerned the renewal of literary and artistic practice in opposition to the voices of tradition. *Revista de Avance*'s cosmopolitan outlook did not preclude its concern with national matters, but rather generated a well-informed intellectual dialogue with the most important artistic and literary currents of its time. In addition to publishing many significant pieces penned by the youngest generation of Cuban writers and essayists, the magazine included a wide range of international artists and authors.[69]

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[65] Manuel Valdés-Rodríguez, *Ensayos sobre educación; teórica, práctica y experimental* (La Habana: Impr. El Figaro, 1898).
[66] Dulce María Escalona, "Manuel Valdés Rodríguez," in *El maestro y la educación popular*, ed. Dulce María Escalona (La Habana: Ministerio de Educacion: Direccion de Cultura, 1950), 7-19.
[67] Pedro R. Noa Romero, "Cronología," in *Ojeada al cine cubano*, ed. Pedro R. Noa Romero (La Habana: Ediciones ICAIC, 2010), 263.
[68] Francine Masiello, "Rethinking Neocolonial Esthetics: Literature, Politics, and Intellectual Community in Cuba's Revista de Avance," *Latin American Research Review* 28, no. 2 (1993): 15.
[69] The pages of the magazine were illustrated with works by Jean Cocteau, Salvador Dalí, Henri Matisse, Pablo Picasso, Diego Rivera, and many others. The magazine published – for the first time in Cuba – many European and North American writers such as Blaise Cendrars, Waldo Frank, André Gide, Jean Giraudoux, Maxim Gorki, Paul Morand, Eugene O'Neill, John Dos Passos, Ezra Pound, Arthur Rimbaud, Bertrand Russell, George Santayana, and Paul Valéry. Spanish and Latin American writers were also well represented, including pieces by Federico García Lorca, José Carlos Mariátegui, José Ortega y Gasset, Horacio Quiroga, Alfonso Reyes, Miguel de Unamuno, and César Vallejo. Masiello, "Revista de Avance," 3; Carlos Ripoll, "La Revista de Avance (1927-1930). Vocero de vanguardismo y pórtico de revolución," *Revista Iberoamericana* 30, no. 58 (1964): 265-267; Rosario Rexach, "La Revista de Avance publicada en Habana, 1927-1930," *Caribbean Studies* 3, no. 3 (1963): 3-16.

The magazine's editors and most of its collaborators were politically active and opposed the highly unpopular Gerardo Machado regime, which ruled the island from 1925 to 1933.[70] The corruption and despotism that characterized this government triggered waves of opposition from all sectors of society. The most radical intellectuals engaged in clandestine activities and eventually suffered prison and exile, while others channeled their activism by working with various oppositional political parties. Valdés-Rodríguez's family's respectability served him well during these turbulent years. His large house, located in the wealthy Havana neighborhood of Vedado, became a clandestine meeting place for young agitators such as Raúl Roa García, then an active member of student and communist organizations.[71] During this time he also organized a rudimentary cine club, holding film screenings at his residence with borrowed projection equipment and using his neighbor's white garage wall as a screen.[72]

Valdés-Rodríguez's involvement with cinema was always dually conditioned. On the one hand, his critical appraisals responded to his aesthetic and intellectual preferences. On the other, he depended on it as a source of income and employment. During the early part of the 1920s he worked in the management of Cine Fausto, one of the largest and most impressive theaters in 1920s Havana.[73] At the end of that decade, he started publishing film and theater reviews in newspapers and magazines such as *El Mundo*, *El País*, *Revista de La Habana,* and *Social*. He secured a permanent column in *El Mundo* in 1935, where he ran the weekly column *Tablas y Pantalla* (Stage and Screen) until 1967.[74] Thus, while pursuing other endeavors, he remained tied to the industrial and public relations imperatives of the press throughout most of his life.

Like other important intellectuals of his generation, Valdés-Rodríguez was openly involved in communist activity between 1931 and 1935. He became a member of the Cuban

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[70] The original editors were Alejo Carpentier, Martí Casanovas, Francisco Ichaso, Jorge Mañach, and Juan Marinello. José Zacarías Tallet and Félix Lizaso substituted Carpentier and Casanovas respectively. Rexach, "La Revista de Avance," 5.
[71] Raúl Roa, "Firmeza y continuidad de una conducta," in *El cine: industria y arte de nuestro tiempo*, ed. Romualdo Santos (La Habana: Editorial Letras Cubanas, 1989), 434.
[72] María Eulalia Douglas, *La tienda negra: El cine en Cuba, 1897-1990* (La Habana: Cinemateca de Cuba, 1996), 51. For more information about this cine-club, see Chapter 2.
[73] Louis A. Pérez Jr., *On Becoming Cuban: Identity, Nationality, and Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), chap. 5, Kobo.
[74] Noa Romero, "Cronología," 264.

Anti-Imperialist League in 1931 and of the Cuban Communist Party in 1934.[75] That year he became one of the editors of the communist magazine *Masas*, for which he was incarcerated in 1935.[76] During this period he was also very much implicated in international exchanges of ideas about cinema. He was a foreign correspondent for the leftist U.S. film journal *Experimental Cinema*, which played a significant role in the film culture of the United States, especially through its translation and dissemination of Soviet texts. In 1932 he published an article in the journal, and on that occasion the "Contributors" page introduced him as "a young Cuban" whose "essays have appeared in various issues of the foremost Cuban intellectual journal, *La Revista de La Habana*" and who "has also made several translations of stories and books by John Reed." He is also presented as "General Secretary of the Cine Club of Cuba.".[77] The article "Hollywood: Sales Agent of American Imperialism" is an accusatory text responding as much to Hollywood movies as to the American control of Cuba's economy.[78] Recent scholarship has demonstrated that many Cuban film critics articulated their anti-imperialist sentiment through their analysis of American films, and Valdés-Rodríguez's writing offers a paradigmatic example of this trend.[79]

It is in the context of his communist involvement that Valdés-Rodríguez first encounters the possibilities of pedagogy regarding cinema. In April 1932 he delivered a lecture at the Lyceum society of Havana entitled "The New Cinematographic Technique". This was one of the first known instances of public discussion about the aesthetic and social aspects of cinema on the island. It was well received for its interest and novelty and recognized by the organizers as a

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[75] Noa Romero, "Cronología," 264. The Communist Party adopted the name Partido Unión Revolucionaria in 1937, and later Partido Socialista Popular (PSP) in 1944. Pérez Jr., *Between Reform and Revolution*, 211, 219.

[76] After the six-month prison term, he returned to the professional milieu unscathed. He remained faithful to socialist ideals, and his writing became more ideologically overt after the 1959 Cuban Revolution. This position was celebrated in most tributes to his legacy throughout the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. See, for example, Romualdo Santos, "Historia de una pasión cinematográfica," in *El cine: industria y arte de nuestro tiempo*, ed. Romualdo Santos (La Habana: Editorial Letras Cubanas, 1989), 5–25.

[77] "Notes on Contributors," *Experimental Cinema*, 1932.

[78] José Manuel Valdés-Rodríguez, "Hollywood: Sales Agent of American Imperialism," *Experimental Cinema*, 1932.

[79] Megan Feeney, "'Enseñándolos a ver': Hollywood in Havana and the Birth of a Critical Practice, 1897-1933," *Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies* 15, no. 3 (2006): 321–39.

topic "of relevant modernity".[80] Although it is not possible to ascertain the exact content of that foundational conference, it is quite likely that it focused on Soviet cinema. This is suggested by Valdés-Rodríguez's conclusion to the talk where he shared his hope that Sergei Eisenstein, the Soviet director he most deeply admired, could travel through Cuba once he finished his *¡Qué viva México!* project.[81]

Eisenstein never visited Cuba, but Valdés-Rodríguez was able to meet him in person during his trip to the Soviet Union between April and September of 1934.[82] He traveled as a correspondent for the magazines *Ahora* and *Bohemia* covering the Soviet Writers' Congress of 1934.[83] Valdés-Rodríguez was part of the international committee organized by *Experimental Cinema* to campaign in defense of Eisenstein's unfinished Mexico film throughout 1933.[84] Through common friends he was able to get in touch with Eisenstein directly, and visited him at his Moscow apartment in August 1934. He remembered having had long conversations with him, obtaining an autograph, and even talking to him about making a film in Cuba.[85] In some of his recollections he also described spending time with Eisenstein throughout the spring and summer

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[80] Rosa M. Abella and Otto G. Richter Library, *Lyceum and Lawn Tennis Club Collection, 1929-1986,* Cuban Heritage Collection, University of Miami.
[81] José Manuel Valdés-Rodríguez, "Cubanía y verdad en nuestro cine," *El Mundo*, June 27, 1961, reprinted in Pedro R. Noa Romero, ed., *Ojeada al cine cubano* (La Habana, Ediciones ICAIC, 2010), 48. For Eisenstein's lasting international influence, see Masha Salazkina, "Moscow-Rome-Havana: A Film-Theory Road Map," *October*, no. 139 (Winter 2012): 97–116, https://doi.org/10.1162/OCTO_a_00082; Sarah Ann Wells, "Parallel Modernities? The First Reception of Soviet Cinema in Latin America", in *Cosmopolitan Film Cultures in Latin America, 1896-1960*, eds. Rielle Navitski and Nicolas Poppe (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2017), 151-175.
[82] Another Cuban, renowned writer Alejo Carpentier, had met Eisenstein in Paris a few years before. Alejo Carpentier, "Con el creador del *Acorazado Potemkin*," *Social*, March 1930, reprinted in Salvador Arias, ed., *El cine, décima musa* (La Habana, Ediciones ICAIC, 2011), 56-60.
[83] Ministerio de Defensa Nacional de Cuba, "J.M. Valdés-Rodríguez", in *Premio Varona* (La Habana: Impresores P. Fernández, 1945), 40.
[84] "Notes on Activities of Experimental Cinema during 1933," *Experimental Cinema*, 1934.
[85] José Manuel Valdés-Rodríguez, "El hombre, el creador, el técnico: Sergei Mijailovich Eisenstein," *Lunes de Revolución*, February 1961.

of that year, and learning firsthand about the film curriculum he was developing for the State Institute of Cinematography (VGIK).[86]

**The Academy of Dramatic Arts: First Iteration of the Film Course**

Valdés-Rodríguez's strong connection to the international Left, initiated during the early 1930s, continued into the following decade. Writing theater and film criticism earned him continuous employment as well as the recognition of his peers. His steady contributions to *El Mundo* won him several honors and accolades for his journalistic work. At this more mature stage of his life, aged 42, Valdés-Rodríguez became involved in new educational initiatives. He was part of the network of Cuban intellectuals who supported the arrival of Spanish émigrés in 1939. They founded the Escuela Libre de La Habana (Open School of Havana), an institution that housed the Academy of Dramatic Arts, which provided the context for the first iteration of his film course.

The Spanish Civil War impacted transatlantic contact in important ways. The defeat of the Republican Army forced a large number of Spaniards into exile, and many leftist artists and intellectuals sought refuge in Cuba. Although they arrived on the island in smaller numbers than they did to other Latin American countries such as Mexico and Argentina, their impact on Cuban cultural and artistic activity should not be underestimated. In addition to abundant family ties facilitating Spanish immigration to the island, other links, forged through political, professional, and regional associations, created welcoming networks of support. Several architects and visual artists took permanent residence, while others, including university professors, dancers, playwrights and theater promoters only stayed for a short time. However, they all left their mark on national culture through their interaction with Cuban artists and intellectuals, their publications, and their creative and educational activities.[87]

The Spanish émigrés played a crucial role in Cuban artistic education during this period. Although exiled university professors faced great difficulties in teaching in Cuba without proper

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[86] Pedro R. Noa Romero, "El cine cubano a través de la mirada crítica de José Manuel Valdés-Rodríguez," in *Ojeada al cine cubano*, ed. Pedro R. Noa Romero (La Habana: Ediciones ICAIC, 2010), 13.
[87] Miguel Cabañas Bravo, "Lazos y ensanches del arte español a través del exilio de 1939. El caso de Cuba," in *Las redes hispanas del arte desde 1900*, eds. Miguel Cabañas Bravo and Wifredo Rincón García (Madrid: CSIC, 2014), 89-106.

validation of their credentials, legal conditions allowed for private education. They were able to create the Escuela Libre, with the help of leftist friends such as Raúl Roa, the support of prominent intellectuals like Fernando Ortiz and José María Chacón y Calvo, and the generosity of the wealthy patron María Luisa Gómez Mena. This independent learning centre was modeled on the progressive ideals about modern, secular education of the Spanish Institución Libre de Enseñanza.[88]

The school opened its classes in October 1939 with an ambitious plan to offer an alternative setting for both secondary and postsecondary educational programs. Initially, it was divided into five sections that aspired to cover subjects in science, business, languages, and the arts.[89] Three of the five sections were under the administrative supervision of Cuban collaborators while the other two were headed by Spaniards.[90] The school benefited from experienced teachers, but their ambitions greatly surpassed their means. The large number of professors and collaborators, both foreign and national, was greater than the number of students they could recruit, and this experimental institution did not last long. However, one of its branches, the Academia de Artes Dramáticas (Academy of Dramatic Arts), known as ADADEL, had a long-lasting impact. Founded by José Rubia Barcia in June 1940, ADADEL introduced Cuba's first systematic approach to the study of theater, and one of the first of its kind in Latin America.

Rubia Barcia was a Spanish playwright, theater director and literature professor who arrived in Havana in May 1939. During his four years on the island, he delivered conferences, published articles, and befriended like-minded Cubans like Roa and Valdés-Rodríguez. From June 1940 until his departure for a teaching position at Princeton University in August 1943,

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[88] Dania Vázquez Matos, "La Escuela Libre de La Habana: Vivero de inquietudes y desvelos renovadores," *Ágora. Boletín Digital Dirección de Información Universidad de La Habana*, no. 3 (September-November 2012): 10–15.
[89] Vázquez Matos, "La Escuela Libre," 14.
[90] The Cubans who were involved with the administration of the *Escuela Libre* were all professors at the University of Havana. Alfonso Bernal del Riesgo was responsible for the section dedicated to secondary studies, José Elías Entralgo Vallina for free courses, and Raúl Roa García for cultural relations and publications. The other two sections, Advanced and University Studies and Arts and Languages were headed by Spaniards Luis Tobío Fernández and José Rubia Barcia respectively. Rubia Barcia took over the leadership of the school after its first director, Cuban lawyer José Miguel Irisarri, stepped down.

Rubia Barcia trained many Cuban actors and directors.[91] Other instructors at the academy included the Austrian Ludwig Schajowicz and the Cuban Luis A. Baralt. A group of ADADEL's ex-students continued their theatrical work by forming the ADAD Group, which was active from 1945 to 1950. The stage where ADAD performed was named "the Valdés Rodríguez", most likely in honor of José Manuel's father, the late educator Manuel Valdés Rodríguez.[92]

The Academia de Artes Dramáticas has been recognized for its importance in theater studies in Cuba, but this setting should also be credited for housing the country's first course on film appreciation.[93] Given his long association with theater criticism and creation, it is not surprising that Valdés-Rodríguez's first students were training to be theater actors and directors.[94] During the late 1920s and early 1930s he had been part of a group of avant-garde enthusiasts, linked to *Revista de Avance*, who staged plays and later formed a short-lived theater group called La Cueva (The Cave).[95] As both film and theater reviewer for the newspaper *El Mundo*, he was knowledgeable in the historical and creative dimensions of the theater, and he was always in contact with new plays and new ideas about this medium.[96]

The relationship between actors' training and the study of film can be traced back to the early days of the State Institute of Cinematography in the USSR. This Soviet film school, founded in 1919 as a technical school (GIK), and turned into a higher education institution in 1934 (VGIK), was initially associated with actors training for the Moscow Art Theater.[97] The school's program covered filmmaking skills as well as the study of the history of art, literature and culture at large, but the performance aspect was key, especially at its inception. For instance, Lev Kuleshov's experiments with actor Ivan Mozhukhin took place there during the early

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[91] Jorge Domingo, *El exilio republicano español en Cuba* (Madrid: Siglo XXI de España, 2009), 503-504.
[92] Luis A. Baralt, "Cincuenta años de teatro en Cuba," in *Libro de Cuba*, ed. Arturo Alfonso Roselló (La Habana, 1954), 614.
[93] Valdés-Rodríguez, *El cine en la Universidad*, xiii.
[94] Among his first students were actors Violeta Casal, Marisabel Sáenz, Alejandro Lugo, Ana Saínz, Juanita Caldevilla, and directors Modesto Centeno and Francisco Morín. See Valdés-Rodríguez, *El cine en la Universidad*, xiv.
[95] Baralt, "Cincuenta años de teatro en Cuba," 614.
[96] Valdés-Rodríguez, *El cine en la Universidad*, 456-485.
[97] Duncan Petrie, "A New Art for a New Society? The Emergence and Development of Film Schools in Europe," in Malte Hagener, *The Emergence of Film Culture* (New York, NY: Berghahn Books, 2014), 270.

1920s,[98] and Sergei Eisenstein taught a workshop in 1928 examining how the techniques of Japan's *kabuki* theater could be applied to film acting.[99]

VGIK served as model and inspiration for European film schools of the 1930s and 1940s such as the National Film School in Rome (renamed Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia*)* and L'Institut des hautes études cinématographiques (IDHEC) in France. These institutions were funded by the Italian and French states, and responded to specific nationalist policies.[100] In contrast, the institutional settings provided by ADADEL, and later by the University of Havana Summer School, were small-scale projects with limited resources and modest objectives. Although the Cuban example is not comparable to the full-fledged European film schools, keeping them in mind allows us to recognize that film culture was acquiring enough importance on the island for an embryonic film pedagogy to emerge.

This film pedagogy shares some traits with the isolated film courses that were offered in higher education institutions in the United States during the interwar years. Those educational initiatives, along with the existence of noncommercial or niche film exhibition sites, and the expansion of the film society movement, contributed to the growth of American film culture.[101] In some instances, film instruction in American universities was connected to the film industry, as was the case for courses offered at Harvard Business School and at the University of Southern California. In other cases, the focus was on the recognition of film's social and aesthetic aspects, independent of any professionalization objectives. One key example of this tendency was the course offered by Harry Alan Potamkin at the end of 1932 for the New School of Social Research in New York.[102]

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[98] Petrie, "Film Schools in Europe," 271.
[99] Sergei Eisenstein, "The GTK Teaching and Research Workshop," in *Selected Works. Writings, 1922-34*, ed. and trans. Richard Taylor, vol. 1, 4 vols. (London: BFI Publishing, 1988), 127–30.
[100] For analyses of film education in Europe during this period, see Masha Salazkina, "Soviet–Italian Cinematic Exchanges: Transnational Film Education in the 1930s," and Petrie, "Film Schools in Europe," in Hagener, *The Emergence of Film Culture*, 180-198, 268-282.
[101] For a collection addressing various aspects of American film culture in the first half of the twentieth century, see Lee Grieveson and Haidee Wasson, eds., *Inventing Film Studies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008).
[102] Dana Polan, *Scenes of Instruction: The Beginnings of the U.S. Study of Film* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 6.

Valdés-Rodríguez drew inspiration from both the Soviet and the American experiences.[103] Eisenstein's teaching methods concerned the training of filmmakers, and were therefore not fully applicable to the Cuban situation, but his ideas and film practice lie at the heart of the theoretical and ideological background of Valdés-Rodríguez's teaching approach. Potamkin's course, on the other hand, was addressed to the adult student with a general interest in cultural and artistic matters, and therefore offers the most pertinent point of reference for the Havana course. It is possible that Valdés-Rodríguez may have met Potamkin in person during a trip to the United States before the latter's untimely death in 1933. They were both associated with the journal *Experimental Cinema*, so they may have met at a gathering or event. If not, Potamkin's course description was anyway available in print form in the *National Board of Review*, and in the *New School Bulletin* for 1932-33.[104]

**Film Pedagogy at the University of Havana Summer School**

Valdés-Rodríguez was ideally situated to be part of the renovation of institutionalized education that took place during the early 1940s. Cuban politics stabilized after several years of unstable governments following the ousting of Machado in 1933. In 1939 a Constitutional Assembly was formed, and general elections were called. The populist government of Fulgencio Batista was elected and inaugurated in 1940. During the early part of that year, the delegates to the Constitutional Assembly, representing various political parties – including the communists – collaborated in the drafting of the new Constitution. This was a rare historical moment in which intellectuals and politicians from a wide range of ideological positions debated together the democratic future of the nation.[105] As a result, the Constitution of 1940 established important social reforms as well as political and civil rights, creating the legal basis for optimal relations between citizen and state. In practice, these principles or laws were not always implemented or respected, thus waves of conflict and resistance continued to exist. Nevertheless, the progressive forces behind constitutional change had great impact on the development of the young nation.

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[103] Mirta Aguirre, "Cine en la Universidad," *Hoy,* July 8, 1948, reprinted in *Crónicas de Cine*, eds. Marcia Castillo and Olivia Miranda, vol. 1, 2 vols. (La Habana: Editorial Letras Cubanas, 1988), 249.
[104] Polan, *Scenes of Instruction*, 240.
[105] Thomas, *Cuba or the Pursuit of Freedom,* 716-723; Pérez Jr., *Cuba: Between Reform and Revolution*, 214.

One of the ways in which this potential was realized was through the modernization of the educational system.

In this context, the status and structure of the University of Havana went through an intense period of transformation. The revolutionary impetus of the student movement had demanded university reforms for almost two decades. The Constitution of 1940 finally recognized the much desired university autonomy and made ample budget allocations. As part of this environment of renewal, the University of Havana founded its Summer School on March 26, 1941.[106] The school focused on cultural enrichment, offering non-credit courses in literature, humanities, Cuban and foreign cultures, geography, history, languages, and the arts. Valdés-Rodríguez's course, "El Cine, Industria y Arte de Nuestro Tiempo" (Cinema, Industry and Art of Our Times) was included in the Arts section.[107] Its future was secured by this new institutional alternative and so was its long-term impact in Cuba's cultural history.

Throughout the 1940s and 1950s, the university opened up to new types of instruction, incorporating for the first time the presence of theater and film. The evidence suggests that these new developments were closely related to the legacy of the Escuela Libre. Links of friendship and camaraderie with University of Havana professors facilitated the gradual insertion of Spanish exiles and their collaborators into this reputable institution. For instance, Rubia Barcia was able to teach Spanish Grammar and Literature at the Summer School between 1941 and 1943.[108] Theater instructors Schajowicz and Baralt, originally associated with ADADEL, created the Teatro Universitario (University Theater) and the Seminario de Artes Dramáticas (Dramatic Arts Seminar).[109] These teaching positions were financially beneficial as they guaranteed a more stable income than the minimal enrolment the Escuela Libre could secure.

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[106] Ramón de Armas, Ana Cairo Ballester and Eduardo Torres-Cuevas, *Historia de la Universidad de la Habana, 1930-1978* (La Habana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1984), 502; Alfonso Bernal del Riesgo, "La enseñanza universitaria en Cuba," in *Libro de Cuba*, ed. Arturo Alfonso Roselló (La Habana, 1954), 546.

[107] I am very grateful to Pedro Noa Romero for generously sharing with me a number of materials related to Valdés-Rodríguez's film course that are held at the University of Havana's Extension Department. These documents have been digitized and preserved thanks to his arduous and laudable archival work. Throughout the text I will refer to these sources as Valdés-Rodríguez Digital Archive.

[108] Domingo, *El exilio republicano español*, 503-504.

[109] Baralt, "Cincuenta años de teatro en Cuba," 614.

Besides these developments in his teaching career, Valdés-Rodríguez was also an active part of the professionalization of journalism that took place during these years. From 1940 to 1942 he was the president of the Agrupación de Reporters Teatrales y Cinematográficos (Theater and Film Reporters Association, ARTYC). He was also a member of the Asociación de Reporters de La Habana (Havana Reporters Association), and led its Foreign Relations Commission from 1941 to 1945. In addition, he presided over the organizing committee for the First Journalist Congress celebrated in Havana in December 1941.[110] At this congress, journalists made the case for professional journalistic training, and in 1942 they were granted official authorization. The Journalism School "Manuel Márquez Sterling" was inaugurated in October 1943. Throughout the rest of the decade, Valdés-Rodríguez earned various certificates and diplomas from the school, culminating in the title of "Professional Journalist" in 1949, and eventually becoming an adjunct professor.[111]

Valdés-Rodríguez professional reputation grew not only through his participation in new institutional spaces, but also through his writing. He won various awards both for his critical essays and for his journalistic pieces.[112] At the same time that his intellectual prestige expanded, he cultivated his professional relationship with film industry representatives. Hollywood film distributors in Havana lent their films for the course screenings, and they also collaborated by offering scholarships covering the course fees. Every year, Fox Film de Cuba conferred ten scholarships through a writing contest.[113] The contest was open to anyone not directly involved with the theater, film or journalistic fields, whether or not they were students.[114] Applicants needed to submit a critical piece regarding a film that had recently premiered in Havana, as specified by Fox.[115] Through this mutually beneficial agreement, Fox enlarged its connection to the Cuban public, and many applicants who could not otherwise have afforded the course were able to enroll.

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[110] Ministerio de Defensa Nacional, "J.M. Valdés-Rodríguez," 41.
[111] Octavio de la Suareé, "Escuela Profesional de Periodismo Manuel Márquez Sterling," in *Libro de Cuba*, ed. Arturo Alfonso Roselló (La Habana, 1954), 527.
[112] Ministerio de Defensa Nacional, "J.M. Valdés-Rodríguez," 40-41.
[113] Valdés-Rodríguez, *El cine en la Universidad*, xv.
[114] Some of these young scholarship recipients, such as Guillermo Cabrera Infante, Germán Puig Paredes, Norma Torrado, and José del Campo, became cine-club founders soon after taking the course.
[115] Valdés-Rodríguez Digital Archive.

The pedagogical program of the university course started as an offshoot of the ADADEL course, but Valdés-Rodríguez's was able to refine it throughout fourteen uninterrupted years of teaching at the Summer School, from 1942 to 1956. The sporadic, self-standing lectures he had delivered during the 1930s, although directed at interested audiences, did not require the same type of planning as a course of longer duration does. This summer course required the integration of several interrelated aspects, and permitted a more sustained engagement with a diversity of topics. The book *El cine en la Universidad de La Habana* (Cinema at the University of Havana), published in 1966, allows us a glimpse of the scope and content of the course. However, by Valdés-Rodríguez's own admission, the program described should be regarded as reminiscence combined with guidelines for future teaching opportunities.[116]

The principal aims of the course were to familiarize students with important film classics, and to provide them with a vocabulary and method useful not only for film analysis, but for the critical appraisal of other artistic manifestations as well. The course was organized into twelve lectures and twelve screenings, but this structure was somewhat variable.[117] As he explained, the length of coverage for each topic could be adjusted according to the amount of time allotted to the overall course. In his synthesis of the course's history, written *a posteriori*, he affirms that the course was divided into the following eight sections: "The Birth of Cinema", "Social Technology and Cinema", "Cinema, Collective and Social Art", "Introduction to Film Criticism", "Cinema, Culminating Art", "The Novel and Cinema", "The Theater and Cinema", and "The Specifically Cinematographic".[118] Central to all the lessons was the belief that cinema is a superior art form capable of revealing aspects of human psychology and social reality that no other art forms could properly represent. To support his arguments, Valdés-Rodríguez made extensive reference to literature and theater, ranging from the modernist literature of James Joyce and Marcel Proust to the plays of Eugene O'Neill. Although he insisted that cinema had not lived up to its full potential, he discussed Eisenstein's films as an exceptional realization of the medium's possibilities.[119]

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[116] Valdés-Rodríguez, *El cine en la Universidad*, 368-371.
[117] Valdés-Rodríguez, *El cine en la Universidad*, xiv.
[118] Valdés-Rodríguez, *El cine en la Universidad*, 369-371.
[119] Valdés-Rodríguez, *El cine en la Universidad*, 393-429, 456-485.

Valdés-Rodríguez strived to create a balanced repertory where various modes of filmmaking such as newsreels, animation, documentaries and feature film genres could be represented. He also incorporated a wide range of filmic traditions, and a typical film list included US, European, and Soviet productions. Several key American and British directors such as Orson Welles, Lawrence Olivier, John Ford, Carol Reed, Vincent Minnelli, and Alfred Hitchcock were featured.[120] The work of significant international directors like Luis Buñuel and Akira Kurosawa was only sporadically available. Latin American films by important Mexican and Argentine directors of the period such as Fernando de Fuentes, Emilio Fernández, and Lucas Demare were included.[121] Occasionally, he also screened Cuban short films[122]. Consistent with the postwar relevance of Italian cinema, various Italian films were shown throughout the 1950s, including those of Roberto Rossellini and Vittorio de Sica. European productions were most amply represented by French cinema, in particular through the films of Jean Renoir and Julien Duvivier, which were shown on several occasions. Only the films of Charles Chaplin and Eisenstein were shown with comparable frequency.[123] The screening selection did not always match the professor's intentions, as he depended on the availability of the films through their local distributors. This irregular supply created a version of film history that to a large extent relied on verbal descriptions rather than filmic examples. Yet, this did not affect the growing desire for this type of learning experience, and the summer film course was soon followed by a year-round screening series.

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[120] Valdés-Rodríguez, *El cine en la Universidad*, 381-386.
[121] Valdés-Rodríguez, *El cine en la Universidad*. The Mexican films *Janitzio* (Carlos Navarro, 1935), *Doña Bárbara* (Fernando de Fuentes, 1943), *María Candelaria* (Emilio Fernández, 1944), and *La perla* (Emilio Fernández, 1947) were shown in the 1940s, while Luis Buñuel's *Los olvidados* (1950) was screened in the 1950s. Argentine films included *La guerra gaucha* (Lucas Demare, 1942), *Todo un hombre* (Pierre Chenal, 1943), *Su mejor alumno* (Lucas Demare, 1944), *La casta Susana* (Benito Perojo, 1944), and *La dama duende* (Luis Saslavsky, 1945). It is interesting to note that in some instances, the film information provided by Valdés-Rodríguez is imprecise. For example, he incorrectly credits the Argentine film *El matrero* (Orestes Caviglia, 1939) to Lucas Demare. In another confusing case, he lists "*Muralla de Pasiones*. Est. San Miguel. Director: Mario Soffici." He may have been referring to the Mexican film *Murallas de Pasión* (Víctor Urruchúa, 1944), or to the Argentine film made for Estudios San Miguel *Tres hombres del río* (Mario Soffici, 1943).
[122] For more specific details about Cuban amateur films, see Chapter 3.
[123] Valdés-Rodríguez, *El cine en la Universidad,* 381-386.

## 2. Evolution of the Department of Cinematography at the University of Havana

### The Department of Cinematography and the Extension of Film Activities

The university film course gained in popularity and prestige as the years went by. During its first six years it functioned in a stable but modest manner. The screening sessions had first taken place with borrowed equipment in a classroom, but to improve on the substandard image and sound quality, they had to be moved to the facilities at a radio station.[124] In 1948, the university was going through a construction boom, and Valdés-Rodríguez managed to get sufficient administrative support to install proper film projection equipment in the amphitheater at the Faculty of Education. The architectural and technical upgrades to the Enrique José Varona theater (henceforth, Varona) were completed in July 1948, and it became a permanent site for film projection within the university – hailed as the first of its kind in Latin America.[125]

A few months later, in March 1949, the branch in charge of the University Extension programs approved the creation of the Department of Cinematography, with a fixed salary for its director, a projectionist as well as a secretary.[126] The Department included the personal library of Valdés-Rodríguez, with hundreds of his books on film and other arts, as well as his collection of specialized film publications.[127] With these developments, the scope of film activities at the university was greatly enlarged. The Department would henceforth be engaged in four principal types of activities: the film course at the Summer School, the promotion of film as audiovisual pedagogical tool, the creation of a film archive, and regular screenings for the general public.

One of the Department's stated goals was to function as a lending service for the use of film as a teaching aid for university professors in any discipline.[128] Valdés-Rodríguez was attuned to ideas about the pedagogical value of visual images, and promoted their use as a necessary tool in modern teaching strategies.[129] Some university professors like Calixto Masó, Raúl Roa, Luis de Soto, and Alfonso Bernal del Riesgo employed the services of the department,

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[124] Valdés-Rodríguez, *El cine en la Universidad*, xiv.
[125] Valdés-Rodríguez, *El cine en la Universidad*, xv-xvi.
[126] Valdés-Rodríguez, *El cine en la Universidad*, xiii-xv.
[127] Valdés-Rodríguez Digital Archive.
[128] Valdés-Rodríguez, *El cine en la Universidad*, xvii.
[129] Aguirre, "Cine en la Universidad," 249.

using films to illustrate certain topics in their classes.[130] In particular, Art History professor Luis de Soto frequently utilized visual media, including photographs, slides, and the screening of documentaries.[131]

The institutional credentials of working within the university setting allowed Valdés-Rodríguez to create a film archive. The refurbishment of the Varona theatre included a film storage area with proper air conditioning and dehumidification.[132] This became the location of the Filmoteca Universitaria (University Film Library), the first Cuban film archive, which by 1957 included a total of 150 titles, including documentaries, feature films, and newsreels, in 35 mm and 16 mm formats.[133] The first acquisition was a 35 mm copy of Eisenstein's 1938 film *Alexander Nevski*.[134] Other prominent titles included *Germany Year Zero* (Roberto Rossellini, 1948), also in 35 mm, as well as 16 mm copies of *Battleship Potemkin* (Sergei Eisenstein, 1925) and *La grande illusion* (Jean Renoir, 1937).[135] In addition, the Filmoteca was an important repository holding the only copies of key Cuban films from the 1920s and 1930s.[136]

In order to collect the funds for growing the film collection, in 1949 the Department of Cinematography started offering an alternative, but regular, film exhibition program called Cine de Arte, or "art cinema". By paying a small membership fee, subscribers could attend two film projections per month. They received printed program notes, and the screenings were preceded by a short introduction, sometimes delivered by Valdés-Rodríguez, and other times by specialists in topics relevant to the film. After the film, spectators participated in the ensuing debate.[137] The

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[130] José Manuel Valdés-Rodríguez, "El Departamento de Cinematografía y algunas de sus actividades," *Vida Universitaria*, August 1950; Raúl Roa, "Firmeza y continuidad de una conducta," in *El cine: industria y arte de nuestro tiempo*, ed. Romualdo Santos (La Habana: Editorial Letras Cubanas, 1989), 436.
[131] José Manuel Valdés-Rodríguez, *La Reforma Universitaria y los medios audiovisuales.* (La Habana: Servicio de Medios Audiovisuales, Universidad de la Habana, 1963), 17; Valdés-Rodríguez, *El cine en la Universidad*, 20-23. In the 1940s, Luis de Soto made a short silent instructional film, "Proceso técnico de la escultura" ("Sculpture Technical Process"). Walfredo Piñera, "Breve historia del cine en la Universidad de La Habana," 1979, unpublished.
[132] Valdés-Rodríguez, *El cine en la Universidad*, xvii.
[133] Pedro Noa Romero, "La primera savia nutricia: La filmoteca universitaria," *Cine Cubano*, July-December 2011.
[134] Valdés-Rodríguez, *El cine en la Universidad*, xvii.
[135] Valdés-Rodríguez, *El cine en la Universidad*, 372-380.
[136] Noa Romero, "La primera savia nutricia".
[137] Valdés-Rodríguez, *El cine en la Universidad*, xvi.

films were provided either by film distributors or by embassies, which collaborated with the university in the promotion of their country's cultural heritage.[138]

When the Department of Cinematography was first created, one commentator ventured to propose that the university could become a filmmaking training facility.[139] This was never seriously considered, and cinephiles with filmmaking aspirations acquired their technical skills either through the local television and advertising industries, or abroad, as will be explained in Chapter 2. On the other hand, the University of Havana program effectively became the training ground for professional film criticism. As a key member of the the film reporters' association, the ARTYC, Valdés-Rodríguez was able to establish and convey the professional standards he valued. For him, a good film review should address five essential components: the thematic quality of the film, the specifically filmic elements displayed, the presence of other artistic values, the significance of the work in terms of its technical and aesthetic contribution to its historical period, and the philosophical, social, and political outlook of the films' writers and directors.[140] Among his most prominent disciples were Guillermo Cabrera Infante (1929-2005), René Jordán (1928-2013), Manuel Fernández (1921-2013), and Walfredo Piñera (1930-2013). Cabrera Infante, who took the course in 1949 after winning one of the Fox scholarships, became the most influential Cuban film critic of the 1950s. He embarked in a very significant journalistic and literary career, developing a distinct style of writing about contemporary cinema.[141] His

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[138] Valdés-Rodríguez, *El cine en la Universidad*, 71.
[139] Aguirre, "Cine en la Universidad," 251.
[140] Valdés-Rodríguez, *El cine en la Universidad*, 369.
[141] The most complete compilation of his work as a film critic can be found in Guillermo Cabrera Infante, *El cronista de cine*: *escritos cinematográficos,* ed. Antoni Munné (Barcelona: Galaxia Gutenberg, 2012). Previous selections of his film reviews were published in Guillermo Cabrera Infante, *A Twentieth Century Job*, trans. Kenneth Hall (London: Faber and Faber, 1991); Guillermo Cabrera Infante, *Arcadia todas las noches* (Barcelona: Editorial Seix Barral, 1978); Guillermo Cabrera Infante, *Cine o sardina* (Madrid: Alfaguara, 1997). For critical appraisals of his work in English, see Kenneth E. Hall*, Guillermo Cabrera Infante and the Cinema* (Newark, Del: Juan de la Cuesta, 1989); Raymond D Souza, *Guillermo Cabrera Infante: Two Islands, Many Worlds* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996); Ardis L. Nelson, *Guillermo Cabrera Infante: Assays, Essays and Other Arts* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1999); Jason Borge, "High Anxiety: Guillermo Cabrera Infante and Pre-Revolutionary Film Criticism in Cuba," *Revista de Estudios Hispanicos* 40, no. 2 (May 2006): 341–60. Recently, Cuban researchers have started to recover his legacy within the island. Elizabeth Mirabal and Carlos Velazco, *Sobre los pasos del cronista: el quehacer intelectual de Guillermo Cabrera Infante en Cuba hasta 1965*

views differed greatly from those of his old teacher, and their divergent opinions constitute a testament to the generational shift that would inevitably occur.

The course and the screening sessions enabled a platform for discussion and interaction where many friendships and collaborations were formed. For instance, Germán Puig and Ricardo Vigón took the course together in 1948, the same year they formed the Cine Club de La Habana. As will be detailed in Chapter 2, in this case the ex-students had a falling out with Valdés-Rodríguez as the youngsters came into their own and developed their own tastes, preferences, and cultural projects.[142] In other cases, the direct mentorship and support of the professor was instrumental for facilitating the activities of cine-clubs like the film section of the Sociedad Cultural Nuestro Tiempo (Our Times Cultural Society), henceforth Nuestro Tiempo, and Cine-Club Visión. He lent them the films from the university film library, wrote favorable accounts of their work in the press, and participated in talks and debates they organized.[143] Thus, the impact of Valdés-Rodríguez's Department of Cinematography extended beyond the university because of its generative effect on specific individuals who became filmmakers, film critics, or cultural promoters in their own right.

**Decline of the Department of Cinematography (1956-1962)**

The tense political climate during the last years of Fulgencio Batista's unconstitutional regime (1952-1958) forced the University to stop some of its classes during the 1955-1956 school year, and others in the 1956-1957 one.[144] When it reopened under the new revolutionary government on May 11, 1959, the university structure, as well as its faculty and staff appointments, underwent drastic changes. The University went through a rapid wave of dismissals, with students denouncing professors who had allegedly collaborated with the previous dictatorship, and who were quickly fired. The University Reform gave official form to

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(La Habana: Ediciones Unión, 2010); Elizabeth Mirabal and Carlos Velazco, *Buscando a Caín* (La Habana: Ediciones ICAIC, 2012).

[142] The history of this organization is fraught with controversy, as has been recently explained by Emmanuel Vincenot, "Germán Puig, Ricardo Vigón et Henri Langlois, Pionniers de la Cinemateca de Cuba," *Caravelle* no. 83 (2004): 11-42. For further details on the Cine Club de La Habana, see Chapter 2.

[143] Noa Romero, "Cronología," 265-266. For a detailed account of the activities of these cine-clubs, see Chapter 2.

[144] Mariano Grau Miró, "Reinicia clases la universidad," *Vida Universitaria*, April/May 1959.

the restructuration taking place.[145] Amidst these vertiginous institutional changes, Valdés-Rodríguez stayed firmly planted in the University.

When the Rebel Army deposed Batista, all Cuban official institutions and public figures showed their support for Fidel Castro's new government. Valdés-Rodríguez immediately expressed his enthusiasm through his column in the newspaper *El Mundo*. He also celebrated the Revolution through an article in the university magazine detailing the content of a documentary with original footage gathered throughout the past several years of urban and guerrilla insurgency.[146] When the university reopened in May, the University Extension Commission (Comisión de Extensión Universitaria, CEU) coordinated a series of events called "Operation Culture". This consisted of a book fair, art exhibits, musical concerts, folkloric and ballet dance performances, storytelling, theater, and film screenings. They were open to the general public, as they intended to convey the message that the university was not an exclusive space, but rather a welcoming and accessible environment for arts and culture to thrive. In this context, Valdés-Rodríguez organized the projection of various films from the Filmoteca, as well as new work by amateur filmmakers.[147] He quickly became the spokesperson for these types of cultural activities coordinated by the CEU for the university, making them known to the wider public through his journalistic work in the general press.[148]

During this transitional period, the Department of Cinematography restarted offering the Cine de Arte sessions that had been stopped at the end of 1956. The inaugural program took place in July 1959, and until August 1960, the sessions continued functioning in a similar fashion than they had before. To start this new phase, the film program specifies that they chose to screen four of the six best films from the history of cinema, as selected by an international jury in Brussels. Two of the films belonged to the Filmoteca, *Battleship Potemkin* (Sergei Eisenstein, 1925), and *La grande illusion* (Jean Renoir, 1937). The Department borrowed the other two, *The*

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[145] Jaime Suchlicki, *University Students and Revolution in Cuba, 1920-1968* (Coral Gables, Fla.: University of Miami Press, 1969).
[146] José Manuel Valdés-Rodríguez, "El cine y la hazaña cubana de la libertad," *Vida Universitaria*, January/March 1959. He refers to *De la tiranía a la libertad* (1959), compiled by the newsreel company NotiCuba.
[147] José Manuel Valdés-Rodríguez, "La Operación Cultura en la universidad," *Vida Universitaria*, June/July 1959.
[148] José Manuel Valdés-Rodríguez, "El cine universitario en la operación cultura," *Cinema,* May 1959.

*Gold Rush* (Charles Chaplin, 1925), and *Paths of Glory* (Stanley Kubrick, 1957), from United Artists. The facsimiles with the film program notes show that Valdés-Rodríguez was still reliant on his relationship with the distribution houses, including United Artists, Pan American Films, Columbia Pictures, Oro-Films, and J. Arthur Rank, as well as the Cuban company Distribuidora de Películas Europeas. [149]

Valdés-Rodríguez continued to be a ubiquitous figure in film culture circles for as long as his health allowed him to. He carried on collaborating with pre-revolutionary institutions, at the same time that he established mutually beneficial relationships with post-revolutionary ones. He had strong ties to the university and on several occasions proposed the idea of making a documentary about the institution's history, highlighting its role in the pursuit of revolutionary ideals.[150] But he also collaborated with other pre-revolutionary institutions, such as the Catholic Center for Cinematographic Orientation (Centro Católico de Orientación Cinematográfica, CCOC). This was a very active organization that created a large network of Catholic cine-clubs, and published an important magazine called *Cine Guía*, as well as end of year compendiums called *Guía Cinematográfica*.[151] They were also involved in the inauguration of the Theatre and Cinema Department of the Catholic University Villanueva in December 1956, where Valdés-Rodríguez pronounced the opening speech.[152] In March 1960, they offered a one-month film seminar, which included several conferences, one of which was given by Valdés-Rodríguez.[153]

With the advent of a radically different social and political order in 1959, some of the old cultural institutions were immediately dissolved, and new ones created. The National Institute of Culture (Instituto Nacional de Cultura, INC), a much reviled organization created by the Batista government, was liquidated. All its resources and cultural assets, including the Havana Museum of Fine Arts, where its offices were located, were transferred to the new government's Department of Culture, which would soon become the National Council of Culture (Consejo

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[149] Valdés-Rodríguez Digital Archive.
[150] José Manuel Valdés-Rodríguez, "La realidad cubana y universitaria en el cine," *Vida Universitaria*, April/June 1960.
[151] For an overview of the Catholic cine-clubs, see Chapter 2.
[152] José Manuel Valdés-Rodríguez, "En torno a los cine-clubes y su función superadora," *Cinema*, December 1956.
[153] Douglas, *La tienda negra*, 151; Walfredo Piñera, "El seminario de estudios y experiencias del CCOC," *Cine Guía*, April 1960.

Nacional de Cultura, CNC).[154] They sponsored film screenings and cine-debates at a massive scale, as well as a series of film courses, one of which was taught by Valdés-Rodríguez.[155] At the same time, the creation of ICAIC in March 1959, signaled a new era of government support for cinema on the island. During its formative phase from 1959 to 1961, the institute relied on its close collaboration with Valdés-Rodríguez, borrowing materials from his Filmoteca, and making use of his contacts.[156] He also participated in some of their early meetings and attended the events they organized.[157] He quickly projected this spirit of collaboration by conveying ICAIC's greeting on the occasion of the May 1959 "Operation Culture" events.[158]

The screenings that Valdés-Rodríguez organized at the university between 1959 and 1961 responded to similar objectives as those that were taking place elsewhere. As will be explained in Chapter 2, during this period, the CNC cine-debates, and the film screenings organized by the cine-clubs and ICAIC, had the clear goal of establishing ideological cohesion and support for the Revolution. Once ICAIC obtains more economic power and a more defined organizational structure, it established key branches for the production, distribution, and exhibition of films. At that point, and especially with the creation of ICAIC's Cinemateca de Cuba, the university's central role as a site for noncommercial film viewing diminished. Instead, the Filmoteca's preservation role, as well as its art cinema programming became the purview of ICAIC's cinematheque.[159] Thus, for the Cuban context, the Department of Cinematography functioned as the first local prototype of what an institutional approach to film preservation, circulation, and exhibition could be.

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[154] The Department of Culture was the division of the Ministry of Education in charge of cultural projects since 1934. Rafael Rojas, "Apuntes para una historia intelectual," in *Historia de las Antillas: Historia de Cuba*, ed. Consuelo Naranjo Orovio, Ana Crespo Solana, and María Dolores. González-Ripoll Navarro, vol. 1, 5 vols. (Madrid, Spain; Aranjuez, Spain: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas; Doce Calles, 2009), 402. In January 1961, it became a different entity, the Consejo Nacional de Cultura (CNC). M. E. Laguna Enrique, *El Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes de La Habana y la colección de retratos de la pintura española del siglo XIX* (Salamanca, Ediciones Universidad de Salamanca, 2013).
[155] José Manuel Valdés-Rodríguez, *Cursillos de Cinematografía: Unión Soviética* (La Habana: Consejo Nacional de Cultura, Palacio de Bellas Artes, 1963).
[156] Noa Romero, "La primera savia nutricia".
[157] "Los miembros de la ARTYC se reúnen con Cesare Zavattini," *Cinema*, January 1960.
[158] Valdés-Rodríguez, "La Operación Cultura en la universidad."
[159] For a comprehensive analysis of the emergence and early development of ICAIC's cinematheque, see Chapter 2.

Valdés-Rodríguez was able to propel the study of cinema from within the purview of independent learned societies and teaching centers to the more stable and prestigious setting of a Department of Cinematography in an institution of higher education. This gradual movement towards the formalization of the study of cinema ensured a permanent place from which to conduct his educational activities, and an enduring environment that could house a growing film collection. However, this institutional basis for the study of film did not coalesce into the formation of a Film Studies discipline within the University of Havana curriculum. For instance, although around 1945 Valdés-Rodríguez had planned to publish a book based on his pedagogy, this never came to fruition.[160] And his department did not publish any disciplinary tools, such as academic journals or specialized books. In contrast to the tendency to establish new film programs in North American universities during the 1960s, at the University of Havana film-related academic endeavors did not solidify into disciplinary formations.[161]

Throughout the transformation process I have outlined, the Department of Cinematography ceased to be a semi-autonomous unit and became progressively more submerged under other administrative entities. However, the old professor stayed relevant by organizing, participating and lending his voice to the plethora of cultural and diplomatic events that started taking place at the university. These activities were all meant to engage with the new official discourse, whether by showing support for the Revolution and its leaders, or expressing enthusiasm and commitment towards the new initiatives and policies of the government. The potential of Valdés-Rodríguez's work to adapt to new objectives was immediately recognized.[162]

Although he did not occupy any administrative positions at ICAIC, Valdés-Rodríguez cooperated with the film institute in many capacities. In the early days of the institution he was a useful resource to them given his extensive contacts with film distributors, local and international filmmakers, and foreign embassies. When the process of nationalization severed many of these connections, his association with the Communist Party and his knowledge of Soviet cinema became useful assets for promoting events related to the cinema of socialist countries. During

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[160] See the reference to "Requisitoria del cinema" in Ministerio de Defensa Nacional, "J.M. Valdés-Rodríguez", 41.
[161] Lee Grieveson and Haidee Wasson, "The Academy and Motion Pictures," in Grieveson and Wasson, xi-xxxii.
[162] Eduardo Manet, "Cine y cultura en la Universidad de La Habana," *Cine Cubano*, 1960.

this time, he officially represented Cuba at various international film events and festivals, in Czechoslovakia (Karlovy Vary, Prague), the Soviet Union (Moscow), and France (Cannes, Paris). He also shared the holdings from the Filmoteca and from his own personal library with the incipient cinematheque founded by ICAIC in 1960, enabling many of their early screenings and providing them with the foundation of their archive thanks to the pre-revolutionary institutional and financial structures that he had ingeniously established.[163]

**Separation of Teaching and Cultural Roles: The Department of Audiovisual Media**

The ongoing reorganization of the university was more definitively outlined with the University Reform of January 10, 1962. This also marked the transformation of the Department of Cinematography, which was split into two different entities. One of them, the Cinema section of the CEU, was to continue promoting cinema as part of the university's cultural activities. The other, a new unit called Department of Audiovisual Media, was tasked with offering a lending and production service for film and other visual aids for teaching.[164] This department was created as part of a new commitment to a less verbal and passive approach to teaching in higher education.[165] Valdés-Rodríguez was named director of the department, and remained so until 1966. As technical deputy director they hired Franklin Catasús Martín, who had experience in the production of film animation for the advertising sector. His role was to review the projects presented by different university faculties and departments in order to fulfill their requests for audiovisual teaching aids, such as films, graphs, maps, slides, microfilm, and photographs.[166] The first task was to create an inventory of all the production facilities available throughout the university, and to catalogue existing audiovisual material. Valdés-Rodríguez was adamant that

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[163] Noa Romero, "La primera savia nutricia".
[164] On May 22 it was created as Committee for Audiovisual Media (Comisión de Medios Audiovisuales), then renamed as Subcommittee for Audiovisual Media on August 30, and finally established as Department of Audiovisual Media on October 22. Piñera, "Breve historia del cine en la Universidad." The fact that this entity changed names several times throughout 1962 indicates that at the outset it was not fully clear what its status and staff would be.
[165] Valdés-Rodríguez, *La reforma universitaria y los medios audiovisuales*, 3.
[166] Valdés-Rodríguez, *La reforma universitaria y los medios audiovisuales*, 12. The resources available at this department were useful for other purposes too. For instance, they provided documentation for architecture experts. See *Diez años de arquitectura en cuba revolucionaria* (La Habana: Union, 1970).

the purpose was not to centralize or appropriate these assets, but rather to better manage resources and to find ways of complementing existing equipment.[167]

One of the most notable activities of the department, organized in collaboration with the tenth National Medical Congress in early 1963, was hosting Jean Painlevé, the French filmmaker and founder of the Institut de Cinématographie Scientifique. His visit was an important occasion for promoting the value of film as a vehicle for popularizing scientific knowledge. As such, it is not surprising that ICAIC personnel attended these talks, at a time when they were involved in the production of their own didactic films.[168] Throughout the year 1963 the department's priority was to complete the installation of a laboratory and other facilities at a permanent location, as well as gathering and analyzing information necessary for future projects.[169] Very soon, the number of educational film projections at the university increased from a yearly average of 72 during the 1950s, to 480 in 1965. By 1970 the number had increased to 571, reaching a yearly average of 1143 by 1975.[170] During this period, the department also produced a total of 52 educational films, mostly for the scientific community.

The heyday of audiovisual media in higher education seems to have faltered in the second half of the 1970s. In the early part of the decade the government undertook a wide-ranging process of institutionalization that encompassed the creation of new ministries with well delineated areas of supervision, and the creation of a new Constitution in 1976.[171] Subsequently, those entities that enjoyed a relative amount of independence were subject to higher degrees of control. With the creation of the Ministerio de Educación Superior (Ministry of Higher Education) in 1976, the university structure was rearranged once again. As part of this process, in April 1977, the Department of Audiovisual Media lost its relative self-sufficiency and was merged with the university press into a new entity called Empresa Nacional de Producción y

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[167] Valdés-Rodríguez, *La reforma universitaria y los medios audiovisuales*, 14.
[168] Although not necessarily dealing with scientific content specifically, the series "Enciclopedia Popular" (Popular Encyclopedia), produced between 1961 and 1963, attempted to bring short instructional documentaries to rural audiences.
[169] Enrique González Manet, "La Subcomisión de Medios Audiovisuales," *Vida Universitaria*, July 1963.
[170] Walfredo Piñera, "El uso del cine en la Universidad de La Habana 1969-1970," *Arte 7*, January 1971; Piñera, "Breve historia del cine en la Universidad."
[171] Pérez Jr., *Between Reform and Revolution*, 266-268; Marifeli Pérez-Stable, *The Cuban Revolution: Origins, Course and Legacy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 104-108.

Servicios del Ministerio de Educación Superior (National Enterprise of Production and Services for the Ministry of Higher Education). By October 1978, all projection equipment and human resources were incorporated into the university's Department of Cultural Activities, indicating a weaker interest in the use of audiovisual media in higher education pedagogy.

**The Fate of the Film Course**

While some of the main goals of the original Department of Cinematography found continuity and support, its main function, that of offering film appreciation classes, did not. The Department of Audiovisual Media supported classroom education at a scale that had been hard to imagine ten years earlier. As head of the Cinema section of the CEU, Valdés-Rodríguez continued to promote film screenings on campus, and in addition, supported a student-led cine-club, the Cine Club Universitario, which started functioning in June 1963.[172] However, the Summer School through which the film appreciation course was offered, ceased to exist. It had been a successful initiative from 1942 to 1956, and it opened its doors again in 1960 for a last session. However, the economic basis of the school had been built on the popularity of its language and culture classes. Every year, they offered Spanish lessons from basic to advanced levels, as well as courses on various aspects of Hispanic literature and culture, which they advertised in American magazines to attract students from the United States. In 1960, they were still able to use the same marketing strategies and attracted a large number of international students. For Cubans, they offered courses that fit the Revolution's educational priorities, in subjects such as educational reform, agrarian reform, and tourism.[173] Valdés-Rodríguez taught the film course that summer, but when all economic and political ties to the United States were definitely broken later that year, the Summer School's mandate stopped being viable.[174] Instead, the CEU focused on staging solidarity events and supporting the official visits of foreign diplomats.

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[172] For more information on the university-based cine-clubs in the post-revolutionary period, see Chapter 2.
[173] "XVII sesión de la Escuela de Verano de la universidad", *Vida Universitaria*, April/June 1960; "Inaugurada la XVII Sesion de la Escuela de Verano", *Vida Universitaria*, July/August 1960; "Clausura de la XVII Sesion de la Escuela de Verano", *Vida Universitaria*, September/October 1960.
[174] For an account of the sequence of events that led to the definitive cut of ties between Cuba and the U.S., see Pérez Jr., *Between Reform and Revolution*, 247-248.

The disappearance of Valdés-Rodríguez's course at the same time that more resources were given to the university's Department of Audiovisual Media demonstrate that film appreciation was not a priority while film as an educational vehicle was. In spite of all the changes, Valdés-Rodríguez's history and stature, along with his savvy ability to give new purpose to old networks, allowed him to remain actively involved and have a certain degree of influence on how this process unfolded. This is evident when we consider that he continued to program the Cine de Arte sessions through the CEU, and that he remained at the helm of the Department of Audiovisual Media for a few more years. Nonetheless, the fact that the film appreciation course for the general public did not find continuation in the new university context, while film as visual aid and vehicle for knowledge dissemination obtained robust support, offer a clear indication of the emphasis on film's utilitarian potential.

The film appreciation course could no longer be offered as a permanent general interest option embedded in the Summer School. Under these new circumstances, Valdés-Rodríguez adjusted the program towards the training of specific undergraduate students. It was targeted exclusively for those in the History program of the Faculty of Humanities, under a new title: "Aesthetic and Social Appreciation of Cinema".[175] This new iteration of the course took place in 1963, and it was presented in the university magazine as another initiative contributing to the fulfillment of the Revolution's goals, because it was said to respond to Fidel Castro's call for a university-wide "technological revolution". They stated: "This initial course offered by the University of Havana about the Aesthetic and Social Appreciation of Cinema takes into account recent declarations concerning our culture and our social cohesion, and their special importance for the socialism under construction in our homeland."[176]

The new film course was presented as a revolutionary endeavor, not an academic one. Furthermore, the post-revolutionary context created significantly different conditions for accessing films. By 1963 film availability was no longer dependent on the film distributors, whom Valdés-Rodríguez consistently thanked and acknowledged for lending him the film prints he showed. At that point the situation had changed in such a way that films had to be taken from

[175] Noa Romero, "Cronología," 266-267.
[176] "Curso sobre cine" *Vida Universitaria* November/December 1963.

the Filmoteca or borrowed directly from ICAIC's brand new cinematheque.[177] Soon after, Valdés-Rodríguez was unable to continue teaching due to his health. When a similar film history course was offered in 1966, it was taught by film critic Mario Rodríguez Alemán (1926-1996), a former student of his who became a well-known film critic and prominent staff member at ICAIC.[178]

If we compare the pre-revolutionary incarnation of the course to the post-revolutionary one, some differences are immediately obvious. The course outline from the 1950s seems more directly oriented towards the utilitarian goal of sharing the tools of film criticism. It was divided into five sections: 1) Introduction to Film Criticism, 2) Cinema as Culmination of the Arts, 3) The Novel and Cinema, 4) The Theatre and Cinema, 5) The Specifically Cinematographic.[179] In the 1966 program, those five sections are preceded by three new ones that serve as a preamble. The first three sections of the new program are "The Birth of Cinema", "Social Technology and Cinema", and "Cinema as Social and Collective Art". Throughout the new program one notices a set of references that was previously absent, including segments dedicated to Marx, socialist cinema, and cinema as a revolutionary art.[180] These mentions coincide with the shift in vocabulary that also occurred in Valdés-Rodríguez's film criticism, announcing the keywords that would become essential in Cuba's critical discourse of the 1960s.

**The Promotion of Socialist Cinema as Performance of Revolutionary Commitment**

During this time of complex allegiances, Valdés-Rodríguez was particularly well suited for promoting the cinema of socialist countries given his historical ties to the Communist Party, and his above-average familiarity with the Soviet Union. He occupied a fortunate position which

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[177] Once the process of nationalization was put underway, all film prints were transferred from the distributors to ICAIC, as explained in Chapter 2.
[178] As a representative from ICAIC, Rodríguez Alemán was able to show to students the latest in modern European cinema, such as the films *Red Desert* (Michelangelo Antonioni, 1964), and *La Jettée* (Chris Marker, 1962). Tomás Piard, interview with the author, June 8, 2015, and email exchange, April-May, 2016. This university-level course was followed by a seminar taught by Alfredo Guevara in 1969. In subsequent years, other ICAIC personalities were invited to offer seminars that were integrated into a subject course for the bachelor's degree in Spanish Language and Literature. Douglas, *La tienda negra*, 174.
[179] "Program from 1950: Apuntes de Cinematografía (notas de Walfredo Piñera)". Archivo Walfredo Piñera.
[180] Valdés-Rodríguez, *El cine en la Universidad*, 369-370.

allowed him to mobilize this knowledge towards the double objectives of promoting films from the Socialist Bloc, and projecting an unambiguous revolutionary stance. From 1962 and until 1966, when his health deteriorated, he was a familiar presence during the official visits of foreign dignitaries from socialist countries to the university. These were sometimes accompanied by art or photography exhibitions, as well as film programs. The film projections were often embedded in formal diplomatic events, where the target audience was not the student population but a body of foreign and national officials. As these events multiplied, he was often called upon to introduce films and pronounce formal speeches to welcome diplomatic delegations.[181]

Soviet cinema also started occupying a more prominent space in the film selections offered to students. While the strategy for reopening the Cine de Arte sessions in July 1959 was to offer an attractive "best films" selection, which included *Battleship Potemkin* along with French, American, and British favorites, from 1960 onwards the number of Soviet and Eastern European films screened increased significantly. For instance, in the month of November, Valdés-Rodríguez promoted the celebration of the October Revolution with special retrospectives of Soviet cinema. He also collaborated with ICAIC's Soviet Cinema Week, celebrated in December.[182] The Cinema section of the CEU (formerly the Department of Cinematography), no longer reliant on American film distributors, was now dependent on the films that ICAIC and other state institutions could bring to the island. Therefore, the need arose to introduce a range of new filmographies to the public, from countries like China, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Mongolia, Romania, and others.[183] This occurred in parallel to similar developments in commercial theatrical releases destined to regular audiences.

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[181] "Películas de Bulgaria en la Universidad," *Vida Universitaria* March 1962; "Semana de homenaje a la URSS," *Vida Universitaria* November/December 1962; "XV aniversario de la República Popular China," *Vida Universitaria* November/December 1964.
[182] José Manuel Valdés-Rodríguez, "Segunda semana del cine soviético. Homenaje al cine de la URSS," *Vida Universitaria*, January 1962; "Rinde la universidad homenaje a la URSS en el 46 aniversario de su revolución," *Vida Universitaria*, November/December 1963.
[183] José Manuel Valdés-Rodríguez, "El cine y la fraternidad revolucionaria de los pueblos," *Vida Universitaria*, June/July 1961; Películas de Bulgaria en la Universidad," *Vida Universitaria* March 1962; José Manuel Valdés-Rodríguez, "En la universidad la delegación a la segunda semana de cine checoslovaco," *Vida Universitaria*, May/June 1963; "Homenajes a países amigos en la Universidad de La Habana," *Vida Universitaria*, September 1964; "Noche rumana en la Universidad," *Vida Universitaria*, September 1964; "XV aniversario de la República Popular China," *Vida Universitaria*, November/December1964.

The emphasis on socialist cinema was related to the pragmatic needs of film programming, but it also became an important factor in the critic's public projection. As Fidel Castro declared that Cuba's Revolution was a socialist one, revolutionaries were compelled to express their ideological commitment in more explicit ways. For journalists and critics, this entailed the adoption of new rhetorical choices in their writing. Valdés-Rodríguez continued writing for *El Mundo* until 1967, reporting on film festivals, events, and publications concerning the cinema. His film reviews, film programs, and other journalistic pieces from this period, reveal a change in tone, vocabulary, and references, that can be seen as the model for this new style of writing. If we look back at the program facsimiles for the screening of *Potemkin* in July 1959 or *El fin de San Petersburgo* in March 1960, we find that he exalted Eisenstein and Pudovkin respectively, but did not mention socialism or communism in the texts. After 1961 the language of the program notes changes dramatically. For instance, in "Homenaje al cine soviético" ("Homage to Soviet Cinema", November 1961), and "El cine socialista" ("Socialist Cinema", April 1962), he begins to include key names and words that would become recurring references, such as "Lenin", "socialist cinema", or "Marxist-Leninist philosophy".[184]

This approach became the norm for active film critics in the following years. Whether prompted by a sincere adherence to Marxist principles, fervent support of Fidel Castro's Revolution, or an opportunistic need to keep their jobs, journalists were compelled to adopt the language and rhetoric that fit the government's expectations. Between 1959 and 1960 the journalistic field underwent a radical transformation that left no other choice to those journalists willing to continue exercising their profession. In 1959 the government confiscated all the newspapers that belonged to businessmen associated with Batista, including *El Mundo*. This was followed by accusations of disloyalty, intimidation tactics, and a series of symbolic actions aimed at discrediting the pre-revolutionary press. These included burnings and public burials of newspapers and magazines, as well as the distribution of fliers urging boycotts. By April 1960, only 4 of the 17 privately-owned daily newspapers that operated before 1959 remained. Starting in January 1960 newsroom workers added printed disclaimers to any news that were unfavourable to Fidel Castro or the Revolution, creating conflicts between management and employees that ultimately led to the confiscation of *Diario de la Marina* and *Prensa Libre*. In

[184] Valdés-Rodríguez, *El cine en la Universidad*, 297-299, 316-318.

this adverse environment, lack of advertising revenue sealed the fate of the remaining *El Crisol* and *Información*.[185] As Guerra puts it, these developments led to the instauration of a "discursive paradigm of unconditional support for the Revolution."[186]

Citizens displayed their support for Fidel Castro and his policies by turning up to street celebrations, marching with signs, shouting slogans, enrolling in civil militias, enlisting for literacy and sugar-cutting campaigns, and by becoming members of the government-sanctioned mass organizations that incorporated all sectors of society into its network.[187] For writers, artists and intellectuals, participating in government organized events, and signing collective statements and declarations constituted a rite of passage of sorts that confirmed they were publicly taking on a revolutionary identity. For instance, in November 1960, writers, filmmakers, musicians, dancers, actors, architects, and visual artists signed a manifesto proclaiming their commitment to work towards the Revolution's goal of building Cuban culture from the basis of national traditions, collaboration with Latin America, and bringing intellectuals closer to the people.[188] This is one of the earliest examples of "revolutionarity," a term I am using throughout the

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[185] The first newspapers that were confiscated were *Tiempo en Cuba, Alerta, Ataja,* and *Pueblo*. José Ignacio Rivero, *Contra viento y marea: periodismo y mucho más: 1920-2004* (Miami, Fla: Ediciones Universal, 2004), 15-21. Verbal and symbolic attacks were specifically aimed at *Diario de la Marina, Prensa Libre, Avance,* and foreign magazines *Life, Time*, and *Fortune*. Lillian Guerra, *Visions of Power in Cuba: Revolution, Redemption, and Resistance, 1959-1971* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), chap. 3, Kobo; Michael Brian Salwen, *Radio and Television in Cuba: The Pre-Castro Era* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1994), 144-150.

[186] Guerra, *Visions of Power*, chap. 3.

[187] For an incisive account of the transformation of civil society throughout the first decade of the Revolution, see Guerra, *Visions of Power*. Mass organizations joined together social groups such as neighbours, through the Committee for the Defense of the Revolution (Comité de Defensa de la Revolución, CDR), workers, through the Confederation of Cuban Workers (Confederación de Trabajadores Cubanos, CTC), women, through the Cuban Women's Federation (Federación de Mujeres Cubanas, FMC), and university students through the reformed University Students Federation (Federación Estudiantil Universitaria, FEU).

[188] "Hacia una cultura nacional que impulse la Revolución," *Noticias de Hoy*, November 19, 1960, Digital Library of the Caribbean. The signatories from the *"Cineastas"* ("Filmmakers") section were the earliest ICAIC employees: Néstor Almendros, Olga Andreu, Jesús de Armas, Santiago Álvarez, Fausto Canel, Selma Díaz, Roberto Fandiño, Jorge Fraga, Julio García Espinosa, Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, Alfredo Guevara, Héctor García (Mesa), Luis García Mesa, Manuel Octavio Gómez, Amaro Gómez, Araceli Herrero, Eduardo Manet, José Massip, Eduardo Muñoz, Raúl Taladrid, Aurora Velasco, Juan Vilar, Fernando Villaverde, Dulce María Villalón, Saúl Yelín.

dissertation as a shortcut to invoke the type of performance of revolutionary commitment that became an essential feature of intellectual work, as evidenced in post-revolutionary film criticism.

## 3. Transformations in the Educational Role of Film and Film Criticism

Post-revolutionary institutions encouraged specific strategies for mediating between publics and filmic texts by guiding film interpretation through film criticism, and by creating new kinds of viewing contexts.[189] Early on, ICAIC's founders expressed their wishes for the future role of film criticism. In a 1960 article entitled "La crítica y su público" ("Criticism and its Public"), Julio García Espinosa (1926-2016) puts the emphasis on the forging of a new type of relationship between the film critic and film audiences. He urges film critics to establish communication with a public that is no longer exclusively middle-class. By engaging with the wider public, one that includes workers and farmers, and by according as much importance to form as to content in the analysis, he envisions that the new film criticism will be able to evolve alongside the new filmmaking efforts.[190] On his part, Alfredo Guevara Valdés (1925-2013), ICAIC's director, also recognized that traditionally, film criticism targeted only a small percentage of the film viewing public, but he considered that this portion of the audience was also in need of critical mediation. In-person exchanges such as cine-debates had a key role to play, but the press was also necessary. In no uncertain words, he urged film critics to "study very carefully the Revolution's program and immediate objectives."[191] Therefore, just as ICAIC personnel had done with their November 1960 signature, film critics were also compelled to follow the parameters of acceptability dictated by the Revolution's leaders.

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[189] Those new viewing contexts were made possible by ICAIC's absolute control of theatrical film exhibition and programming. See Chapter 2 for a detailed examination of the process of centralization through which ICAIC achieved the ability to regulate film exhibition and create new types of public screenings, such as the popular cine-debates.
[190] Julio García Espinosa, "La crítica y el oúblico," *Cine Cubano*, 1960.
[191] Alfredo Guevara, "Realidades y deberes de la crítica cinematográfica," *Lunes de Revolución*, February 1961.

**Film Criticism during the Republican Period**

ICAIC's official position was to dismiss pre-revolutionary film criticism as vulgar and superficial, concerned only with bourgeois values, stunted by its exclusive familiarity with Hollywood production, and either characterized by gossip, or drowned by literary style.[192] However, film criticism in Cuba was much more diverse and sophisticated than what those words implied. As Jason Borge and Megan Feeney have abundantly explored, a great number of Cuban journalists and intellectuals wrote about film in a large array of publications, ranging from short film reviews to essayistic texts.[193] According to Borge, "Since the 1920s, perhaps nowhere else in Latin America has film been discussed and debated so extensively as in Cuba."[194] During the 1920s and 1930s, these discussions centered on elevating cinema to the status of art, questioning the arrival of sound in relation to film's visual qualities, and considering issues around the language chosen by Hollywood producers when exporting their films to the Spanish-speaking world.[195] Feeney has also stressed the role played by film critics in incorporating the humanistic and anti-fascist rhetoric of American films into Cuban critical discourse during the 1940s.[196]

Regarding the 1950s, Feeney emphasizes the antimperialist aspect of Cuban critical practice. She finds abundant evidence of intense critique of aspects of American life and international projection such as colonialism, racism and consumerism in a wide range of Cuban film reviews from this period. She also identifies several examples of political dissent and anti-Batista sentiment in the body of film criticism she analyzes.[197] However, this should not lead us to conclude that Cuban critics were exclusively concerned with interpreting Hollywood movies as mirrors to U.S. society or as pretexts for an indictment of that country's policies. Her focus on the work of Valdés-Rodríguez, Mirta Aguirre (1912-1980), Rodríguez Alemán, and José Massip

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[192] Guevara, "Realidades y deberes."
[193] Borge, *Latin American Writers*; Borge, "High Anxiety," 341-360; Jason Borge, *Avances de Hollywood: crítica cinematográfica en Latinoamérica, 1915-1945* (Rosario, Argentina: Beatriz Viterbo Editora, 2005); Feeney, "Enseñándolos a ver."
[194] Borge, "High Anxiety," 343.
[195] Lisa Jarvinen, *The Rise of Spanish-Language Filmmaking: Out from Hollywood's Shadow, 1929-1939* (Piscataway: Rutgers University Press, 2012).
[196] Megan J. Feeney, "Hollywood in Havana: Film Reception and Revolutionary Nationalism in Cuba Before 1959" (PhD diss., University of Minnesota, 2008).
[197] Feeney, "Hollywood in Havana," 325-366.

(1926-2014), and on a reduced number of texts by Cabrera Infante, invites further investigation into a larger corpus encompassing other critics who published contemporaneously in a myriad of publications.[198]

In the 1940s and 1950s, several periodical publications were printed daily and weekly. Most newspapers had regular film and theater reviewers on staff.[199] As members of the ARTYC, they collectively produced a list of best films at the end of each year. In revealing their preferences, they fashioned themselves as the arbiters of taste. Publications specifically concerned with new releases and the business of film included the weekly magazines *Cinema*, founded by Enrique Perdices, and the yearly directory of the film and television business, *Anuario Cinematográfico y Radial Cubano*, edited by Enrique Agüero Hidalgo and Pedro Pablo Chávez.[200] Starting in 1953, the magazine *Cine Guía*, published by the CCOC, provided the most exhaustive compendium of all aspects of film and film culture on the island. As magazine director, Manuel Fernández created an up-to-date and sober reference that included well-written reviews of new releases, along with other types of articles on topics such as explanations of cinematographic techniques, the filmmakers' toolbox, in-depth analysis of films, comments on genres, updates on festivals and awards, and considerations about specific directors and national cinemas. An essential contributor to the magazine, and one of the driving forces of the CCOC, was the film critic Walfredo Piñera.[201] Unsurprisingly, they also discussed topics specific to the relationship between cinema and religion, and reported on events and activities organized by the

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[198] Such an analysis lies beyond the scope of this dissertation.

[199] Film and theater reviewers included François Baguer (*El Crisol*), Ramón Becali (a.k.a. Lady Godiva) (*El País*), Charles Garrett (*Avance*), Francisco Ichaso and Walfredo Piñera (*Diario de la Marina*), José Manuel Valdés-Rodríguez (*El Mundo*), Eduardo Héctor Alonso (*Alerta*), Augusto Ferrer de Couto and Luis Amado Blanco (*Información*), Germinal Barral (a.k.a Don Galaor) (*Prensa Libre, Bohemia*), Antonio Villazón (*Exhibidor*), Mirta Aguirre (*Hoy*), Lezcano Abella and Rodolfo Santovenia (*Pueblo*), Jorge Piñeyro and Mario Rodriguez Alemán (*Mañana*), Guillermo Cabrera Infante and Oscar Pino Santos (*Carteles*), René Jordán (*Excelsior*). "Cronistas Teatrales y Cinematográficos 1947," in Pedro Pablo Chávez, ed., *Anuario Cinematográfico y Radial Cubano 1946-47* (La Habana, 1947), 71.

[200] *Anuario Cinematográfico y Radial Cubano* was founded in 1940 by Chávez and Ramón Peón. Douglas, *La tienda negra*, 151.

[201] After the Revolution, Piñera was relegated to obscure positions, incommensurate with his level of competence. Nonetheless, from his post at the Department of Audiovisual Media in the University of Havana, he took care of Valdés-Rodríguez's legacy and became a father figure himself for later generations of cinephiles and researchers.

CCOC's parent organization, the International Catholic Office for Cinema (Organisation Catholique Internationale du Cinéma, OCIC). In spite of the interest these publications elicited, no books were published on the specific topic of cinema.[202] In turn, cinephiles and aspiring filmmakers regularly purchased foreign books and magazines available at specific bookstores.

The most prominent of Valdés-Rodríguez's former disciples, Guillermo Cabrera Infante, developed his own line of thinking about contemporary cinema.[203] Since 1954, he worked as a movie critic and chief editor for the popular magazine *Carteles*, which enjoyed a wide readership and was therefore very influential.[204] Cabrera Infante's prolific output included pieces of diverse quality and length. His movie reviews were short and to the point, as they were meant to provide recommendations to potential moviegoers. He also wrote longer articles and year-end summaries, as well as in-depth critiques where he was able to expand on some topics of interest. An overview of his extensive output indicates that he had a preference for Hollywood cinema over other types of filmmaking from around the world. He says, for instance, that Hollywood cinema was "frenetic, mobile, anti-literary, anti-theatrical, anti-intellectual, and thus profoundly stimulating to the intellect and to the sight".[205] For him, "(…) American cinema is the only one that has always been current, the only one that has always known how to renew itself, the only one that has been able to teach lessons and set standards".[206] Other themes that come up in his writing include the emergence of new currents of filmmaking outside of Hollywood, the star

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[202] In 1945 Valdés-Rodríguez had plans to publish a book entitled "Requisitoria del cinema," but this project never materialized. Ministerio de Defensa Nacional, "J.M. Valdés-Rodríguez", 41.
[203] He admired American cinema and American film critics, especially Bosley Crowther (*The New York Times*), William K. Zinsser (*New York Herald)*, and Henry Bradford Darrach Jr. (*Time)*. Amongst his Cuban contemporaries, he acknowledged his affinity with the youngest film critics, then writing for the newspapers *Diario de la Marina* (Walfredo Piñera), and *Excelsior/El País* (René Jordán). Guillermo Cabrera Infante, "Lo mejor ajeno," *Carteles,* January 13, 1957, reprinted in *El cronista de cine*: *escritos cinematográficos,* ed. Antoni Munné (Barcelona: Galaxia Gutenberg, 2012), 1152.
[204] For a variety of perspectives on Cabrera Infante from his contemporaries, including the impact of his film criticism upon his readers, see Elizabeth Mirabal and Carlos Velazco, *Buscando a Caín* (La Habana: Ediciones ICAIC, 2012).
[205] Guillermo Cabrera Infante, "Las falsas reputaciones," *Carteles,* November 1, 1959, reprinted in *El cronista de cine*: *escritos cinematográficos,* ed. Antoni Munné (Barcelona: Galaxia Gutenberg, 2012), 1029.
[206] Cabrera Infante, "Las falsas reputaciones," 1029-1030.

system, new technologies and film formats, neorealism, auteur theory, and the French New Wave.[207]

Film critics and progressive intellectuals were aware of the formative importance of film criticism and cine-clubs and of their impact on the viewing public. Because of his work as an educator, Valdés-Rodríguez often emphasized the need for a discerning public in order to improve the quality of film offerings.[208] The struggle for a more constructive, better informed film criticism was often voiced in CCOC publications. Manuel Fernández stressed the need for intelligent film criticism at a time when formal and technological innovations were changing all cinematic standards. For him, the film critic had the responsibility to guide the audience in confronting these changes, contextualizing the new trends in relation to the history of cinema and the aspects of the philosophy of art that apply to this medium. He was critical of gossip columnists and film reviewers whom, bound by commercial obligations, tended to provide positive appraisals rather than honest opinions.[209] As years went by, his admonition became more stern, as he specifically criticized the inability of some film reviewers to properly judge a cinematic object, due to their incapacity to properly place films historically and aesthetically, their inability to interpret films beyond their most superficial aspects, and their ignorance of basic landmarks in the history of cinema.[210] Therefore, not only does the film criticism published during the 1950s display a range of approaches and opinions, but a self-aware attitude about the profession was also evident.

**Film Criticism during the Early Revolutionary Period (1959-1964)**

As explained earlier, during the 1959-1961 period the journalistic field was significantly restructured. With the confiscation of privately-owned newspapers, the press, television, and the publishing industry became fully dependent on state institutions to survive. Newspapers and magazines that relied on the sponsorship of advertisers could not subsist without the patronage of various commercial interests linked to the film industry, such as film equipment providers and the local offices of Hollywood distributors. For decades they regularly advertised new

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[207] Munné, "Retrato del crítico como ente de ficción," 24.
[208] Valdés-Rodríguez, "En torno a los cine-clubes".
[209] (Manuel Fernández), "Primer Plano: "La crítica y el porvenir del cine," *Cine Guía,* May 1955.
[210] (Manuel Fernández), "En torno a la crítica," *Cine Guía*, June 1958.

Hollywood releases, and also promoted the work of national entrepreneurs. For instance, *Anuario Cinematográfico y Radial Cubano*, which stopped operating in March 1960, was still advertising for American companies Kodak, Kneisly Electric, Rank Precision Industries, and Philips in its last edition.[211] The weekly magazine *Cinema* was also affected, but Perdices was able to continue its publication in a reduced format until 1964, supported by advertisements from local small-businesses. *Cine Guía,* the magazine most appreciated by serious cinephiles, struggled to continue in circulation. In spite of their strong foundation in Cuban society, religious institutions quickly disappeared into the background, and religious beliefs became questionable and punishable.[212] In consequence, the large network of Catholic cine-clubs dissolved, and the CCOC lost the infrastructure upon which depended its survival. At the end of 1960, Fernández left the country and the magazine downsized its format, but new issues continued to appear until June 1961 under Piñera's direction.[213]

With the disappearance of traditional periodical publications in the years 1960 and 1961, most critics had to find new jobs within the new institutional formations. By December 1960, only Valdés-Rodríguez still held his position at the newspaper *El Mundo*, seized by the government earlier that year. *Cinema* continued publishing his pieces, along with those by Rodríguez Alemán, Oscar Lombardo Sierra, and a few contributions from Rafael Suárez Solís, who started working for *El Mundo*. Cabrera Infante briefly wrote for *Revolución*, the newspaper created by Carlos Franqui, and subsequently became the director of its cultural magazine, *Lunes de Revolución*. Other film critics who were briefly active during this period include Néstor Almendros, Fausto Canel, Ricardo Vigón, and René Jordán. They intermittently contributed to *Bohemia*, *Cine Guía*, *Revolución*, *Lunes de Revolución* and *Cine Cubano*. Mirta Aguirre, long-

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[211] Pedro Pablo Chávez, ed., *Anuario Cinematográfico y Radial Cubano 1960* (La Habana, 1960).

[212] Mateo Jover Marimón, "The Church," in *Revolutionary Change in Cuba*, ed. Carmelo Mesa-Lago, (Pittsburgh, PA.: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1971), 399-426; Joseph Holbrook, "The Catholic Church in Cuba, 1959-62: The Clash of Ideologies," *International Journal of Cuban Studies* 2, no. 3/4 (2010): 264–75.

[213] According to Douglas, *Cine Guía* stopped in May 1960. Douglas, *La tienda negra*, 152. This is incorrect. In the issue for October-November 1960, the editors acknowledged that they were having material difficulties, but they expressed their intention to continue their work. They did so, until March 1961.

time film reviewer for the communist newspaper *Noticias de Hoy*, was designated president of the ARTYC for the year 1961.[214] The organization ceased functioning in 1962.

The redistribution of the press and the publishing industry ensured government control over all printed content. Not only did this limit the range of political opinions that could be shared with a wide readership, but it also facilitated the reinforcement of certain interpretive models. The film critic most associated with the dogmatic tendency that came to dominate in print and televisual media was Rodríguez Alemán. For three decades, he published extensively in several publications including *Granma*, *Bohemia*, *Juventud Rebelde*, *Combate*, *La Tarde*, *Mujeres*, and *Cine Cubano*.[215] He was also a familiar presence on television, hosting programs such as "Cinemateca de Cuba en TV," "Cine en Televisión," and "Tanda del Domingo".[216] Like Valdés-Rodríguez before him, he was instrumental in familiarizing audiences with the filmographies of the Soviet Union and other socialist countries.[217]

Rodríguez Alemán was the main practitioner of a dogmatic method of film interpretation that automatically attributed negative values to capitalist cinema. In 1961 he was named president of ICAIC's Comisión de Estudio y Clasificación de Películas (Commission for Film Classification), as well as director of the Centro de Información Cinematográfica (Centre for Cinematographic Information). Through his rather ubiquitous presence, he established the outlook that became prevalent in the reviews published in large circulation newspapers. They were characterized by their prescriptive tone and simplistic approach, which were meant to educate the revolutionary public by establishing the parameters of "correct" taste. In his view:

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[214] The board of directors also included Valdés-Rodríguez, Mario Rodríguez Alemán, Renée Potts, and José Ardévol. The rest of the membership consisted of Enrique Perdices, Luis Amado Blanco, Sergio Piñeyro, Eduardo Héctor Alonso, Oscar Lombardo Sierra, Graciela Méndez, María Luisa Blanco, Ramón Becali Jr., Rafael Suárez Solís, and Ramón Gainza. Former members Francisco Parés, René Jordán, Rafael Casalín, Francisco Ichaso were expelled. "XXV Reunión anual de la Agrupación de Redactores de Teatro y Cine (ARTYC)," *Cinema*, January 1961.

[215] Mario Rodríguez Alemán, "Epílogo-Prólogo," in *La sala oscura*, vol. 1, 2 vols. (La Habana: Unión de Escritores y Artistas de Cuba, 1982), 13.

[216] Douglas, *La tienda negra,* 175-176.

[217] For instance, he taught the course on Hungarian cinema for the CNC. Mario Rodríguez Alemán, *Cursillos de Cinematografía: Hungría* (La Habana: Consejo Nacional de Cultura, Palacio de Bellas Artes, 1963).

> Cinema educates and denounces, but imperialism and the negative forces of humanity have also used it as a drug to poison and confuse. Therefore, it is the duty of the revolutionary critic to analyze a film under various premises, the primary one being to make bear the ideological essence of the cinematographic work (…) Concealed as entertainment, amusement, sex, and melodrama, films (…) are made that contain a great dose of ideological poison and that propagate obscurantist ideas that desensitize the audience. Thus, I believe that the critic must start from a partisan position if he truly is a revolutionary and an educator and his purpose is to practice a constructive criticism that guides the masses who read him.[218]

ICAIC's magazine *Cine Cubano,* founded in June 1960, extended the breadth of critical discourse to include a relatively more expansive range of references and ideas, and more sophisticated perspectives.[219] The *raison d'être* of the magazine was to report on ICAIC's productions and collaborations, but in its earliest phase it was also a vehicle for communicating with the international network of leftist filmmakers and intellectuals. Since it was not tasked with informing the public about theatrical releases, it could periodically focus on the topics that were considered important at each specific juncture. This created a double-standard whereby the national press offered ready-made answers that were first and foremost justified through ideology, while the dialogue established by ICAIC with its local and foreign readers was comparatively more open to new aesthetic tendencies and analytical approaches.

In print, radio and television, film criticism became one of the fields in which the ambiguity of ideological strictures was most visibly played out. At this time, every published piece held an enormous amount of weight, and the perceived level of revolutionarity often decided the professional and personal fate of the authors. Those who, like Valdés-Rodríguez and Rodríguez Alemán, adopted the rhetoric of revolutionary and communist discourse, could transition into post-revolutionary institutions and ensure a presence in the national press. Others, like René Jordán and Cabrera Infante did not subscribe to such ideological and performative requirements.[220] Their positive disposition towards some aspects of American culture was subject

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[218] Rodríguez Alemán, "Epílogo-Prólogo," 10.
[219] Douglas, *La tienda negra*, 152.
[220] For example, see René Jordan, "La nueva ola del cine anticonformista americano," *Cine Cubano*, 1960; Guillermo Cabrera Infante, "Alejandro Nevsky, el destino de un hombre, y 20

to scrutiny. Hollywood movies and stars, which had been an organic evaluative element of movie criticism in republican Cuba, became *a priori* targets of attack. From the Marxist point of view the great majority of American cinema represented a worthless aspect of consumer culture that embodied capitalist exploitation, and other perspectives were discouraged.

The new emphasis on Soviet and socialist cinema extended well beyond the university.[221] With the cutting of economic and diplomatic ties with the United States, no new imports were brought from US film distributors. Instead, as a consequence of the a quick rapprochement between Cuba and the USSR, more Soviet and Eastern European films started to be shown. In December 1960 ICAIC organized its first one-week retrospective of Soviet cinema, "Semana del Cine Soviético" (Soviet Cinema Week) that took place at one of the first film theaters it controlled, Arte y Cinema La Rampa.[222] This one-week showcase model became a common preview format that was used for several years to present new Soviet and Eastern European releases.[223] Indeed, as more film theaters were nationalized, ICAIC's programming strategy focused on films from the Socialist Bloc, and these cinematographies dominated the screen between 1961 and 1963.[224] This change in the exhibition sector made it necessary for film critics to educate the public about socialist cinema by providing context and reference points for film viewers, the great majority of which were encountering these unfamiliar narratives and expressive resources for the first time. Valdés-Rodríguez's enthusiasm for Soviet cinema, which dated back to the 1930s, was quickly mobilized through his regular column in *El Mundo*. Aguirre also eagerly recommended these films in the communist newspaper *Noticias de Hoy*.

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años de realismo socialista," May 29, 1960, reprinted in *El cronista de cine: escritos cinematográficos*, ed. Antoni Munné (Barcelona: Galaxia Gutenberg, 2012), 1279-1286.

[221] For a detailed analysis of the presence of Soviet cinema in Cuban screens from 1961 to 1991, see Carlos Muguiro Altuna, "Kinofikatsia cubana y sus fantasmas. Inventario de la presencia (y de la ausencia) del cine soviético en las pantallas de Cuba (1961-1991)," *Kamchatka*, no. 5 (2015), DOI: 10.7203/KAM.5.5181. Also, see Vladimir Alexander Smith Mesa, "Kinocuban: The Significance of Soviet and East European Cinemas for the Cuban Moving Image" (PhD diss., University College London, 2011), http://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/1336532/.

[222] Douglas, *La tienda negra*, 154; Valdés-Rodríguez, "Segunda semana del cine soviético."

[223] Muguiro Altuna, "Kinofikatsia," 267-268.

[224] Concurrently, they made an effort to stop showing the American films that they had in stock. See Raúl Taladrid, Héctor García Mesa, José Manuel Pardo, Humberto Ramos, "La programación cinematográfica como factor de información y formación del público," *Cine Cubano*, 1968, 20.

Furthermore, between 1962 and 1963 the CNC offered evening film courses consisting of weekly lectures and screenings at the Museum of Fine Arts, including one on Soviet Cinema, taught by Valdés-Rodríguez, and one on Hungarian cinema, taught by Rodríguez Alemán.[225]

However, critical reaction was not one of unanimous celebration. At the end of 1960 *Cine Guía* reprinted an article exposing the contradictions of film industries born within totalitarian states.[226] The magazine proposed a measured approach towards the incoming films, warning that:

> What happens with these cinematographies is the same that used to happen with European cinema a decade ago. The shortage of French and Italian films put us under the spell of those inaccessible masterpieces that we learned about through foreign magazines (…) In the case of socialist countries, we must add to the spell of the unknown, the exoticism of the language, traditions, characters and ideology reflected in their cinema.[227]

In contrast to the large circulation newspapers, the more specialized spaces such as *Cine Guía* and ICAIC's *Cine Cubano* did not show a particular interest in promoting these films indiscriminately. As will be explained in more detail in Chapter 2, from 1961 to 1963 the presence of Soviet and Eastern European films in commercial film screens increased incrementally, reaching 92% of the total number of movies released in 1963.[228] However, the reaction to this influx of films from different epochs and genres was not unanimous. The key personalities at the film institute embraced the new waves of Polish and Czech cinemas, but opposed the parameters of socialist realism. They made excuses for the avalanche of socialist films, but at the same time advocated for more selective criteria.[229] They wanted to implement an approach to film programming that was guided by their own sense of aesthetic, social, and

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[225] Douglas, *La tienda negra*, 160; Valdés-Rodríguez, *Unión Soviética;* Rodríguez Alemán, *Hungría.*

[226] Andres Ruszkowski, "El cine y las ideologías contemporáneas," *Cine Guía,* October/November 1960. As a Polish exile, Ruszkowski's perspective stands in contrast with the positive reception by critics in the European and American left.

[227] Manuel Fernández, "Las películas de los países socialistas," *Cine Guía,* December 1960/January 1961.

[228] These percentages were calculated based on the numbers provided in Table 2, "Películas ruso-soviéticas exhibidas en salas comerciales en Cuba (1949-1969)," in Muguiro Altuna, "Kinofikatsia," 283.

[229] Julio García Espinosa, "Nuestro cine documental," *Cine Cubano*, 1964; Taladrid et al., "La programación cinematográfica", 20.

ideological value. Yet, as I will detail in the following section, the CNC had a more constrained outlook on these matters, and relentlessly questioned ICAIC's choices. The film institute stood its ground and defended its autonomy in the face of fierce institutional power plays.

## 4. ICAIC's Variable Position within the Institutional Configurations of the Early Revolutionary Period

Post-revolutionary institutions used film criticism as a tool for educating the public in terms of rendering new filmographies legible, as well as a didactic strategy for fostering new modes of ideological film interpretation in the general audience. These developments occurred in parallel with ICAIC's struggles towards ensuring its autonomous place within the institutional configurations of the early revolutionary period. In this section I will explain how ICAIC was able to establish itself as a powerful institutional entity that was temporarily protected from interference by other decision-making bodies. In order to gain this level of independence, ICAIC's representatives navigated a series of strategic alliances and personal rifts, as well as public polemics. It is important to understand the process by which ICAIC gained this high degree of independence, and what it meant to later lose it, because it helps us contextualize the increased emphasis on cinema's role as an educational vehicle in the 1970s, as well as the developments in film programming and amateur filmmaking that will be explored in the next chapters.

### Coexistence and Confrontation (1959-1961)

In direct or indirect ways, different clusters of artists and intellectuals supported the revolutionary movement that led to Fidel Castro's ascent to power. They came together through formal and informal means, connected through friendships and professional links. With the creation of new post-revolutionary cultural institutions in 1959, they found professional positions at new entities such as ICAIC, the cultural magazine *Lunes de Revolución*, or the institution known as Casa de las Américas. Like other aspects of public life during this time, these institutions worked towards the goal of achieving national cohesion. They were also crucial for advancing the international validation of the Revolution by sponsoring invitations of renowned intellectual figures and encouraging cultural exchange. For a brief period between 1959 and 1961, when the display of unity was considered the highest priority for the Revolution's survival,

the various clusters of artists and writers, who espoused divergent views on cultural production and promotion, temporarily put away their differences. This momentary equilibrium started to break down once resources were allocated to certain organizations and not others. And when ideological radicalization became the norm, conflicts started to arise in more public ways.[230]

As mentioned earlier, one notable institutional formation from this period was the CNC, led by intellectuals such as Vicentina Antuña (1909-1992), Mirta Aguirre, and Edith García Buchaca, who were active members of the Communist Party, known as Partido Socialista Popular (PSP). The CNC became the umbrella government organization overseeing the various branches of cultural activity, including literature, theatre, and visual arts. In terms of economic power and political influence, they enjoyed an advantageous position in 1959 and 1960 (still functioning as Department of Culture of the Ministry of Education). Their immediate access to government resources, combined with the strong PSP organizational network which extended to numerous workers' organizations, put this group in a privileged position. They were able to sponsor and promote film screenings and cine-debates in film theatres and public spaces like Havana's Parque Central, and they organized film programs at the Museum of Fine Arts.[231] However, by signing Law 169 on March 20, 1959, the government clearly designated ICAIC as the sole entity in charge of cinema-related activities in the long-term.[232] Thus, the process of radical restructuring of the distribution and exhibition business that started at the end of 1960 exclusively benefited ICAIC, and it ultimately accorded the state-owned film institute the ability to control all film purchases, distribution and exhibition.[233]

Guevara, along with other ICAIC founders, had worked closely with the PSP when he headed the Cinema section of the Sociedad Cultural Nuestro Tiempo (Our Times Cultural

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[230] For an incisive analysis of the intellectual field in the early revolutionary period, see Rafael Rojas, "Apuntes para una historia intelectual," in *Historia de las Antillas: Historia de Cuba*, eds. Consuelo Naranjo Orovio, Ana Crespo Solana, and María Dolores González-Ripoll Navarro, vol. 1, 5 vols. (Madrid, Spain; Aranjuez, Spain: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas; Doce Calles, 2009), 404-417.

[231] "Cine municipal del pueblo," *Noticias de Hoy*, October 25, 1959, Digital Library of the Caribbean; "Cine de Bellas Artes," *Cine Cubano*, 1960.

[232] Douglas, *La tienda negra*, 147. While it is sometimes mistakenly reported that the law was signed on March 24, it was in fact signed on March 20, and communicated by the press four days later.

[233] For a focused discussion on how the process of nationalization affected film-related businesses, see Chapter 2.

Society) in the 1950s. As I will discuss in more detail in Chapter 2, they received instructions from PSP members Carlos Rafael Rodríguez (1913-1997) and Mirta Aguirre, who came to occupy powerful positions in the new post-revolutionary institutions. In the new context, Guevara and CNC personalities initially collaborated to eliminate specific cultural clusters that opposed their mutual interests. In particular, they established a strategic allegiance in order to ban the exhibition of the short documentary *PM* (Orlando Jiménez Leal and Sabá Cabrera Infante, 1961). The fallout from the crisis that ensued has become a *cause celèbre* in Cuban cultural history.[234]

*PM* was a semi-amateur film made by two young first-time filmmakers who worked for the television program associated with the print cultural magazine *Lunes de Revolución*. Orlando Jiménez Leal (1941), in spite of his young age, had accumulated significant experience working as a newsreel cameraman, while Alberto (Sabá) Cabrera Infante was a painter who worked as an editor for television. Therefore, the conflict over the film had little to do with the filmmakers. Rather, it was directed at the cluster of people with whom they were associated. Specifically, it was aimed at the group linked with the publication *Lunes de Revolución*, managed by the well-respected film critic and writer Guillermo Cabrera Infante. *Lunes* was highly influential in literary and artistic circles, as it covered a wide range of literary and artistic topics with a modern and liberal outlook. The majority of *Lunes* collaborators were artists and intellectuals who had shared the general antipathy towards Batista's government, but did not welcome the rapid radicalization of the new government nor the new pressures being put on the artistic field. As such, their outlook on cultural and political matters differed from both the younger Marxists at ICAIC and the older communists at the CNC. Like Carlos Franqui, the director of the newspaper *Revolución*, from which *Lunes* sprung, they did not identify with the communist direction the government was taking.

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[234] In recent years, some of the protagonists of the heated cultural debates of those early years have collaborated with historians to make known their account of the events that unfolded. These contributions have been essential to my own understanding of that time period. In particular, see Manuel Díaz Martínez et al., "1961: Palabras de los intelectuales," *Encuentro de la Cultura Cubana*, Winter 2006-2007; William Luis, *Lunes de Revolución: literatura y cultura en los primeros años de la Revolución Cubana* (Madrid: Editorial Verbum, 2003); Orlando Jiménez-Leal and Manuel Zayas, eds., *El caso PM: Cine, poder y censura (*Madrid, España: Editorial Colibrí, 2012).

*PM* was shot with independent resources at a time when all film stock purchases were controlled by ICAIC, and it was shown in the magazine's regular Monday televised space. When the filmmakers tried to secure the film's exhibition in film theatres, the enraged reaction by ICAIC's Guevara and Rodríguez Alemán made clear that this incursion of the *Lunes* group into filmmaking territory was considered a threat.[235] At a time when the film institute was trying to establish itself as the sole provider of cinematic images of the Revolution, its executives would not tolerate a film that showed a lifestyle incompatible with the heroic vision of 1961 Cuba. Instead, this short observational documentary showed the carefree attitude of regular people dancing, drinking and enjoying Havana's nightlife, untroubled by daytime preoccupations.

The film acted as a catalyst with very long-lasting implications. ICAIC and CNC members collaborated to ensure that it would be banned from exhibition. They organized a public screening at Casa de las Américas on May 31, 1961, with the alleged goal of letting representatives of Cuba's mass organizations decide if ICAIC's prohibition of the film should be revoked. The screening generated an intense debate that was not circumscribed to the specific fate of this particular film, but exposed the existing anxieties over incipient restrictions placed upon cultural practices. For instance, one of the most respected of the young filmmakers, Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, opposed the idea of banning the film, but his input was bypassed. Effectively, the ban on *PM* had been decided the day before the public screening took place. In November of that year the CNC ended the publication of *Lunes de Revolución*. This unambiguous suppression of independent filmmaking efforts provoked an outcry that culminated in a series of meetings at the National Library in June 1961, which provided the framework for Fidel Castro to directly address a large group of artists and intellectuals. His closing remarks, known as "Palabras a los intelectuales" ("Words to the Intellectuals"), set the basis for the government's official position on cultural policy: "[w]ithin the Revolution everything, against the Revolution nothing". Since then, the parameters of what content fell 'within the Revolution' were under constant reinterpretation.

In spite of their 1961 collaboration to successfully eliminate the *Lunes* group, intrinsic frictions existed between the CNC and ICAIC. The mutually beneficial alignment between these groups eventually broke down, and their conflicts started to surface publicly in 1963. The CNC

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[235] Orlando Jiménez Leal, "Conversaciones en la biblioteca", in Jiménez-Leal and Zayas, 37–39.

and ICAIC had fundamental disagreements with respect to the kinds of films that should be brought to the public. ICAIC's preference for the modernist cinema of the new waves emerging from Western and Eastern Europe was not well received by the Old Left cultural critics and bureaucrats. The CNC's orthodox interpretation of Marxist aesthetics and their preference for the socialist realist model had a lasting effect in the areas of cultural promotion that they oversaw. In the next few pages I will describe how ICAIC's core group held its ground through intense public polemics that ultimately reasserted the institution's independence. In the subsequent few years, ICAIC ensured its control over film exhibition against CNC's intromissions, and guaranteed a relatively open atmosphere for creativity and experimentation internally.

**Power Struggles through Territorial Polemics (1961-1964)**

The debates that took place in the early 1960s involved confrontations between filmmakers and other cultural workers, as well as key figures at the highest levels of government. The first one took place between August 1963 and March 1964. It included articles published in the magazines *La Gaceta de Cuba*, *Cine Cubano*, and *Cuba Socialista*, as well as face to face encounters between filmmakers and university students and professors. Concerned by the increasing valorization of the Soviet model, ICAIC filmmakers published a declaration defending the value of formal plurality in artistic practice, and reacting against the superficial attribution of class character to specific formal features in artistic expression. Guevara republished the text in *Cine Cubano,* and expressed his support and a call for further discussion.[236] The expected reaction was immediate. CNC leaders García Buchaca and Aguirre voiced a strong reaction that demonstrated the ongoing rivalry between orthodox Marxists and the newer generation. Representing ICAIC, Jorge Fraga, Julio García Espinosa, and Tomás Gutiérrez Alea published several articles responding to their objections.[237] In addition, Juan J. Flo, a professor of Marxist Aesthetics, expressed his skepticism towards the point of view of the filmmakers because of their bourgeois origins. Gutiérrez Alea eloquently rebutted him by

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[236] "Conclusiones de un debate entre cineastas cubanos", *La Gaceta de* Cuba, August 3, 1963, reprinted in Graziella Pogolotti, ed., *Polémicas culturales de los 60* (La Habana: Letras Cubanas, 2006), 17-22; Alfredo Guevara, "Sobre un debate entre cineastas cubanos," *Cine Cubano,* October/November 1963.
[237] Pogolotti, *Polémicas culturales de los 60,* 26-101.

pointing out that Flo's attitude increased the prejudice towards intellectuals, and worked towards giving weight to bureaucratic rather than popular channels of artistic tutelage.[238]

A second, concurrent debate, consisted of a series of exchanges that took place in December 1963, in the pages of the two newspapers with the widest circulation at the time, the communist newspaper *Hoy*, and the still surviving *Revolución.* In this case, rather than dealing with philosophical questions regarding the function of art in a socialist society, the issue at hand was more concrete, specifically the money invested on the purchase of imported films. On paper, this challenge to the film institute's priorities started when a reader complained that recent theatrical releases of international films were not appropriate for workers and for youth. It was reported that workers had taken issue with films either because they did not understand them (*El ángel exterminador/The Exterminating Angel*, Luis Buñuel, 1962) or they did not think they offered any solutions to the decadence of the bourgeois lifestyle depicted (*La dolce vita*, Federico Fellini, 1960). Another source of objection was that the prostitutes and disaffected youth in *Accatone* (Pier Paolo Passolini, 1961) set a negative example for young Cuban audiences. This set the stage for an extensive exchange between Guevara and Blas Roca Calderío (1908-1987), leader of the Communist Party since 1934.[239]

Once again, the subtext running through this polemic was the opposition between those who advocated for the simplicity and triumphalism of socialist realism, and those who preferred a more open approach to artistic creation and interpretation.[240] Guevara was firm, taking the opportunity to make it clear that the only cultural policy he was willing to accept on behalf of ICAIC was that defined by Fidel Castro himself in "Words to the Intellectuals". As long as the artistic products fit the "within the Revolution" label, aesthetic formulas were unnecessary. More

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[238] Juan J. Flo, "¿Estética antidogmática o estética no marxista?," *La Gaceta de Cuba,* January 10, 1964, reprinted in Pogolotti, *Polémicas culturales de los 60,* 102-110; Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, "Donde menos se piensa salta el cazador… de brujas", *La Gaceta de Cuba,* March 20, 1964, reprinted in Pogolotti, *Polémicas culturales de los 60,* 111-125.
[239] Pogolotti, *Polémicas culturales de los 60,* 145-203.
[240] For further considerations regarding ICAIC's stance regarding socialist realism, see Emmanuel Vincenot, "Tchapaev à La Havane: le cinéma révolutionnaire cubain et la question du réalisme socialiste," *Savoirs en prisme*, no. 2 (2012): 143-172, https://savoirsenprisme.files.wordpress.com/2014/04/11-vincenot.pdf; Masha Salazkina and Irene Rozsa, "Dissonances in 1970s European and Latin American Political Film Discourse: The Aristarco – García Espinosa Debate," *Canadian Journal of Film Studies* 24, no. 2 (Fall 2015): 66–81, https://doi.org/10.3138/cjfs.24.2.66.

importantly, he took a stand when he expressed: "Propaganda may make use of art; it must do it. Art may be of service to revolutionary propaganda; it must do it. But art is not propaganda, and taking away art's meanings is not fair, even when it is done in the name of the Revolution."[241]

Here, we see a clear example of how revolutionarity could be calibrated as a function of relative power. Guevara had a weighty advantage because of his direct connection with the government leadership. He was one of Fidel Castro's most trusted friends from his university years, called upon in the early days of 1959 to be part of the team writing the flagship legislation of the Revolution (the Law of Agrarian Reform), and appointed by the leader himself to head the first post-revolutionary cultural institution. All of this accorded him the level of influence that allowed him to assert his combative position publicly without fear of being labeled counterrevolutionary himself. Other cultural workers had to walk on thin ice when it came to staking public positions, and their level of defiance of the status quo was in direct correspondence with their own personal clout, and the perceived protective power of the institutional body that employed them.

With Guevara at the helm, the channel of communication between ICAIC and the government was direct, and did not require any form of mediation. This put ICAIC in a strategic position, not only in relation to its mandate concerning cinema on the island, but also for creating crucial bridges of exchange that strengthened the image of the Revolution abroad. This was particularly important during the early 1960s, with the film institute functioning as a link to the European and North American left. These factors, along with the warm reception ICAIC films were starting to receive at various European festivals, created a sense of confidence from which creativity and experimentation could flourish.

What was truly at stake through the conflicts and debates that occurred in the early years of the Revolution were the practical matters of designating who would have control over film production, and who would have the privilege of speaking about cinema in general, and of setting the course of Cuban cinema in particular. The *PM* affair clearly established that ICAIC would not let film productions that were financed outside its own institutional structure to reach the screens. On the other hand, print-based media fell outside of ICAIC's jurisdiction, with the

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[241] Alfredo Guevara, "Alfredo Guevara responde a las 'Aclaraciones'," *Hoy*, December 18, 1963, reprinted in Pogolotti, *Polémicas culturales de los 60,* 171.

exception of the magazine *Cine Cubano* and ICAIC's own internal publications under the label Ediciones ICAIC. This helps explain the dichotomy pointed out earlier regarding the split between a more prescriptive type of film criticism in wide circulation publications, and the relatively more forward-looking analyses found in *Cine Cubano*.

**Film as Educational Vehicle after 1964**

In 1961 ICAIC established itself as the sole regulator of film production on the island, and a few years later managed to establish its independence from the CNC's sphere of influence. During this time film output grew exponentially, and by 1964, the film institute gained the self-confidence to declare that the training phase had been completed and they no longer required help from foreign filmmakers. Finally, by 1966, it had acquired all the film-related infrastructure that belonged to both North American companies and national entrepreneurs, making it possible to control the totality of theatrical exhibition venues. Given its high degree of confidence, it is not surprising that bolder statements were made during this time concerning a concerted effort towards changing the population's taste and viewing preferences. This is clearly laid out in a 1967 piece:

> For those who create as well as for leaders, it is indispensable and urgent to proceed to a decolonization of taste as a step towards the right taste and cultural education, with an immediate objective in mind: to liberate the perceptive, critical, and creative potentialities of our population; to bring our people towards the category of a perceptive and aware kind of audience, capable of enjoying quality.[242]

For generations, Cubans had enjoyed Hollywood and Mexican movies as one of their principal modes of entertainment. Now they were required, as part of their conversion into revolutionary citizenship, to "decolonize" their taste. The mission for film critics like Rodríguez Alemán and others, was to teach people to dislike what they loved through the ideologically charged interpretation of films, reducing westerns and melodramas to their sociopolitical underpinnings, while ignoring the plurality of readings available to them. Many intellectuals

[242] Enrique Pineda Barnet, "La colonización del gusto y algunos asuntos a analizar para una descolonización y culturalización adecuada," *Cine Cubano*, 1968.

believed in earnest that taste could be defined and controlled, but in reality, the undercurrent of continuities between old genres and traditional popular taste continued in the privacy of people's homes, even though the revolutionary discourse suppressed it from public view. This became particularly evident when old films were televised. According to one revealing anecdote, in the 1970s one television program called "Cine del Ayer" (The Cinema of Yesterday) showed Mexican and Argentinian films from the 1940s and 1950s on weekdays in the early afternoon. The program was so popular that it created an unexpected spike in electricity consumption during that time slot. High schools also noticed a higher than usual level of unpunctuality amongst students attending the afternoon session. It seems that young people were as motivated to watch these old films as their grandparents were.[243]

From ICAIC's perspective, their educational responsibilities included both the training of audiences and the training of filmmakers. To educate the public, they found it was necessary to act on various levels by first removing from screens the pernicious products of cultural colonization, and then limiting and diversifying film programs. In terms of film production, they identified three different types of nationally produced films that could accomplish different educational functions. The first kind were films that were intentionally educational. This category included didactic films as well as political films, such as newsreels and propaganda documentaries. The second group was identified as "not intentionally educational, but exercising a direct formative influence", which encompassed a wide range of documentary and feature films foregrounding elements of Cuba's historical past. For instance, *Lucía* (Humberto Solás, 1968) or *La primera carga al machete* (Manuel Octavio Gómez, 1969). The third classification was more imprecise, simply referring to films "not intentionally educational, but that given their sense of social responsibility, exercised an indirect formative influence." No specific examples for this type of film are given, just a general mention of fiction films and art documentaries.[244] While the audience was mostly responsive to the pleasurable and entertaining elements of Cuban films, it

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[243] Sara Vega et al., *Historia de un gran amor: relaciones cinematográficas entre Cuba y México 1897-2005* (Cuba; Guadalajara, Jal.: Instituto Cubano de Arte e Industria Cinematográficos, Cinemateca de Cuba; Universidad de Guadalajara, Centro Universitario de Ciencias Sociales y Humanidades, 2007), 7.
[244] "El cine cubano, factor de educación permanente," *Cine Cubano*, 1969.

was at the level of critical discourse that the desired meanings were enunciated, especially in the case of the "not intentionally educational" films.

At the same time, it was imperative to reveal the implicit ideological mechanisms embedded in North American productions, especially after they started being shown in theaters again in the 1970s. The television medium was particularly effective for deconstructing the filmic text. The television program "24 x segundo" (24 per second), broadcast on Cuban television since 1970, achieved this by showing the narrative and visual mechanisms through which films convey meaning. As Enrique Colina, the program creator, explained:

> This is why we never make value judgments on our television program. Instead, we deal with the factors which account for a film's success with the public. We begin to question these, showing the spectators how the visual material is structured and questioning everything that is implicit and difficult to define. Many entertainment films only marginally possess or are apparently exempt from any type of ideological or political meaning. In fact, they all have an ideological dimension, which we must both point out and criticize, since we are part of a society which is trying to transform all inherited values. So we especially emphasize how ideological messages are conveyed directly or indirectly through film. We try to perform a kind of aesthetic and ideological "de-montage," taking apart what the filmmaker has assembled in order to reveal the film's inner workings.[245]

Colina conceived and designed the program at ICAIC, but he had to navigate the censorship mechanisms of the Cuban Radio and Television Institute (Instituto Cubano de Radio y Televisión, ICRT).[246] Nonetheless, his approach was exceptional, especially in relation to the dry and rigid landscape of print criticism. The show became a beloved presence on Cuban television screens through his pleasant and dynamic style. It is unlikely that the training in ideological film

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[245] Enrique Colina, "Film Criticism in Cuba," interview by Jorge Silva, 1976. Translated and published in *Jump Cut* no. 22 (May 1980), http://www.ejumpcut.org/archive/onlinessays/JC22folder/EnriqueColinaInt.html.
[246] "Carta de Enrique Colina a Desiderio Navarro," *Cine cubano, la pupila insomne*, February 25, 2007, https://cinecubanolapupilainsomne.wordpress.com/2007/02/25/carta-de-enrique-colina-a-desiderio-navarro/.

readings was the main reason for the show's popularity. People tuned in to find out about new theatrical releases, to learn about cinematic style, and to engage with up to date film information.

The importance placed upon the critic as mediator was also prevalent in the academic milieu, where university professors expressed their concern regarding the fact that the copious post-revolutionary literary and artistic production was not being met with sufficient insightful commentary. They perceived that the public was exposed to abundant output of creative material, but lacked enough critical activity to guide this exposure.[247] In contrast, the utopian vision put forward by Julio García Espinosa in his 1969 essay "For an imperfect cinema", calls for the eventual elimination of the film critic as mediator.[248] However, his ideas did not gain traction, nor did they generate further discussion or debate within national boundaries.[249] In fact, Cuban film criticism in the 1970s did not engage with the new trends in film analysis or the more relevant theories of the decade, such as structuralism or semiotics. This was due to the lack of academic training for would be critics, paired with the severely limited and hard to access specialized film books or magazines. The emphasis on referencing the classics of Marxism, and on adopting a vocabulary often reduced to a dozen of key words, created a lag that resulted in simplistic reviews and unsophisticated approaches to a field of knowledge that was growing elsewhere.[250]

After 1968 Cuba entered into a period of Sovietization that became ever more entrenched after the government's failure to meet the target of a ten-million ton sugar harvest.[251] In this context, repressive measures towards artists and intellectuals created a dangerous environment for creativity and expression. This became particularly evident in the first half of 1971 with the

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[247] Camila Henríquez Ureña, "La crítica es necesaria para promover la cultura," *Vida Universitaria*, April 1963; Graziella Pogolotti, "Perspectivas actuales de la crítica literaria", *Vida Universitaria*, January/April 1970.
[248] Julio García Espinosa, "Por un cine imperfecto," *Cine Cubano*, 1969. For a translation, see García Espinosa, "For an Imperfect Cinema".
[249] Juan Antonio García Borrero, *La edad de la herejía: ensayos sobre el cine cubano, su crítica y su público* (Santiago de Cuba: Editorial Oriente, 2002), 43.
[250] Luis Álvarez Álvarez, "Para una nueva historia del cine cubano," in *El cine, el crítico, y el espectador que vino a cenar,* ed. Armando Pérez Padrón (Santiago de Cuba: Editorial Oriente, 2013), 82; Salazkina and Rozsa, "Dissonances," 72.
[251] Gott, *Cuba*, 235-272.

arrest and self-inculpation of the iconoclast poet Heberto Padilla, a former *Lunes* collaborator.[252] The international reaction to Padilla's situation precipitated that the Congress of Education scheduled for April 1971 quickly turned into the First Congress of Education and Culture, joining together decision-makers from the two sectors.[253] In recent years, key intellectual figures have looked back at this decade as one of the darkest moments in the post-revolutionary period. The first five years in particular have been dubbed "the gray quinquenium" because of their harmful impact on cultural and intellectual production. Others consider that the long-term effects of the policies adopted during that time should not be ignored, and expand this five-year range well beyond the confines of the 1970s.[254]

The impact of the ideologically strict cultural policies of the 1970s was most strongly felt in literature and theater, but it also affected the cinema. In the two reports delivered on behalf of ICAIC at the congress, García Espinosa detailed the film institute's accomplishments, stressing the institution's commitment to the Revolution and clarifying the educational relevance of its work.[255] In his role as bureaucrat providing feedback on the state of affairs of the institution he represented, nothing is left of the idealist vision of a future where art and work would fuse into one. ICAIC was asked to "continue and increase the number of Cuban films and documentaries of historical character as a means to connect the present with the past, and to lay out different forms of cinematographic information and education so that all our nation's people can successfully reach the conditions necessary to become active and analytical spectators of the diverse manifestations of this important means of communication."[256] Thus, during the 1970s the expectation that ICAIC would deliver more directly educational content became higher and the film institute readjusted its priorities in order to accommodate more didactic tendencies.

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[252] Lourdes Casal, *El caso Padilla: Literatura y revolución en Cuba; documentos* (Miami: Ediciones Universal, 1971).
[253] Ambrosio Fornet, "El Quinquenio Gris: Revisitando el término," in *La política cultural del período revolucionario: Memoria y Reflexión*, ed. Desiderio Navarro (La Habana: Centro Teórico-Cultural Criterios, 2008), 13.
[254] Desiderio Navarro, ed., *La política cultural del período revolucionario: memoria y reflexión* (La Habana: Centro Teórico-Cultural Criterios, 2008).
[255] Julio García Espinosa and Manuel Pérez, "El cine y la educación," *Cine Cubano*, 1971; Julio García Espinosa, Estrella Pantín, and Jorge Fraga, "Para una definición del documental didáctico," *Cine Cubano*, 1971.
[256] Marta Díaz and Joel del Río, *Los cien caminos del cine cubano* (La Habana: Ediciones ICAIC, 2010), 38.

## Conclusion

For two decades, Valdés-Rodríguez mediated the encounter of many Cuban cinephiles with the most provocative aspects of international cinema. At the Varona theater the professor ensured that they learned essential critical tools to discuss films with an informed, open-minded outlook. In the absence of film festivals or stable cinematheque screenings, he fulfilled the role of arbiter of an alternative circuit of film programming. The conditions that made this possible depended very heavily on the initiative, determination, and perseverance of this man, who had the remarkable capacity to successfully navigate the worlds of intellectual pedigree, leftist politics, cultural journalism, industry imperatives, and institutional labyrinths. These abilities served him well during the transition from the pre-revolutionary to the post-revolutionary contexts.

At the same time, Valdés-Rodríguez occupied an inherently paradoxical position. In the early 1960s, he embodied several contradictions. On the one hand, he was still the person who had introduced the ICAIC generation to a more sophisticated approach to film history and film aesthetics.[257] On the other, he also represented an ossified version of film taste and a more orthodox view of culture than the one supported by younger cultural promoters. Furthermore, the newly formed state-funded film institute adopted the official position to categorically deny the ongoing or future value of any preceding film-related efforts in Cuba. It was important to them to start from a blank slate, and this applied to everything from filmmaking and film criticism to practices of film viewing in any of its forms.[258]

Valdés-Rodríguez was the living guardian of that heritage, one of the last surviving vestiges of a past in the process of being erased. He continued to talk about and show the silent and early sound films that had been entrusted to him for safeguarding at the Filmoteca.[259] For instance, he discussed Cuba's cinematic past at a History congress that took place in February

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[257] Alfredo Guevara, José Massip, and Jorge Haydú all took the course in 1953. "Relación de Estudiantes de la Escuela de Verano," in Valdés-Rodríguez Digital Archive.
[258] Alfredo Guevara, "Realidades y perspectivas de un nuevo cine," *Cine Cubano*, 1960.
[259] Rafaela Chacón Nardi, "José Manuel Valdés-Rodríguez y la cultura cinematográfica," *Bohemia*, February 14, 1986, Digital Library of the Caribbean; Noa Romero, "La primera savia nutricia".

1960, and again in March of that year at a seminar offered by the CCOC.[260] He also showed a retrospective at the university in tandem with the 1963 course imparted to students in the History program, and took the opportunity to publish an accompanying booklet highlighting those aspects of pre-revolutionary cinema that seemed worthy of attention at that particular juncture.[261] Irrespective of his public support for the direction the country was taking, he embodied a historical memory that risked being completely obliterated. Only one more public screening of pre-revolutionary Cuban films took place in the 1960s, also at the university.[262] ICAIC had no interest in bringing them to the general audience, but rather followed a deliberate policy of restricting access to Cuba's pre-revolutionary film history, countering the efforts of those who remembered it and wanted to share it.[263] In fact, pre-revolutionary Cuban films were not screened again in theaters or television until 1989.[264]

Clearly, the country's drastic change in political direction caused a major reconsideration of the social role of art and intellectual activity, including traditional approaches to film history and film knowledge. Whereas establishing a film department in the 1940s was an innovative and forward thinking development, by the early 1960s other priorities were at stake. The academic setting for the study of film was at odds with the cultural project of the Revolution. Popular culture became a matter of the highest concern for the state, and the redefinition of the scope and importance of film culture and film knowledge went far beyond the university walls. The overriding concern was a political task of enormous implications – it concerned the ideological

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[260] José Manuel Valdés-Rodríguez, "El cine en Cuba Republicana. Antecedentes. Presente. Posibilidades Industriales y Estéticas," in *Historia de Cuba republicana y sus antecedentes favorables y adversos a la independencia* (La Habana: Oficina del Historiador de la Ciudad de la Habana, 1960), 155-158; Piñera, "El seminario de estudios," 1- 4.
[261] "Fotos y Noticias. Pequeño ciclo de cine cubano," *Vida Universitaria*, April 1963; José Manuel Valdés-Rodríguez, *Ojeada al cine cubano, 1906-1958* (La Habana: Imprenta de la Universidad de La Habana, 1963).
[262] Mario Rodríguez Alemán, "Cine cubano. Retrospectiva," *Vida Universitaria*, August 1967.
[263] For instance, according to Vincenot, Arturo Agramonte disclosed to him that his book *Cronología del cine cubano*, published in 1966, was promptly withdrawn from circulation. Vincenot, "Pionniers de la Cinemateca de Cuba," 15.
[264] Luciano Castillo, "1959: Para una cronología del año de las luces," in *Le cinéma cubain: identité et regards de l'intérieur*, ed. Sandra Hernández (Nantes: CRINI, Centre de recherches sur les identités nationales et l'interculturalité-Université de Nantes, 2006), 24.

reorientation of revolutionary citizens in the making, as well as the construction of a new national identity.

One can imagine an alternative scenario whereby ICAIC could have supported Valdés-Rodríguez's course, or encouraged the training of new instructors. The parameters for teaching film appreciation could have eventually shifted towards a more refined analysis of film aesthetics or a more elaborate theorization of cinematic codes. However, ICAIC's pragmatic focus on professionalization was specifically concerned with the future of filmmaking, and not with film theory or academic approaches. The film institute offered several learning opportunities to its staff, but it did not create new educational spaces catering to the general population or to the training of film critics. Furthermore, the prevailing spirit in 1959 was one of breaking away from established institutions and creating anew. The university was seen as an old institution not suitable for developing the ambitious cinematic projects of the Revolution.

In the transition from the pre-revolutionary to the post-revolutionary moments, the function of film education changed from educating audiences about cinema (its history, its relationship to other narrative forms, its medium-specific characteristics) to using film as a far-reaching educational vehicle. With the Revolution, the government saw the capacity of cinema for teaching the general population outside of traditional educational settings. This encompassed various related priorities, including imparting particular frames of mind and interpretation mechanisms in the viewer through the mediating figure of film critics and cine-debate moderators, making films that conveyed to a wide audience a general knowledge about the nation's history of anticolonialism and antimperialism, and delivering specific practical and technical knowledge through didactic documentaries. Yet, the film institute inadvertently carried forward the inherent dichotomy between elite and popular audiences. While the film reviews published in daily periodicals tended to be overly concerned with ideological correctness, the more essayistic format of the pieces published in ICAIC's magazine *Cine Cubano* demonstrated a higher degree of engagement with the formal and expressive qualities of cinema, and with the evolution of film history.

Post-revolutionary cultural institutions held a more demanding attitude vis-à-vis the role of cinema as instrument of cultural expression and social education, and film interpretation as affirmation of revolutionary citizenship. As I will show in Chapter 2, in the early years, ICAIC executives believed that audiences could be educated through a controlled policy of film

exhibition and selective programming. They sought to condition people's taste through exposure to specific films, and relied on the mediating role of film critics to impart the desired markers of quality. However, in practice, the film critics' own needs to express their ideological position unambiguously, often resulted in the heavy-handed ideological interpretation of films. Critical discussions centered on the film's social and political message at the expense of a deeper understanding of the aesthetic and medium-specific qualities of the films.

In a way, Cuban audiences were an early testing ground for the textual analysis theories that gained traction in the discipline of Film Studies in the 1980s. Film critics were given the task to unveil the hidden aspects of cinematic construction and to train the public in detecting the ideological positions embedded in the films. However, these readings were at odds with viewer enjoyment, and audiences rejected the film reviews commonly found in print periodicals.[265] Contrary to the desired effect, Cuban audiences continued craving foreign and national productions with high entertainment value. The average viewer's predilection for conventional narratives became particularly evident with the enormous box office success of the highly generic Cuban films of the 1980s.[266] Therefore, while the government's approach to film as ideological tool may have been useful in the short term, ICAIC's goal of changing the taste preferences of the general public was never achieved.

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[265] Orlando Rojas and Rubén Medina, "Reflexiones en torno a la crítica cinematográfica en Cuba," *Cine Cubano,* 1982.

[266] Díaz and del Río, *Los cien caminos del cine cubano*, 59-72; Paulo Antonio Paranaguá, "Cuban Cinema's Political Challenges," in *New Latin American Cinema. Studies of National Cinemas*, ed. Michael T. Martin, vol. 2, 2 vols. (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1997), 167–90; Chanan, *Cuban Cinema*, 395-443.

# Chapter 2. Film Exhibition and Programming Strategies

"Better educated audiences, interested in the cinema as a genuine art, will lay a more solid and universal basis for the Cuban cinema of the future."
Néstor Almendros[267]

In the 1950s, various formal and semi-formal initiatives created a network of film screening sites and discursive spaces that opened the way to an emergent art cinema audience. Cuban cinephiles of that decade comprised a mainly elite audience – young, middle class and with creative aspirations – which is similar to the trend also found in North American, Latin American and European contexts during that time.[268] In Chapter 1 I focused on the intersections of cinema and education, analyzing instances of film as an object of study, and cinema as an educational vehicle. Chapter 2 will concentrate on other factors that contributed to a differentiated audience, including the proliferation of cine-clubs during the 1950s, and the particular ways in which they adopted the idea of "cinema as art". I also explore the practical conditions of film programming and exhibition that impacted upon this notion, and I document the manner in which those existing structures for film exhibition and noncommercial film culture underwent a gradual process of institutionalization during the early years of the Revolution.

I will provide a historical account of the formation, main activities, and programming options of pre-revolutionary cine-clubs, starting with a brief overview of José Manuel Valdés-Rodríguez's home-based cine club of the late 1920s, named "Cine Club de La Habana". Following this, I discuss the cine-club formed in 1948, originally known by the same name and renamed "Cinemateca de Cuba" after its affiliation with the International Federation of Film Archives (FIAF).[269] The most stable film programming bodies were associated with local

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[267] Nestor Almendros, "The Cinema in Cuba," *Film Culture*, 1956.
[268] Ana M. López, "Cine clubs," in *Encyclopedia of Contemporary Latin American and Caribbean Cultures*, eds. Daniel Balderston, Mike Gonzalez, and Ana M. López (London; New York: Routledge, 2000), 363-364; Lee Grieveson and Haidee Wasson, eds., *Inventing Film Studies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008); Malte Hagener, *The Emergence of Film Culture* (New York, NY: Berghahn Books, 2014).
[269] Given the confusion created by the organization's multiple names, which include Cine Club de La Habana, Cinemateca Cubana, and Cinemateca de Cuba, I am referring to it by the following abbreviation: CCH-CC.

institutions. One was the Cine de Arte initiative organized by the University of Havana's Department of Cinematography starting in 1949, and the other was the national network of Catholic cine-clubs established by the Catholic Center for Cinematographic Orientation (Centro Católico de Orientación Cinematográfica, CCOC) in 1952. However, their links to the university and the Church did not give them access to subsidies, making them dependent on paid membership instead. Political parties also offered their support to cultural organizations involved in the promotion of cinema, as was the case of the relationship between the Communist Party (Partido Socialista Popular, PSP) and the cultural society Nuestro Tiempo. In addition, short-lived neighbourhood and workplace based cine-clubs further expanded the cinephile horizon in 1950s Havana.

With the advent of a radically different social and political order in 1959, new cultural institutions such as the Cuban Institute for Cinematographic Art and Industry (Instituto Cubano de Arte e Industria Cinematográficos, ICAIC) and the National Council of Culture (Consejo Nacional de Cultura, CNC) tried to change the general direction in which both commercial and noncommercial film exhibition had shaped audiences until then. As demonstrated in Chapter 1, in spite of tensions between them, those two organizations shared the conviction that cinema had a key role to play as an ideologically powerful tool in support of Fidel Castro's Revolution. Here, I will discuss how their early large-scale initiatives, such as the *cine-debates populares* (popular cine-debates) and the mobile cinema units, transformed the notion of cine club and gradually rendered obsolete previous models of film culture. I will demonstrate that ICAIC's strategic conception of commercial film programming and the establishment of specialized spaces such as the cinematheque enlarged the reach and scope of film exhibition while at the same time implementing an increasingly centralized structure that eliminated the possibility of non-regulated cinema-related activities on the island.

In the first section I will provide a historical overview of the types of cine-clubs that existed before the Revolution, explaining their affiliations to influential international figures as well as the local educational, political, and religious organizations that supported them. I will examine the different ways in which they established a film-historical canon that was similar to the one becoming institutionalized in key American and European metropolis, even though noncommercial film culture in Cuba operated under distinctly different conditions. The second section explains how the nationalization process shifted Cuba's industrial landscape in the years

1959 to 1961, determining the fate of the film business sector and the cine-clubs. I also analyze the impact of institutionalization on commercial film exhibition and on the programming strategies that were designed to shape the taste of Cuban spectators and to change their perception of cinematic value. The third section details the conditions for the emergence and development of the cinematheque, placing it in contrast to more regulated screening spaces.

## 1. Cuban Cine Clubs before 1959

### Cine Club Precedents: Valdés-Rodríguez's Cine Club of the Late 1920s

We find references to Cuban cine-clubs as early as 1928. In the issue of the film journal *Experimental Cinema* where Valdés-Rodríguez published an English language article, he was introduced as the president of the "Cine Club de La Habana".[270] According to his own recollections, between 1927 and 1929 he showed the films at his home in the Vedado neighbourhood, with an old 35 mm projector, and using the white wall that separated his home from the next door garage. The people who attended these film screenings at his home included Cuban intellectuals and cultural figures like Fernando Ortiz, Raúl Roa García, Regino Pedroso, Pablo de la Torriente Brau, César García Pons, Arístides Sosa de Quesada, Rubén Arango, Alberto Hernández Catá, Rubén Martínez Villena, José Tallet, Roberto Agramonte, Miguel Pérez, Alberto Riera, Ramón Miyar, Juan Marinello, and Addison Durland, as well as Spaniards such as Fernando de los Ríos.[271]

Valdés-Rodríguez remembered showing mostly German and Soviet films that were difficult to see in the theaters, or that he and his friends wanted to see again.[272] The prominent

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[270] "Notes on Contributors," *Experimental Cinema*, 1932.
[271] José Manuel Valdés-Rodríguez, "En torno a los cine-clubes y su función superadora," *Cinema*, December 1956.
[272] The Soviet films were *Mother* (Vsevolod Pudovkin, 1926), *The End of Saint Petersburg* (Vsevolod Pudovkin, 1927), *Storm over Asia* (Vsevolod Pudovkin, 1928), *Battleship Potemkin* (Serguei Eisenstein, 1925), *October/Ten days that Shook the World* (Serguei Eisenstein, 1927), and *The New Babylon* (Grigoriy Kozintsev, 1929). Valdés-Rodríguez refers to *The New Babylon* (Grigoriy Kozintsev, 1929) as "La comuna de París". He mentions several German productions, including various films by F.W. Murnau featuring Emil Jannings, such as *The Last Laugh* (1924), *Tartuffe* (1925), *Variety* (1925), and *Faust* (1926), along with *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (Robert Wiene, 1920), and *The Flight in the Night/Die Flucht in die Nacht* (Amleto

place of Soviet film titles is not surprising if we take into consideration that in the late 1920s many key Cuban intellectuals were communists or professed a certain curiosity towards the USSR. It is also consistent with the general tendency found around this period in leftist and non-leftist circles in Latin America, which constructed Soviet cinema as the cinematic paradigm that provided an alternative to the prevalent Hollywood model.[273] We know that *Battleship Potemkin* (Serguei Eisenstein, 1925), was banned soon after its commercial release in September 1927.[274] It is therefore quite likely that this may have been the motivating factor behind Valdés-Rodríguez bringing the film home in a somewhat clandestine manner. We also know that he worked in the administration of the Fausto theater, which explains why he may have had access to the film projector he brought to his home.[275] Thus, we can hypothesize that after this first experience in 1927 he realized how easy it was to borrow other films. Some of the other titles he mentioned were actually released in Cuba in 1930 or later, signaling that perhaps those sporadic film screenings actually lasted longer than what the 1927-1929 timeline of the cine-club indicates.[276]

The Havana cine-club differs from the early cine-clubs that were created in Latin America during this time in one important way, namely, the lack of a print legacy. As far as we know, these rather informal home-based screenings did not have a regular membership or program notes. While the Chaplin Club founded in 1928 in Rio de Janeiro published the magazine *O Fan*, Valdés-Rodríguez did not create an ongoing publication.[277] Similarly, The Cine Club de Buenos Aires, active from 1928 to 1931, produced program notes, while the Havana one

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Palermi, 1926). He refers to the latter as "Enrique IV", but he must be referring to the German film adaptation of the play. Valdés-Rodríguez, "En torno a los cine-clubes," 12-13.

[273] Sarah Ann Wells, "Parallel Modernities? The First Reception of Soviet Cinema in Latin America", in *Cosmopolitan Film Cultures in Latin America, 1896-1960*, eds. Rielle Navitski and Nicolas Poppe (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2017), 151-175.

[274] Raul Rodríguez, *El cine silente en Cuba* (La Habana: Editorial Letras Cubanas, 1992), 137-140.

[275] Pedro R. Noa Romero, "Cronología," in *Ojeada al cine cubano*, ed. Pedro R. Noa Romero (La Habana: Ediciones ICAIC, 2010), 263.

[276] For instance, *The End of St. Petersburg* and *The New Babylon* were released in 1930, Rodríguez, *El cine silente en Cuba*, 140-141. He also mentions *La caída de un imperio,* which is most likely *Juárez y Maximiliano* (Miguel Contreras Torres and Rafael J. Sevilla, 1934).

[277] Ruda Andrade, "Film Societies in Seven Latin American Countries," *Écrans du monde/World Screen*, April/September 1961, 49.

did not.[278] On the other hand, compared to the Cine Club de Mexico, which was more a statement of interest than an actual screening series, the Havana cine club stands out as a more tangible effort.[279] In all these cases, cine-club members were generally part of a group of modernist writers and avant-garde artists, usually associated with a literary magazine. In the Cuban case, the magazine *Revista de Avance* gave voice to that generation of young intellectuals. Valdés-Rodríguez's connection to this group, combined with his access to the commercial sector through his job at the Fausto theater, made those early screenings possible.

With the formation of various cultural associations in the late 1920s, other opportunities for promoting film beyond its entertainment value became available in intellectual circles. For instance, the Institución Hispano-Cubana de Cultura (Spanish-Cuban Cultural Institute) created by Fernando Ortiz in 1927 was the first to show educational and artistic films to its members as part of its cultural programming.[280] The Lyceum society, a cultural and educational association founded by a group of women in 1928, featured lectures on the topic of cinema as early as 1931.[281] Later, in 1942, the Cuba Photography Club (Club Fotográfico de Cuba, CFC) created its own screening space, where they showed their members' amateur movies, as well as 16 mm film programs.[282]

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[278] Andrade, "Film societies," 44; David Oubiña, "The Skin of the World: Horacio Coppola and Cinema," *Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies* 24, no. 2 (2015): 208–209.
[279] Jesse Lerner and Luciano Piazza, "Ism, Ism, Ism," in *Ism, ism, ism: Experimental Cinema in Latin America*, eds. Jesse Lerner and Luciano Piazza (Oakland, California; Los Angeles: University of California Press; Los Angeles Filmforum, 2017), 10, 24; James Oles, "Emilio Amero's missing movies," *Luna Córnea*, 2002, https://issuu.com/c_imagen/docs/lunacornea_24/288.
[280] Valdés-Rodríguez, "En torno a los cine-clubes," 12-13; Consuelo Naranjo Orovio and Miguel Ángel Puig-Samper Mulero, "Fernando Ortiz y las relaciones científicas hispano-cubanas, 1900-1940," *Revista de Indias* 60, no. 219 (2000), 491, https://doi.org/10.3989/revindias.2000.i219.516.
[281] Besides Valdés-Rodríguez, other intellectuals such as Francisco Ichaso, Eugenio Florit, and Herminia del Portal offered these talks at the Lyceum. Rosa M. Abella and Otto G. Richter Library, *Lyceum and Lawn Tennis Club Collection, 1929-1986,* Cuban Heritage Collection, University of Miami.
[282] For more on the Cuba Photography Club, see Chapter 3.

**Cine Club de La Habana / Cinemateca De Cuba (1948-1956)**

The increasing interest in film found a particular level of fervor in two young men who would eventually found another "Cine Club de La Habana" in 1948: Germán Puig Paredes (1928) and Ricardo Vigón Teurbe-Tolón (1928-1960). As the French film historian Emmanuel Vincenot has unveiled, they started out by organizing two screenings in March 1948, and for several years struggled to transform the cine-club into a cinematheque.[283] In their first screening they showed *La bête humaine* (Jean Renoir, 1939) and *Alexander Nevsky* (Serguei Eisenstein, 1938).[284] Puig has recently revealed that they searched for interesting titles at local film distributors offices, and then rented the selected ones for five dollars. To show the films, they counted on the screening facilities of one of the newsreel companies, *Noticiario Royal News*, thanks to their friendship with its director, José Guerra Alemán."[285] They wanted to create a more formalized version of the cine-club, and asked for Valdés-Rodríguez's collaboration, but he quickly showed a lack of interest in their project.

That summer of 1948, during the months of July and August, Puig and Vigón enrolled in the film course at the University of Havana, for which Puig had won one of the scholarships. Another student in the course was Néstor Almendros Cuyás (1930-1992), a recent émigré who had attended a Barcelona cine-club and would become an essential part of the Havana group, writing the film program notes and eventually assuming director duties while Puig was abroad.[286] It is very likely that the film course enabled an added platform for discussion and interaction that strengthened friendships and collaboration. Other core members of the cine-club included Guillermo Cabrera Infante (1929-2005) and Tomás Gutiérrez Alea (1928-1996). Cabrera Infante

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[283] Unless otherwise indicated, most of the specifics concerning the CCH-CC have been gathered from Emmanuel Vincenot, "Germán Puig, Ricardo Vigón et Henri Langlois, Pionniers de la Cinemateca de Cuba," *Caravelle* no. 83 (2004): 11-42. Other sources informing this discussion include the interview with Germán Puig, "Debido a la política, me quedé sin amigos," interview by Manuel Zayas, *Cuba Encuentro*, October 9, 2009, https://www.cubaencuentro.com/entrevistas/articulos/debido-a-la-politica-me-quede-sin-amigos-216025; Arturo Agramonte and Luciano Castillo, *Cronología del cine cubano III (1945-1952)*, vol. 3, 4 vols. (La Habana: Ediciones ICAIC, 2013), 159-161, 356-375; and Ramón Cabrales, *Diccionario Histórico de la Fotografía en Cuba* (Miami: Arista Publishing, 2016), 294-295.
[284] Nestor Almendros, *A Man with a Camera* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1984), 27; Agramonte and Castillo, *Cronología III*, 159.
[285] Agramonte and Castillo, *Cronología III*, 159.
[286] For more in-depth biographical information about Almendros, see Chapter 3.

became an outstanding film critic and literary author, and Gutiérrez Alea developed into the most prominent Cuban filmmaker of his generation. [287] In contrast, Puig and Vigón's contributions, which will be detailed in the following pages, remained virtually unknown until researchers made direct contact with Puig to access his recollections and personal archives. Vigón, who was well-liked and admired by his contemporaries because of his film knowledge and critical insight, died too young to leave a tangible legacy.[288] Additional names associated with this project as eager participants or active supporters include names that are well known in Cuban cultural circles, such as Ramón Fernando Suárez (1930), Rine R. Leal Pérez (1930-1996), Carlos Franqui (1921-2010), Juan Blanco (1919-2008), Roberto J. Branly Deymier (1930-1980), Lisandro Otero (1932-2008), Edmundo Desnoes (1930), Jaime Soriano Geraldino, Paulino Villanueva, Adrían García Hernández, Plácido González Gómez, María D. López Salas, Emilio Guede, Julio Matas Graupera (1931), and Rodolfo Santovenia (1929).

The cine club had a very unstable history, due in part to the mobility of its main organizers in pursuit of training opportunities abroad. Their interest in watching films grew in parallel to their determination to make them. As they embarked on their personal journeys as young adults in the early 1950s, some of them stayed in Cuba, working in film criticism or making amateur films, while others went abroad to get formal filmmaking training. Cabrera Infante became a professional film critic in Havana, while Almendros and Gutiérrez Alea alternated between writing about cinema, attending film school overseas, and making amateur films, as will be explored in depth in Chapter 3. They found some support through Raúl Roa, then director of the Department of Culture of the Ministry of Education, who assisted them in

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[287] He is best known for directing the most celebrated film in Cuban cinema, *Memories of Underdevelopment* (1968), and continued to be recognized until the end of his life for films such as *Strawberry and Chocolate* (1994). For an appraisal of his early days as an amateur filmmaker along with Néstor Almendros, see Chapter 3.

[288] Vigón spent most of the 1950s in Paris, and also lived in New York and Mexico for a short time. He worked at the Cinémathèque Française and as a translator for UNESCO. In Paris, he befriended such unalike personalities as Henri Langlois, Julio Cortázar, and Susan Sontag. In Havana, he was close to literary figures of the stature of José Lezama Lima. For a biographical synthesis of his life, see Carlos Espinosa Domínguez, "La pasión cinéfila," *Cuba Encuentro*, April 3, 2015, https://www.cubaencuentro.com/cultura/articulos/la-pasion-cinefila-322419; and Carlos Espinosa Domínguez, "Una vida casi en flor cortada," *Cuba Encuentro*, April 10, 2015, https://www.cubaencuentro.com/cultura/articulos/una-vida-casi-en-flor-cortada-322492.

obtaining scholarships to study abroad.[289] They also published their first texts in the magazine published by this government entity before the change of power brought about by the Fulgencio Batista *coup d'état* in March 1952.[290]

Puig left for France in October 1950, to study at L'Institut des hautes études cinématographiques (IDHEC), but found out upon arrival in Paris that the school had closed for the 1950-1951 session. Thus, he used his time there to attend a course taught by George Sadoul at the Institut de Filmologie, to work as an assistant in *L'auberge rouge* (Claude Autant-Lara, 1951), and to become a regular of the Cinemathèque Française.[291] His encounter with the director of the Cinemathèque Française, Henri Langlois, in early 1951 was decisive. In spite of an earlier request by Valdés-Rodríguez to borrow a program of films to show at the University of Havana, Langlois decided to support the young idealist cinephile instead, who reminded him of his own trajectory. He suggested to Puig that he should change the status of the Cine Club to that of a cinematheque, the "Cinemateca de Cuba", so that he could legally send film prints to the Cuban organization as an official member of the International Federation of Film Archives (FIAF).[292] Furthermore, Langlois invited Puig to participate as an observer in the Fifth Congress of FIAF in Cambridge, in July 1951. Working under the understanding that this formalization process was in progress, the Cinemathèque Française sent a remarkable film program that the incipient art cinema audience in Havana truly appreciated. This initiated the second, and perhaps

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[289] He intervened in getting Germán Puig's scholarship to study at IDHEC. Agramonte and Castillo, *Cronología III*, 357-358.

[290] From 1948 to 1953 Almendros wrote film reviews and film-related articles in small local publications, such as *Juventud de Marianao* and the university magazine *El Filósofo Travieso.* He also published in *Mensuario de Arte, Literatura y Crítica*, and *Noticias de Arte*, printed by the Department of Culture of the Ministry of Education. Later, Gutiérrez Alea published film reviews and cinema-related analysis in *Nuestro Tiempo* magazine.

[291] Agramonte and Castillo, *Cronología III*, 357. For an institutional history of the Institut de Filmologie associated with the Sorbonne, see Martin Lefebvre, "L'aventure filmologique : documents et jalons d'une histoire institutionnelle," *Cinémas: revue d'études cinématographiques* 19, no. 2–3 (2009): 59–100, https://doi.org/10.7202/037547ar.

[292] Langlois encouraged similar initiatives across Latin America. See Rielle Navitski, "The Cine Club de Colombia and Postwar Cinephilia in Latin America: Forging Transnational Networks, Schooling Local Audiences," *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* (2018), DOI: 10.1080/01439685.2018.1453993. For accounts of Langlois pioneering work in film archival and preservation, see Richard Roud, *A Passion for Films: Henri Langlois and the Cinemathèque Française* (New York: Viking Press, 1983), and Georges P Langlois and Glenn Myrent, *Henri Langlois, First Citizen of Cinema* (New York: Twayne, 1995).

most successful phase of the Cine Club de La Habana, turned Cinemateca de Cuba (from hereon, referred to as the CCH-CC), which lasted from October 1951 to November 1952.[293]

During this dynamic time Puig was intensely invested in the future of the cine-club, which the main members agreed to rename "Cinemateca de Cuba" in 1951.[294] Although he did not return from Paris until May 1952, he was in constant contact with Gutiérrez Alea and Almendros. Their correspondence, along with Puig's memories, provide strong evidence that the major obstacles this cinematheque project encountered was the antagonistic attitude of Valdés-Rodríguez.[295] As the cine-club ambitions became more evident, their former teacher became a formidable adversary. He took concrete actions that hindered Puig's ability to develop the project he envisioned. Specifically, he interfered with the first shipment of French films destined for the CCH-CC by using his connections at the French embassy to personally receive them. Once the CCH-CC became officially recognized as a member of FIAF, Valdés-Rodríguez was no longer able to interfere with the shipment of reels, but he used his influence with the Agrupación de Reporters Teatrales y Cinematográficos (Theater and Film Reporters Association, ARTYC) to prevent the press from promoting CCH-CC screenings. As Cabrera Infante later recalled, Puig and Vigón were "on their own fighting against the hydra of indifference, provincialism and lack of culture, with nothing but enthusiasm."[296]

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[293] The films that were shown on this occasion included silent film classics such as *Cabiria* (Piero Fosco, 1913, Italy), *Los proscritos/Berg Ejvind och hans Hustru* (Victor Sjöström, 1917, Sweden), *La vieja mansión/Gunnar Hedes Saga* (Maurtiz Stiller, 1922, Sweden), *La brujería a través de las edades/Heksen* (Benjamin Christensen, 1922, Denmark), *Entreacto/Entr'acte* (René Clair, 1924), *La calle sin alegría/Die Freudlose Gasse* (G.W. Pabst, 1925, Germany), *Naná* (Jean Renoir, 1926, France), *Un chapeau de paille d'Italie* (René Clair, 1927, France), *Napoleon* (Abel Gance, 1927, France), *En rade* (Alberto Cavalcanti, 1927, France), and *Juana de Arco/La passion de Jeanne d'Arc* (Carl Theodor Dreyer, 1928). Other projections included *El nuevo Gulliver* (A. Ptushko, 1935-36, USSR), *Things to come* (William Cameron Menzies, 1936, United Kingdom) and *Tales of Manhattan* (Julien Duvivier, 1942). Towards the end of the screening series the organizers had to improvise, because of difficulties obtaining the films on time, so they arranged borrowing from local distributors *El halcón maltés/The maltese falcon* (John Huston, 1941) and *Murder, my Sweet* (Edward Dmytryck, 1944).

[294] However, some continued referring to it as "cine-club," or called it Cinemateca Cubana.

[295] All references to this correspondence come from Vincenot, "Pionniers de la Cinemateca de Cuba" ; Agramonte and Castillo, *Cronología III*, 356-375; and Puig, "Debido a la política."

[296] Guillermo Cabrera Infante, "Recuerdo a Ricardo," reprinted in *El cronista de cine*, *Escritos cinematográficos,* ed. Antoni Munné (Barcelona: Galaxia Gutenberg, 2012), 60.

One element of this genealogy that has generated some historiographic confusion, has been the claim that the CCH-CC was subscribed to the Sociedad Cultural Nuestro Tiempo (Our Times Cultural Society), henceforth Nuestro Tiempo. Vincenot has explained in detail the many omissions, imprecisions, and errors present in various historical overviews that either failed to mention the existence of the CCH-CC or did so in ways that purposely obscured the truth. In those instances, the name of one or both of the founders was left out, the name of the members was selectively chosen, the chronology was inexact, and the association with Nuestro Tiempo was overemphasized.[297] While the link with Nuestro Tiempo did in fact exist, it was short-lived and unwelcome by the founders of the CCH-CC.

As will be explained in more detail in the following pages, Nuestro Tiempo was officially created in February 1951. Several CCH-CC organizers signed the manifesto that gave life to this organization, including Cabrera Infante and his brother Alberto (Sabá) Cabrera Infante, Almendros, Leal, and Gutiérrez Alea. Even Puig, who was abroad around that date, appears in the list of signatories.[298] With Puig and Vigón in France, the rest joined forces with Nuestro Tiempo for the cine-club screenings. Not only were these gaining in popularity, but by the end of the year they were also sustaining Nuestro Tiempo at a time when the new cultural society had no other activities on offer. However, this symbiotic relationship became increasingly problematic. From Puig's point of view, Nuestro Tiempo was trying to appropriate his initiative and rob him of the credit for his work. He saw their intentions as usurpation, and he was decidedly in disagreement with the politicized element of the Nuestro Tiempo mandate. Upon his return to Cuba in May 1952, he confronted Alfredo Guevara, who was in charge of the Cinema section of Nuestro Tiempo, to make a clean break between the two organizations.

The conflict with Valdés-Rodríguez weighed heavily over the future of the CCH-CC. While Puig was away, other members of the CCH-CC directive met with the old professor but did not find a way forward. Another such meeting took place after his return. In August 1952, Puig and Valdés-Rodríguez met with the president of the ARTYC, Eduardo Héctor Alonso. Predictably, the journalist sided with Valdés-Rodríguez, arguing that the university was the only stable and legitimate place to store the films sent by the Cinemathèque Française. As reported by

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[297] Vincenot, "Pionniers de la Cinemateca de Cuba," 11-18.
[298] One possible explanation is that his wife, Adoración G. de Chávez, who also signed the document, may have added his name on his behalf.

Vincenot, in a letter Puig sent to Vigón he warns him that the journalists were even threatening to carry out a defamatory campaign against Langlois because of his refusal to deal with the university entity in favour of Puig's novel organization. These clashes, combined with Puig's personal circumstances of having to provide for his new wife and child, led to a long hiatus for the CCH-CC.

The third and final phase of the CCH-CC took place between 1955 and 1956. In 1955, Cabrera Infante and Puig made arrangements with the Film Library of the Museum of Modern Art in New York to borrow their program of film classics.[299] In Havana, Puig enlisted the support of the Instituto Nacional de Cultura (National Institute of Culture, INC), which had just moved into the new building for the Museum of Fine Arts.[300] They offered them a screening space for their first program, entitled "Film Classics from the Museum of Modern Art of New York." For a period of six months, the bimonthly screenings enjoyed considerable success. Although the conditions were less than ideal due to the lack of comfortable seats and air conditioning, the public was clearly interested in this encounter with the history of cinema.[301]

The promising prospect of finding stable sponsorship from the INC did not last long. Puig's desires were thwarted by the political reality of the 1950s. The INC was a highly controversial institution because many saw it as the Batista regime's attempt at winning loyalties through government grants. While some well-established figures worked under the INC's tutelage, many considered the artists and intellectuals who accepted INC financing "collaborationists".[302] Puig has always presented himself as "apolitical," but the environment in which he was trying to build his project was decidedly not so. His formerly loyal accomplices in the CCH-CC adventure felt the need to make a statement. As he later recounted to Vincenot, Cabrera Infante and Adrián García Hernández took away one of the films that were due to be

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[299] Vincenot, "Pionniers de la Cinemateca de Cuba"; Agramonte and Castillo, *Cronología III*, 369.
[300] The National Institute of Culture replaced the Department of Culture of the Ministry of Education, which had existed since 1934. Rojas, "Apuntes," 402.
[301] Manuel Fernández, "Cinemateca de Cuba: Clásicos del cine," *Cine Guía*, March 1956.
[302] Mirta Aguirre, "¿Instituto nacional… y de cultura?," *Mensajes. Cuadernos Marxistas*, July 1956, reprinted in Ricardo Luis Hernández Otero, ed., *Sociedad Cultural Nuestro Tiempo: Resistencia y acción* (La Habana: Editorial Letras Cubanas, 2002), 263-270.

screened, in protest against the INC, and by extension, against Batista. In response, Guillermo de Zéndegui, director of the INC, withdrew his support.

Once again, Puig and his considerably reduced support base (Vigón had been working in France since 1951, and only two of his original allies remained by his side), struggled to find a place to show the second instalment of MOMA classics. Eventually, they were able to screen the second program of a truly impressive selection of silent and early sound films at the Lyceum and Lawn Tennis Club.[303] However, their difficulties were compounded by the lack of advertising, leading one commentator to assert: "Cinemateca de Cuba has the duty to send its information to the press, and the press is obliged to publish it, given that its fundamental purpose is to keep readers informed of what is happening, especially if it is of importance and significance like in this case."[304]

The ARTYC's reluctance to announce the CCH-CC screenings was due to Valdés-Rodríguez's influence. Adding to this, the Nuestro Tiempo cluster was vehemently opposed to the INC. Even more independent-minded personalities like Cabrera Infante could not bear to be associated with a Batista-sponsored entity. As was the case from its beginnings, the CCH-CC was at the verge of disappearing. The hurdles Puig encountered were in part due to the founders' mobility in pursuit of training opportunities abroad, the sense of entitlement demonstrated by established individuals, and his unpopular position in the increasingly radicalized sphere of Havana's cultural life. Defeated, Puig moved to France in 1957 and later to Spain in order to build a life away from what he considered "the envy" of his contemporaries. His place in the history of Cuban cinema remained significantly obscured until researchers like Vincenot and Manuel Zayas brought it to light through an academic article and the diaspora based magazine Cuba Encuentro.

**Cine de Arte and Cinemateca Introduce the Film-Historical Canon in Cuba**

Perhaps more important than trying to determine who wronged whom, it is imperative to try to understand the distinct ways in which different promoters contributed to the common

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[303] The Lyceum society founded in 1928 merged with the Tennis Lawn society in 1939 and was renamed Lyceum and Lawn Tennis Club. Soon after they inaugurated a newly built cultural center in the Vedado neighbourhood, which included a library and a theater. Today, the former site of the Lyceum is known in Cuba as the *Casa de la Cultura de Plaza*.
[304] "Coloquio con los lectores," *Cine Guía,* October 1956.

mission of bringing a new perspective on cinema to an increasingly diversifying audience. In order to do so it is worth taking a closer look at what each of these entities offered, and to compare them to the other programming models available simultaneously in the capital. The main point of reference for noncommercial exhibition during this period, as described in Chapter 1, is the ongoing screening series offered by the Department of Cinematography at the University of Havana under the title Cine de Arte. The name Cine de Arte which translates as "art cinema", invites further scrutiny, especially if we compare the group of films available through that program, to the programs loaned by the Cinemathèque Française and the Museum of Modern Art Film Library to the CCH-CC during its second (1951-1952) and third (1955-1956) phases.

First of all, it must be noted that Valdés-Rodríguez's educational program, as well as the Cine de Arte public screenings, were mostly restricted to the films that were available through local distributors. This meant that the professor entered into mutually convenient agreements with representatives of the distribution companies, and to a certain extent played a role in their marketing strategy. For example, the scholarships offered by Fox to Valdés-Rodríguez's potential students, required candidates to submit a film review for one of their studio films, thus creating a mutually beneficial relationship between educational and commercial objectives. Additionally, foreign embassies collaborated with the university in the promotion of their country's cultural heritage. For instance, in 1950, a retrospective entitled "Shakespeare in the Cinema" was presented in collaboration with the British Embassy.[305] The event's organizers dutifully acknowledged and thanked its sponsors in the program notes:

> The Department of Cinematography of the University of Havana wishes to express its profound gratitude to the Consulate and Embassy of Great Britain in Havana and Caracas respectively, for its cooperation in the realization of this retrospective. We equally wish to make known our gratitude to Universal International, to Metro Goldwyn Mayer, and to Republic Pictures of Cuba for generously facilitating the films included in this Shakespeare retrospective.[306]

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[305] Four recent adaptations of Shakespeare plays were screened: Laurence Olivier's versions of "Henry V" and "Hamlet" (from 1946 and 1948 respectively), George Cukor's *Romeo and Juliet* (1936), and Orson Welles' *Macbeth* (1948).
[306] Valdés-Rodríguez Digital Archive.

Other special sessions were organized around the topic of "Friendship between Nations". These were retrospectives dedicated to the cinematographies of specific countries, including France, the United States, and Mexico. Those screenings were developed in close collaboration with the Ministry of the State, as part of the mandate of the University Extension program, to which the Department of Cinematography belonged. The "Friendship between Nations" program, Valdés-Rodríguez explained, was created at the request of Ernesto Dihigo, a university professor turned Minister of the State, who had "the beautiful idea of intensifying the relationship between the delegations and embassies through cultural activities, with the objective of familiarizing the ministry with the life of the nations here represented, while at the same time promoting the diplomatic and consular relationships between the members of our international service and the staff of the Cuban Foreign Relations ministry."[307] The formal and official tone of these public film presentations gives us valuable insight into the less visible aspects of Valdés-Rodríguez's endeavours. They bring to the surface the acute importance of Valdés-Rodríguez's professional relationship with the local diplomatic and film business communities of his time.

The possibilities and limitations of both the film appreciation course and the screening sessions offered by the Department of Cinematography were determined by the particularities of the institutional space of the university, and by the strength of Valdés-Rodríguez's connections. Therefore, the criteria for attributing value and status in the history of cinema that he brought to the Cuban context of the 1950s, was marked by eclecticism and a certain degree of convenience, especially in the case of the Cine de Arte sessions. In comparison, the summer course was a more serious undertaking that played an important role in conveying a film-historical canon. Although, generally, the film selection for the course consisted of a highly heterogeneous mix of relatively recent releases, these were meant as illustration for explaining filmic methods and techniques.[308]

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[307] Valdés-Rodríguez, *El cine en la Universidad*, 71.

[308] For example, the films that were shown in the summer of 1951 were *El tercer hombre/The Third Man* (Carol Reed, 1949), *Ladrones de bicicletas/Bicycle Thiefs* (Vittorio de Sica, 1948), *El ocaso de una vida/Sunset Boulevard* (Billy Wilder, 1950), *Los olvidados/The Young and the Damned* (Luis Buñuel, 1950), *Harvey* (Henry Koster, 1950), *Carne y fantasía/Flesh and Fantasy (Julian Duvivier*, 1943), *El precio de una vida* (Edward Dmytrick), *Bambi* (1942), *Los mayas a través de las edades* (Kenneth McGowan), *Time in the Sun* (Mary Seaton, 1940), *El renegado* (William Wellman), *Juarez* (William Dieterle, 1939), *La malvada/All About Eve* (Joseph Mankiewicz, 1950). For 1952, the following titles were included: *Cyrano de Bergerac* (Michael Gordon, 1950), *Odio que fue amor/The Browning Version* (Anthony Asquith, 1951), *Sinfonía de*

At the same time, in his attention to the films of Charles Chaplin, Jean Renoir, Sergei Eisenstein, and Italian neorealism, it is clear that Valdés-Rodríguez understood the standards of excellence in similar terms as in the North American and European film culture contexts. This often meant relying on oral descriptions and explanations of the intrinsic value of the classics, delivered in the form of lectures rather than through actual projections. Even though the film prints were largely unavailable on the island, Cuban cinephiles were able to familiarize themselves with the film history references established in international books and magazines, which they accessed in original or translated form. Thus, the inaccessibility of films was circumvented through access to print sources that described, categorized, and analyzed cinema's accomplishments. For many, Valdés-Rodríguez acted as intermediary of this knowledge, filling in the gaps through his own descriptions and interpretations of those inaccessible cinematic works.

In contrast to the university's film programming model, which was confined by local availability, the CCH-CC provided rare and special opportunities for Cuban cinephiles to directly encounter a decidedly historical selection of cinema classics. As a direct result of Puig's networking in Paris, a very enticing program of film classics borrowed from the Cinemathèque Française took place in Havana between 1951 and 1952. The critical observations in the program notes reveal the areas of film history that were most interesting to the young organizers. For instance, Almendros extended special praise for *The Joyless Street* (Georg Wilhelm Pabst, 1925) because he considered that the film combined an interest in realism through its exploration of the social inequalities of modern society, with a visual aesthetic that was comfortably elitist, showing traces of expressionism and putting much importance on framing, camera movement, and editing.[309] He also appreciated the universal power of humour and laughter. Presenting Mack Sennett's comedy, he pointed out the acrobatics and confusion characteristic of slapstick, and

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*París/An American in Paris?* (Vincent Minelli, 1951), *El imán/The Magnet* (Charles Frend, 1950), *1812, La derrota de Napoleón/Kutuzov* (Vladimir Petrov, 1944, USSR), *El diablo y la dama/Le diable au corps* (Claude Autant Lara, 1947), *Los 8 sentenciados/Kind hearts and coronets* (Robert Hamer, 1949), *Pasaporte a Pimlico/Passport to Pimlico* (Henry Cornelius, 1949), *El rey/A Royal Affair* (Mark Gilbert Sauvajon, 1949), *Pacto siniestro/Strangers on a Train* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1951), *Alemania Año Cero/Germany Year Zero* (Roberto Rossellini, 1948), *Arroz Amargo/Bitter Rice* (Giuseppe de Santis, 1949).

[309] Nestor Almendros, *Cinemanía* (Barcelona: Seix Barral, 1992), 32-33.

credited his knack for ridiculing authority and for the comic effect of depriving respectable figures of their apparent dignity.[310]

Watching these films, and writing about them, was a valuable learning exercise for the cine-club organizers. Their program notes contain abundant references to facts and anecdotes learned from film history books and articles, but they also give us a sense of those aspects of film aesthetics that held importance for them, such as realism and humour. At the same time, this film program offered the audience a once in a lifetime chance to see films that had become legendary. Further, the opportunity to watch several filmic examples from the trajectory of a given director allowed audience members to think of cinema as an evolving medium, with particular aesthetic tendencies manifesting themselves at different moments in film history. For instance, they could become acquainted with René Clair's avant-garde beginnings through *Entr'acte* (1924), and see his progression into a more realist type of humour with *Un chapeau de paille d'Italie* (1927).[311] They could also gain an understanding of how film aesthetics evolved from experimental to more realist cinematic forms in the works of Clair, Alberto Cavalcanti, Joris Ivens, or Luis Buñuel.[312]

The thematic organization of the program designed by the Cinemathèque Française looks similar to the keystone of film history curricula adopted all over the world. It started with fragments from film pioneers such as the Lumière brothers, George Méliès and Émile Cohl, as well as early Italian, Swedish, and Danish classics from the 1910s. The avant-garde movement was well represented through Clair, Ivens, Cavalcanti, Buñuel and Salvador Dalí. Key points of reference in the history of cinema like *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (Robert Wiene, 1919), *Napoléon* (Abel Gance, 1927), *The Fall of the House of Usher* (Jean Epstein, 1928), and especially *La passion de Jeanne d'Arc* (Carl Theodor Dreyer, 1928) were received with great expectation, notwithstanding their incomplete versions. The latter, shown in November 1952, was the best attended screening in the program.[313]

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[310] Almendros, *Cinemanía*, 43-44.
[311] Almendros, *Cinemanía*, 37-38. Cine-club organizers especially appreciated *Un chapeau de paille d'Italie*, stating that "Of all the films that Cinemateca has presented so far, this is undoubtedly the one that has best stood the test of time." Almendros, *Cinemanía*, 38. They even acquired it as a cornerstone of their future film archive, but storage never materialized, and they could not preserve it.
[312] Almendros, *Cinemanía*, 39.
[313] Agramonte and Castillo, *Cronología III*, 367-368.

Despite its relative success, since the CCH-CC worked in an independent manner without the support of an institutional setting, they could not sustain this type of screening series in a regular manner. In contrast, the Cine de Arte sessions were a more permanent initiative, enjoying the advantages of continuity and stability. Valdés-Rodríguez had a 20-year history with the film distribution and exhibition sector, giving him access to multiple contacts and an undeniable power of convocation. But the selection made by Valdés-Rodríguez was more contemporary, responding less to a tested seal of quality or interest, and more to pragmatism. On the other hand, the group of youngsters that had started by relying on favours and on local availability of film prints, was now connected with the Cinemathèque Française. This represented a shock to the local environment of petty influence and competition. At that point it became evident that they were offering something new and unique. The film selection that came from international film libraries consisted of a collection of classics, properly selected and legitimized.

This was put in evidence once again when the CCH-CC brought a second film program to the island, this time rented from the MOMA Film Library. This program included complete versions of some of the films seen in fragmented form three years later, but it also added essential titles never before seen by this generation, most notably works by D.W. Griffith, Erich von Stroheim, Louis Feuillade, F.W. Murnau, Vsevolod Pudovkin, and Leni Riefenstahl.[314] In

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[314] From December 1955 to May 1956, the following film classics were screened at the Museum of Fine Arts: *Intolerancia/Intolerance* (D.W. Griffith, 1916), *Esposas frívolas/Foolish Wives* (Erich von Stroheim, 1921), *Paris duerme/Paris qui dort* (René Clair, 1924), Lumière films (1895), Fantomas/Fantômas (Louis Feuillade, 1914), El caballo fugitivo (Ferdinand Zecca, 1907), *Nada más que las horas/Rien que les heures* (Alberto Cavalcanti, 1926), *La caída de la casa Usher/The Fall of the House of Usher* (Jean Epstein, 1928), *El gabinete del doctor Caligari/The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (Robert Wiene, 1919), *El golem/The Golem* (Paul Wegener, 1920), La boda de don Juan (Oscar Messter, 1909), Incomprendidos (Oscar Messter, 1912), Primitivos alemanes, *La última risa/The Last Laugh* (F.W. Murnau, 1924), Hamlet (Sven Gade, 1920), *La leyenda de Gosta Berling/The Saga of Gösta Berling* (Mauritz Stiller, 1923), Los proscriptos/The Outlaw and his Wife??? (Victor Sjostrom, 1917), *La carreta fantasma/The Phantom Carriage* (Victor Sjostrom, 1920), *El tesoro de Arne/Sir Arne's Treasure* (Mauritz Stiller, 1919), *La fiebre del ajedrez/Chess Fever* (Vsevolod Pudovkin, 1925), *La madre/Mother* (Vsevolod Pudovkin, 1926), El abrigo (Kozintzev y Trauberg, 1926), *Dura Lex/Po zakonu* (Lev Kuleshov, 1926), *El cantor de jazz/The Jazz Singer* (Alan Crosland, 1927), *Luces de Nueva York/Lights of New York* (Bryan Foy, 1928), *Shaw habla para el Movietone*, *El vaporcito de Willey* (Walt Disney, 1928), *La vida sexual del pólipo* (Robert Florey), *Olympia* (Leni Riefenstahl, 1938). The second part of the program was screened at the Lyceum, and it consisted of the following: *Birth of a Nation/Nacimiento de una nación* (D.W. Griffith, 1915), *Lluvia* (Joris

the program booklet produced for the occasion, the organizers personally thanked Guillermo de Zéndegui, director of the INC, MOMA staff members Richard Griffith, John Adams, Margareta Akerman, and Christopher Bishop, as well as Henri Langlois for his sustained support. They also offered a brief history of FIAF, and announced that Cuba had been represented in their congresses.[315] Once again, the legitimacy of a curated program originating in an internationally recognized cinema institution, offered an alternative to locally-generated selections. At the same time, this insistence on international connections may have been negatively perceived in the eyes of those who represented local networks of prestige and influence.

Taken together, the Cine de Arte sessions at the university and the CCH-CC screenings defined a new type of collective spectatorship, an emerging Cuban art cinema audience. But they articulated their vision of film history from different positions, as they were differently situated in terms of institutional affiliations and financing models. Valdés-Rodríguez's selection was much more dependent on the exhibition context than on any specific legitimating factors or textual markers. In contrast, Puig and his collaborators established direct contact with film archives abroad, and therefore imported very unique cultural products into the local market. These loans from well-respected international archives consecrated the cinematic canon that had taken shape in Europe, Britain, and the Unites States, in a "largely agreed upon catalogue of 'classics'."[316] Therefore, the pre-revolutionary model of film culture in Cuba established a film-historical canon that had been defined in similar terms from Paris to New York.

**Politicized Cine Clubs: The Cinema Section of Nuestro Tiempo**

Cine de Arte and the CCH-CC proposed film programs that responded to their organizations' mission to promote cinema's artistic and educational potential. On the other hand, the cultural society Nuestro Tiempo created an alternative, radicalized space for cultural activity

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Ivens, 1929), *El hipocampo* (Jean Painlevé, 1934), *Tierra sin pan* (Luis Buñuel), *Un chien andalou/El perro andaluz* (Luis Buñuel), *Storm over Asia/Tempestad sobre el Asia* (Vsevolod Pudovkin, 1925), El baile en el cine, *La pasión de Juana de Arco* (Carl Dreyer, 1928), La vanguardia en Francia: *La sonriente madame Beudet* (Germaine Dulac, 1923), *Menilmontant* (D. Kirnassof, 1925), *Ballet mecánico* (Fernand Leger, 1924), *Entreacto* (René Clair, 1924), *Metropolis* (Fritz Lang, 1926). Printed program, *Cinemateca de Cuba/Instituto Nacional de Cultura*, 1956; "Coloquio con los lectores," *Cine Guía*, October 1956.

[315] Printed program, *Cinemateca de Cuba/Instituto Nacional de Cultura*.

[316] Hagener, *The Emergence of Film Culture*, 298.

in the 1950s. This included an active Cinema section, although this was part of a much broader mandate to promote various artistic forms. Other Nuestro Tiempo sections included books, theatre, music, and visual arts. During its early days it was mainly involved in organizing art exhibitions and other events, but when the society's directors began working under the auspices of the PSP, they were able to publish a magazine containing articles on philosophical, scientific and artistic topics, as well as topic-specific bulletins, including bulletins on film. They also organized ballet performances, conferences, photography exhibitions, and public readings.[317]

Nuestro Tiempo has occupied a mythical place in Cuban cultural history since the 1960s. While this entity's importance as an active center for cultural dissemination and critical activity is undeniable, official histories have overemphasized its perceived significance by discussing it as if it had existed in a vacuum. The high level of revolutionarity accorded to Nuestro Tiempo's legacy has raised the status of this organization, because it highlights its achievements at the expense of other equally dynamic cultural projects of the 1950s, which have been regularly omitted or downplayed. Within Cuba's official history, the merits of Nuestro Tiempo have been periodically commemorated through a controlled version of the historical memory. For example, in 1982 the booklet *30 Años de Nuestro Tiempo* was printed in celebration of the organization's thirtieth anniversary, even though the actual date of foundation was in 1951.[318] This calls attention to the fact that the celebrated version of Nuestro Tiempo was the PSP-guided one, not the original.

In addition to repeated narratives, the documentation related to the organization has also been tightly managed. For instance, the first selection of articles from Nuestro Tiempo magazine, reproduced in a 1989 book compilation, was directly supervised by two of the organization's overseers: Mirta Aguirre and Harold Gramatges.[319] Only in 2002 did a more historically accurate version of events come to the fore as a corrective. As Hernández Otero suggested, the second

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[317] Ernestina Grimardi, *Nuestro Tiempo: 1954-1959, Índice* (La Habana: Biblioteca Nacional José Martí. Departamento de Hemeroteca e Información de Humanidades, 1978), 6-7.
[318] Carlos Rafael Rodríguez, *30 Años de Nuestro Tiempo* (La Habana: Sociedad Nuestro Tiempo, 1982).
[319] Ricardo Luis Hernández Otero, "Nota de edición,", in *Revista Nuestro Tiempo: Compilación de trabajos publicados* (La Habana: Letras Cubanas, 1989), 7.

volume extended the history of Nuestro Tiempo by discussing in more detail the genesis of the organization in 1951, as opposed to that of the magazine founded in 1954.[320]

In order to correct this multiplicity of omissions, we must start by establishing an accurate genesis of Nuestro Tiempo. It has been incorrectly stated that the group was set up at the University of Havana in 1950.[321] Yet, multiple testimonies as well as documentary evidence demonstrate that it was actually created in 1951. In one version of events, Nuestro Tiempo was actually an idea born from Cabrera Infante and Carlos Franqui.[322] However, with the rapprochement of the organization to the PSP, they both rejected it. In another version, Gramatges and some of his music composition students created a music society to promote classical music composers, and this attracted the interest of other young artists, also interested in promoting their own work.[323] Most probably the truth lies somewhere in the middle, with the idea bouncing from one friend to another, until one (Gramatges) took charge of the bureaucratic steps necessary to register the association.

As mentioned before, when Nuestro Tiempo was first created in February 1951, several young people converged, including the core members of the CCH-CC. It is therefore not surprising that the screenings of the second phase of the CCH-CC, which started in October 1951, had a found a natural setting within the Nuestro Tiempo group. In fact, during part of its first year, the society's main activities were the film screenings, which were actually organized by the members of the CCH-CC. However, several of the signing parties, such as Puig, Cabrera Infante, and Franqui, very soon parted ways with Nuestro Tiempo in order to distance themselves from the ideological direction that this group took. On the other hand, upon their arrival from Italy in 1953, Gutiérrez Alea and Julio García Espinosa became deeply involved with the Cinema section, giving conferences and publishing articles in the magazine.[324]

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[320] Ricardo Luis Hernández Otero, "Introducción," in *Sociedad Cultural Nuestro Tiempo: resistencia y acción*, ed. Ricardo Luis. Hernández Otero (La Habana: Letras Cubanas, 2002), 5.
[321] Chanan, *Cuban Cinema,* 105.
[322] Carlos Franqui, *Diary of the Cuban Revolution*, trans. Georgette Felix et al. (New York: The Viking Press, 1980), 41.
[323] Harold Gramatges, "La Sociedad Cultural Nuestro Tiempo," 1974, reprinted in Hernández Otero, *Sociedad Cultural Nuestro Tiempo*, 281-283.
[324] For more details on the participation of Tomás Gutiérrez Alea and Julio García Espinosa in Nuestro Tiempo, see Chapter 3.

While at times the close link between Nuestro Tiempo and the PSP has been downplayed, that relationship is essential in order to understand Nuestro Tiempo's impact. Very early, Gramatges was approached by Luis Más Martín, a member of the Socialist Youth, to establish the initial link with the PSP.[325] From that moment on, the PSP was instrumental in helping Nuestro Tiempo succeed. The party helped them find a permanent location at the end of 1953, and without its support it would not have been able to publish its magazine for 5 years (1954-1959). Thus, at a time when finding sponsorship for cultural events and publications was extremely difficult, the only association that was able to regularly publish articles about film was Nuestro Tiempo.[326] At the same time, Nuestro Tiempo was an important component of the PSP strategies for the dissemination of radicalized ideas and for mobilization against Batista's interests, as was the effective campaign against the INC.[327]

This was not the first time that the PSP had used cultural activities and the media as a vehicle for party activities. They had done so in a less covert manner in the late 1930s and early 1940s, taking advantage of collaborations and alliances that gave the communists a more open participation in Cuba's political life.[328] In 1938 the PSP created the radio station 1010, the newspaper *Hoy*, and the film company Cuba Sono Films, which all operated rather openly as a successful propaganda tool.[329] From 1938 to 1948, Cuba Sono Films made newsreels and documentaries that were screened at union meetings and other worker-oriented events.[330] However, during the mid-1950s anti-communist sentiment was at its height, and the party had to use organizations like Nuestro Tiempo as a front. In any case, Nuestro Tiempo was repeatedly

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[325] Gramatges stated that he admired the work of communist intellectual figures like Nicolás Guillén, Mirta Aguirre, Carlos Rafael Rodríguez, and José Antonio Portuondo. Gramatges, "La Sociedad Cultural Nuestro Tiempo," 283-284.
[326] Alberto Cardelle, "Las actividades de cultura cinematográfica en Cuba," *Cine Guía*, December 1956/January 1957.
[327] Gramatges, "La Sociedad Cultural Nuestro Tiempo," 295-296.
[328] Louis A. Pérez Jr., *Cuba: Between Reform and Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 211.
[329] Emmanuel Vincenot, "Cinéma et propagande à Cuba: de la ferveur nationaliste à l'engagement révolutionnaire," in *Une histoire mondiale des cinémas de propaganda,* ed. Jean-Pierre Bertin-Maghit (Paris: Ed. Nouveau Monde, 2008), 681-699.
[330] Arturo Agramonte and Luciano Castillo, *Cronología del cine cubano II (1937-1944)*, vol. 2, 4 vols. (La Habana: Ediciones ICAIC, 2012), 92-121; Miriam Sacerio, "¿Qué fue la Cuba Sono Film?," *Bohemia*, June 29, 1984, Digital Library of the Caribbean.

accused of having links to the PSP, and for some time the association's director defended it from those accusations through misleading declarations.[331]

The "Intellectual Commission" of the PSP, headed by Carlos Rafael Rodríguez, Juan Marinello and Mirta Aguirre, was in charge of guiding the members of Nuestro Tiempo towards radical left-wing political positions. However, they were not openly imparting Marxist messages or Soviet propaganda, but rather worked from below to foster the rebellious spirit already widely present through anti-Batista sentiment. As expressed by Rodríguez, a high ranking member of the Communist Party, the Juventud Socialista (Socialist Youth) and the PSP were committed to the "task of helping and guiding that valiant group."[332] They did not recruit convinced communists, but rather progressive elements that would be open to new ideas: "Had Nuestro Tiempo been a space for convinced militants of the Marxist-Leninist ideology, its resonance would have been minimal, because the influence of socialist ideas was still too scarce."[333]

Furthermore, the PSP did not interact with the organization's membership directly, but rather relied on a core group of individuals:

> In order to accomplish its tasks, the Party organized a Bureau within Nuestro Tiempo, integrated by trusted comrades who looked out for the incorporation, through standard democratic means, of the Party's positions and the group's activity. I would like to mention them, as recognition for their devotion and dedication. They were Sergio Aguirre, Santiago Álvarez, Marta Arjona, Antonieta Enríquez, Alfredo Guevara and José Massip. It was them, from the Board of Directors, in close association with Harold Gramatges, whom we met so many times in clandestine meetings during that time, that this precious activity took place.[334]

In the late 1940s and early 1950s, a new generation of cinephiles who attended Valdés-Rodríguez's film course and gathered around the CCH-CC, became seriously involved in promoting cinematic art, writing about film, and making films. However, their energies became dispersed due to their own individual ambitions, as well as to the process of radicalization that

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[331] Gramatges, "La Sociedad Cultural Nuestro Tiempo," 281-306.
[332] Rodríguez, *30 Años de Nuestro Tiempo*, 3.
[333] Rodríguez, *30 Años de Nuestro Tiempo,* 4.
[334] Rodríguez, *30 Años de Nuestro Tiempo,* 6.

followed the March 1952 coup. Through their shared interests, the CCH-CC and Nuestro Tiempo initially joined forces to show the 1951-1952 film program, but by mid-1952, tensions amongst the two groups grew to the point of making that partnership unsustainable. This polarization became even more salient in 1955, when they gravitated towards opposing ends of the political spectrum, with Puig seeking support from the government's INC, while the PSP was leading young people's boycott of Batista institutions through Nuestro Tiempo. These conflicts persisted throughout many decades, resulting in the erasure of CCH-CC from the version of history put forth by ICAIC, Nuestro Tiempo's direct heir. In Chapter 3, I will also discuss the consequences of this rift for the unequal recognition of the amateur filmmaking activities of these two groups. As we have seen with both the CCH-CC and Nuestro Tiempo the issue of originality and ownership over ideas looms large over this generation.

**Neighbourhood Cine Clubs**

The 1950s also saw the emergence of neighbourhood cine-clubs. The Cine-Club Lumière initiated its activities at the end of 1953, at *La Ceiba* neighbourhood in Marianao. Although not much information exists about this group, it is known that members included Osvaldo Ferrer, Manuel Samperio, Armando Montes de Oca, Juan Liñeiro, Guillermo Arrastra, and Ricardo Gómez.[335] Their first activity consisted of the screening of *La perla* (Emilio Fernández, 1947) at the Cine Alba, in December of 1953. It was presented by the film's cinematographer, Gabriel Figueroa, who was in Cuba filming *La rosa blanca* (Emilio Fernández, 1954). While it is unknown how the cine-club members established contact with Figueroa, it is possible that it was through Valdés-Rodríguez, who was a great admirer of his work, and had shown *La perla* in one of his summer courses.[336] Another important activity that took place at this cine-club was the conference given by Italian priest Gabriel Sinaldi, who was involved in a series of film education conferences and workshops from 1953 to 1955 through the CCOC. At the Cine-Club Lumière, he

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[335] These sources offer some information, but many details remain unclear: Arturo Agramonte, *Cronología del cine cubano* (La Habana: Ediciones ICAIC, 1966), 164; María Eulalia Douglas, *La tienda negra: El cine en Cuba, 1897-1990* (La Habana: Cinemateca de Cuba, 1996), 135; Maria Eulalia Douglas, "Los cine clubes en Cuba," *Cine Cubano*, 2008, http://www.cubacine.cult.cu/sitios/revistacinecubano/digital10/centrocap31.htm; Arturo Agramonte and Luciano Castillo, *Cronología del cine cubano IV (1953-1959)*, vol. 4, 4 vols. (La Habana: Ediciones ICAIC, 2016), 57-58.

[336] He frequently loaned Filmoteca films for the screenings. Douglas, "Los cine clubes en Cuba."

highlighted the role of cine-clubs in the acceptance of Italian neorealism during its early days.[337] It is very likely that the connection was established through the CCOC, given that an important Jesuit school, the Colegio de Belén, is situated in the same peripheral region of Havana.

Cine-Club Visión, also known as Sociedad Cultural Cine-Club Visión, was a locally-based initially created in 1955.[338] Through fundraising and membership fees, the young people involved obtained financial support from neighbours and local business, offering in turn regular film screenings and other cultural activities. The cine-club's founder was Luis Costales, the son of the owner of the local grocery store where informal conversations about cinema regularly took place. In 1955, Nelson Rodríguez, the youngest in the group, took Valdés-Rodríguez's course, and this is probably where the idea of creating the cine-club was born. José del Campo Valdés and Norma Torrado Zurbarán obtained the Fox scholarship to take the course in 1956. Other members of the cine-club included Gloria Argüelles, Gisela Domenech, José Rodríguez Calderón, Juan Granda, Rigoberto Águila, Hilda Regueiro, Manuel Cofiño López, Francisco S. Piñón, Gisela Benítez, José Royo, José Antonio Jorge, Manuel Pérez, Manuel Octavio Gómez, and Leo Brouwer. Many of them became well-known personalities in Cuban film circles.

The cine-club was located in the Santos Suárez neighbourhood, but it soon attracted the attention of people in adjoining locations like Luyanó and La Víbora. They held monthly screenings at the Cine Apolo, renting the evening slot from the owner. The day after the screenings, they held cine-debates at the cine-club's locale, an apartment they rented with the association's funds, where they also projected 16 mm films. Their activities expanded beyond film screenings, including theatre plays, art exhibits, music sessions, and conferences. In the press, Valdés-Rodríguez and Walfredo Piñera praised the group's activities.

These neighbourhood-based cine clubs enjoyed the support of Valdés-Rodríguez, who praised their work through his newspaper column. The cine club organizers fostered personal connections with well-known figures in the cultural milieu, who participated in film-related conferences, as well as other cultural activities. At the same time, in the years 1956 to 1958, as

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[337] Arturo Agramonte and Luciano Castillo, *Cronología del cine cubano IV (1953-1959)*, vol. 4, 4 vols. (La Habana: Ediciones ICAIC, 2016), 58.
[338] Luciano Castillo has reconstructed the history of this cine-club based on interviews with some of its main participants: Nelson Rodríguez, Gloria Argüelles, and Manuel Pérez Paredes. Agramonte and Castillo, *Cronología IV*, 252-257.

city-based actions against Batista intensified, the cine-clubs also became the site for political activity.[339] For instance, Cine-Club Visión had political undertones, as some of its founders were involved with the Socialist Youth, and clandestine fighters attended some of their activities, unbeknownst to the rests of the membership.[340] On the other hand, the Catholic cine-clubs responded to a completely different organizational logic.

**Catholic Cine Clubs and the CCOC**

As mentioned in Chapter 1, the CCOC was a key contributor to Cuban film culture in the 1950s through its influential publication *Cine Guía.* Even before the magazine started to circulate, the CCOC was responsible for creating a highly successful cine-club called "Cine-Club Dominical" (Sunday cine-club), which started functioning in April 1952, one Sunday per month, at Cine Duplex. One year later, in April 1953, they expanded their activities and created the Cine-Club Nocturno (Nocturnal Cine Club) and Cine-Club Estudiantil (Student Cine Club), which functioned on the last Monday of the month at Cine 23 y 12.[341] Given CCOC staff's experience and expertise, they also performed as a coordinating body for other cine-clubs that were subsequently created throughout the island, and they supported the Catholic Action branches when they organized film screenings in relation to specific events.

In total, 2000 people were associated with Catholic cine-clubs by 1957, including those outside Havana in places like Camaguey, Sagua la Grande, and Santiago de Cuba.[342] These Catholic cine-clubs addressed a range of different audiences. Adults could become members of the Cine Club Dominical or Cine Club Nocturno, or associate themselves with Church-specific ones, like Cine Club de la Iglesia de la Santa Cruz, or Cine Club de la Parroquia del Espíritu Santo. University students attending the Universidad Católica de Santo Tomás de Villanueva, had access to the university's Department of Cinematography and Cine Club.[343] The Federation of Cuban Catholic Schools (Confederación de Colegios Cubanos Católicos) was also committed to

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[339] For a historical account of city-based actions against Batista, see Julia Sweig, *Inside the Cuban Revolution: Fidel Castro and the urban underground* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2002).
[340] Agramonte and Castillo, *Cronología IV*, 254-256; Feeney, "Hollywood in Havana," 369-370.
[341] "Secuencias," *Cine Guía*, March 1953.
[342] In contrast, membership into secular cine-clubs added up to 1460. Cardelle, "Las actividades de cultura cinematográfica en Cuba," 2, 58.
[343] Valdés-Rodríguez, "En torno a los cine-clubes."

film education. Various Catholic secondary schools, such as Colegio de La Salle (Vedado), Academia de La Salle (Centro Cívico), Colegio de las Ursulinas, Mérici Academy (Marianao), and MM. Esclavas (Marianao), Colegio del Calvario, and Colegio de la Salle (Santiago de Cuba) organized their own cine-clubs. In addition, some cine-clubs were specifically designed for the clergy, like the Cine Club del Circulo Sacerdotal Pio X, and Cine Club Pio XII.

The Catholic Church played a defining role in the education of Cuban audiences. Throughout the first few decades of the twentieth century, various Catholic groups were involved in the publication of lists classifying films according to their moral criteria. However, towards the end of the 1940s the strongly moralistic tone had gradually softened, and a more nuanced approach was embraced.[344] This shift was in large part the result of a post-war initiative carried out by the International Catholic Office for Cinema (*Organisation Catholique Internationale du Cinéma*, OCIC), an organization formed in Europe in 1928 to coordinate and implement Catholic film policy across several national offices.[345] In the late 1940s, OCIC pursued an intensive process of expansion in Latin America, opening several national branches in the region. The Havana office was particularly receptive to OCIC's more progressive outlook during this period, putting the emphasis on cinema's capacity to enhance religious faith and clarify ethical dilemmas. CCOC organizers were less concerned with morality than they were with film aesthetics and the transformative and educational potential of the viewing experience.

Catholic cine-clubs followed a similar format across the world. *Cine Guía* reprinted an article describing the typical unfolding of a cine-club session.[346] First, the film was introduced through a short presentation (not longer than 10 minutes) meant to contextualize the film in relation to its place in the history of cinema and within a director's filmography. The cine-debate director pointed out specific passages in the film that the audience should pay special attention to, restraining from offering a critical stance at this stage. For the after-screening discussion, the

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[344] Alberto Ramos, "Cine e Iglesia Católica en Cuba (1934-1950), in *Huellas olvidadas del cine cubano*, ed. Armando Pérez Padrón (Santiago de Cuba: Editorial Oriente, 2010), 106-124.
[345] Léo Bonneville, *Soixante-dix ans au service du cinéma et de l'audiovisuel: Organisation Catholique Internationale du Cinéma, OCIC* (Saint-Laurent, Québec: Fides, 1998); Guido Convents, "Resisting the Lure of the Modern World: Catholics, International Politics and the Establishment of the International Catholic Office for Cinema (1918-1928)," in *Moralizing Cinema: Film, Catholicism and Power*, eds. Daniel Biltereyst and Daniela Treveri Gennari (New York; London: Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group, 2015), 19-34.
[346] Leo Bonneville, "Una sesión de cine club," *Cine Guía,* June 1956.

recommendation was to be adaptable depending on the film. A competent cine-debate director would keep in mind that his main function was to spark discussion and foster participation. The main goal of the session was to lead the audience towards identifying the main idea in the film. They would do this by avoiding star centered appraisals, and by learning how all cinematic expressive means (framing, camera movements, editing) work towards creating a unit of meaning. The audience was to leave with an understanding of the film's main ideas, and with a critical stance on the film's merits. In Cuba, they introduced the film at the beginning of the session, offered a printed program with notes and a fact sheet about the film, held a debate or discussion at the end of the screening, and sold their magazine, *Cine Guía*. They assigned great importance to the role of the debate moderator, the "director de cine debate", as essential to the development of the cine-club sessions. For this reason, CCOC staff like Manuel Fernández and Piñera took Valdés-Rodríguez's course in 1950, and also attended special training sessions offered through OCIC.[347]

It is important to stress that the CCOC had a progressive attitude towards moral classification, and that they were constantly in search of open-minded approaches towards morality as represented in the cinema.[348] They allowed for a reasonable degree of latitude concerning representation in film. Rather than focusing on the content of the profilmic, they gave more importance to the opportunities created by any given film to generate rational discussions about ethical and moral dilemmas. OCIC members warned against a strictly ethical approach to movies:

> It is necessary to avoid moralizing discussions: certain debate moderators only deal with the ethical aspect of the film. That shows a lack of integrity. But it is equally necessary to banish exclusively aesthetic discussions: a concern with formal value often makes one forget the content of the films. Undoubtedly, a balanced dosage of these two aspects will facilitate more wide-ranging and fair judgments.[349]

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[347] Cardelle, "Las actividades de cultura cinematográfica en Cuba, 58-59.
[348] "Primer Plano: En estudio la orientación moral del cine," *Cine Guía,* May 1954.
[349] Bonneville, "Una sesión de cine club," 31-32.

Like its counterparts, Catholic cine-clubs relied on the films available through distribution houses, but they also enjoyed the benefits of belonging to the powerful international network created by OCIC, their parent organization. This gave them access to regular communication and up to date information about the world of cinema. Moreover, they were directly connected to the numerous Church-related schools and associations in existence. This made the process of advertising their activities, gathering new members, and sustaining a long-term strategy much more feasible than in the case of cine-clubs that lacked local institutional support. However, in time, the model of film culture offered by the network of Catholic cine-clubs proved to be less malleable than the university's. From 1959 onwards cine-club activities became more difficult to organize and less frequent, and by 1960 its key organizers went into exile. The government proscribed religious practice, leading to the concealment of faith, the demise of the Church, and the disappearance of its secular chapters.[350] As will be detailed below, the film institute integrated all film production, distribution, and exhibition into a single coordinating unit, making it impossible for cine-clubs to operate independently. While the CCOC cine-clubs had been successful enough to rent movie theater space according to their needs, they were now faced with ICAIC's control of film exhibition venues and policy.

**Specificities of Noncommercial Film Culture in Pre-revolutionary Cuba**

Assessing the landscape of noncommercial film culture in pre-revolutionary Cuba, one important element that needs to be considered is the different nature of the film viewing contexts that were created through various forms of association. Malte Hagener differentiates between bottom-up organizations, normally defined as audience associations that emerge from grassroots activities, and top-down initiatives such as "politically motivated screening events for an audience of party members", or organized by unions and left-wing associations "in order to mobilise members for political action, either for singular events or for a regular audience organization."[351] While the Cine de Arte, CCH-CC, and neighbouhood cine-clubs resemble

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[350] Mateo Jover Marimón, "The Church," in *Revolutionary Change in Cuba*, ed. Carmelo Mesa-Lago, (Pittsburgh, PA.: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1971), 399-426; Joseph Holbrook, "The Catholic Church in Cuba, 1959-62: The Clash of Ideologies," *International Journal of Cuban Studies* 2, no. 3/4 (2010): 264–75.
[351] Malte Hagener, *Moving Forward, Looking Back: The European Avant-Garde and the Invention of Film Culture, 1919-1939* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2007), 86.

traditional audience-led cine-clubs, Nuestro Tiempo is closer to a top-down politicized initiative. Unsurprisingly, it was precisely Nuestro Tiempo's cluster that was enlisted in the early days of 1959 to lead instructional activities within the Rebel Army, and to build ICAIC shortly after.

In general, Cuban cine-clubs did not achieve the same level of reach and stability as the European cine-clubs or the North American film societies. In Europe, the generative force of the avant-garde had a lasting effect that first consolidated into the film societies and cine-clubs of the 1920s, and later evolved into durable institutional formations such as film festivals, film archives, and film schools from the 1930s onwards.[352] That transition into stable institutions was possible because of the convergence of support from national governments and film industries. In Cuba, the lack of government interest in supporting the local film industry also meant that noncommercial cinema-related projects were even further away from aspiring to any substantial financial backing. Instead, cine-clubs remained for the most part small initiatives that relied very heavily on their relationship with influential figures like Valdés-Rodríguez. He selectively offered his support to some ex-students and like-minded people, allowing them to borrow films from the university film library, acting as guest speaker in their events, and publishing accounts of their activities for the press.

While the Department of Cinematography and its Filmoteca also faced the challenge of insufficient funding, being embedded in Cuba's main institution of higher education provided it with a certain level of safeguard. On the other hand, in spite of their best efforts, young people like Puig and Vigón could not make their dream of a fully functioning Cuban cinematheque become a reality. Their ambitions were in direct competition with those of Valdés-Rodríguez, and no alternative sources of financial support came to their rescue. This situation is vastly different from that of the United States, where important cultural institutions were often sponsored by philanthropic donors instead of public funds. For instance, the patronage of the Rockefeller foundation enabled the creation and subsequent prosperity of the Museum of Modern Art Film Library, which became a fundamental center for film archival and the formulation and dissemination of film-historical knowledge. The presence of such a strong funding body ensured that the convergence of ideas, knowledge, and administrative competence crystallized into an

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[352] Hagener, *The European Avant-Garde and the Invention of Film Culture*; Hagener, *The Emergence of Film Culture*.

enduring institution in the mid-1930s.[353] On the other hand, all the aptitude and energy of the Cubans trying to lift the CCH-CC off the ground in the early 1950s were not enough not make it succeed. Many conditions were ready in the transition from the 1940s to the 1950s, but the consolidation of a properly funded institution for the preservation, circulation, and exhibition of films did not take place until a decade later.

Cubans also faced a limited range of options for finding suitable screening spaces. The owners of movie theaters (the *cines*) were highly dependent on box office revenue to keep their businesses profitable. They could not afford to give up the slot of a theatrical release unless they could be given some kind of assurance that they would meet basic financial targets. The situation is not comparable to that of the United States, where specialized and art house movie theaters formed an extensive alternative circuit for less commercially-oriented cinema, comprising documentary, experimental, educational, scientific, and amateur films.[354] In contrast, only a handful of Havana movie theaters were in a position to hosts cine-club screenings. For instance, Cine Duplex, a 500-seat theater which concentrated on programming shorts, documentaries, and animated films, was the first site for the Sunday screenings of the Catholic cine-clubs, followed by Arte y Cinema La Rampa (900 seats), which specialized in European films from the mid-1950s on, and Cine Trianón (1,100 seats). The evening screenings and the student cine-clubs took place at the larger Cine 23 y 12 (1492 seats). The Catholic cine-clubs were the only ones that could count on a reliable membership base that allowed them to establish mutually beneficial partnerships with those *cines*. They had the enormous advantage of counting on their own journalistic and educational branches, which ensured stable channels of communication and outreach. Yet, they had to move their screenings to smaller venues, such as the Cine Foxa (252 seats), until they had to completely cease their activities when the state took control of public exhibition venues, as will be detailed in the following pages.

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[353] Haidee Wasson, *Museum Movies: The Museum of Modern Art and the Birth of Art Cinema* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).
[354] Anthony Slide, *Before Video: A History of the Non-Theatrical Film* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1992); Barbara Wilinsky, *Sure Seaters: The Emergence of Art House Cinema* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001); Ben Davis, "Beginnings of the Film Society Movement in the U.S," *Film & History* 24, no. 3/4 (1994): 6–26; Wasson, *Museum Movies*.

## 2. ICAIC and the Institutionalization of Film Exhibition

### The Process of Nationalization Shifts the Industrial Landscape (1959-1965)

The founding of ICAIC epitomizes a radically different attitude of the state towards cinema and film culture on the island. Fidel Castro's government put significant weight on certain areas of social life such as culture and education. Thus, the narrative of the initial years of the Cuban Revolution emphasizes literacy campaigns, university reforms, popular access to "bourgeois" culture and the opening of countless schools and educational centers. Cinema's importance for the task of creating a revolutionary conscience was well-recognized in Marxist circles even before the Revolution, but after 1959, the institutions charged with the cultural re-awakening of the nation had the opportunity to translate this desire into policy. The notion of cine clubs, which had traditionally served to discuss and compare interpretations of films by small groups of people, were transformed to include large-scale gatherings known as "popular cine-debates" and the reach of noncommercial film exhibition was expanded through the creation of a well-funded cinematheque and its outreach departments.

However, ICAIC did not immediately occupy the central place in Cuban cinema and culture that it is presently known for. The beginnings of the "Instituto del Cine" in the years 1959 and 1960 did not take place in a vacuum, but rather built on an already existing film culture. At the same time that the institute's leadership sought the necessary resources for film production, it also envisioned its solid participation in the film exhibition sector. In order to achieve this, it had to establish a presence locally, and it did so by absorbing the people and information coming from existing cine clubs and cinephiles. As detailed in the previous section, the generation of cinephiles that came of age in the 1940s and 1950s formed an identifiable group of people highly committed to promoting cinema's artistic and social potential. With the arrival of ICAIC on the cultural scene, they saw the promise of an institution fully supported by the new revolutionary government. In Chapter 1 I showed that this was a sentiment shared by intellectuals like Valdés-Rodríguez, but it should be noted that those invested in the film business and film culture at large, also placed much hope in the new film institute.

The film business community welcomed the new government and made known their aspiration to participate in its provisions for cinema. In the pages of *Cinema* various distributors and exhibitors proclaimed their support. One January 1959 article gives us useful insight into the

expectations of the film business sector, expressing the anticipation that the new government would create the desired stable environment in which investors would be much more open to finance Cuban film productions.[355] However, this was a short-lived expectation. In the span of just a few years, private property, especially large enterprises, were transferred to the state. All film production facilities, theatrical screens, and stock catalogue were gradually transferred to the film institute. The main film exhibition circuits were nationalized in October 1960, and the local branches of Hollywood distribution houses in May 1961. As the process of nationalization took shape and the government declared its socialist ideology in April 1961, foreign businesses and the local entrepreneurial class became targets of political, economic and social isolation, leading to a massive exodus.[356]

At first, the confiscation of US-owned monopolies and of properties owned by Batista's sympathizers was very welcome by the population at large.[357] However, the pace of nationalization started to intensify in the summer of 1960, affecting not only U.S properties in Cuba, but also "medium and large-size businesses". The state entity created to take care of this process and deal with the funds obtained was the Ministerio de Recuperación de Bienes Malversados *(*Ministry of Ill-Gotten Goods). As historian Lillian Guerra puts it "in the space of four months, the Cuban state suddenly gained control over 80 percent of the economy and became responsible for producing 90 percent of Cuba's exports. The state also controlled the banking system, railroads, ports, airlines, department stores, hotels, casinos, bars, cafeterias, and most movie houses."[358]

The rise of ICAIC is intrinsically linked to the nationalization of the film business infrastructure, but this was not a predictable outcome in the euphoric days of early 1959.

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[355] Enrique Aguero Hidalgo, "Cruzada pro-cine cubano," *Cinema,* January 1959.
[356] Cuba's economic elite was the first to leave the island. It is estimated that a total of 173,000 property owners, business executives and high ranking professionals fled from 1959 to 1962. The second wave of emigration encompassed a larger group of 250,000 that left the island in a span of 9 years (1965-1974). This group consisted of Cubans with families in the United States, small business owners, middle class Cubans and qualified workers. Silvia Pedraza, "Olas migratorias desde 1959 entre el desencanto y la desesperanza", *El Nuevo Herald*, May 30, 2008, https://www.elnuevoherald.com/ultimas-noticias/article1933014.html.
[357] Lillian Guerra, *Visions of Power in Cuba: Revolution, Redemption, and Resistance, 1959-1971* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), chap. 1, Kobo.
[358] Guerra, *Visions of Power*, chap. 4.

Actually, key figures of the Cuban film business were enthusiastic about the government's plans. For instance, an article by producer and director Ramón Peón, written on February 28, 1959, conveys his excitement about the preliminary plans towards an upcoming law concerning the development of Cuban cinema.[359] Law 169 was indeed signed on March 20th, 1959, and the official announcement was published on March 24th.[360] A few days later, *Cinema* printed the first article commenting the text of that legal document. It specified the institute's mission to build up Cuban cinema from the founding principle that "cinema is an art".[361] It also explained that ICAIC's work would start by creating three committees: Committee for Economic Study and Industrial Organization, Committee for Cinematographic Culture and Technique, and a Financing Committee. These preliminary study committees indicated that ICAIC was taking a smart, global approach to an old problem, but it did not signal any potential threat to existing structures. In April, Enrique Perdices, editor of *Cinema* and president of the ARTYC, also delivered a hopeful message, highlighting aspects of the association's recent meeting with Alfredo Guevara, and specifying that a starting budget of five million pesos had been destined to propel cinema on the island. Guevara, the former head of the Cinema section of Nuestro Tiempo and newly appointed president of ICAIC was an unfamiliar name to *Cinema*'s readership. Thus, Perdices found it necessary to introduce him as a "young man, modest, cultivated, and understanding".[362]

Cuban film directors and producers were encouraged by these words. Indeed, they had been lobbying to obtain government support for decades. At various junctures, associations such as the Committee Pro National Cinema, the Council for the Promotion of the Cinematographic Industry, and the Executive Commission for the Cinematographic Industry, had worked towards obtaining and managing government funds in support of Cuban film production.[363] However, these plans either failed materialize or never delivered concrete results. For the most part, the

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[359] Ramón Peón, "Sobre el cine cubano. Ahora o nunca," *Cinema*, March 1959.
[360] Agramonte, *Cronología del cine cubano*, 115.
[361] Mario Rodriguez Alemán, "Instituto del Cine," *Cinema,* March 29, 1959.
[362] Enrique Perdices, "Son cosas nuestras," *Cinema*, April 1959.
[363] For the Committee Pro National Cinema (Comité o Patronato Pro Cine Cubano), see Agramonte and Castillo, *Cronología II*, 357-359. For the Council for the Promotion of the Cinematographic Industry (Patronato para el Fomento de la Industria Cinematográfica) and the Executive Commission for the Cinematographic Industry (Comisión Ejecutiva para la Industria Cinematográfica, CEPLIC), see Agramonte and Castillo, *Cronología III*, 163-166, 230-231, 375-378.

governments of Carlos Prío Socarrás (1948-1952) and Fulgencio Batista (1952-1958) made empty gestures that consistently disappointed national expectations. Moreover, the bank that was created to stimulate film production, Bank for the Promotion of Cuban Agriculture and Industry (Banco Fomento Agrícola e Industrial de Cuba, BANFAIC) proved to be badly conceived and insufficient. The main issue was that a corrupt government would give financial advantages and privileges to a small circle of close allies, and to foreign enterprises. For instance, BANFAIC committed dollar amounts to foreign productions that would be filmed on the island, instead of supporting national stories.[364] Thus, when news that ICAIC would be well funded by the new government reached the film business circle, many hoped to reap the benefits from new forms of support. However, as I explain in more detail in Chapter 3, it soon became evident that the established film entrepreneurs would not fare well in the new exclusionary system.

The private companies and funding structures that enabled Cuban film production during the pre-revolutionary period did not disappear overnight. In his indispensable chronology, film historian Luciano Castillo summarizes the film-related activities of the year 1959.[365] He makes reference to the film studios, entrepreneurial associations, dubbing companies, advertising agencies, and laboratories that continued functioning for a short time until they were nationalized. For instance, it is interesting to note that the first post-revolutionary film, the short *Esta tierra nuestra* (Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, 1959), was shot with film equipment borrowed from entrepreneur José Manuel Samaniego Conde.[366] At the same time, several documentaries were produced by the existing newsreel companies, which were the best equipped to continue making films.[367] During the Batista years they had shot their own footage of important events as they unfolded, and in 1959 they turned this material into very well-received compilation

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[364] "¿Cine cubano?," *Nuestro Tiempo*, January 1956, reprinted in Hernández Otero, *Sociedad Cultural Nuestro Tiempo,* 142-144.
[365] Luciano Castillo, "1959: Para una cronología del año de las luces," in *Le cinéma cubain: identité et regards de l'intérieur*, ed. Sandra Hernández (Nantes: CRINI, Centre de recherches sur les identités nationales et l'interculturalité-Université de Nantes, 2006), 15-36; Agramonte and Castillo, *Cronología IV,* 453-571.
[366] Castillo, "1959," 17.
[367] See especially Emmanuel Vincenot, "Cineperiódico, la otra memoria filmada de la Revolución Cubana," *Cuba Encuentro*, 2014, https://www.cubaencuentro.com/cultura/articulos/cineperiodico-la-otra-memoria-filmada-de-la-revolucion-cubana-319274.

documentaries about the anti-dictatorship movement, such as *El gran recuento* (Cineperiódico, 1959), *Cuba 1959* (Cineperiódico), *Sierra Maestra / De la tiranía a la libertad* (NotiCuba, 1959), and *Gesta Inmortal* (Noticiario Cubacolor).[368] The prolific producer and director Manolo Alonso also put together two comedies: *Soy un bicho* (1959) and *Allá va eso* (1960). For each of these two films he edited together the comedy sketches sponsored by the Cuban beer company "Polar", which were regularly added to his newsreel, Noticiario Nacional Excelsior.[369]

Privately financed projects that were shot or released between 1959 and 1960 include the feature films *La vida comienza ahora* (Antonio Vazquez Gallo, 1959), *La vuelta a Cuba en 80 minutos* (José Manuel Samaniego Conde, 1959), and *Mares de Pasión* (Manuel de la Pedrosa, 1960). Non-fiction films were also produced, such as *¡Adelante Cubanos!* (José A. García Cuenca, 1959), *Surcos de libertad* (Manuel de la Pedrosa, 1959), and amateur films. Among the foreign productions that were shot on location in Cuba during this period the most notable one is *Our man in Havana* (Carol Reed, 1959). The Mexican films *Aquí están los Villalobos* and *La justicia de los Villalobos* (Enrique Zambrano, 1959), and the American productions *Kiss her Goodbye* (Al Lipton, 1959), *Catch me if you can* (Don Weis, 1959), and *Yanki No!* (Albert Maysles, 1960) were also filmed in Cuba. In addition, maverick projects shot during this time include *The Truth about Castro Revolution/Cuban Story* (Victor Pahlen, 1959) *Cuban Rebel Girls* (Barry Mahon, 1959) (both involving Errol Flynn), and *Pier 5, Havana* (Edward L. Cahn, 1959), and *Rebellion in Cuba* (Albert C. Gannaway, 1960).[370]

The dissimilar nature of all these projects took place concurrently with the first crop of films made by the three production entities created in the post-revolutionary context. These included the Department of Culture of the Rebel Army, with *Esta tierra nuestra* (Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, 1959) and *La vivienda* (Julio García Espinosa, 1959), the Department of Culture of the Ministry of Education, with *Los tiempos del joven Martí* (José Massip, 1960), and ICAIC,

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[368] Douglas, *La tienda negra*, 149; Castillo, "1959," 22-23, José Manuel Valdés-Rodríguez, "El cine y la hazaña cubana de la libertad," *Vida Universitaria*, January/March 1959; Agramonte and Castillo, *Cronología IV,* 471-472.

[369] Manolo Alonso directed two significant feature films during the 1950s: *Siete muertes a plazo fijo* (1950) and *Casta de roble* (1953). He was also an astute and successful entrepreneur, who owned a great portion of the filmmaking infrastructure throughout the decade. Castillo, "1959," 23; Agramonte and Castillo, *Cronología IV*, 538-542.

[370] Alberto Elena, "Cuba Sí! Errol Flynn and the Adventure of Revolution," *Journal of Popular Film & Television* 41, no. 1 (2013): 10–19, https://doi.org/10.1080/01956051.2012.684078.

with *Sexto aniversario* (Julio García Espinosa, 1959), *¿Por qué nació el Ejército Rebelde?* (José Massip, 1959), *¿Qué es una cooperativa?* (Manuel Octavio Gómez, 1959), and *Tierra Olvidada* (Oscar Torres, 1959), *Venceremos* (Jorge Fraga, 1960), Carnaval (José Massot, Fausto Canel, 1960), *Un año de libertad* (Julio García Espinosa, 1960), *Patria o muerte* (Julio García Espinosa, 1960), *Escuelas rurales* (Néstor Almendros, 1960), *Ritmo de Cuba* (Néstor Almendros, 1960), *Asamblea General* (Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, 1960), and *El negro* (Eduardo Manet, 1960). At the same time, foreign directors shot films in Cuba in collaboration with ICAIC, training many young filmmakers in the process. The documentaries *Carnet de viaje (Travel Notebook,* Joris Ivens, 1961*)*, *Pueblo armado (A People in Arms,* Joris Ivens, 1961*)*, and *Cuba Sí* (Chris Marker, 1961), are the earliest examples of this trend.[371] By 1961, advertising and film facilities became nationalized, and the strict nature of ICAIC's policy towards filmmaking and film exhibition was established. From that point on, ICAIC became the only film production entity with access to theatrical releases.

Although film production in pre-revolutionary Cuba was limited and faced a myriad of challenges, the film exhibition sector was large and in the second half of the 1950s showed clear signs of diversification. According to data compiled by Castillo, at the end of 1958 Cuba's population reached close to 6 million people (5,829,029), with access to 519 movie theaters, for a total of 396,138 seats. In addition, another 76 screens were available for 16 mm projection, and three drive-in cinemas existed in Havana. In comparison, all the countries in Central America (excluding Mexico) had a combined total of 357 cinemas, and all the countries of the Caribbean had a combined total of 245.[372] With such a vast network of movie theaters available on the island, especially in the capital, entrepreneurs became increasingly receptive to changes in the audience's preferences and started catering to different tastes. For instance, in April 1955, a brand new cinema, Arte y Cinema La Rampa, opened in a central location of the modern Vedado neighbourhood.[373] Its owner, Ventura Dellunde was targeting what he recognized as a new type of audience interested in cinema's artistic qualities rather than on popular entertainment. As he

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[371] Other films made by Western Europeans in Cuba during the early 1960s include *Al compás de Cuba* (Mario Gallo, 1960), *Arriba el campesino* (Mario Gallo, 1960), *Salut les cubains* (Agnès Varda, 1963), *El otro Cristóbal* (Armand Gatti, 1963), and *Ellas* (Theodor Christensen, 1964).
[372] Castillo, "1959," 21-22.
[373] "Figuras y sucesos de 1955," *Cine Guía,* January/February 1956.

declared in an interview: "The quality audience interested in the great works of cinematography has undoubtedly doubled in the last three years, thanks to educational initiatives, to the cine-clubs, to *Cine Guía*, and to good constructive film criticism in general." From his business perspective, it made sense to respond to the increasing demand of audiences with more specific taste. He was convinced that the cinema "no doubt tends to, and will become, an art for the minority. By my calculations, more than forty second-class movie theaters will close next year in Havana."[374]

The film exhibition sector was the first one affected by the nationalizations. While the main film distribution houses remained active until mid 1961, as early as December 1959, Cine de Arte y Ensayo La Rampa was expropriated.[375] It became the place where ICAIC showcased its first achievements. For instance, the first program of ICAIC short films was released there in August 1960, as was ICAIC's first feature film, *Historias de la Revolución* (Tomás Gutiérrez Alea) in December of that year.[376] Between December 1959 and October 1960, several other movie theaters such as Cine Riviera, Cine Acapulco and Cine Lido were nationalized. On October 13, 1960, a new decree, Law 890, expanded the extent of the expropriations, and within a year, all the main movie theaters were transferred to ICAIC.[377]

According to historian Louis Pérez Jr. this wave of expropriations had a different character than previous ones:

> What distinguished the October 13 expropriations from previous state seizures, however, was that the government nationalized a broad range of private enterprises irrespective of national ownership. For the first time since the confiscation of *batistiano* property, the state moved against non-agricultural Cuban-owned interests. A total of 382 private enterprises were expropriated, including sugar mills, department stores, and cinemas.[378]

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[374] "Una encuesta sobre crisis actual y futuro del cine," *Cine Guía*, September 1958.
[375] Douglas, *La tienda negra*, 148.
[376] Mirta Aguirre, "Festival de cortometrajes," *Hoy*, August 3, 1960, reprinted in *Crónicas de Cine*, eds. Marcia Castillo and Olivia Miranda, vol. 2, 2 vols. (La Habana: Editorial Letras Cubanas, 1989), 354-355; Douglas, *La tienda negra*, 154.
[377] Douglas, *La tienda negra*, 153.
[378] Pérez, *Between Reform and Revolution*, 248.

The number of distribution houses remained relatively stable from 20 in 1959 to 21 in 1960. This comprised both Cuban-owned companies and local branches of the main Hollywood distributors. While three of the American companies ceased working in Cuba in 1959 (Republic Pictures, Paramount, and RKO-Radio), the others had no intention of losing the Cuban export market. Even though they stopped being paid since May or June 1960, they decided to keep showing American films rather than giving up on this commercial outlet.[379] Local entrepreneurs were equally determined to continue in business. Along with J. Arthur Rank, the company Distribuidora de Películas Europeas, S.A., founded by seasoned film distribution businessman Justo Suárez Calderaro, acquired Paramount's stock. Another Cuban company, founded by Néstor Sánchez and Aníbal Fernández with the name Motion Pictures, picked up Republic's supply.[380]

The main Hollywood distributors, Fox, United Artists, MGM, Columbia, Warner, Universal, continued to announce their upcoming releases, until they were nationalized in May 1961, leaving their stock catalogue behind.[381] The magazine *Cinema* announced the end of American film distribution with the headline "ICAIC intervenes North American film distribution houses." The article explains that all of their film prints were acquired by the new centralized film distribution center, the Consolidado de Distribución Cinematográfica ICAIC (ICAIC Combined Cinematographic Distribution).[382] Thus, ICAIC gained full access to hand-pick the films they wanted to ban or continue showing. Alfredo Guevara personally oversaw the intervention, and he made a point of reporting to the press that he set aside the films of Charles Chaplin, previously held by United Artists, so that they could be widely circulated, and as a gesture of homage to this "friend of the Cuban Revolution and artist who has fought against imperialism from within."[383] The intervention was turned into one of many public spectacles of

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[379] "See No Policy Change Toward Cuban Market," *Motion Picture Daily*, October 26, 1960, Media History Digital Library.
[380] Pedro Pablo Chávez, ed., *Anuario Cinematográfico y Radial Cubano 1959* (La Habana, 1959), 42.
[381] Douglas, *La tienda negra*, 156.
[382] The Consolidado de Distribución Cinematográfica ICAIC took possession of the nationalized film distribution houses, taking over all their film prints and documentation. It was later known as Distribuidora Nacional de Películas.
[383] "Interviene el ICAIC las distribuidoras cinematográficas norteamericanas," *Cinema,* May 1961.

revolutionarity, immortalized in ICAIC's Newsreel # 49, under a segment called "Distribuidores de veneno" ("Distributors of Poison").[384] Meanwhile, other smaller distributors continued to operate, supplying a modest number of international releases from Mexico, Europe, and Japan, but by January 1965 both foreign and national distributors had been integrated into ICAIC.[385]

**ICAIC Calls for Meeting of Cine Clubs (April 1959)**

People involved in the film business were deliberately prevented from engaging with ICAIC, as will be shown in Chapter 3. On the other hand, the film institute sought to secure the support of those who were already active in noncommercial film culture, especially young people. With this in mind, Guevara organized a meeting of cine clubs in April 1959, just one month after the creation of the film institute.[386] This event took place in Santiago de Cuba, and it provided an opportunity for the attendees to sign a document expressing their support for the government's vision of a national film industry that would strengthen and defend revolutionary ideals.[387] This was the first of several documents that would be signed throughout the years, capturing the essential requirements of revolutionarity at specific moments in time. The participants included several people who had been invested in diversifying the film culture of the 1950s, either as cine club organizers or in other capacities.[388] With this meeting, ICAIC officials looked forward to a strong national cine club movement. They intended to extend the basic idea of groups of people meeting regularly to watch and discuss movies beyond the middle-class educated target audience. They now conceived of cine clubs as capable of reaching the uneducated and the illiterate, and fomenting in them "the taste and appreciation for good cinema, a cinema that educates and guides [...], passing judgment on those works that don't teach the people the true causes of their suffering."[389]

The recruitment effort of April 1959 enlarged the list of potential ICAIC members, but it did not have a direct effect on the proliferation of cine clubs. One year later, in early 1960,

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[384] Noticiero ICAIC No. 49, May 15, 1961, DVD.
[385] Douglas, *La tienda negra*, 156, 166.
[386] Douglas, *La tienda negra*, 147.
[387] Juan Liñeiro, "Los cines-clubs en la Revolución," *Noticias de Hoy*, May 20, 1959, Digital Library of the Caribbean.
[388] Antonio Bosch, "Empezará a ser realidad los planes del cine cubano. Alfredo Guevara ante los cine-clubs," *Cinema*, May 1959.
[389] Liñeiro, "Los cines-clubs".

ICAIC was still trying to encourage potential cine club organizers. An article in ICAIC's new magazine, *Cine Cubano*, provided detailed information on how to create a cine club, its objectives and the costs associated with it. Much of the advice related to how to obtain the films, reaching out to film sources such as distribution houses and foreign embassies.[390] Yet, the cine club model promoted in the article corresponded to a paradigm that was gradually becoming obsolete. Given the success of large-scale film events known as popular cine-debates, at the expense of traditional cine clubs, one could see the afore-mentioned article as a way to call attention to the difference between the two. The article's authors set them apart by explaining that while cine-debates only require spectator's attendance to a screening and their participation in the post-screening discussion, cine clubs require higher levels of commitment, such as the creation of a library of film books and specialized magazines, the organization of and participation in talks, conferences and courses on different aspects of film and the creation of experimental films.[391] We can add that the difference between one and the other also lies in the top-down direction of the cine-debates, to which a group of people are invited to or told to participate in, and the contrasting characteristics of the cine-clubs that are built from the bottom up.

At the time of its inception, the new institution did not take responsibility for the wide spectrum of film activities right away, and was still largely dependent on collaboration with individuals connected to venues like the University of Havana in order to host special screenings. As outlined above, in 1959 and 1960, pre-existing production interests ranging from privately funded features and documentaries to amateur short films were still active. ICAIC initiated production with several short documentaries and two feature films, but at this point it was imperative to provide the mostly inexperienced personnel with training and learning opportunities. A few years would pass before ICAIC's specific subdivisions, such as its cinematheque, became functional and not just nominal.

The meaning of "cine club" evolved under the new circumstances. From 1960 on, the terminology for discussing this phenomenon is very slippery, as the terms "cine club", "cine-debates", and "cinemateca" were sometimes used interchangeably, or at least inconsistently.

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[390] Héctor García Mesa and José del Campo, "¿Qué es un cine club?," *Cine Cubano*, 1960.
[391] García Mesa and del Campo, "¿Qué es un cine club?".

Noncommercial screenings were organized by pre-revolutionary entities such as the University of Havana's Department of Cinematography and the CCOC, as well as new cultural bodies like the reorganized Department of Culture of the Education Ministry (later CNC), and ICAIC. What follows provides insight into one of the most recurring practices of this period, the *cine-debates populares*.

**The Expansion of Cine-debates**

The term "cine-debate" originally referred to the method of conducting viewing sessions at the Catholic cine clubs. They involved an introduction before the film and a discussion after, led by a knowledgeable moderator.[392] Outside of the religious sphere, Valdés-Rodríguez' university screenings followed a similar approach, with introductory words and post-screening discussions built into the film viewing session. In the context of the mass mobilizations of 1959, the term was borrowed to refer to large-scale events known as *cine-debates populares*.

The first post-revolutionary adoption of the term occurred very early. The guerrilla forces that overthrew Batista – organized under the name of Rebel Army – took power on the 1st of January 1959, when the dictator fled the island. Soon after, the fighters occupied the previous regime's military encampments.[393] Many of them were of peasant origin and they were temporarily housed in the old military camps, which were equipped with screening facilities. The Department of Culture of the Rebel Army made use of these resources by setting up a Cinema section, which started around February 1959. They carried out film screenings, referred to as cine-debates, with the goal of increasing the educational level of the humblest members of the guerrilla forces.[394]

The new military also organized cine-debates in commercial movie theatres located in the eastern part of the island, where they had operated for several years.[395] For instance, the Manzanillo Revolutionary Cine Club, in Oriente province, operated at the town's Rex Cinema in October of 1959. From the outset, the terms "cine club" and "cine-debate" were used with flexibility to refer to any type of screening that included a discussion. In the Manzanillo case, the

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[392] Nora Watson, *Elementos para un cine-debate* (Buenos Aires: Dirección Central de Cine y Teatro, A.C.A, 1957).
[393] Pérez Jr., *Cuba: Between Reform and Revolution*, 236.
[394] Castillo, "1959," 16.
[395] Liñeiro, "Los cine-clubs".

"Revolutionary Cine Club" did not exist in the minds of the movie-goers until it was announced to them. One observer's account suggests that the link between the cine club and its purpose may have been unexpected for the audience at first:

> [b]ut there were more surprises. When the lights went on and the audience was already making their way to the doors, a member of the Rebel Army's Department of Culture asked them to stay in their seats and explained the cultural purpose of the Department's film screenings, and requested the participants to express their opinion about the film.[396]

In the capital, similar film events were promoted under the name *cine-debates populares*. The word "popular", meaning "of the people", was no doubt used in order to stress the non-elitist character of the screenings. In a series of articles, Mario Rodríguez Alemán announced and promoted these activities as part of an ambitious plan by the revolutionary government in Havana to bring the arts to the masses through music, cinema, theatre and visual arts initiatives. The first *cine-debates populares* took place in three Havana movie theatres, but the number of cinemas hosting these events gradually multiplied, as did the number of screening sessions scheduled. In August 1959, a new funding system called Cooperativa Popular de Arte (Popular Art Cooperative) was created in order to finance these events. For a monthly fee of 25 cents, members had the opportunity to enjoy plays, visual arts exhibits, concerts and cine-debates.[397] This membership system functioned similarly to traditional cine clubs, but it extended access to other cultural forms.

The popular cine-debates, like most public events in the early years of the Cuban Revolution, had a political character.[398] As explained in one of their brochures, "a cine-debate is something other than an activity to entertain the public, it is a practical system of popular orientation, an instrument of education and culture."[399] Initially, these Sunday morning activities

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[396] Oscar Mas, "Cine-club revolucionario en Manzanillo," *Noticias de Hoy*, October 25, 1959, Digital Library of the Caribbean.
[397] Mario Rodríguez Alemán, "Al pueblo lo que es del pueblo," *Cinema*, February 1959; Mario Rodríguez Alemán, "Distrito cultural metropolitano," *Cinema*, March 1959; Mario Rodríguez Alemán, "Cooperativa popular de arte", *Cinema*, August 1959.
[398] For an excellent analysis of the different social practices that contributed to Fidel Castro's political strategies during 1959 and throughout the 1960s, see Guerra, *Visions of Power.*
[399] "Cine-debates mayo," (*Cooperativa Popular de Arte,* 1961), 5.

gathered 200 to 300 people, but by 1961, the program had expanded to eight cinemas, which, according to the event organizers, gathered a total of almost 10,000 spectators.[400] In contrast, the cine club movement of the late 1950s had never exceeded 3500 members in total.[401] Cine-debate programmers and moderators were therefore able to reach very large audiences directly, with the goal of guiding their interpretation of specific films.

The role of the moderator was key to the success of cine-debates. According to one eye-witness account, the cine-debate moderator would prompt the audience to answer questions about the meaning of the film, eliciting varied responses. He would then offer his own interpretation and comment on the film's technical aspects.[402] However, with the rapid expansion of the popular cine-debates, some voices raised the fact that the recent popularity of these activities had not been matched by the availability of properly trained personnel to oversee them. Piñera, by then an experienced film critic and promoter who had been involved in the very first steps towards organizing the cine-debates of March 1959 expressed some reservations only a year later, as he was concerned about the lack of "a methodic, organized system of instruction" for training cine-debate moderators.[403]

He pointed out that the multiple institutions that asked for more cine-debates

> seem to ignore the specialization, the capacity, the study, the qualities required for the task. No activity related to cinematography can be improvised. It requires a mechanism, a set of antecedents, a suitable climate. And it is a fact that the qualified personnel for this task is no longer enough to satisfy the high demand for the now 'in-vogue' cinema trends in our country.[404]

To address this situation, the CCOC organized the Seminario de Estudios y Experiencias Cinematográficas (Seminar of Cinematographic Studies and Experiences) in March 1960.

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[400] "Cine-debates mayo," 5.
[401] According to a study carried out by the CCOC, on average, the total number of secular cine club members was 1460, and the average of religious members was 2000. Cardelle, "Las actividades de cultura cinematográfica en Cuba", 2, 58.
[402] Fornarina Fornaris, "Cine-debate popular. *La Trampa*," *Noticias de Hoy*, October 30, 1959, Digital Library of the Caribbean.
[403] Antonio Bosch, "Exponen alcance de los cine debates populares," *Cinema*, March 1959; Walfredo Piñera, "El seminario de estudios y experiencias del CCOC," *Cine Guía*, April 1960.
[404] Piñera, "El seminario de estudios," 3.

However, Piñera's call for better trained moderators was out of step with the priorities of the growing cine-debate movement, which had acquired a mainly ideological and political function.[405]

The popular cine-debates were clear examples of top-down screenings, and the evidence indicates that they were organized by the Communist Party. In her analysis of the early links between the PSP and the Revolution's leadership, Guerra argues that the cine-debates were a hidden weapon of the Communist Party. The party had used cine-debates since the 1930s as an efficient form of knowledge exchange capable of opening the door to radicalization. This was one of many tactics that required a high degree of secrecy. As she puts it, "[e]ngaging the public in cine-debates went hand-in-hand with a strict policy of concealing the affiliation of these events or discussants with the party itself."[406] She convincingly makes the point that we can trace a continuity from the activities of the PSP through Cuba Sono Films in the 1930s and 1940s to the cine-debates of 1959. As I pointed out earlier, this is also consistent with Nuestro Tiempo's tactical use of its Cinema section during the 1950s.

The PSP genealogy can be further confirmed by analyzing the various affiliations of the Popular Art Cooperatives that subsidized the cine-debates of the post-revolutionary period. In 1959 they were associated with the Municipality of Havana, and in 1960 with the Department of Culture of the Education Ministry, which became the CNC in January of 1961[407]. As explained in Chapter 1, all of the key positions at the Department of Culture were occupied by a cluster of PSP members that represented the most orthodox communist cultural figures of the pre-revolutionary period. They replaced the personnel that had been in charge of this governmental body under Batista's regime, and they occupied the top positions at the CNC, becoming responsible for Cuban cultural policy until the Ministry of Culture was founded in 1976.

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[405] A one-time cine-debate training program was implemented several years later, in 1968. See Chapter 3.

[406] Guerra, *Visions of Power*, chap. 2.

[407] According to ICAIC's chronologies, *cine-debates populares* were created by the Department of Culture of the Education Ministry at an unspecified date in 1960 (Douglas, *La tienda negra*, 154), but as the evidence discussed here demonstrates, that is only partially correct. The link between the Cooperativas Populares de Arte and the CNC is made explicit in the brochures published for the cine-debates in 1961. However, I cannot confirm whether they existed after November 1961, as that is the date of the latest document I have been able to locate.

Determining the point of origin of the cine-debates can help us to understand their organizational efficiency and the reasons behind their durability. Another way of ascertaining the proximity of the root of the cine-debates to the PSP is by taking a closer look at their main promoter. Rodríguez Alemán, who had close links to both the municipality of Havana and the PSP, wrote several articles announcing and explaining this initiative. As mentioned in Chapter 1, his brand of film commentary became representative of the most rigid type of Marxist film criticism that circulated widely through print and televisual media for the general public. Introducing a compilation of his critical pieces, he recalled these cine-debates with affection:

> I must say that these critical commentaries on the cinema complement my many other activities. Thus, I would have liked to keep transcripts of the cine-debates that took place with many different publics. In the first years of the revolutionary triumph, with audiences from different social origins who attended these events at Havana movie theatres on Sunday mornings. Later, with workers, students, leaders and members from the Cuban Communist Party and the Communist Youth Union.[408]

This recollection further corroborates the transformations that occurred in relation to the format and target audience of the cine-debates. In their earliest phase, the Havana cine-debates were originally promoted as being free of ideological bias. They were meant to be "a true debate towards guidance and analysis, looking to unravel the values and meaning of any given film."[409] The tone changed by 1961, coinciding with the government's official adhesion to Communism. Cine-debates became unapologetically ideological, with organizers stating that

> [t]hrough popular cine-debates, the Revolutionary Government contributes to considering filmic issues in didactic terms. The cinema is school and it is life, it is the exercise of ideas and of human problems. When faced with a film, the people must know what position to adopt. Therefore, the cine-debate is a highly beneficial activity.[410]

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[408] Mario Rodríguez Alemán, "Epílogo-Prólogo," in *La sala oscura*, vol. 1, 2 vols. (La Habana: Unión de Escritores y Artistas de Cuba, 1982), 11.
[409] Bosch, "Exponen alcance de los cine debates populares".
[410] "Cine-debates mayo," 5.

The cine-debate format also became a regular feature of special screenings organized for workers, students, women's groups and other mass organizations. These special screenings were sometimes called cine-debates, in reference to their proclaimed objective of using film as a catalyst for discussion. In fact, since those film screenings took place in highly monitored environments, they were a useful political tool for verifying the revolutionary status of workers and students, and for identifying and condemning those who espoused tendencies considered counter-revolutionary. Although it is impossible to find written records of the cine-debate sessions that took place in institutional settings, evidence of the political focus of the debates of the period can be found in relation to the most public issues of the time, such as the controversial banning of the film *PM* (Orlando Jiménez Leal and Sabá Cabrera Infante, 1961) that elicited a well-known instance of political theater as discussed in Chapter 1.

The performance of revolutionarity gained the most traction at the heart of mass organizations and educational institutions. Although we cannot access actual transcripts of the cine-debates as they happened at the time, it is instructive to look back at the written evidence that survives. We can draw several conclusions from the article "Debate en torno a *La paloma blanca*" ("Debate about *The White Dove*").[411] The film *The White Dove* (Franticek Vlasil, 1960, Czechoslovakia) was first shown during the one-week showcase of Czechoslovakian cinema in early May 1961, and commercially released in the month of June. On the surface, it appears that a review that enthusiastically endorsed this Czech film because of its exemplary departure from Stalinist aesthetics, motivated a cine-debate discussion at the Faculty of Medicine. However, we can extract several revealing elements from this unsigned report.

First, the fact that the cine-debate was presented by a representative from the Czechoslovakian embassy is a clear indicator that the event was more relevant than a simple movie session organized by a student association. Second, the experience was considered significant enough that a written account was published in the *Mella* magazine of the Socialist Youth, therefore reaching a readership that already identified as revolutionary.[412] Third, the film critic in question was Néstor Almendros, who published his piece for the wide-circulation

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[411] "Debate en torno a *La Paloma Blanca,*" *Mella,* July 4, 1961, reprinted in Nestor Almendros, *Cinemanía* (Barcelona: Seix Barral, 1992), 180-183.
[412] The Juventud Socialista (Socialist Youth) organization is the predecessor of the still existing Unión de Jóvenes Comunistas (Union of Young Communists, UJC).

magazine *Bohemia* on June 18, 1961, precisely at the time when Fidel Castro held a meeting to address the concerns of the intellectual community after the banning of *PM.* Under those circumstances, his appraisals voiced a value system that was deemed undesirable. In fact, the whole debate seems to have been staged in order to refute Almendros' perspective on Stalinism in a direct, confrontational tone. The article, most likely written by Miguel Ángel Moreno, who in the text is referred to as the "film critic for *Mella,*" dedicates three paragraphs to confront Almendros' negative perception of Stalinism and its consequences for the cinema of Eastern European countries. Fourth, taking into consideration the timing of this particular cine-debate, it is evident that it was part of the more generalized effort to discredit the *Lunes* group, whom Almendros was known to be close to. Finally, the key message from the Czech representative and from the student leader went beyond recalibrating public opinion with regards to cinematic symbolism versus clarity of message in filmmaking. The real aim was to discourage direct criticism of Stalin and his policies. Therefore, we can see that the cine-debates worked as correctives to unfitting ideological tendencies. They were opportunities for pre-emptively clarifying what were the correct ideological positions to adopt, providing a blueprint for revolutionarity.

**ICAIC's Control of Regular Film Exhibition**

The nationalization and expropriation of private enterprises began in 1959 and intensified in October 1960. By mid-1961, ownership of all movie theatres and of the majority of film distribution houses had been transferred to ICAIC.[413] This new state of affairs prompted the young organization to display a great degree of optimism regarding new possibilities for managing film programming priorities, and consequently, for adjusting popular taste. As they announced in the news section of *Cine Cubano* magazine in November 1960:

> [t]he Cuban Institute of Cinematographic Art and Industry prepares a series of select programmes that will completely modify the character of the so-called "commercial

[413] For a better understanding of the character and extent of the nationalization process, see Pérez Jr., *Between Reform and Revolution*, 248; and Guerra, *Visions of Power*, chap. 4. For a chronology of the nationalizations directly affecting the film industry, see Douglas, *La tienda negra*, 153.

> exhibition". Works of real artistic significance will substitute definitively the negligible quality of former film exhibition.[414]

It is worth quoting Alfredo Guevara at length in order to better understand this enthusiasm:

> [t]hus in reassessing the whole structure of the cinematographic system, which comprises national production as well as the importation of the most significant works from other industries, along with the exhibition regime that we should follow for both, we have to first pull out by the roots all of that rotten and poisonous cinema that is the negation of our culture and our Revolution, without at the same time forgetting the extreme tact and the deep knowledge of the public that we need to have when promoting these variations. In that sense, the new *Distribuidora Cubana de Películas ICAIC*,[415] our national production, and the control over film imports with financial and selective criteria, will work as a filter, and the forty nationalized cinemas, along with the rest of the theatres that ally themselves with this large network, will set the general guidelines of the exhibition field.[416]

One of the first outcomes of the nationalization of the film business sector was the elimination of Hollywood theatrical releases, that "rotten and poisonous cinema" that Cuban audiences were so fond of. However, Guevara's optimistic outlook met with some practical challenges over the years. As explained in Chapter 1, the strongly prescriptive tone of the film criticism of the period raises strong doubts about the desire to achieve a tactful and informed understanding of the public. In terms of film purchases and film programming, the evidence suggests that the institution's original goals were often modified according to the realities of political circumstances, film markets and foreign donations.

The short-term effects of the new configurations of film exhibition were assessed in a retrospective analysis published in 1968. At that point ICAIC acknowledged the difficulties in

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[414] *Cine Cubano*, no. 3, 1960, 62.
[415] The Distribuidora Cubana de Películas ICAIC (Cuban Film Distribution ICAIC) mentioned here was the entity first known as Consolidado de Distribución Cinematográfica ICAIC (ICAIC Combined Cinematographic Distribution). Later, it was called Distribuidora Nacional de Películas (National Film Distributor). Douglas, *La tienda negra*, 156.
[416] Alfredo Guevara, "Una nueva etapa del cine en Cuba," *Cine Cubano*, 1960.

finding enough films of appropriate quality to fill the numerous Cuban screens. In particular, the report admitted to a problem in the 1961-1963 period, when the number of North American films being shown was drastically reduced, and Eastern European productions became dominant. On average, 246 American films were released in Cuba per year between 1955 and 1959.[417] That number was reduced to 184 in 1960, 7 in 1961, and 0 from 1962 to 1965.[418] This drastic reduction was mainly due to the end of business relations with the US. However, there was also a concerted effort on the part of ICAIC to stop showing American films, as only a small selection of the large stock of the distribution houses was approved for public exhibition.[419]

ICAIC explained its programming strategy as one aimed at diversification and decolonization, reserving the right to establish which films met those criteria in the institution's own terms. This meant selecting the best from the international new waves, in order to create a new canon that responded to both ideological and aesthetic criteria. However, these requisites were often difficult to meet given the fluctuating conditions of the national situation and the international market. First of all, this selective policy was difficult to implement in a massive scale. The majority of the 396,000 movie theater seats that existed in 1959 still needed to be filled. Thus, in the absence of new American imports after the nationalization of US distributors,

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[417] These numbers are based on the statistics compiled by the CCOC in *Guía Cinematográfica 1955* (La Habana: Centro Católico de Orientación Cinematográfica, 1956), 435; *Guía Cinematográfica 1956-57* (La Habana: Centro Católico de Orientación Cinematográfica, 1957), 406; *Guía Cinematográfica 1957-58* (La Habana: Centro Católico de Orientación Cinematográfica, 1958), 382; *Guía Cinematográfica 1958-59* (La Habana: Centro Católico de Orientación Cinematográfica, 1960), 320; *Guía Cinematográfica 1959-60* (La Habana: Centro Católico de Orientación Cinematográfica, 1961), 196; "1960. Un año de cine en Cuba," *Cine Guía*, December 1960/January 1961.

[418] For the number of films per country in the 1960s, see Table 2, "Películas ruso-soviéticas exhibidas en salas comerciales en Cuba (1949-1969)," in Carlos Muguiro Altuna, "Kinofikatsia cubana y sus fantasmas. Inventario de la presencia (y de la ausencia) del cine soviético en las pantallas de Cuba (1961-1991)," *Kamchatka*, no. 5 (2015), 283, DOI: 10.7203/KAM.5.5181.

[419] According to some accounts, as late as 1962 a few older American films were still shown in the small Foxa movie theater (272 seats), and in some cases this elicited pro-American reactions from the audience. Eduardo G. Noguer, *Historia del cine cubano: cien años, 1897-1998* (Miami, Fla: Ediciones Universal, 2002), 525. Interestingly, the owners of this movie theater were Victor Pahlen and Errol Flynn, who collaborated on the maverick production *The Truth about Castro Revolution/Cuban Story* (1959). Pahlen is listed as the owner in "Cine-Teatros de Cuba," *Anuario Cinematográfico y Radial Cubano 1960*, ed. Pedro Pablo Chávez (La Habana, 1960),141. Alberto Elena mentions a co-ownership situation in Elena, "Cuba Sí!," 15.

it was Soviet and Eastern European films that filled the screens. In other words, just as the market reality of pre-revolutionary Cuba created positive conditions for a majority of US imports, after the Revolution the prominent place of the USSR in the Cuban economy opened the way for the colossal importation of Eastern Bloc cultural products.

However, ICAIC had an uneasy relationship with the disproportionate high number of Socialist Bloc films that engulfed Cuban screens in 1961, 1962, and 1963, leading García Espinosa to admit that "we now see the most important and interesting films from the capitalist world, but also the worst ones from socialist countries." He justified this flawed situation as necessary for keeping the jobs of movie theater workers.[420] In the previously mentioned 1968 report ICAIC also acknowledged this reality, but justified it differently, stating that "socialist bloc production indiscriminately inundated our movie theaters for incalculably urgent reasons after the implantation of the US blockade that followed the failed Playa Girón landing, at which point, for obvious reasons, we removed from circulation a great number of American films that were apologetic of the imperialist ideology."[421] In consequence, the number of Socialist Bloc films released in Cuba increased as follows: 4 in 1959, 38 in 1960, 116 in 1961, 138 in 1962, and 201 in 1963. This represented 10, 55, 85, and 92 percent of the total number of movie releases for each of the years mentioned.[422]

Following this, in the 1964–1967 period, socialist films became subject to more selective criteria, and theatrical exhibition became more diversified in comparison.[423] Once ICAIC asserted its independence from the CNC, and a wider variety of choices became available through connections with sympathetic filmmakers and film institutions around the world, the numbers start to shift, showing a slight increase in European imports, especially from France, Italy, the United Kingdom, and Spain. ICAIC made known its position regarding selection criteria, expressing that the same deficit of quality to quantity found in capitalist production could be found in socialist production. Therefore, according to their own calculations for the 1964 -1967 period, 30% of total film exhibition corresponded to French, Italian, British and

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[420] Julio García Espinosa, "Nuestro cine documental," *Cine Cubano*, 1964.
[421] Raúl Taladrid, Héctor García Mesa, José Manuel Pardo, Humberto Ramos, "La programación cinematográfica como factor de información y formación del público," *Cine Cubano*, 1968, 20.
[422] These percentages were calculated based on the numbers provided in Muguiro Altuna, "Kinofikatsia," 283.
[423] Taladrid et al., "La programación cinematográfica," 20.

Spanish films combined, while 38% corresponded to Soviet, Polish, Czech, and Hungarian films.[424] However, when compared with recently compiled statistics, those numbers don't hold up, showing instead that the average of Eastern European films for that four-year period was 60% and the average of Western European films amounted to 38% of the total. While it is not possible to ascertain how exactly the 1968 calculations were performed, it is clear that the release of socialist films followed a downward trend from the 92% peak in 1963 to about 35% in 1967. In parallel, Western European films increased from an all-time low of 7% in 1962 to 69% in 1967.[425]

Clearly, after an initial period of readjustment in 1961-1963, in which Socialist Bloc cinema effectively replaced Hollywood, the following few years show a more balanced film selection. This was due in part to the economic realities of market imports, and in part to ICAIC's selective criteria. In this sense, it is telling that ICAIC found it necessary to verbally justify the 1961-1963 situation as a pragmatic solution in the face of what was referred to as the US-blockade.[426] In reality, during that time ICAIC also encountered other types of challenges, such as the immovable opinions of old-time communists. As described in Chapter 1, in the early 1960s ICAIC's programming choices were the object of direct attacks by the most orthodox representatives of the Communist Party. Through his response to those intrusions, Guevara stood up for ICAIC autonomy. He insisted that the film exhibition policies of the film institute needed to be justified in their own terms, and not follow the directives of the PSP. Although they had successfully collaborated to expunge the *Lunes* group, ICAIC made good use of this opportunity to stand its ground and secure its future decision-making power.

By the mid-1970s, film programming was still discussed according to quantitative and qualitative criteria, putting emphasis on the geopolitical origin of the films. For instance, it was reported that by 1976 fifty percent of films came from socialist countries, with the other half coming from capitalist ones.[427] However, in order to properly qualify this distinction we must

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[424] Taladrid et al., "La programación cinematográfica," 20.
[425] These percentages were calculated based on the numbers in Muguiro Altuna, "Kinofikatsia," 283.
[426] Taladrid et al., "La programación cinematográfica," 20.
[427] Enrique Colina, "Film Criticism in Cuba," interview by Jorge Silva, 1976. Translated and published in *Jump Cut* no. 22 (May 1980), http://www.ejumpcut.org/archive/onlinessays/JC22folder/EnriqueColinaInt.html.

take into consideration that Eastern Bloc film imports comprised a mixture of the New Waves of Soviet, Czech and Polish cinemas, along with more conventional examples of the socialist realist aesthetic, and popular genres such as socialist melodramas and war films.[428] Thus, this insistence on reporting these numbers in interviews and other forms of public discourse, more than anything shows that ICAIC representatives were eager to convey that they were not interested in creating a homogeneous film offering. Specifically, they emphatically wanted to counteract the perception that they were veering towards socialist realism.[429] Their penchant for modernist cinematic tendencies was especially evident in their approach to specialized film programming.

## 3. ICAIC's Cinemateca and Specialized Film Programming

### Emergence of the Cinematheque

ICAIC created its own Cinemateca de Cuba (from hereon, referred to as the Cinemateca), as a cultural department on 6 February 1960.[430] In several articles published throughout that year, the film institute made known that it needed the cine clubs in order to recruit young personnel, and to gather existing film-related information and materials.[431] Guevara requested "their close collaboration, not only because of their role in educating popular taste, but also through their provision of information essential to film production." He made the suggestion that people should "share the names and contact details of artists and technicians from around the world who could be beneficial to our industry-in-the-making."[432] This would eventually be echoed by

[428] Muguiro Altuna, "Kinofikatsia"; Vladimir Alexander Smith Mesa, "Kinocuban: The Significance of Soviet and East European Cinemas for the Cuban Moving Image" (PhD diss., University College London, 2011), http://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/1336532/.
[429] For more on the perceived influence of Cuba's political alliance with the Soviet Union on Cuban cinema, see Masha Salazkina and Irene Rozsa, "Dissonances in 1970s European and Latin American Political Film Discourse: The Aristarco – García Espinosa Debate," *Canadian Journal of Film Studies* 24, no. 2 (Fall 2015): 66–81, https://doi.org/10.3138/cjfs.24.2.66.
[430] "40 Años de la Cinemateca de Cuba," in *Coordenadas del cine cubano,* vol. 1, ed. Reynaldo González (Santiago de Cuba: Editorial Oriente, 2001), 283.
[431] Bosch, "Empezará a ser realidad"; Rodríguez Alemán, "Instituto del Cine".
[432] Bosch, "Empezará a ser realidad".

donation requests made on behalf of the Cinemateca.[433] Once ICAIC obtained the majority of these resources, the cinematheque became a one-stop repository of film-related information.

The scope and ambitions of the Cinemateca took on different configurations throughout its first few years of existence. To this end, Alfredo Guevara and his associates persistently sought the help of friendly filmmakers, critics, and organizations all over the world. As early as 1959 they sent questionnaires to key international figures such as Guido Aristarco, requesting assistance in setting up and running a cinematheque.[434] They also benefited from the guidance of enthusiastic collaborators like Joris Ivens. By enlisting influential contacts, taking the appropriate first steps, and maintaining the consistent direction of Héctor García Mesa (1931-1990) ICAIC guaranteed the long-term objectives and stability of its cinematheque.

The Cinemateca's first foundational stage took place from February 1960 to December 1961. During this period, it focused on collecting cinema-related materials, and creating a catalogue of all the Cuban filmography. To this aim, García Mesa, who had been part of the Nuestro Tiempo group and had good relations with Valdés-Rodríguez, relied very heavily on the collaboration of the old professor.[435] A public call was also announced, requesting "any type of filmic material, such as long or short films, whether national or foreign, from any time period, irrespective of its conservation state." The request also asked for photos, publicity posters, cinema movies and magazines, as well as old cameras and projectors.[436]

The cinematheque was meant to offer high quality films and become an important alternative to commercial film programming. Originally, it was thought that it would become one more provider lending out films to the cine clubs, along with distributors and foreign embassies.[437] Instead, as a result of the wide process of nationalization that took place in October 1960, ICAIC became the sole provider of film prints and gradually took control of the majority of film screens on the island. This effectively eliminated the need for individual cine clubs to

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[433] Héctor García Mesa, "Cinemateca de Cuba," *Cine Cubano*, 1961.
[434] Masha Salazkina has consulted the correspondence between Alfredo Guevara and Guido Aristarco in the Aristarco archives at the *Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia in Rome*. Salazkina and Rozsa, "Dissonances," 70.
[435] Pedro Noa Romero, "La primera savia nutricia: La filmoteca universitaria," *Cine Cubano* 181-182, July–December 2011, 110-115; Valdés-Rodríguez Digital Archive.
[436] García Mesa, "Cinemateca de Cuba," 51.
[437] García Mesa and del Campo, "¿Qué es un cine club?".

directly contact the different film sources, as had originally been suggested. Further, the creation of the "Cine Club section" in January 1961 signaled a new dynamics of centralized film exhibition. Projects that depended on self-organization and management outside of state-controlled channels were quickly becoming obsolete in all realms of life. The cine club structure outlined in the article from early 1960 was reliant on the already existing commercial networks, private film rental options and exhibition venues. Once this infrastructure disappeared, these recommendations were no longer viable. Entities that relied on their contacts at Hollywood studios' local branches or at specific movie theatres were no longer able to make use of their traditional sources of support.

The Cinemateca included several subsections conceived as outreach units. The "Cine Club section," created in January 1961, was responsible for rendering screening services to civic and educational institutions, as well as parks, amphitheatres, social clubs, unions and teaching centres.[438] This unit was responsible for providing the resources needed for the institution-based cine-debates described above. The second outreach unit, called Department for Cultural Outreach (Departamento de Divulgación Cinematográfica), was created in September 1961 to manage the mobile cinema project, which had started as part of the first, but was growing at a considerable pace. As part of this program, ICAIC projectionists drove to remote areas of the country by truck or jeep (and later mule and motorboat), in order to screen 16 mm films in far-away communities.[439]

Mobile cinema units, along with workers' cine-clubs, were designed for increasing the access to rural farmers and the urban working classes. ICAIC's perspective was that "The Cuban cine club movement, in the midst of a Revolution, should contemplate the progressive transformation of the public as a whole, starting with the liquidation of the class composition of the public. So we preferred to concentrate our efforts in reaching the peasant areas where

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[438] García Mesa "Cinemateca de Cuba", 50.

[439] Douglas, *La tienda negra,* 157; Héctor García Mesa, "Cine en camión, en arrias, en el aula, en la caña, en la montaña. Un reporte sobre el cine-móvil ICAIC," *Cine Cubano*, 1970. In Cuba, this was not a completely unprecedented idea, as a system for taking theater and other arts to remote areas had been implemented since 1940. See Luis A. Baralt, "Cincuenta años de teatro en Cuba," in *Libro de Cuba* (La Habana: 1954), 615. For more on the mobile cinema project, see Nicholas Balaisis, "Modernization and Ambivalence in Octavio Cortázar's *Por primera vez*," *Cinema Journal* 54, no. 1 (2014): 1–24.

hundreds of thousands of men and women had never seen a film."[440] With plenty of resources at its disposal, this initiative quickly gained momentum, reportedly reaching very high numbers of new spectators. Thus, ICAIC's outreach departments were dedicated to bringing the enjoyment of cinema, as well as the ideology of the Revolution, to communities that were otherwise hard to reach in a direct manner.[441] In the same vein, post-revolutionary cine-clubs were always in direct or indirect collaboration with ICAIC through official or unofficial resource people who ensured that their film viewing gatherings did not sidetrack into political dissent.

**Post-revolutionary Cine Clubs**

The term "cine club" was liberally applied in this context. One clear example of this tendency was the Cine-club Obrero Chaplin (Chaplin Workers' Cine Club), which took place at the former Teatro Blanquita, one of the first movie theatres acquired by ICAIC.[442] This "worker's cine club" started in January 1960 under the direct supervision of the Cinemateca and in collaboration with the National Film Distribution Center (Distribuidora Nacional de Películas). At this 5500-seat theatre, young people who were participating in the literacy campaign and other educational initiatives were exposed to a selection of films in order to "shape their taste and film culture under the care of Cinemateca the Cuba."[443] As Guevara argued, the task of cine-debates and cine clubs was to re-educate the audience, make people break away from their old viewing habits and preference for Hollywood genre movies, and to teach them to appreciate other cinematographies to which they had not been previously exposed. Furthermore, he called for an extension of the reach of cine-debates, which became a common practice of the various municipalities, nationalized sugar companies, cultural branches of state institutions as well as

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[440] "Cinemateca de Cuba - Report to the XXVIII FIAF Congress, Annex 2. ICAIC Mobile Units," 2. Typescript of report by Héctor García Mesa (translated), Folder AFF/041, FIAF Archives, Brussels, Belgium. I am very grateful to Dr. Rielle Navitski for generously sharing the FIAF materials with me.

[441] Guerra also makes a connection between the literacy campaign and the ideological crusade, finding examples of teaching materials that used revolutionary referents to teach the alphabet and basic concepts to illiterate farmers. Guerra, *Visions of Power*, chap. 2.

[442] This large theatre, formerly known as Teatro Blanquita, was expropriated due to the owner's connections with the Batista regime. It was renamed Chaplin, and later became the Karl Marx theater. Douglas, *La tienda negra,* 150.

[443] "Cinemateca de Cuba," *Cine Cubano*, 1962, 76.

educational and worker's organizations.[444] As detailed above in relation to the cine-debate at the Faculty of Medicine, it was precisely at the heart of educational institutions and mass organizations that the performance of revolutionarity gained the most traction.

Only in exceptional contexts could the small size of traditional bottom-up cine clubs be preserved. This was the case of Cine Club ICAIC, founded in 1962 for ICAIC staff members.[445] Watching and discussing films together was a defining characteristic of the institution's policy since its earliest days, even though the debates generated within those viewing sessions led to internal ruptures as early as 1961.[446] Every Monday, ICAIC filmmakers and other personnel had the chance to watch the best of international filmmaking, and to engage in direct dialogue with important proponents of the latest cinematic currents.[447] On the other hand, outside of ICAIC, in spite of the will expressed in the April 1959 meeting, the cine-club tradition hardly survived. While a few spontaneous initiatives appeared, such as the Santa Clara Cine Club founded by two high school students in 1959, these were mostly short-lived attempts at amateur filmmaking.[448] The energies that ICAIC would have devoted to the cine-club movement, were channeled into the mobile cinema campaign instead.

In urban centers, especially in the capital, rather than creating independent cine-clubs, young people interested in cinema affiliated themselves with the institutional options offered to them. The new University Students Federation (Federación de Estudiantes Universitarios, FEU), created a "Cine-Club Universitario" in 1963. The cine-club was meant for students, faculty and staff of the university, and it was to work closely with FEU and the Cinema section of the University Extension Commission (Comisión de Extensión Universitaria, CEU).[449] Its aim was

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[444] Guevara, "Una nueva etapa del cine en Cuba."
[445] In 1962 ICAIC personnel were also taught a History of Cinema course by Rodríguez Alemán. The cine-club was renamed Cine Club Theodor Christensen in 1971, to honor the Danish filmmaker's collaboration with ICAIC.
[446] Juan Antonio García Borrero, *Cine cubano de los sesenta: mito y realidad* (Huelva: Festival de Cine Iberoamericano de Huelva, 2007), 76-80.
[447] Agramonte, *Cronología del cine cubano*, 171; "Palabras pronunciadas por Theodor Christensen," *Cine Cubano* 1968; Douglas, "Los cine clubes en Cuba."
[448] Douglas, *La tienda negra*, 146. For an in-depth discussion of amateur filmmaking, see Chapter 3.
[449] As detailed in Chapter 1, the former Department of Cinematography was split into the Cinema section of the University Extension Commission, and the Department of Audiovisual Media.

to offer regular screenings, seminars, and cine-debates, which took place at two university theaters, the Aníbal Ponce (at the Faculty of Psychology), and the Enrique José Varona (at the Faculty of Education).[450] As Valdés-Rodríguez' health deteriorated towards 1967, Rodríguez Alemán became the main resource person for the Cinema section, until 1969.[451]

One outstanding case that demonstrates the resourcefulness of cine-club enthusiasts was the Cine Club Gerard Philippe, created in 1964 at a bus terminal.[452] José del Campo and Rodolfo Santovenia, experienced cine-club organizers, helped bus transportation workers to create their workplace cine-club.[453] To achieve this, they made use of their own personal contacts with people from the workers' union, Sovexportfilm (the Soviet Union film export entity), the Ministry of the Revolutionary Armed Forces, and ICAIC. This disparate mix of connections speaks to the importance of informal links during this period. The cine-club was initially well attended by bus drivers, mechanics, students, and neighbours. ICAIC personalities like Jorge Fraga, Santiago Álvarez, and Gutiérrez Alea moderated some of the post-screening debates. However, as time went by, job rotations and mass mobilizations changed the original dynamic and the audience waned. By 1971 only a small core group continued to be actively engaged. Throughout the years the organizers struggled to gather enough workers for the screenings and to make them participate in the debates, because the films chosen did not fit the easy entertainment that they preferred.[454]

José del Campo, indefatigable cine-club promoter, also headed the cine-debate moderator training program offered through the Confederation of Cuban Workers from September 1968 to May 1969.[455] This course was offered only on one occasion, with the objective of training skilled personnel to lead the cine-debates taking place at work and educational sites. Many years before,

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[450] "Noticias Varias," *Vida Universitaria*, July 1963.
[451] Piñera, "Breve historia del cine en la Universidad."
[452] Agramonte, *Cronología del cine cubano*, 171-172; Douglas, *La tienda negra*, 166.
[453] Rodolfo Santovenia had worked as a film critic throughout the 1950s and supported the CCH-CC during its most trying times.
[454] Teresita Huerta, "¿Dónde? ¿Cómo? ¿Quién? Tres preguntas a un cine-club," *Arte 7*, July 1971.
[455] I am deeply thankful to Tomás Piard for sharing his vivid memories with me in the summer of 2015, and through subsequent email exchanges. Without his recollections these projects could not have been recovered from oblivion.

Piñera had pointed out the need for this type of training.[456] The course encompassed various subject matters, with del Campo teaching cine-debate techniques, Alejandro Saderman film direction, Nicolás Cossío, film criticism, amongst others.[457] The course graduates decided to continue meeting and created the Charles Spencer Chaplin cine-club. They met at the former site of the Lyceum and Lawn Tennis Club cultural center, where they screened *Senso* (Luchino Visconti, 1954), and *Intimate Lighting* (Ivan Passer, 1965, Checkoslovakia).[458] The latter had not been released in commercial screens, and Guevara viewed this action as a transgression. Soon after, the cine-club stopped functioning.[459]

In spite of the control mechanisms that existed, during brief periods of time university students were able to create a semi-independent oasis for student-based film culture. According to their recollections, around 1969, a group of students from different university faculties became actively engaged in organizing film screenings, collecting cinema-related information, and creating their own cinema magazine.[460] They found an enthusiastic partner in Alberto Mora Becerra, a former revolutionary army commander and Minister of Commerce, who had fallen out of favor. As a young man, in the 1950s Mora had been close to the cultural milieu, where he befriended people like Cabrera Infante and Heberto Padilla. By the late 1960s, the ideas he had voiced in the early part of the decade were shunned by top government decision-makers, and he became ostracized.[461] His appointment at the CEU was a bureaucratic demotion, but his presence there made a difference in the life of many cinephiles.

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[456] Piñera, "El seminario de estudios," 3.
[457] Alejandro Saderman is an Argentinian film director who lived in Cuba in the 1960s. Nicolás Cossío was the film critic for the magazine *Bohemia.*
[458] The Lyceum and Lawn Tennis Club was confiscated on March 16, 1968. It became the *Casa de la Cultura de Plaza*. Rosario Rexach, "El Lyceum de La Habana como institución cultural," *Actas del IX Congreso de la Asociación Internacional de Hispanistas, 18-23 Agosto 1986*, http://www.cervantesvirtual.com/obra/el-lyceum-de-la-habana-como-institucion-cultural-/.
[459] Tomás Piard, interview with the author, June 8, 2015, and email exchange, April-May, 2016; Tomás Piard, "El eslabón perdido. Episodios del cine independiente cubano," interview by Dean Luis Reyes, *La Gaceta de Cuba*, May-June 2015, in *Altercine* mailing list, March 26, 2019.
[460] I am very grateful to Roberto Madrigal, Antonio Mazón Robau, and Mario Naito López for bringing this initiative to my attention.
[461] Guillermo Cabrera Infante, *Mea Cuba* (Barcelona: Plaza & Janés, 1992); Rafael Rojas, "El comandante Mora y sus amigos", *Libros del Crepúsculo,* http://www.librosdelcrepusculo.net/2014/11/el-comandante-mora-y-sus-amigos.html.

With Mora's help, students revived university-based film culture through an active cine-club that showed films every Friday and Saturday, provided written commentary for each of the screenings, and published *Arte 7*, a bulletin that transformed into a magazine. Published from September 1970 until January 1972, the magazine reached 5,000 copies that were distributed throughout the country, at a time when the only other cinema publication was ICAIC's *Cine Cubano*.[462] Mora proposed to differentiate the student-led initiative from the Tuesday night sessions organized by the Cinemateca for university students by naming them differently.[463] Thus, the university cine-club became the Cine-Club Universitario Serguei M. Eisenstein, while the Cinemateca sessions were named Cine-Club Universitario Dziga Vertov.[464] However, the success of the Eisenstein cine-club and the *Arte 7* publication were short-lived. Mora interceded on behalf of his friend Padilla during his high-stakes trial. As a result, he was removed from his post and sent to do agricultural labour at a farm, driving him to commit suicide.[465] Once again, political circumstances changed the course of personal influence. This was "a heartfelt and unexpected loss"[466] that had a direct impact on the ability of a small-scale initiative to survive. On the other hand, the Vertov cine-club, established by the cinematheque, continued taking place at the Cine de Arte ICAIC location until 1980.[467]

**Development and Legacy of the Cinematheque**

Therefore, while the strategies seeking to reach larger strata of the population prevailed, they did not eliminate the interest in specialized film programming and instruction. The type of film experience that was once circumscribed by the university film course and cine club screenings was transported to other settings, including seminars like the one organized by the CCOC in March 1960, the evening courses offered by the CNC at the Museum of Fine Arts

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[462] Carlos Espinosa Domínguez, "Hojeando revistas (I)," *Cuba Encuentro*, July 15, 2016, https://www.cubaencuentro.com/cultura/articulos/h-ojeando-revistas-i-326041.
[463] The Cine-Club Universitario that functioned at the cinematheque started in January 1969. Douglas, *La tienda negra*, 172.
[464] Walfredo Piñera, "Breve historia del cine en la Universidad de La Habana," 1979, unpublished.
[465] Cabrera Infante, *Mea Cuba*; Rojas, "El Comandante Mora y sus amigos".
[466] Walfredo Piñera, "Breve historia del cine en la Universidad de La Habana," 1979, unpublished.
[467] Douglas, *La tienda negra*, 172-173.

between 1962 and 1963, and film history courses targeted specifically to students in History or Literature programs. More enduring still was the specialized programming of Cinemateca, which nurtured a growing community of cinephiles, demonstrating that this select type of audience did not disappear. The regular sessions of specialized film programming that the cinematheque started offering in December 1961 proved extremely successful, bringing together large audiences seeking curated screenings that offered an alternative to regular theatrical exhibition.

During its second organizational stage, which took place during the years 1962 and 1963, the four-person staff at the Cinemateca, comprised of the director, two assistants, and one secretary, were immersed in a frantic period of collecting and cataloguing in order to fulfill FIAF's membership requirements. This was a hurried process that led to many essential acquisitions, but also to lamentable losses. For instance, only a few films deemed significant were recovered from the archives of the nationalized US distributors, leaving the rest of the stock to languish. Entire bundles of documents, photographs, posters, and lobby cards taken from those offices were packaged by García Mesa and two of his staff. However, since ICAIC prioritized its limited storage space for Cuban cinema materials, the rest was kept in a theater basement indefinitely. In spite of constituting a fire hazard, those papers were never officially accounted for and their fate is unknown.[468] Furthermore, according to the testimony of personal collectors, during that period it was not uncommon to see entire archives thrown in the dumpster. Fueled by their own archival interest, individual collectors were able to painstakingly recover massive amounts of materials that were discarded by workers because they did not fit the cultural narrative their respective institutions were in the process of constructing.

The cinematheque created by ICAIC became a provisional FIAF member in December 1961, and gained full membership status in 1963.[469] While ICAIC initially considered a wide

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[468] Maria Eulalia Douglas, "Mayuya-Memoria de la Cinemateca de Cuba," interview by Christian Dimitriu, *Journal of Film Preservation* 83 (Nov 2010), 60.

[469] According to García Mesa's 1961 report to FIAF, Cuba had become a provisional member at the 16th Congress held in Paris in November 1960. "Cinemateca de Cuba Annual Report to the Seventeenth Congress of the FIAF," October 1961, 1. Typescript of report by Héctor García Mesa (translated), Folder AFF/041, FIAF Archives. However, in the general report produced in 1976, García Mesa reports the December 1961 date. Héctor García Mesa, "Cinemateca de Cuba Informe General XVI Aniversario 1960-1976," December 1, 1976, 8. Booklet in folder AFF/041, FIAF Archives. Douglas refers to yet another date, October 1961. Douglas, *La tienda negra*, 158. The date for permanent membership is from Douglas, *La tienda negra*, 163.

range of suppliers for its film programming, the cinematheque program during these years relied very heavily on the countries of the Socialist Bloc.[470] García Mesa traveled to Czechoslovakia, the Soviet Union, and the German Democratic Republic in the summer of 1961, and through this trip he guaranteed important film donations for ICAIC's incipient archive. For instance, "Three Decades of Soviet Cinema", the program of Soviet film classics from the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s that inaugurated the Cinemateca's regular programming in December 1961, was donated by the Soviet national film archive, Gosfilmofond.[471] Throughout 1962 García Mesa also borrowed films from the university film library and requested program notes from Valdés-Rodríguez in order to complete some of the film programs.[472] Cinemateca also rented some films from a few commercial distribution houses that were still active.[473]

The programs prepared for 1962 showcased different aspects of international cinema, with national showcases (Soviet Union, Sweden, Japan) as well as focus on short film and animation (Latin American Social Documentaries, Czech Animation and Puppetry), literary adaptations (Oscar Wilde, Emile Zola, Shakespeare), genres (Comedies from Yesterday), and actors (Gerard Philippe).[474] In the beginning, the films were introduced through a short oral presentation, which was eventually replaced with printed programs. By 1963, the cinematheque had exhibited an impressive total of 352 films, with a global attendance of 220,000 spectators. Soviet, French, British, Italian, German, Swedish, Polish, Argentinean, Brazilian, Soviet, and American films were shown. Regular exhibition schedules spanned every day of the week except Mondays, when the Cinemateca was reserved for Cine-Club ICAIC. In 1963, cinematheque screenings had expanded exponentially, running four simultaneous programs which happened from Tuesday to Sunday, with two and three sessions per day.[475]

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[470] Early on, they turned to American film distributor Thomas Brandon. "Notas y Noticias," *Cine Cubano*, 1960.
[471] Douglas, *La tienda negra*, 158; "Entrevista con Hector García Mesa," *Cine Cubano*, 1961; "Cinemateca de Cuba," *Cine Cubano*, 1962.
[472] Noa Romero, "La primera savia nutricia"; Valdés-Rodríguez Digital Archive.
[473] García Mesa mentions collaborating with companies Rank, Cofram, Películas Mexicanas, and Blanco y Travieso. "Cinematheque de Cuba Rapport Annuel au XVIII Congres," May 25, 1962, 5. Typescript of report by Héctor García Mesa (translated), Folder AFF/041, FIAF Archives.
[474] García Mesa, "Rapport Annuel au XVIII Congres."
[475] "Cinemateca de Cuba Rapport Annuel au XIX Congres," May 1963. Typescript of report by Héctor García Mesa (translated), Folder AFF/041, FIAF Archives.

The Cinemateca's extraordinary programming took place at its permanent site in the upscale Vedado neighbourhood. The movie theater formerly known as Cine Atlantic, built in 1953, which had a total capacity of 1,500 seats, was upgraded and renamed Cine de Arte ICAIC in 1962, until the name was changed to "Cine Charles Chaplin" in 1983.[476] It was equipped to project 16 mm, 35 mm and 70 mm films, and the audience could enjoy comfortable seats, stereo sound and air conditioning.[477] In the beginning, the cinematheque started with a membership system similar to that of traditional cine clubs. Registration started in November 1961, reaching 2,500 members in a few months.[478] By 1963, membership numbers had increased to 11,500, but consisted mostly of one-time attendees. In response to this situation, the administration created more strict regulations, and permanent membership stabilized at 6000.[479] As mentioned above, in 1969 the cinematheque incorporated regular screenings on Tuesdays for university students.[480] Furthermore, in a general report to the FIAF, submitted in 1976 on the occasion of the cinematheque's sixteenth anniversary, García Mesa proclaimed that Cinemateca "had exemplarily overcome the elitist, restrictive, and exclusionary model of conventional cinematheques".[481] In effect, in the late 1960s the cinematheque expanded its activities to other provinces, reaching a total capacity of 90,778 available seats weekly for audiences across the island.[482]

From 1964 through the 1980s, the cinematheque prospered. In terms of film acquisition and preservation, the numbers grew very significantly. In 1962, Cinemateca acquired 300 feature films and 100 shorts from national and international film distributors.[483] One year later, the total number of films in the archive had reached 780.[484] During this time Cinemateca received donations and exchanged films from Ceskoslovenska Filmoteka, Staaliches Filmarchive (DDR),

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[476] Douglas, *La tienda negra*, 197.
[477] García Mesa, "Informe General XVI Aniversario 1960-1976," 8.
[478] García Mesa, "Rapport Annuel au XVIII Congres," 1.
[479] García Mesa, "Rapport Annuel au XIX Congres," 1.
[480] Douglas, "Los cine clubes en Cuba"; Douglas, *La tienda negra*, 176. This initiative was given the name Cine Club Dziga Vertov in 1971, not to be confused with the university-based screenings of Cine Club Eisenstein.
[481] García Mesa, "Informe General XVI Aniversario 1960-1976," 7.
[482] García Mesa, "Informe General XVI Aniversario 1960-1976," 16.
[483] García Mesa, "Rapport Annuel au XVIII Congres," 1.
[484] García Mesa, "Rapport Annuel au XIX Congres," 2.

Gosfilmofond (USSR), Stichting Nederlands Filmmuseum, Cinemathèque Royale de Belgique, Cinemateca Universitaria (Chile), and China Film Archives.[485] By 1980 the film collection of the cinematheque amounted to more than 6000 films. It also held the largest collection in the world of films from the New Latin American Cinema movement.[486] In addition, the documentation section gathered a sizeable collection of magazines, books, catalogues, dictionaries, film posters, photos, and index cards. The holdings also included 14,000 files with technical information, filmographies, film reviews, biographies, articles, and information about films and film personalities.[487]

As part of a state institution, Cinemateca was privileged in its ability to build proper storage, use laboratory facilities for restauration and duplication, make copies of imported films, and obtain all nationally produced film and publicity material.[488] As a new institutional space with consistent staff and long-term funding, it answered the need for a space for film archives and regular curated programming that had been identified in the early 1950s. This need had been identified by the founders of the Cine Club de La Habana, but in spite of their privileged international connections, they lacked the necessary local support to carry their project through. On the other hand, while Valdés-Rodríguez' Department of Cinematography constituted a significant step forward in this direction, his university-based initiative was not comparable to a state-designed institution with guaranteed funds and a political function.

The cinematheque became one of the most successful and enduring cultural spaces created in the early post-revolutionary period. In the early 1960s it became the place where all those interested in film history and the new cinematic tendencies converged. The popularity of the Cinemateca demonstrates the interest of growing portions of the population, especially young people, in a cinematic experience unrestricted by specific genres, time periods, or nationality. At the same time, it is also possible that those staggeringly numerous spectators were attracted to the cinematheque not only due to a sense of open-mindedness towards classic and modernist influences, but also because they were looking for an alternative to the narrowing options in the

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[485] García Mesa, "Rapport Annuel au XIX Congres," 7.
[486] Héctor García Mesa, "La Cinemateca de Cuba. Un Museo del cine," *Boletín UNESCO,* Comisión Nacional Cubana de la UNESCO, March-June 1980, no. 83-84, 16. Folder AFF/042, FIAF Archives.
[487] García Mesa, "La Cinemateca de Cuba. Un museo del cine," 16-18.
[488] García Mesa, "Rapport Annuel au XIX Congres," 6.

commercial exhibition landscape. From 1961 to 1969 the majority of the films released in commercial cinemas originated in the Socialist Bloc, with an overwhelming number of Soviet films occupying the screens.[489] It must be noted that from 1962 to 1968, no American films were shown in commercial screens, with the exception of 1 in 1966. During this time, various cinematheque retrospectives included hand-picked US productions. Taking this into consideration, it is not surprising that audiences looking for more familiar cinematographies would congregate at the cinematheque. It became a special screening site offering a more diverse film programming that included American films recovered from the vaults of the nationalized distribution companies, along with recent Western European acquisitions obtained through personal or institutional donations, and which did not have commercial circulation.

While Cinemateca frequently screened Soviet and Socialist Bloc films, its choices responded to a more sophisticated curatorial sense informed by the film-historical canon of the consecrated figures of world cinema, as well as by the new generation of directors heralding their countries' "New Waves" and making an impact in prominent film festivals. Furthermore, given its close proximity with the intellectual class, embodied in the first generation of ICAIC filmmakers who had been formed through the university film course and the cine-clubs of the 1950s, it makes sense that cinematheque programs strove for a more careful balance between well-defined ideological concerns and aesthetic preferences. Thus, in the context of specialized film programming, the art cinema canon that had taken root in the pre-revolutionary period became the basis upon which aesthetic value was ascribed to more recent cinematic works. This does not preclude the fact that in other viewing contexts like the mass-oriented cine-debates ideological considerations took precedence over aesthetics, but rather indicates that the prevalent duality that differentiates audiences according to knowledge levels and expectations, continued to exist.

Amongst all of ICAIC departments, the cinematheque was the one that allowed for the least regimented relationship between the institution and Cuban audiences. It exceeded its intended function as a screening site, becoming also a social space of interaction amongst

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[489] More specifically, the percentage of film releases from the Socialist Bloc breaks down as follows: 10% in 1960, 55% in 1961, 85% in 1962, 92% in 1963, 72% in 1964, 73% in 1965, 60% in 1966, 35% in 1967, 27% in 1968, 32% in 1969. These percentages were calculated based on the numbers in Muguiro Altuna, "Kinofikatsia," 283.

audience members. The films were open to interpretation, and it is through the process of commenting the films, of praising or complaining about the institutional selection, of watching films together, that a large community of cinephiles evolved, from the 1960s into the 1990s. The Cine de Arte ICAIC, later Cine Chaplin, functioned as a communal hub surrounded by restaurants, cafeterias, bookstores, and even the cemetery, all of which became meeting grounds for students, intellectuals, and anyone open to a good conversation about cinema, literature, art, and of course, politics.

## Conclusion

Cuban film historiography has traditionally emphasized ICAIC's importance for expanding Cuban audiences' exposure to international cinema. However, this portrayal of the film institute as a generating factor rather than a continuation of an already existing trend needs to be corrected. In order to assess the process of audience diversification in Cuba during this period, we must first acknowledge the commercial film exhibition venues, and the parallel non-theatrical activities of the cine-clubs that preceded the Revolution and ICAIC. In this chapter I have provided an alternative history of ICAIC's emergence that takes into account the specific ways through which the film institute incorporated the relationships and institutional structures that preceded it.

In the context of the large-scale mobilizations taking place at the time, such as the literacy campaign, the small size of the traditional cine clubs was not a suitable paradigm. The concentration of large numbers of people brought together for a concerted purpose created the conditions for the centralization of material and human resources. In 1959 and 1960, the PSP organizational network, in the form of the CNC, was better equipped to perform this function. Gradually, and especially after 1961, ICAIC occupied the ideal position to coordinate a unified strategy for educating the masses through film. The mobile cinema project was designed to accomplished this goal in rural areas. At urban centers, this was done in coordination with the mass organizations that gathered the various civil groups, such as neighbours, through the Committee for the Defense of the Revolution (Comité de Defensa de la Revolución, CDR), workers, through the Confederation of Cuban Workers (Confederación de Trabajadores Cubanos, CTC), women, through the Cuban Women's Federation (Federación de Mujeres Cubanas, FMC)

and university students, through the University Students Federation (Federación Estudiantil Universitaria, FEU).

While the terms “cine club” and “cine-debate” were liberally applied to include the large-scale film screenings that were becoming commonplace events in Cuban movie theatres, the traditional notion of cine clubs was mostly disappearing. What was sometimes called cine clubs in the post-revolutionary period actually functioned as recruitment tools for engaging spectators in cine-debates. In general, the cine clubs of the 1950s comprised a relatively small membership, resulting in a more or less recurring group of people with a common interest in film history and in the medium’s possibilities. In contrast, the new activities were part of a government strategy, fully aware of cinema’s potential as a vehicle of education and indoctrination. Film was a useful tool for guiding the public’s interpretation towards ideological correctness rather than focusing on cinematic expression and techniques. The types of interactions that could take place at these massive viewing sessions were very different from what could be accomplished in smaller settings. Large audiences made it more difficult to get a representative sample of opinions. Instead, it was more likely that one person, or a few people, would deliver summaries of opinions. Thus, debates in the context of film screenings tended to impart these new publics with a Manichean approach to film interpretation, categorizing films according to pre-established ideological requirements.

ICAIC assumed responsibility for the needs of all types of audiences. The creation of ICAIC’s cinematheque effectively eliminated the need for cine-clubs as it took on the great majority of the functions related to film knowledge and promotion. Thus, taken as a whole, the film exhibition initiatives of the early revolutionary period reveal the gradual formation of a new two-tier system. On the one hand, large-scale projects such as the cine-debates strived to modify the taste inclinations of the non-specialized public, aiming to substitute their preference for Hollywood and Mexican popular movies with the now abundant products of socialist cinematographies. This tendency was supported by the critical work available through print and televisual media offering a strongly ideological interpretation of the films. At the other end of the spectrum, the cinematheque addressed the need that had traditionally been filled by cine clubs, by curating programs that searched for aesthetic, thematic and historical coherence, giving ample space to the modernist tendencies of Western and Eastern European New Waves. This outlook

was reinforced by the magazine *Cine Cubano*, which activated a higher degree of film-historical knowledge and analytical depth than wide-circulation publications.

Film programming was an important component of ICAIC's self-professed contribution to the Revolution. By bringing ideologically sound examples of international cinema to commercial screens, extending the reach of the audiovisual universe to remote communities through the mobile-cinema program, and providing a rich selection of aesthetically and historically significant films to the cinematheque, the institution fulfilled its audience-oriented goals. This was happening in tandem with the film production units that rapidly produced newsreels, documentaries, and educational films, along with the narratives captured in short and feature films. However, the expectation that an adequate film selection would determine the public's taste and have a tangible impact on their conscience formation, achieving the sought-after goal of decolonization of the mind, did not take into consideration the generative force of subversive readings. Multiple possibilities were open for counter-readings, the role of humour (especially irony) and the use and reuse of intertextual elements derived from the cinematic universe. These subversive uses of the film text started at the moment of film watching, and they extended into the social world of conversation, joke-making, and literary and artistic creation.

# Chapter 3. Amateur Filmmaking: Emergence and Decline

> "Decayed, curled up, crystallized, brittle or pulverized, these little movies that contained our illusion-filled past, turn up one day at the bottom of our drawers. But it doesn't matter, they fulfilled their mission. Those who made them know it. They propelled dreams. And making movies is dreaming."
>
> Walfredo Piñera[490]

The Revolution transformed the practical and discursive stakes for all aspects of cultural and intellectual expression. As demonstrated in the previous chapters, during the pre-revolutionary period individual and small group activity -whether creative, organizational, or intellectual- prevailed, while in the post-revolutionary stage the new sociopolitical conditions at first rendered these options suspicious, and later unworkable. I have shown how film education and cine-club initiatives taking place at the university, through the Church, or at neighbourhood cine-clubs, were assimilated into the Revolution's new and transformed institutions. I also explained how the influence of revolutionary politics and the drastic reorganization of the business sector favoured the centralization of film production, distribution and exhibition into a *de facto* state-owned company, the Cuban Institute for Cinematographic Arts and Industry (Instituto Cubano de Arte e Industria Cinematográficos, ICAIC). This concentration of resources and decision-making power eliminated the possibility of the healthy ideological plurality that many aspired to, and directly affected various aspects of film culture, most notably the evolution of critical discourse outside the ideological constraints set by state institutions, but also the advancement of amateur filmmaking as a self-regulating practice. Nevertheless, just as the activities and intellectual development of Cuban cinephiles in the 1950s created the conditions for a diversified audience capable of assimilating the new characteristics of 1960s' film culture, a similar evolution can be traced from amateur filmmaking to the cinema of the early post-revolutionary period.

In this chapter I question the place of amateur filmmaking in the historiography of Cuban cinema. I am particularly interested in focusing attention on the role of amateurism in the highly

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[490] Walfredo Piñera Corrales and María Caridad Cumaná González, *Mirada al cine cubano* (Brussels: Ed. OCIC, 1999), 107.

contested period of redefinitions of the years 1959 to 1961. Taking into consideration that ICAIC inherited a situation where there was no developed film industry, it is important to understand what happened to the energies devoted to pre-existing amateur activities, and to reassess their value. There are vast differences between the individual trajectories of pre-revolutionary amateur filmmakers, but in spite of these variations, they shared an important common trait: their outsider status in relation to commercial production. This outsider status conferred amateurs and semi-amateurs the opportunity to acquire revolutionarity, a type of social capital that the old players in the film business establishment could not emulate.

We must understand amateur filmmaking in Cuba as a highly fragmented constellation of very different individuals with significantly distinct aspirations. The most prominent of Cuba's 1940s amateurs were wealthy people with professions that afforded them the means and time necessary to turn their hobby into serious creativity. They were engineers, lawyers and doctors who started as amateur photographers with an interest in the moving image. Some of them inserted themselves in the international community of amateurs through their membership in the Amateur Cinema League (ACL), an organization based in the United States. Others were cinephiles that either had an interest in commercial filmmaking, or were content with experimenting with the image-making technologies available to them. By the early 1950s, new types of communities start to form around filmmaking. For instance, at specific localities such as San Antonio de los Baños, a multi-generational group of enthusiasts attempted to imitate Hollywood B-movies. In the context of the University of Havana, young people attended film appreciation classes, created cine-clubs, wrote about film, and were involved in promoting special screenings. They also held the desire to make films, which they did in an amateur capacity until they eventually pursued formal training in Europe and the United States. They were ideally placed to occupy a central role in the formation of the film industry in the early 1960s, although their position in the political spectrum was the defining factor in fulfilling this potential.[491]

Taking into consideration the copious evidence of Cuban amateur filmmaking in the 1940s and 1950s, and the wider availability of affordable technology around the world in the following decades, the fact that this type of production practically comes to a halt in Cuba during

[491] For a detailed discussion of cine-club activities, see Chapter 2.

the 1960s needs to be explained. This situation is rendered more perplexing in light of two pieces of evidence. The first is a manual providing detailed technical guidance for would-be amateurs, published in 1963.[492] The second is the attitude expressed in the 1969 essay "For an Imperfect Cinema," whereby its author advocates for the everyman's access to filmmaking.[493] However, as this chapter will demonstrate, there are many reasons why this film practice vanished in Cuba exactly at the time that institutionally-based filmmaking rises.

Some of the reasons are economic, while others are directly connected with the nature of ICAIC as an institution. As ideological perspective and the performance of revolutionarity gained more value over qualifications or experience, veteran filmmakers and entrepreneurs lost their sphere of influence in favour of a new generation of amateurs and semi-amateurs. The latter brought with them a youthful set of artistic aspirations connected with the European art cinema and uninterested in Hollywood or Mexican generic codes. ICAIC's enterprise was less interested in technical proficiency and experience than in a sense of rejuvenation, both political and aesthetic. Therefore, the institution adopted a more relaxed approach to amateurism than what a system of commercial production companies would have implemented. ICAIC took in all the amateurs that were ideologically compatible, and provided them with a training and development infrastructure. Ultimately, I argue that ICAIC filmmaking of the early 1960s was a state-funded amateur cinema.

The chapter opens with a brief discussion of recent scholarship on amateur filmmaking internationally. I then provide a local history of amateur filmmaking in Cuba, as a prelude to understanding why these nonprofessional practices disappeared. I describe the models of amateurism that existed in the 1940s and 1950s, and I assess how the term "amateur" was transformed during the years of ICAIC's emergence.

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[492] Arturo Agramonte, *Orientaciones para el principiante en cinematografia* (Cuba: Empresa Consolidada de Artes Graficas, 1963).

[493] Julio García Espinosa, "Por un cine imperfecto," *Cine Cubano*, 1969. For a translation, see Julio García Espinosa, "For an Imperfect Cinema," in *New Latin American Cinema. Theory, Practices, and Transcontinental Articulations*, ed. Michael T. Martin, trans. Julianne Burton, vol. 1, 2 vols. (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1997), 71–82.

## 1. Amateur Filmmaking: Contexts and Definitions

The process of bringing amateur film practice into focus has gradually evolved from a straightforward enumeration of facts, to challenging the established paradigms of film historiography. From the mid-1980s to today, the questions asked of this mode of audiovisual production and consumption have become progressively complex.[494] Film archivists, preservationists, and scholars have increasingly recognized the necessity to bring into light the large amount of filmed material that remained unexamined by the film historical cannon. Many have eagerly participated in a long-standing symposium on "orphan films" that has generated further investigations and critical attention into amateur filmmaking.[495] Researchers were eager to address the invisibility of home movies and amateur films from film history by first establishing their undeniable abundance, describing its textual codes, explaining the technological infrastructure available to nonprofessional film enthusiasts, and investigating the points of convergence between amateurism, the avant-garde, documentary film practices, and the domestic space.[496] With this increased recognition, a plethora of case studies have been documented, attesting to the copiousness and heterogeneity of nonprofessional cinema. However, as researchers based in Europe, the United Kingdom and the United States reclaim

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[494] For an overview of the main issues that have been put under scrutiny, it is useful to look back at three thematic dossiers published in academic journals throughout the past few decades: Patricia Erens, ed. "Home Movies and Amateur Filmmaking." Special issue, *Journal of Film and Video* 38, no. 3/4 (Summer/Fall 1986); Melinda Stone and Dan Streible, eds. "Small-Gauge and Amateur Film." Special issue, *Film History* 15, no. 2 (2003); Masha Salazkina and Enrique Fibla-Gutierrez, eds. "Toward a Global History of Amateur Film Practices and Institutions." Special issue, *Film History* 30, no. 1 (Spring 2018).

[495] The Orphan Film Symposium started in 1999 at the University of South Carolina, and continues taking place in multiple locations. Stone and Streible, "Small-Gauge and Amateur Film," 125.

[496] Volumes that have been instrumental for this area of research include Alan Kattelle, *Home Movies: A History of the American Industry, 1897-1979* (Nashua, N.H: Transition Pub, 2000); Patricia Rodden Zimmermann, *Reel Families: A Social History of Amateur Film* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995); Karen L. Ishizuka and Patricia Rodden Zimmermann, eds., *Mining the Home Movie: Excavations in Histories and Memories* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).

more space for acknowledging the uniqueness of these practices, the rest of the world remains comparatively understudied.[497]

Only recently has a richer understanding of the global implications of amateurism begun to emerge. In a special issue of the journal *Film History*, edited by Masha Salazkina and Enrique Fibla, they have demonstrated that once we adopt a more international lens, different issues come to the foreground.[498] They "propose a comparative model of analysis for amateur cinema that examines nonprofessional film as a creative practice that inhabits a liminal space between public and private spheres, state institutions and civic platforms, politics, and leisure."[499] One of the key insights this approach brings to the foreground is that in many parts of the world amateur practice has taken place in institutional spaces generated by the state, creating complex configurations of practical complicity and ideological dissent.

This vast body of work provides valuable points of reference for my investigation into the particulars of amateur film production in Cuba. Firstly, it is necessary to clearly identify the phenomenon under examination by properly categorizing Cuban film productions of the pre-revolutionary period, regardless of their perceived quality, message, or success. To establish appropriate distinctions within the non-professional horizon of filmmaking, James Moran's critical categorization is particularly useful. He explains: "Fundamentally an economic relation, amateurism accommodates any non-industrial practice pursued for reasons other than market exchange. It is the presence of commodification that properly defines the industrial, and inversely the absence of commodification that defines the amateur -rather than the historical contingencies of their respective technologies, aesthetics, and ideologies".[500]

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[497] For an important study on the United States, see Charles Tepperman, *Amateur Cinema: The Rise of North American Moviemaking, 1923-1960* (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2015); for the UK, Heather Norris Nicholson, *Amateur Film: Meaning and Practice, 1927-1977* (Manchester; New York; New York: Manchester University Press ; Distributed exclusively in the USA by Palgrave Macmillan, 2012); for France, Valérie Vignaux and Benoît Turquety, eds., *L' amateur en cinéma: un autre paradigme: histoire, esthétique, marges et institutions* (Paris: Association française de recherche sur l'histoire du cinéma, 2016).
[498] Salazkina and Fibla-Gutierrez, "Toward a Global History".
[499] Salazkina and Fibla-Gutierrez, "Toward a Global History," xi-xii.
[500] James M. Moran, *There's No Place Like Home Video* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 67.

Thus, in order to elucidate whether a film can be considered amateur or not, I have assessed whether it was financed through a production company with the intention to return a profit. In a national context like Cuba's during this period, where stable material and financial infrastructures supporting market-driven filmmaking never solidified, national movies were rarely able to recover the cost of production. However, this did not deter the tenacious entrepreneurial spirit of people like Ramón Peón, Jaime Salvador, Max Tosquella, Ernesto Caparrós, Manolo Alonso or Manuel de la Pedrosa, who created various production companies, starting with BPP Pictures in 1930 all the way to Productores Cinematográficos Associados (Associated Cinematographic Producers), formed in 1959.

It is inappropriate to characterize amateurism through the quality of the images it produces. Moran insists that amateur filmmaking is not a genre, and should not be defined by textual traits. Following this logic, he makes the case for thinking of amateurism as a mode within which different functional modalities can be identified. Thus, within the amateur filmmaking model, he includes not only non-professional amateur filmmaking, but also the avant-garde modality and the home modality.[501] This larger conceptualization of the amateur mode is very useful for understanding the diverse range of practices that existed in Cuba outside of the commercial circuit. As a small country without a reliable film industry, filmmaking took different configurations even when the same individuals were involved. For instance, one of the most recognized of the 1940s amateurs, doctor Roberto Machado Ortega, made films that span the three functional modalities specified by Moran. He filmed home movies within the family setting, he made films intended for the amateur and the scientific communities, and he also made films that aspired to an abstract quality.[502] Furthermore, through personal connections with wealthy industrialists and government figures, he also made sponsored films, although it is difficult to ascertain whether they were made in exchange for remuneration.

Machado was one of several well-positioned Cuban professionals who made amateur films as part of a community of creative individuals. They participated in local and international

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[501] Moran, *No place like home video*, 71-72.

[502] In a telephone interview with one of his sons, Roberto Machado Jr., he shared his memories of watching family movies in his childhood home in Havana in the 1940s. He also discussed his father's long-lasting interest in optical abstraction, which he explored later in life through op art paintings. Roberto Machado Jr., in discussion with the author, February 2018.

networks through which they exhibited their work, exchanged ideas, and competed for recognition. As members of the movie section of the Photography Club of Cuba (*Club Fotográfico de Cuba*, CFC), they participated in yearly contests, and those who also belonged to the ACL had the added benefit of gaining exposure in the United States and beyond. Indeed, their films shared similar traits to those analyzed by Charles Tepperman in his study of the ACL:

> Advanced amateur films differ from home movies in ways that require further attention: though both are produced outside professional filmmaking contexts using mass-marketed small-gauge film formats (16mm and 8mm film rather than professional 35mm film), films by advanced amateurs employ more polished filming and editing techniques and feature elements of narrative or thematic continuity. And while home movies are generally produced as private records of family and friends, more advanced amateurs have had a wider group of potential viewers and viewing contexts in mind.[503]

Ryan Shand introduces a helpful category to account for amateur films that do not conform to the domestic nor the avant-garde modalities. He posits that this "community mode"

> (…) is defined rather by the ambivalent exhibition space it occupies *between* the home and mass modes. Filmmakers working within the community mode include those who belonged to film societies and entered their group-made films into the annual film festivals that were held all around the world, as well as travel filmmakers who toured with their films, and also more locally based civic filmmakers who rented town halls and other available exhibition spaces. (…) the point is that their films were made not for just artists or family members, but for a general audience.[504]

One of the aspects that I find particularly compelling is how the formation of these communities is closely tied to the process of seeking legitimacy from peers. In sections II and III of this chapter I detail how this worked for different types of amateur collectives. For some, such as the members of the CFC, winning awards at national and international contests afforded them

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[503] Tepperman, *Amateur Cinema*, 6.
[504] Ryan Shand, "Theorizing Amateur Cinema: Limitations and Possibilities," *Moving Image* 8, no. 2 (2008): 53.

added encouragement and an extended exhibition network as their films were requested by fellow film societies.[505] For others, like the university students and those who shared their artistic aspirations, finding professionalization opportunities made all the difference. A section of this group later morphed into a politicized community as key events triggered a process of radicalization amongst some sectors of Cuban youth. For them, the experience of working together in a semi-clandestine manner to portray social aspects rarely seen on screen, resulted in a strong sense of loyalty and revolutionary purpose. Finally, geographically peripheral amateur communities thrived on local support and recognition.

**Latin American Context**

In the context of Latin American cultural studies, amateur cinema is unhurriedly making an appearance.[506] In Mexico and Brazil archives are facilitating new interest in amateur films, and some progress has been made in recent years towards recovering and valorizing these works, but they remain exceptional cases.[507] This new dimension of historical research is often the byproduct of work that focuses on avant-garde figures or film archival discoveries, but more sustained attention to regional amateur filmmaking is starting to emerge.[508] Scholars have employed a variety of methodologies, the most evident of which is to follow the steps of specific

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[505] In the U.S., the most important recognition was being selected in the Top Ten of the Amateur Cinema League. Internationally, several contests were held in Europe, organized through *Union Internationale du Cinéma Amateur* (UNICA). See Alan D. Kattelle, "The Amateur Cinema League and Its Films," *Film History* 15, no. 2 (2003): 238–51; Kattelle, *Home Movies,* 265-271.
[506] I am grateful to all the participants in the SCMS seminar "Non-Theatrical Film: Hemispheric American Perspectives" (Toronto, 2018), organized by Laura Isabel Serna and Julián Etienne, for the rich discussion on this topic, and in particular to Etienne for his response to my keyword paper, and for pointing out some of the current research in this direction.
[507] David M. J. Wood, "Beyond Documentary?: Archives, Absences, and Rethinking Mexican "Nonfiction" Film, c. 1935-1955," in *The Precarious in Cinemas of the Americas,* eds. Constanza Burucúa and Carolina Sitnisky (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 27-28; Lila Foster, "The Cinema Section of Foto Cine Clube Bandeirante: Ideals and Reality of Amateur Film Production in São Paulo, Brazil," *Film History* 30, no. 1 (Spring 2018): 88.
[508] For examples of scholarly work specifically dedicated to amateur film production in the region see Magdalena Acosta, "Harry Wright y el Cinema Club de México," in *El cine en las regiones de México*, eds. Lucila Hinojosa Córdova, Eduardo de la Vega Alfaro, and Tania Ruiz Ojeda (Monterrey, México: Universidad Autónoma de Nuevo León, 2013), 205-249; Lila Foster, "Brazilian Amateur Cinema: History, Discourses and Practices (1926–1959)" (PhD diss., University of São Paulo, 2016).

filmmakers already known through national film histories. Timely interviews and access to personal archives are especially helpful in order to enrich our understanding of any given amateur filmmaker's life and practice. Another constructive direction is to research specific amateur organizations with a significant publication history, such as the magazine *Movie Maker* for the ACL, or the bulletins published by local photo and cine-clubs.[509]

Going forward, it is also worth re-examining avant-garde and experimental cinema created in Latin America to re-discover how that history intersects with amateur cinema both in historical and critical discourse.[510] As mentioned above, the amateur filmmaking mode includes non-professional amateur filmmaking along with the avant-garde modality and the home modality.[511] Therefore, although avant-garde filmmakers are not generally identified as amateur, most were indeed working in an amateur capacity.[512] As a more expansive view emerges

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[509] These materials have informed important research such as Tepperman's study of the ACL in Tepperman, *Amateur Cinema*, and Foster's revealing analysis of Brazilian amateur filmmaking in Foster, "Brazilian Amateur Cinema".

[510] Latin American contributions to the historical avant-garde have been recently examined in Paul A. Schroeder Rodríguez, "La primera vanguardia del cine latinoamericano," in *Cine mudo latinoamericano: Inicios, nación, vanguardia y transición*, eds. Aurelio de los Reyes and David M.J. Wood (México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas, 2015). Although the term "experimental" is often used in contradictory ways, many scholars keep a close association between experimental form and avant-garde sensibility. See for example, Jesse Lerner and Luciano Piazza, *Ism, Ism, Ism: Experimental Cinema in Latin America* (Oakland, California; Los Angeles: University of California Press; Los Angeles Filmforum, 2017), and *Cine a contracorriente: un recorrido por el otro cine latinoamericano* (Barcelona: Cameo Media, 2010), DVD.

[511] Moran, *No place like home video*, 71-72.

[512] Well known examples in the North American context include *The Fall of the House of Usher* (James Sibley Watson and Melville Webber, 1928) and *Meshes of the* Afternoon (Maya Deren and Alexander Hamid, 1943). In Latin America, renowned films such as *Limite* (Mario Peixoto, 1929) were made without commercial intentions. Following Schroeder-Rodríguez, Cuarterolo suggests an expanded corpus of Latin American avant-garde filmmaking. It would include *São Paulo: A Sinfonia da metrópole/São Paulo: Symphony of the Metropolis* (Rodolfo Rex Lustig and Adalberto Kemeny, 1929, Brazil), *Ganga bruta* (Humberto Mauro, 1933, Brazil), *777* (Emilio Amero, 1929, Mexico), *¡Qué Viva México!* (Sergei Eisenstein, 1931, Mexico), *Redes* (Paul Strand, 1934, Mexico), and *Disparos en el istmo/Shots Fired in the Isthmus* (Manuel Álvarez Bravo, 1935, Mexico). Andrea Cuarterolo, "A gaze turned towards Europe," in *Cosmopolitan Film Cultures in Latin America, 1896-1960*, eds. Rielle Navitski and Nicolas Poppe (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2017), 180-210. Also Schroeder-Rodriguez, "La primera vanguardia del cine latinoamericano". Other lost films could be added to this corpus, as

regarding what makes a film "experimental" and the limits of what is "Latin American,"[513] specific filmographies provide new insights into each of the categories they straddle.[514] Thus, by adopting a more flexible attitude regarding the contours of experimental cinema, scholars can arrive at new insights that enrich different aspects of non-industrial film history in the region.

We can identify amateur films of the avant-garde modality by paying attention to a combination of formal traits, such as the intentional subversion of institutionalized aesthetic codes, and other characteristics linked to their reception context. One essential aspect to take into consideration is that avant-garde films exist in very specific discursive environments, accompanied by essays or manifestos expressing allegiance to a given artistic community, and finding their publics in distinctive exhibition spaces. Thus, amateur films that are mentioned in artistic journals or participated in certain events would clearly fall into the avant-garde category and conform to the most common usage of the word experimental. My preference is to differentiate between discourses of experimentalism, which can be applied to a variety of filmmaking practices, whether professional, non-professional, politically committed or formalist in nature. This would include the films of Horacio Coppola and other modernist photographers.[515] Meanwhile, other non-professional work, which may originate from a domestic ethos, or from a different type of cinephile community would fall outside the category of the intentionally experimental.

Most known cases of experimental filmmaking in Latin America during the first half of the twentieth century were carried out by photographers such as Emilio Amero, Manuel Álvarez Bravo, and Horacio Coppola.[516] The historical evidence so far has not generated any information

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more local histories start to emerge. For instance, Lila Foster mentions *Estudos* (Thomaz Farkas, 1949, Brazil) in Foster, "The Cinema Section of Foto Cine Clube Bandeirante," 99.

[513] Lerner and Piazza, *Ism*, *ism, ism*, 4.

[514] See for example studies of Horacio Coppola's films: David Oubiña, "The Skin of the World: Horacio Coppola and Cinema," *Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies* 24, no. 2 (2015): 207–21; Cuarterolo, "A gaze turned towards Europe"; Verónica Tell, "Portraits of Places: Notes on Horacio Coppolas Photography and Short Urban Films," *Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies* 24, no. 2 (2015): 153–71.

[515] Eduardo de la Vega Alfaro, "Álvarez Bravo, Filmmaker," *Luna Córnea*, 2002, https://issuu.com/c_imagen/docs/lunacornea_24/288; James Oles, "Emilio Amero's missing movies," *Luna Córnea*, 2002, https://issuu.com/c_imagen/docs/lunacornea_24/288.

[516] For a useful overview of the relationship between film and photography in Latin America, see Andrea Cuarterolo, "Film and Photography: An Archeology," in Marvin D'Lugo, Ana M. López,

linking Cuban photographers from the earlier part of the 20th century with avant-garde filmmaking practices or sensibilities. Nonetheless, accomplished photographers like Roberto Machado or Antonio Cernuda were active movie makers. Yet, since their films have not survived, ascribing or denying aesthetic merits to them would be equally misleading, and should remain in the realm of the speculative. Still, this does not mean we should dismiss the possibility of them holding an artistic vocation.

**Amateur Filmmaking in Cuban Film Historiography**

In Cuba, like in the rest of Latin America, amateur films from the first half of the twentieth century are almost completely unavailable. Lerner and Piazza, referring to the lost films of Mexicans Emilio Amero and Manuel Álvarez Bravo, assert that theirs represents a typical situation where "(…) so much of it is lost, unavailable for viewing, slowly deteriorating, forgotten and neglected, in the closets of artists' grandchildren, tied up in disputes among heirs, or otherwise inaccessible."[517] In the Cuban context, other issues besides family neglect have contributed to the almost total disappearance of these artefacts. Throughout the 1960s, the massive exodus of the upper and middle-classes forced a break in the typically continuous safekeeping of family mementos. Cuba's economic elite was the first to leave the island. It is estimated that a total of 173,000 property owners, business executives and high ranking professionals fled from 1959 to 1962. The second wave of emigration encompassed a larger group of 250,000 that left the island in a span of 9 years (1965-1974). This group consisted of Cubans with families in the United States, small business owners, middle class Cubans and qualified workers.[518] Hurried *émigrés* had to leave behind photos and home movies. As the state took possession of their homes, any personal contents that did not have monetary value were discarded.

Furthermore, the dust, heat and humidity of the unsparing Cuban climate have been particularly unkind to film. From the perspective of cultural institutions home movies lacked

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and Laura Podalsky, eds., *The Routledge Companion to Latin American Cinema* (Abingdon, Oxon; New York, NY: Routledge, 2018).

[517] Lerner and Piazza, *Ism, Ism, Ism*, 10.

[518] Silvia Pedraza, "Olas migratorias desde 1959 entre el desencanto y la desesperanza," *El Nuevo Herald*, May 30, 2008, https://www.elnuevoherald.com/ultimas-noticias/article1933014.html.

cultural value, but some amateur films were once preserved. However, even classical feature films at the care of ICAIC's cinematheque did not survive the 1990s economic crisis known as the Special Period.[519] In the assessment of film critic and promoter Walfredo Piñera:

> Unfortunately, we have been losing almost all of the initial amateur work I have referred to, a victim of time and the lack of efficient conservation resources. Decayed, curled up, crystallized, brittle or pulverized, these little movies that contained our illusion-filled past, turn up one day at the bottom of our drawers. But it doesn't matter, they fulfilled their mission. Those who made them know it. They propelled dreams. And making movies is dreaming.[520]

Amateur films have never occupied a prominent place in Cuban film historiography. During the late 1950s, a handful of film critics publicly celebrated award-winning amateur filmmakers, and they continued to promote their work during the first two years of the Revolution.[521] After 1961, pre-revolutionary film production was either ignored or referred to in derisive terms. One notable exception was Arturo Agramonte's 1966 book *Cronología del Cine Cubano* (Cronology of Cuban Cinema), which included an appendix dealing with the non-professional and semi-professional movies made during the 1940s and 1950s.[522] The next effort to recover this history was published over three decades later, in 1999. In a chapter entitled "El cine aficionado" ("Amateur Cinema") Piñera attempted the first basic narrative of this history.[523] That book, published in Belgium through SIGNIS, the international Catholic organization for media and communication (which replaced the earlier International Catholic Office for Cinema),

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[519] The list of films that used to be available at the Cinemateca de Cuba were listed in María Eulalia Douglas, *La tienda negra: El cine en Cuba, 1897-1990* (La Habana: Cinemateca de Cuba, 1996), 278-281. However, when I inquired about these films in the summer of 2015, I was told that all of these titles have been lost.
[520] Piñera, *Mirada al cine cubano*, 107.
[521] Walfredo Piñera, "El cine experimental. Camino para encaminar el cine nacional," *Cinema,* May 1959; José Manuel Valdés-Rodríguez, "El cine en Cuba Republicana. Antecedentes. Presente. Posibilidades Industriales y Estéticas," in *Historia de Cuba republicana y sus antecedentes favorables y adversos a la independencia* (La Habana: Oficina del Historiador de la Ciudad de la Habana, 1960), 155-158.
[522] Arturo Agramonte, *Cronología del cine cubano* (La Habana: Ediciones ICAIC, 1966), 155-172.
[523] Piñera, *Mirada al cine cubano,* 101-107.

did not have links to any Cuban government institutions. In the 2000s, other books approached the topic of non-professional filmmaking, especially Juan Antonio García Borrero's *Rehenes de la sombra*, published in Spain in 2002, and Eduardo Noguer's *Historia del cine cubano*, published the same year in Miami. Neither were likely to circulate within Cuba. With Luciano Castillo's four volumes of *Cronología del Cine Cubano* (2011, 2012, 2013, 2016) a new era of more in-depth knowledge about Cuban pre-revolutionary cinema in all its facets has opened up.[524]

As more information becomes available, researchers have started to place the old traditions of non-professional filmmaking in relation to present day initiatives.[525] This is a necessary effort in order to create a complete picture of Cuban cinema in all its modalities. However, the intent to demonstrate the historical existence of a cinema produced outside of commercial and state institutions has run the risk of establishing straightforward connections between amateur practices supported by different technologies (film, analog video, digital platforms), and conditioned by different social, cultural, and political circumstances. Through archival research, and with Agramonte and Castillo's encyclopedic work as reference, many details come to light that open themselves up for further analysis and contextualization. Rather than listing specific works and their perceived worth, the following sections discuss the relationship between amateur filmmakers and the specific communities to which their films were addressed.

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[524] Arturo Agramonte and Luciano Castillo, *Cronología del cine cubano I (1897-1936)*, vol. 1, 4 vols. (La Habana: Ediciones ICAIC, 2011); Arturo Agramonte and Luciano Castillo, *Cronología del cine cubano II (1937-1944)*, vol. 2, 4 vols. (La Habana: Ediciones ICAIC, 2012); Arturo Agramonte and Luciano Castillo, *Cronología del cine cubano III (1945-1952)*, vol. 3, 4 vols. (La Habana: Ediciones ICAIC, 2013); Arturo Agramonte and Luciano Castillo, *Cronología del cine cubano IV (1953-1959)*, vol. 4, 4 vols. (La Habana: Ediciones ICAIC, 2016).

[525] Dean Luis Reyes, "El cine independiente en Cuba. Cómo llegamos hasta aquí," *Cine Cubano, la pupila insomne* (blog), June 16, 2015, https://cinecubanolapupilainsomne.wordpress.com/2015/06/16/dean-luis-reyes-sobre-el-cine-independiente-en-cuba/.

## 2. Cuban Precursors: Amateur Filmmaking in the 1940s

### Club Fotográfico de Cuba

Amateur filmmakers gained a public presence in the early 1940s through their association with the Cuba Photography Club (Club Fotográfico de Cuba, CFC). The early link between amateur photographers and cinematographers is made evident by the name of the first CFC publication, *Foto-Cine*. This choice of name indicates that its founders wanted to give equal relevance to those interested in still and moving images. Moreover, some members of the CFC were also members of the Photography Society of America (PSA) and of the Amateur Cinema League (ACL) in the United States. Members of the CFC were mostly wealthy professionals, including lawyers, doctors and engineers.

One of the first events organized by the CFC was the national amateur filmmaking contest in 1943. It was not only advertised nationally, but also in the United States through *Popular Photography* magazine. By looking at the winners of the 1943 contest we can get a glimpse at the type of person interested in amateur cinematography and at the type of film that was thought of as meriting awards.[526] One of the winning films in the 8 mm category, *La vida de los peces* (The Life of Fish) was made by Armando García-Menocal y Córdova (also known as Armando Menocal), a dental surgeon who won several awards in photography and film throughout his membership in the CFC.[527] The film was awarded on the basis of its cinematographic qualities and scientific outlook. As member of the ACL and the PSA, he screened a later version of this film in the US in 1949 under the title "The Life of Fish and Flowers of Havana".[528] In 1947, Menocal took the film course offered by José Manuel Valdés-Rodríguez, indicating his growing interest in cinema.[529] The other 8 mm film was *Desfile gimnástico femenino* (Women's

[526] Arturo Agramonte and Luciano Castillo, *Cronología del cine cubano II (1937-1944)*, vol. 2, 4 vols. (La Habana: Ediciones ICAIC, 2012), 404-407; Agramonte, *Cronología del cine cubano*, 157.
[527] Ramón Cabrales, *Diccionario Histórico de la Fotografía en Cuba* (Miami: Arista Publishing, 2016), 160.
[528] "Clubs," *Movie Makers*, November 1949, 430, Media History Digital Library.
[529] "Relación de Estudiantes de la Escuela de Verano," Valdés-Rodríguez Digital Archive.

Gymnastics Parade, Félix Ayón).[530] In the 16 mm category one of the winning films was *Varadero* (Guillermo González Vidal), and the other was *Vida y triunfo* (Life and Triumph, Jaime Traumont).[531] In both instances the jury pointed out the excessive verbosity of the narration. They also found that in spite of its pictorial achievements, *Varadero* left out the human element from its approach. In contrast, *Vida y triunfo* was praised for its subject matter, which was deemed to have a social projection that the other films in the contest lacked.[532]

The CFC continued to hold the annual amateur filmmaking contests until at least 1948. Each year, both small-gauge formats were represented. Film historians have also mentioned several film titles for which very little information exists, such as *Baracoa* (Dr. Guillermo Cepero), *Consagración episcopal* (Episcopal Consecration, Dr. Guillermo Cepero & Eusebio Dardet), *Trinidad* (Dr. José Lastras), *Yerba Alta* (Tall Grass, René Martínez), *La promesa del mar* (The Promise of the Sea, Miguel A. Torrás and Federico de Ibarzábal, 1946-1949).[533] It is therefore evident that similarly to the United States, in Cuba, especially in Havana, the wealthy and upper middle classes could afford amateur film equipment.[534]

The availability of 16 mm film equipment in Cuba dates back to the late 1920s, while 8 mm cameras became available in the country in 1935.[535] The presence of a Kodak branch in Havana ensured that cameras and projectors arrived in the country shortly after their introduction in the North American market. They were accompanied by manuals and technical advice provided by the company, as well as local film processing facilities.[536] While most were using

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[530] Félix Ayón is most likely the son of politician Félix Ayón Suárez. The younger Ayón became a publisher, well-known in bohemian circles and connected to progressive voices in literature, journalism, and the arts.
[531] González Vidal was a manager of photography studios in Havana. Cabrales, *Diccionario Histórico de la Fotografía en Cuba*, 173. I have not been able to find any information about Jaime Traumont.
[532] Agramonte and Castillo, *Cronología II*, 404-407.
[533] Agramonte, *Cronología del cine cubano,* 160; Agramonte and Castillo, *Cronología II*, 406-407; Douglas, *La tienda negra*, 278-281.
[534] Kattelle, *Home Movies*, 313.
[535] The company American Photo Studios commercialized amateur movie cameras like the FILMO (Bell and Howell) as early as 1927. They also advertised Cine Kodak cameras as early as 1932. In 1935, *Kodak Cubana* advertised the Cine-Kodak Eight. See advertisements in *Bohemia*, October 16, 1927; *Bohemia*, January 31, 1932; *Bohemia*, December 22, 1935, Digital Library of the Caribbean.
[536] Piñera, *Mirada al cine cubano*, 101-102.

these tools just for the pleasurable recording of their travels and family events, others had a fascination with technology and visuality that was channeled through their amateur filmmaking.

**Roberto Machado and International Recognition**

The Cuban amateur filmmaker whose work gained the most international exposure during the 1940s was doctor Roberto Machado Ortega (1905-1979). Like many of the affluent members of the CFC, he was an avid amateur photographer who was also interested in the moving image.[537] What sets his work apart from other amateur cinematographers of his time, is the relative success and widespread exposure of his work, compared to his contemporaries. His film *Kaleidoscopio* was selected as one of the ACL's Ten Best of 1946, and following this, it was screened several times throughout 1947 at ACL events.[538] Remarkably, it was also included in the screening of experimental films organized by the *Art in Cinema Society* of the San Francisco Museum of Art.[539] The film gained further international exposure when it was selected for the International Amateur Movie Festival in Sao Paulo, Brazil in October 1950.[540] After that it is very likely that it remained in the ACL library, as there is evidence that it continued to be borrowed and screened at least as late as mid 1951.[541]

The ACL presented *Kaleidoscopio* as one of the Ten Best of 1946 in the following manner:

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[537] His filmography includes *Cuba, Land of Romance*, *Rapsodia en azul*, *Tabaco cubano*, *El secreto de una industria,* and *El dragado de la Bahía de* Cardenas. Piñera, *Mirada al cine cubano*, 103; Agramonte, *Cronología del cine cubano*, 157. As confirmed by one of his sons, all his films have been lost. Roberto Machado Jr., in discussion with the author, February 2018. His still photography has survived and has been restored and published. See Roberto Machado, *Cuba 1930-1958: Photographs of Dr. Roberto Machado*, ed. Silvia Lizama (Lunenburg, Vt.: The Stinehour Press, 2001).

[538] His film was shown at various ACL clubs across the US. "Amateur Clubs," *Movie Makers*, January 1947, 26; "Amateur Clubs," *Movie Makers*, February 1947, 64; "Amateur Clubs," *Movie Makers*, March 1947, 113; "Amateur Clubs," *Movie Makers*, May 1947, 199; "Clubs," *Movie Makers*, December 1947, 549. Media History Digital Library.

[539] Scott MacDonald, Frank Stauffacher, and Art in Cinema Society, *Art in Cinema: Documents toward a History of the Film Society* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006), 63-64.

[540] "Brazilian Festival," *Movie Makers,* December 1950, 476, Media History Digital Library; Foster, "The Cinema Section of Foto Cine Clube Bandeirante," 100.

[541] "Clubs," *Movie Makers,* August 1951, 270, Media History Digital Library.

> *Kaleidoscopio*, by Dr. Roberto Machado, is a brilliant and provocative study in abstractions, filmed in its entirety through a kaleidoscope. Dr. Machado's cinematic extension tube, however, is quite obviously not the familiar small toy of one's childhood: in one sequence, delicate human fingers are deployed before the device, while in another a set of colored, kitchen measuring spoons do a gay dance in multiple. The lighting -which traditionally was transmitted only through the base- ranges from that type (through gleaming balls of crushed cellophane) to reflected illumination on an assortment of children's marbles. Billed by its producer as a "film musical," *Kaleidoscopio* is indeed instinct with strong rhythmic patterns and pulsations. The picture is an exciting and imaginative advance along the ever widening frontier of personal motion pictures.[542]

In an article written for *Movie* Makers, Machado explained how he got the idea for making the film after one of his sons' toy kaleidoscope got broken. As he tried to fix it, he came to understand the toy's mechanism and this motivated him to build a contraption that created the same effect as a kaleidoscope. With the help of his wife, he then shot glassware and various other objects through it. He was proud of this achievement and made a modest claim at imagination and originality.[543] Interestingly, he expressed that he was particularly interested in synchronizing music and abstract images: "Immediately the inspiration rose in my mind to capture these colored images with my camera and later to synchronize them with phonograph records, obtaining in this way an abstract and rhythmic film which would represent to a certain point, the visualization of the music."[544]

The fact that Cuban amateur filmmakers had a close relationship with their American counterparts is not surprising. Doctors like Roberto Machado or Armando Menocal had training and professional ties to the Unites States, and were regularly in close contact with larger networks of like-minded practitioners through medical associations.[545] Their membership in the ACL provided visibility and a certain level of recognition for their creative work. In the absence

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[542] *Movie Makers,* December 1946, 471, Media History Digital Library.
[543] Roberto Machado, "Adventure in Abstraction," *Movie Makers*, May 1947, 195, 216-217, Media History Digital Library.
[544] Machado, "Adventure in Abstraction," 195.
[545] For an in-depth account of many shared aspects in education and consumer culture during the first six decades of the 20th century, see Louis A. Pérez Jr., *On Becoming Cuban: Identity, Nationality, and Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999).

of an interest in commercial success, this wider access was probably an important motivating factor. At the same time, the ACL saw itself as an alternative network for the global circulation of films, and encouraged the participation of amateurs from other countries in their contests as a way of strengthening its international links.[546]

*Kaleidoscopio* was seen not only within the ACL community, but also in the context of experimental film screenings. The Art in Cinema Society of the San Francisco Museum of Art included the film as part of its second series of screenings, in April 1947.[547] At that time, the term "experimental" had not yet become enshrined into a precise typology, and this fluidity allowed for an eclectic selection of Soviet, European and North American films.[548] They were shown over the course of five Friday nights, organized into five themes: "Experiments in Fantasy", "Trickery and Surrealism", "Symbolism and Poetry", "Ingenuity and Wit", and "Two Russian Experimental Groups". Recommended by the ACL for its technical and visual inventiveness, Machado's film was shown in the "Ingenuity and Wit" section, exhibiting the amateur's contribution to new forms of visual abstraction. Thus, while no specific accounts of a Cuban experimental filmmaking tradition exist, this film's inclusion into a foundational event of the emerging international network of experimental cinema demonstrates that Cuban amateurs of the 1940s were as inclined to formal experimentation as their counterparts in the rest of the world.

**Other Amateurs**

Nevertheless, some amateurs had a clear financial interest. Juan Miguel Alonso Echevarría is an example of a medical professional who was interested in the film industry per

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[546] Tepperman, *Amateur Cinema*, 73, 85. Other Cubans (or Cuba-based) members of the ACL mentioned in *Movie Makers* during the 1950s include Dr. Julio de los Santos, Merlino Cremata Hernandez, Orlando Matas, Enrique Reyes, Pascual de Rojas, Rolando A. Díaz, Dr. Nivardo Martínez de la Cotera, Orestes A. Dulzaides, Victor M. Fernandez, José de Lugo Jaime, and Frank Barone.

[547] MacDonald and Stauffacher, *Art in Cinema*, 63-64.

[548] The first volume that attempted a typology of experimental cinema in North America was P. Adams Sitney, *Visionary Film: The American Avant-garde* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974). The collection of films in Bruce Charles Posner et al., *Unseen Cinema: Early American Avant-Garde Film 1894-1941* (New York: Anthology Film Archives, 2005), DVD, takes a wider, more encompassing view that includes avant-garde as well as amateur films as part of a tradition of experimentation.

se. He was a dental surgeon who co-directed and produced the first 16 mm feature film, *El profesor maldito* (The Cursed Professor) along with actor Carlos G. Alpuente in 1940. For this production, the line between amateur and professional are slightly blurred, since the people who participated were involved in the commercial industry. The cameraman was Luis Caparrós, an experienced professional. The equipment was borrowed from Kodak through one of its technicians, probably a friend. Given the close ties of all the participants to the then booming commercial production, it is hard to make the case for this to be an amateur film.[549] After this, Alonso Echeverría was involved with a production company, Compañía Producciones Cinematográficas Cubanas, S.A, as treasurer and stakeholder.

On the other end of the spectrum, we find examples of young people making films for the pleasure and fun of combining a hobby with the company of friends. Such is the case of Plácido González Gómez, who made his first amateur films as a teenager. His passion for movie making evolved from regular home movies to documentary and fiction films.[550] In 1946 he made an ambitious genre-based movie entitled *El tesoro sangriento* (The Bloody Treasure). This thirty-minute color film was an homage to Errol Flynn's adventure movies. His friends, dressed up as pirates, displayed their athletic abilities for the camera. As a youngster, Piñera was involved in this amateur "superproduction". He remembered that it "included the use of miniatures for the pirate scenes, underwater views, aerial shots taken from a small airplane, and car chases as expected of a true thriller." According to him, "its candor and spontaneity, its achievements in continuity and montage, were sincerely praised by the specialists who saw it."[551]

Amateur filmmakers were diverse in their aims as well as in their measure of success. Machado and Menocal were affluent professionals who obtained local and international prestige

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[549] Agramonte, *Cronología del cine cubano*, 156; Agramonte and Castillo, *Cronología II*, 256-257.

[550] His amateur filmography includes *Un día cazando palomas* (1943), *El tesoro sangriento* (1946), *Festival de cultura física* (1948). *La cerca de vidrio o una tragedia en época de mangos* (1946-1949), *Cimarrón* (1951-1953), *Close-Up o Un suicidio en Primer Plano* (1953), *Uno, el solitario* (1958). Agramonte, *Cronología del cine cubano,* 157-158; Piñera, *Mirada al cine cubano*, 103-104; Agramonte and Castillo, *Cronología II*, 406-407; Agramonte and Castillo, *Cronología III,* 72-74, 77; Fausto Canel, "Breve historia de un cine," *Lunes de Revolución,* February 1961; Nestor Almendros, "The Cinema in Cuba," *Film Culture*, 1956; Walfredo Piñera, "Una sesión de cine experimental cubano en el Lyceum Lawn Tennis," *Diario de La Marina*, November 14, 1959, Digital Library of the Caribbean.

[551] Piñera, *Mirada al cine cubano*, 103-104.

within the amateur community, while Alonso Echevarría exemplifies the professional who became involved in the movie business. They can be considered successful in their relative ambitions. On the other hand, cinephiles like González Gómez made films by themselves or with their friends, outside of amateur or semi-professional networks. This type of amateur, interested in the artisanal and collective nature of filmmaking, sometimes fails due to lack of technical expertise, but remains highly enthusiastic. They don't achieve wider recognition, but the people who know them attest to their passion and persistence. Their lesser known projects were either lost because of technical insufficiencies, or because they never circulated outside of very small circles. Taken as a whole, this body of work demonstrates that already in the 1940s amateur production in Cuba was rich and heterogeneous. In the following section I will analyze the emergence of new sets of interests attached to amateur production in the following decade.

## 3. Amateurs and Cinephiles in the 1950s

### Néstor Almendros and Amateur Filmmaking within Cine Club de La Habana/Cinemateca de Cuba

In the 1950s cinephilia bifurcated into film criticism or amateur filmmaking, depending on circumstance. As described in Chapter 2, by the turn of the decade a group of young cinephiles from a different generation was actively engaged in creating cine-clubs, organizing screenings, and writing reviews and thematic essays on film. The core members of the Cine Club de La Habana/Cinemateca de Cuba (from here on referred to as CCH-CC) were pioneers in engaging with the latest ideas about the importance of preserving and exhibiting film classics.[552] They also had a strong interest in making films, which led them to pursue occasions for experimenting with the medium, at first in an amateur capacity, and later through training and professional opportunities.

Renowned filmmaker Tomás Gutiérrez Alea (1928-1996) took his first steps in this direction while he was still a young university student. His early collaborations with other amateur filmmakers of his generation played an essential role in his decision to become a film director. He made his first two amateur films in 1947 as a 19-year old Law student at the

[552] For a detailed account of the evolution of the Cine Club de La Habana, turned Cinemateca de Cuba, see Chapter 2.

University of Havana. When he made *La caperucita roja* (Little Red Riding Hood) and *El fakir* (The Fakir) with his first 8 mm camera, he became convinced that he would become a filmmaker, not a lawyer.[553] By 1948, he had befriended other active cinephiles involved with the CCH-CC. His friendship with Néstor Almendros (1930-1992) was particularly important during these formative years, and the two collaborated on their first serious project in 1950. For this film, entitled *Una confusión cotidiana* (A Common Confusion), they purchased a Bell & Howell 8 mm camera. Gutiérrez Alea wrote the script based on a short story by Franz Kafka, and enlisted theatre students Vicente Revuelta and Julio Matas as actors.[554]

Almendros' presence in Havana during these years was essential not only for the young Gutiérrez Alea, but more widely for the development of a dynamic community of aspiring filmmakers linked to the CCH-CC. Born in Spain into a highly educated family, Almendros had been involved with the cine-club movement in Barcelona before moving to Cuba in 1948 at the age of 18.[555] As a testament to the deep roots he created in Havana, Guillermo Cabrera Infante referred to him as "a Spaniard who knew how to be Cuban".[556] While studying Philosophy and Literature at the University of Havana, he immediately became involved in Havana's film culture, participating in cine clubs, writing about film, and making movies with fellow amateurs. A few years later he obtained some formal training in New York and Rome, where he also promoted the new generation of Cuban film enthusiasts that he knew so well.[557] Once he left Cuba definitively in 1961, he worked with European and American directors, eventually became an Oscar winning cinematographer in the United States. His career is representative of the type of artistic talent that finds their calling early on, and is able to successfully contribute to international cinema.

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[553] Agramonte and Castillo, *Cronología III*, 99, 248.
[554] Vicente Revuelta (1929-2012) was a distinguished avant-garde theater actor and director. Julio Matas (1931-2015) was a theater director, lawyer, author, and literature professor.
[555] His father, Herminio Almendros (1898-1974), was an influential educator, who became a household name in Cuba as the author and editor of children's textbooks and story books. For more on the Almendros family, see Elizabeth Mirabal and Carlos Velazco, "Maria Rosa mira los Almendros," *Revolución y Cultura*, 2010.
[556] Cabrera Infante dedicated his book *Mea Cuba* "A Néstor Almendros, un español que supo ser cubano." Guillermo Cabrera Infante, *Mea Cuba* (Barcelona: Plaza & Janés, 1992).
[557] Almendros, "The Cinema in Cuba," 21.

One of the first texts he published in Cuba was a how-to-guide for would be amateurs in 1950: "Orientaciones para el cine amateur" ("Guide for amateur cinema").[558] The text starts with a brief historical overview of amateur filmmaking, and asserts the belief that amateur filmmaking can bring more artistic freedom than commercial cinema. He decries the lack of artistic amateur filmmaking in Latin America in comparison to the dynamic European scene. The main goal of the article is to provide practical advice to amateur filmmakers, explaining the basic terms necessary for writing a script and planning a film shoot. While his rudimentary understanding of camera techniques and scriptwriting strategies sound like the naif advice of an inexperienced 20-year old, this didactic piece gives us some insight into what was probably the topic of many conversations between his cinephile contemporaries. Taking into consideration that 1950 was precisely the year in which Almendros and Gutiérrez Alea were working on *Una confusión cotidiana*, we can also see the film as their exercise in putting these lessons into practice. At this learning stage, some contradiction is evident in the amateur's emphasis on the rules ("the grammar") of shot composition, camera placement, and transitions. On the one hand he advices to follow the conventional use of these filmic strategies, and on the other, he insists that the defining element is the filmmaker's artistic sense.

Almendros' active participation in Havana's film culture was most strongly felt during the first half of the 1950s. During this time, he wrote many of the program notes for the CCH-CC screenings, as well as essays on film published in local publications.[559] He was a dynamic collaborator who participated in a wide range of amateur projects. Initially he took up the role of director of photography for *Una confusión cotidiana* (A Common Confusion, Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, 1950, 8 mm), and *Cimarrón* (Runaway Slave, Plácido González Gómez, 1951, 16 mm). Between 1951 and 1955 he directed his own projects, such as *La boticaria* (The Pharmacist, 8 mm), *Sabá* (16 mm), *Nunca* (Never, 16 mm), and *Un monólogo de Hamlet* (A Hamlet

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[558] Néstor Almendros, "Orientaciones para el cine amateur," *Mensuario de Arte, Literatura y Crítica*, September 1950, reprinted in Néstor Almendros, *Cinemanía* (Barcelona: Seix Barral, 1992), 25-29.

[559] For a more detailed consideration of CCH-CC programming see Chapter 2. Almendros published several short pieces in *Juventud de Marianao, El Filósofo Travieso, Mensuario de Arte, Literatura y Crítica*, *Noticias de Arte.* He continued writing about film throughout his life, and published a compilation of his texts in Almendros, *Cinemanía*.

Monologue, 16 mm), co-directed with Ramón Suárez.[560] Although many of these films remained unfinished, these projects and the collaborations they involved, turned the cinephile community of the CCH-CC into an amateur filmmaking community. He even tried to formalize the goal of making 16 mm films with the creation of a group called Grupo 16 (Group 16) in 1953.[561] Although Group 16 did not last long, some of its members worked together on the film *Close Up o Un suicidio en primer plano* (Suicide in Close Up, 10 min), directed by Plácido González Gómez, with camerawork by Ramón Suárez.[562] Other amateur projects made around this time by members of the group include *Sarna* (Scabies, Germán Puig, Edmundo Desnoes, 1952), *La pintura de Amelia Peláez* (Amelia Pelaez Paintings, Ramón Suárez),[563] *El guante* (The Glove, Ramón Suárez),[564] and *El visitante* (The Visitor, Germán Puig, 1955).[565]

Those aspiring filmmakers who had the necessary connections and were able to afford it, sought formal training abroad. As mentioned in Chapter 2, Germán Puig traveled to France at the end of 1950 with the intention to study at L'Institut des hautes études cinématographiques (IDHEC). For their part, in 1951 Gutiérrez Alea and Julio García Espinosa (1926-2016) enrolled

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[560] Nestor Almendros, *A Man with a Camera* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1984), 289-290. However, Suárez denies Almendros' participation in this project. Arturo Agramonte and Luciano Castillo, *Cronología del cine cubano IV (1953-1959)*, vol. 4, 4 vols. (La Habana: Ediciones ICAIC, 2016), 369.

[561] The group was integrated by members of the CCH-CC, and others from amateur filmmaking and experimental theatre, including Plácido González, Germán Puig, Roberto Branly, Cabrera Infante, Nydia del Valle, Néstor Almendros, Francisco Domínguez, among others. Agramonte and Castillo, *Cronología III*, 74-75. According to Almendros, an Association for the Production of Experimental Films "has been created which groups various of the elements that were before dispersed." Almendros, "The Cinema in Cuba," 21. It is very likely that he is referring to the same group.

[562] Agramonte and Castillo, *Cronología III*, 74. Ramón Suárez (1930) became a cinematographer, also known as Ramón F. Suárez. He worked at ICAIC for several years, most notably with Gutiérrez Alea in *La muerte de un burócrata* (Death of a Bureaucrat, 1966), and *Memorias del subdesarrollo* (Memories of Underdevelopmnent, 1968). He left Cuba permanently at the end of the 1960s and continued his film career in Europe.

[563] Canel, "Breve historia de un cine"; Agramonte and Castillo, *Cronología IV*, 343-344.

[564] Agramonte and Castillo, *Cronología IV*, 344.

[565] Almendros was the director of photography for *El visitante*. Germán Puig, "Debido a la política, me quedé sin amigos," interview by Manuel Zayas, *Cuba Encuentro*, October 9, 2009, https://www.cubaencuentro.com/entrevistas/articulos/debido-a-la-politica-me-quede-sin-amigos-216025. Puig also co-directed a short promotional film for Esso with Carlos Franqui: *Carta a una madre* (1954). Maria Eulalia Douglas, *Catálogo del cine cubano, 1897-1960* (Ediciones ICAIC, 2008), 121-122.

at the Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia in Rome, Italy, a path taken by many of their Latin American contemporaries.[566] Similarly, Almendros moved to New York in 1955 to study at the Institute of Film Techniques at City College, a program headed by the artist and avant-garde filmmaker Hans Richter. However, he was disappointed by the limited resources available at the school and decided to continue his education at the Centro Sperimentale. He had heard good things about it from his Cuban friends, but once again he was disillusioned. Almendros felt that as an autodidact he had already learned most of what was taught. Furthermore, foreigners were allowed in class as auditors, and therefore they were not supposed to undertake 35 mm film projects as the Italians students did. Latin American students felt frustrated by this differential treatment, but they circumvented these rules by enthusiastically participating in their Italian friends' projects. He was most disenchanted by the conservative teaching style he encountered that year, whereby retired filmmakers with long-term appointments lacked enthusiasm and creativity. The emphasis put on the technical clichés for lighting led him to adopt a more inquisitive and creative attitude towards cinematography, which served him well throughout his long career.[567]

Upon completion of his studies in Italy, he found a job as a Spanish instructor at Vassar College, which allowed him to return to the United States. He then resumed making amateur films, which he shot on the weekends. During this time, he completed two films, *The Mount of Luna,* and *58-59*.[568] The latter is the film that he considered "his first success."[569] In his own words:

> Yet the film was like nothing we had been taught in the Italian film school, nor in Richter's courses in New York. The idea, like that of the English "Free Cinema," was to catch people unaware. It was spontaneous filmmaking, shot with a hand-held camera and

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[566] On the importance of this collective experience of studying in Europe, see Paulo Antonio Paranaguá, "Of Periodizations and Paradigms: The Fifties in Comparative Perspective," *Nuevo Texto Crítico* 11, no. 21–22 (1998): 41-42. Other well-known Latin American figures who coincided in Rome were Fernando Birri and Gabriel García Márquez, who would become instrumental in founding the first Cuban international film school, the Escuela Internacional de Cine y Televisión (EICTV) in the mid-1980s.
[567] Almendros, *A Man with a Camera*, 30-31.
[568] His sister recalls participating in *The Mount of Luna.* Mirabal and Velazco, "Maria Rosa mira los Almendros," 26.
[569] Almendros, *A Man with a Camera*, 33.

no tripod, using very sensitive negative film, the Kodak Tri X, which had recently appeared on the market.[570]

Since Almendros left for the US, his path as a filmmaker began to diverge from that of his Cuban contemporaries. First, he realized that the conventions of cinematography were too rigid, and decided to experiment by applying principles of photography to his camerawork, such as the use of available light for shooting night scenes. Second, having arrived in Italy a little bit later than Gutiérrez Alea and García Espinosa, his contact with neorealism was more distant and less formative. Instead, he was exposed to new trends in American filmmaking, participating in the vibrant underground scene of New York, where he befriended Maya Deren and the Mekas brothers, and contributed to the seminal magazine *Film Culture*. This initiated him into a different type of iconoclast attitude, opening his mind to the liberating possibilities of the New American Cinema and the British free cinema movements. His interest in a spontaneous, low budget approach to subject matters rooted in ordinary life, is manifested in his short films *58-59* (1959) and *Gente en la playa* (People at the Beach, 1961). He was also a direct influence on younger filmmakers like Orlando Jiménez Leal (1941), who was inspired by his approach for making *PM* (Orlando Jiménez Leal and Sabá Cabrera Infante, 1961), a film Almendros himself enthusiastically embraced.[571]

During his time abroad Almendros also continued encouraging his amateur filmmaking community. In 1956 he published the article "The Cinema in Cuba", in *Film Culture*.[572] The text briefly discusses the situation of "retarded development" of the local film industry before

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[570] Almendros, *A Man with a Camera*, 33.
[571] Néstor Almendros, "Pasado Meridiano," *Bohemia*, May 1961, reprinted in Orlando Jiménez-Leal and Manuel Zayas, eds., *El caso PM: Cine, poder y censura (*Madrid, España: Editorial Colibrí, 2012), 11-12. On *Gente en la playa*, see Almendros, *A Man with a Camera*, 36-38, and Emmanuel Vincenot, "Censura y cine en Cuba: el caso PM," in Jiménez-Leal and Zayas, 60-61. On Almendros' influence, see Orlando Jiménez Leal, "Un baile de fantasmas," interview by Manuel Zayas, *Encuentro de la Cultura Cubana*, Fall 2008, 195. For a brief period of time between 1960 and 1961 the exciting possibilities of free cinema were a source of debate among the young film critics and filmmakers. See Néstor Almendros, "Qué es *free-cinema*?," *Bohemia*, Dec 1960, reprinted in Almendros, *Cinemanía,*123-125; René Jordan, "La nueva ola del cine anticonformista americano," *Cine Cubano*, 1960; Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, "El free cinema y la objetividad," *Cine Cubano*, 1961. However, as Vincenot states, the banning of *PM* sent a clear signal that this aesthetic direction would not be promoted.
[572] Almendros, "The Cinema in Cuba," 21.

highlighting the progress of the amateurs by stating: "Perhaps more interesting than the professional cinema is the experimental cinema movement in 16 mm and the intense action of the cine-clubs." He adds: "In the making of experimental films, the Cuban "aficionados" have faced the usual difficulties of anyone without too much money and proper technical tools, depending the greatest part of time on the sunlight. Nevertheless, some of the films turned out to be very interesting."[573]

In the span of just a few years, Almendros, who had called for a more ambitious approach to amateur filmmaking in his 1950 "Orientaciones para el cine amateur",[574] already notices some filmmaking achievements worthy of mention:

> We will cite some examples: three years ago Placido Gonzalez made *Cimarron*, a short story in color about a slave who escaped and was captured at the end. Another interesting film is *One*, a sort of avant-garde film about a man who wakes in the morning and finds that everybody in the city has disappeared and that he is completely alone. In 1954 Germán Puig made an advertising film for Standard Oil about traffic accidents and the danger caused to children by the imprudence of some drivers. The film was well made and very poetic. J. Garcia Espinosa and Tomas G. Alea finished last year *El megano*, a documentary of social message about the life of the charcoal gatherers in the swamps of southern Cuba. Recently, an Association for the Production of Experimental Films has been created which groups various of the elements that were before dispersed.[575]

The best known of the amateur films mentioned in this short article is *El Mégano*, for reasons that will be described in the following section.

**Politicized Filmmaking Communities: Nuestro Tiempo's *El Mégano***

The film *El Mégano*, which belongs to the genre known in particular in Latin America as "social denunciation film", is a prime example of how politicized communities form around culture-making. This 20-minute film was directed by García Espinosa in collaboration with

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[573] Almendros, "The Cinema in Cuba," 21.
[574] Almendros, "Orientaciones para el cine amateur".
[575] Almendros, "The Cinema in Cuba," 21. It is likely that the association he makes reference to is the Grupo 16 mentioned above.

Gutiérrez Alea. The two returned to Cuba in 1953, after graduating from the Centro Sperimentale in Rome, but struggled to find professional work as filmmakers. During these uncertain times, they became involved with the Sociedad Cultural Nuestro Tiempo (Our Times Cultural Society), henceforth Nuestro Tiempo. As explained in Chapter 2, this cultural organization created in 1951 with apparently apolitical objectives, was surreptitiously overseen by the "Intellectual Commision" of the Communist Party, known as Partido Socialist Popular (PSP).[576] Nuestro Tiempo consisted of interest sections in theatre, music, visual arts, and cinema. The two friends were very active in the Cinema section, giving conferences and publishing film reviews and essays, but the opportunity to make a film was a rare and precious one. *El Mégano* was the only film Nuestro Tiempo produced and it became a *cause célèbre* of the anti-Batista movement.[577]

I maintain that the film must be seen as a collective project exemplary of the PSP's media strategy. This is particularly clear when we consider that the film also credits as screenwriters two people who worked in close collaboration with the PSP: Alfredo Guevara and José Massip. Once we recognize *El Mégano* as part of the propaganda efforts of the PSP, its antecedents can be clearly located in the documentaries produced by Cuba Sono Films. As mentioned in Chapter 2, this production company, founded in 1938, was established as part of several PSP media initiatives that included a radio station and a newspaper. The documentaries they produced between 1938 and 1948 were created in close collaboration with key communist intellectuals like Alejo Carpentier and Nicolás Guillén. Those films shared the social denunciation aspect of *El Mégano*, but they were not amateur, since they were commissioned by the PSP and used to raise funds for other party initiatives.[578] Interestingly, *El Mégano* was shot in the same geographical

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[576] Carlos Rafael Rodríguez, *30 Años de Nuestro Tiempo* (La Habana: Sociedad Nuestro Tiempo, 1982), 6.

[577] For a more complete history of this cultural society, see Chapter 2. Also, Agramonte and Castillo, *Cronología IV*, 213-222.

[578] The PSP's interest in the outreach value of cinema extended into the early post-revolutionary era, when the newly restructured Department of Culture of the Ministry of Education financed the production of *Los tiempos del joven Martí* (The Times of Young Martí, José Massip, 1960). Mirta Aguirre, "*Un año de libertad* y *Los tiempos del joven Martí*," *Hoy*, February 28, 1960, reprinted in *Crónicas de Cine*, eds. Marcia Castillo and Olivia Miranda, vol. 2, 2 vols. (La Habana: Editorial Letras Cubanas, 1989), 315-317.

area as two of the Cuba Sono Films documentaries: *Los carboneros de la Ciénaga* (José Tabío, 1944) and *Sur de Batabanó* (José Tabío, 1944).[579]

It is important to discuss *El Mégano*'s exceptionality. Since the very early days of ICAIC, critics and historians have referred to this film as the most important precursor to revolutionary cinema. It is the amateur film that features most prominently in Cuban film historiography, while the rest of the amateur production of the 1950s has been mostly omitted.[580] Thus, looking back at how *El Mégano* achieved this privileged status allows us to illustrate the discursive process that ensured that specific legacies became well-known and celebrated, while others were erased.

As soon as the Revolution came to power, Nuestro Tiempo reinitiated its activities. They had stopped in March 1958 as repression increased, and reinitiated their work on January 17, 1959.[581] In the first issue of its magazine since it had been forced to stop printing, García Espinosa wrote a full article about the film's ordeals. He explains how the reels were seized by Batista's intelligence service, accused of being "a communist film", and comunicates his disbelief at the notoriety it achieved, when, according to his own assessment,

> *El Mégano* was just an experimental film, so much so that it was impossible to project it to audiences without an explanatory note to account for its multiple limitations. It was a 16 mm film made with a hand-cranked camera and two reflectors. A film that, for economic reasons, was limited in its subject matter and in its execution. A film devoid of the means that could give it artistic or technical standards. In brief, a film that could only count on the goodwill and the little skill of the filmmakers.[582]

These seemingly unfavourable words actually opened the way for the early attribution of revolutionarity to this particular film. The text goes on to explain that *El Mégano*'s merits were intrinsically linked to its subversive quality, for showing what was otherwise absent from Cuban films:

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[579] Agramonte and Castillo, *Cronología IV*, 215.
[580] Chanan, *Cuban Cinema*, 109-110.
[581] "Palabras de Harold Gramatges," *Nuestro Tiempo*, January/February 1959, reprinted in Hernández Otero, *Sociedad Cultural Nuestro Tiempo,* 179-181.
[582] Julio García Espinosa, "El Mégano," *Nuestro Tiempo*, January/February 1959, reprinted in Ricardo Luis Hernández Otero, eds., *Revista Nuestro Tiempo: Compilación de trabajos publicados* (La Habana: Letras Cubanas, 1989), 358-361.

> In a very modest way, the idea was to represent the authentic reality of a Cuban person. That was it. To show a farmer without masks or spectacularity. To show a tiny aspect of a reality that we did not invent. That was the only merit of *El Mégano*. For the first time, the cinema of our country was showing, in dramatic form, a national reality without any kind of theatrical adornments, and in a way that could be understood around the world. It was an example. And this could not be allowed.[583]

The political value of *El Mégano*'s neorealist approach was immense. It provided a model that granted superior importance to social critique, placing it at the core of filmic representation.[584] This was profoundly at odds with the comedic and melodramatic genres that dominated commercial cinema. It was also far from valuing the formal experimentation or technical virtuosity that interested other amateurs. This political value was immediately recognized and promoted in 1959 through multiple screenings of the film across the cine-clubs, and through critical appraisal.[585] Critics like Piñera felt it was important to recognize the potential of the film, rather than fixate on its many shortcomings. At the same time, he envisioned an inclusive reconsideration of other amateurs who could equally bring new talent and ideas to the future of Cuban filmmaking:

> Should Cuban cinema stop at *El Mégano*? Not at all. It is precisely along this road of experimental cinema that we may get to a genuine national cinema. We know that there are some hidden films around. We need to call a "festival" to showcase the new values and the imaginative ideas that will be the only ones capable of making our cinema praiseworthy.[586]

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[583] García Espinosa, "El Mégano," 359.
[584] This is not to say that this was the only film dealing with the topic of extreme poverty in rural areas. See for example the case of *El cabo de San Antonio o La* Jocuma (José Antonio Sarol, 1955). Agramonte and Castillo, *Cronología IV*, 227-232; Emmanuel Vincenot, "Jocuma: un caso olvidado de cine comprometido en tiempos de Batista," *ArtCultura* 13, no. 22 (2011): 9–24.
[585] Piñera, "El cine experimental. Camino para encaminar el cine nacional"; Fornarina Fornaris, "El cine experimental en Cuba," *Noticias de Hoy*, May 8, 1959, Digital Library of the Caribbean.
[586] Piñera, "El cine experimental," 32. Such a showcase did in fact take place a few months later, in November. See Piñera, "Una sesión de cine experimental cubano."

The experience of these middle-class youngsters who acquired a cosmopolitan worldview either through university studies or through their links and proximity with the intellectual elite of Havana, makes their amateur filmmaking practice rather singular. In order to get a full picture of the multifaceted ways in which cinephilia expressed itself in the 1950s, we must also consider other types of communities formed around amateur practice during that time. As described above, in the 1940s the Cubans who were members of the ACL belonged to the international network enabled by this organization, as part of its mission was to promote film exchanges across the world. More significantly, organizations like the CFC fostered support, encouragement, and a degree of competition amongst upper class amateur photographers and cinematographers. In some cases more than in others the pleasure of collaboration and the necessity for pooling resources together strengthened certain local communities working as *de facto* training grounds, where the more experienced taught the novices, and collaboration was essential. This model of sharing and peer instruction would be adopted during ICAIC early years. This working model could also be found in amateur activity originating in peripheral communities.

**Amateur Filmmaking in Peripheral Communities**

As mentioned earlier, Kodak's presence in the Cuban capital facilitated a regular flow of new film technologies into the country. While up to that point the price range of movie equipment had only been accessible to the upper classes, in the 1950s new models of 8 mm cameras became much more affordable and a wider demographic was able to purchase it.[587] It is therefore not surprising that during this decade we find a proliferation of amateurs in peripheral communities, outside the better known intellectual circles of Havana.[588] One of the most

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[587] To offer some measure of comparison: "A typical 16 mm camera in the early 30s sold for over $100, and a roll of film cost $6 (…)". The top of the line Ciné-Kodak Special introduced in 1933 cost $375 and the equally impressive Ciné-Kodak K-100 introduced in 1955 cost $269. In contrast, the first 8 mm cameras from Kodak cost $29.50 in 1932, while the Bell and Howell ones cost $69. More relevantly, the Kodak Brownie Movie Camera (8 mm) that entered the market in 1951 cost $44.50. Kattelle, *Home Movies*, 96-103.

[588] In recent years, local histories have unearthed evidence of prolific amateurs working in the outskirts of Havana during the 1940s and 1950s. See Wilma Hernández Fernández, *El Club Fotográfico de Güines, 1953-1961* (San Antonio de los Baños, La Habana: Editorial Unicornio, 2004); Gabriel Estrada Reyes, "Dr. Salvador Solé: Los albores del documental en Cuba" (2016), unpublished. These local histories have been a blind spot in Cuban film historiography until very

remarkable examples of local amateur production was the group formed in San Antonio de los Baños in the early 1950s.[589] Eulalio Cruz (1920-2005), the local hardware store owner, bought a Keystone 8 mm camera for $49.95, and started making movies as a hobby in his spare time.[590] Family members, neighbours, and friends, participated in his projects. His nephew, Vicente Cruz, a 15-year old high school student in 1952, was a keen collaborator who both acted and did camera work.

From 1952 to 1958 they completed five silent 8 mm short fiction films. The first few films, *El invasor marciano* (The Martian Invader*,* 1952), *La herencia maldita* (The Doomed Inheritance*,* 1953), and *Lobos de mar* (Seawolves*,* 1955) credited Eulalio Cruz as the director, and were introduced by the title card "Producciones Cruz Presenta" ("Cruz Productions Presents"). Later, younger members Osvaldo Ordaz (1936-1959) and Vicente Cruz directed *Contrabando* (Smuggling*,* 1957) and *El cayo de la muerte* (The Isle of Death*,* 1958) respectively. At that point the introductory title card changed from "Producciones Cruz" to "Cine Local de Aficionados" ("Local Amateur Cinema Group"). This change is a clear indication that an experience that had started as a family pastime, had quickly grown into a community affair. It is estimated that at one point as many as 36 local residents (small business owners, high school students, blue collar workers and their families) had participated in the films in one way or another.[591]

Judging from participant testimonies and from the images that have survived from these amateur films, the group shared a collective fascination with Hollywood genres. They attempted to copy the representational strategies of the movies they loved, spanning science fiction, horror,

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recently, but these young researchers are bringing them to life, and it is possible that new facts will become known about amateur filmmaking in other provinces. Also see Agramonte and Castillo, *Cronología IV*, 436-440.

[589] The main source of information about this group of amateurs from San Antonio de los Baños is the documentary *El invasor marciano: 36 años después* (Wolney Oliveira, 1988), produced by film students during their first year at the Escuela Internacional de Cine y Televisión (EICTV) in San Antonio de los Baños, Cuba. Luciano Castillo has supplemented these accounts with more recent interviews with Vicente Cruz Álvarez and Pedro Rodríguez García. Agramonte and Castillo, *Cronología III*, 383-389; Agramonte and Castillo, *Cronología IV*, 468-471. Oliveira's interest in this story led him to create a fictionalized account of this unique experience for the film *El Cayo de la Muerte* (Wolney Oliveira, 2010).

[590] Agramonte and Castillo, *Cronología III*, 387.

[591] Agramonte and Castillo, *Cronología III*, 385.

mystery, adventure and gangster genres. They strived to reproduce familiar plots and generic codes with artisanal means, putting considerable effort and ingenuity into their sets and props. For instance, for *The Martian Invader* they built a robot suit and a spaceship made of cardboard. They transformed a living room into a castle interior for *The Doomed Inheritance*, and a garage into the inside of a ship for *Seawolves*. For *Smuggling*, most of the scenes were exterior shots around their town. Not only did they enlist local folk as extra, but they also procured the collaboration of the local fire department. In *The Isle of Death* (their first color film) one character throws another from a building, and the firefighters helped give this scene its realism, catching the actor with a life net.[592] Thus, the amateurs' enthusiasm and resourcefulness allowed them to solve filmic challenges with the help of the local community.

Recently, the San Antonio group has been discussed in the context of experimental cinema histories, but this inclusion is actually hard to justify.[593] Rather than purposefully subverting generic codes, or mobilizing them for dissenting meanings, these amateurs had every intention to emulate the Hollywood films they loved. If technical deficiencies and the expected pitfalls of artisanal production permeated the texts with formal anomalies, this was not part of a conscious aesthetic choice or a deliberate stance against the status quo. In fact, the filmmakers apologized for their lack of professionalism, with an intertitle that read: "Any artistic or technical deficiencies are due to our amateur condition."[594]

Making these movies had started as a leisure activity in 1952, but it eventually took on a more serious and aspirational character. This loose neighborhood association morphed into a more formalized initiative when one of its youngest collaborators, Pedro Rodríguez García, turned it into the Asociación Pro Cine Ariguanabense (Association for Ariguanabo Cinema, APCA) in 1959.[595] Rodríguez García had famously written a letter addressed to Metro Goldwyn Mayer in 1953, asking for a job at the age of 13. When he received a negative response, he joined the local amateur group to gain hands-on experience in filmmaking. Along with the

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[592] Agramonte and Castillo, *Cronología III*, 388.
[593] Luisa Marisy, "Experimental Cinema in Cuba?," in *Ism, Ism, Ism: Experimental Cinema in Latin America*, eds. Jesse Lerner and Luciano Piazza (Oakland, California: University of California Press; Los Angeles: Los Angeles Filmforum, 2017), 142-165.
[594] In the Spanish original: "Los defectos artísticos y técnicos de este film se deben a nuestra condición de aficionados".
[595] Ariguanabo is the geographical location of the town of San Antonio de los Baños.

youngest amateurs of San Antonio, such as Vicente Cruz and Osvaldo Ordaz, he created APCA in order to make 16 mm films and find further opportunities for film training.[596]

Although an undeniable continuity exists from "Producciones Cruz" to "Cine Local de Aficionados," to APCA, I maintain that they must be discussed as different embodiments of the amateur experience. The timing of APCA's foundation (January 20, 1959), as well as the tone and content of the films they made in 1959 and 1960, support Rodríguez García's assertion that his organization was "a product of the Revolution."[597] Certainly, these amateurs were taking their filmmaking efforts into a very different direction. Whereas the Cruz family's 8 mm productions took place in faraway lands, and their characters sported foreign names, the new 16 mm films (four fiction films and three documentaries) were firmly rooted in their present local reality.[598] APCA functioned like a cooperative, with members contributing a fixed amount from their salaries or student stipends. It was both a means of acquiring revolutionarity and a path towards professionalization.

Ultimately, the amateur movies made in San Antonio by the Cruz family should be studied in relation to the work of other amateur storytellers from this period, such as the adventure movie *El tesoro sangriento* (The Bloody Treasure, Plácido González Gómez, 1946), described earlier. Other examples include the comedy *El gran cardenal* (The Great Cardinal, 1944), shot by Frank Taracido Gómez in Güines, another peripheral community.[599] Paulino Villanueva, a pharmacist by profession who had a passion for creating special effects, also authored an ambitious project entitled *La garra* (The Claw, 1960) that has been described as a suspense paying homage to Alfred Hitchcock.[600] Altogether, these films share the common traits

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[596] Also in 1959, Luis R. Pagán, José Manuel Fernández, Ovidio Pérez, and others, created a group called Cinematografía Experimental de Oriente in Santiago de Cuba. Douglas, *La tienda negra*, 149.
[597] Agramonte and Castillo, *Cronología IV*, 468.
[598] The film titles were *La razón X* (Pedro Rodríguez García, 1959); *El robo* (Pedro Rodríguez García, 1959); *Atrapados* (1959); *Alfredito se enamora* (1959), *Uno* (Pedro Rodríguez García, 1960), *Pinceladas del Ariguanabo* (Pedro Rodríguez García, 1959), *El agua en San Antonio* (1959), and *Milicias campesinas* (1960).
[599] Tarácido was a district attorney who dedicated his vacation and free time to making movies, including fiction, documentaries, and scientific films. See Hernández, *El Club Fotográfico de Güines*.
[600] Piñera, *Mirada al cine cubano*, 104.

of following generic conventions and involving a mix of skill acquisition and community building.[601]

**Distinct Communities of Access and Audience**

For most young people interested in a film career, working together was the only way to make movies given the lack of a stable film industry and the absence of opportunities for filmmaking training in the country. In the process, they formed distinct communities the nature of which depended on several factors. For instance, those involved with the CCH-CC had a cosmopolitan outlook and were searching for alternative aesthetics that diverged from the modes of representation typical of commercial cinema. Through their university experience and family relations they were well connected enough to mobilize the help of government officials in order to get scholarships to study in Europe, which increased their exposure to the new tendencies of international cinema. On the other hand, the middle class and blue collar workers of San Antonio admired the reliable thrill American movies afforded them, and their moviemaking interest lied in creating the same type of pleasurable entertainment for themselves and their local community. In a way, the naif letter that Rodríguez García sent to MGM in 1953 encapsulates the essence of an old-fashioned belief in the Hollywood studio system and in the opportunities for advancement it had offered to Latin Americans decades earlier.[602]

When looking at how amateur practices evolved from the 1940s into the 1950s, we should not only take into consideration the increased affordability of small-gauge film equipment and processing facilities, but also pay attention to the type of audiences the films were addressing. The films made by those involved with the CCH-CC were not seen by many outside their immediate group of friends. Therefore, those young amateurs obtained their feedback from

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[601] They are comparable to some of the examples in Ryan Shand and Ian Craven, eds., *Small-gauge Storytelling: Discovering the Amateur Fiction Film* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013).

[602] Several Latin Americans gained valuable experience in Hollywood during the time that Spanish-version films were made. They were pioneers of sound cinema in their countries. The Cuban Ramón Peón, pioneer of Cuban silent films, worked for Fox Films in Hollywood between 1930 and 1931 as assistant director for Spanish-version films. Through this experience he learned the ropes of using sound in filmmaking, and he later moved to Mexico to work as an assistant to Antonio Moreno for filming the first sound film in that country, *Santa* in November 1931. Arturo Agramonte and Luciano Castillo, *Ramón Peón, El hombre de los glóbulos negros* (La Habana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 2003), 57-68.

each other, all aspiring artists and intellectuals. As detailed in Chapter 2, they found major hurdles for carving small spaces in which to hold their screening of film classics. Puig's conflict with Valdés-Rodríguez meant that the limited noncommercial venues that existed, such as the university film theater, were closed to them. On the other hand, the more politicized Nuestro Tiempo film section led by Guevara counted on the indispensable seal of approval of Valdés-Rodríguez.

As an eminently local initiative, the San Antonio group is a singular case. The group's cohesion was guaranteed by the links that tied the people involved, all living in the same vicinity, whom in their testimonies refer to other participants by their occupations (i.e. the butcher, the shoe-seller, the bank clerk). This interconnection meant that film exhibition became a neighborhood affair. For instance, in 1954 they showed their first two films at the local movie theatre, Cine-Teatro Círculo de Artesanos, to raise funds for the youth baseball league.[603] In 1959, a more ambitious fundraiser for the newly founded APCA turned into a resounding success. The owner of the theater reluctantly agreed to host the screening because of his friendship with the youngsters' fathers. They advertised the movie night all over town, and a large crowd turned up to see the films, filling all 350 seats, and prompting a second showing that same night for those who did not get into the first. These amateurs became local celebrities, admired and recognized as genuine movie stars by the kids in the vicinity.[604]

The different ways in which these amateur communities came to be demonstrate that cinema generated personal bonds and creative networks that were not necessarily conditioned by political activity. Histories that emphasize political engagement as the determining factor for pre-revolutionary cine-clubs to exist ignore these alternative models of local organization. Upper-class amateur communities like the CFC, or middle-class neighbourhood associations like the Cruz family network, need to be taken into consideration as valid forms of collectivity. While ICAIC's post-revolutionary discourse positioned Nuestro Tiempo as the only legitimate form of collective engagement with the cinema in the 1950s, cine-clubs like the CCH-CC and the

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[603] Agramonte and Castillo, *Cronología III*, 386.

[604] Agramonte and Castillo, *Cronología IV*, 468-470. To this day, a San Antonio resident remembers admiring the local shoe-seller as a movie star. "Mario Crespo a propósito del cine aficionado en San Antonio de los Baños," May 28, 2009, *Cine cubano, la pupila insomne*, https://cinecubanolapupilainsomne.wordpress.com/2009/05/28/mario-crespo-a-proposito-del-cine-aficionado-en-san-antonio-de-los-banos/.

amateur groups discussed in this chapter testify to a more heterogeneous pre-revolutionary tradition.

**Antonio Cernuda and International Recognition through Amateur Film Festivals**

Most examples of amateur filmmaking indicate the importance of cooperation and of pooling resources together, but it is also necessary to recognize exceptional cases of individual achievement. For instance, Antonio Cernuda Pico (1910-1999), earned an impressive track record in the international amateur film circuit. He was an accomplished photographer with multiple awards for his work in color photography. This experience served him well when he started making 16 mm films, as his acute pictorial sense, put at the service of the moving image, was immediately well received. His first film, *Asturias Pintoresca* (Picturesque Asturias, 1957, 40 min), won the top award from the Motion Picture Division of the PSA in 1957. His second film, *Ritmo en tránsito* (Rhythm in Transit, 1959, 11 min), earned him accolades from amateur contests in Australia, France, Japan, South Africa, the United Kingdom, and the United States. With *Diez centavos* (Ten Cents, 1959), he once again obtained the PSA Gold Medal Award.[605] In total, he received 37 awards from the international amateur community, making him one of the most accomplished amateurs in the world.[606] Between Machado and Cernuda, Cubans earned three top awards within the North American amateur circuit. Cleary, Cubans were participating successfully in those transnational networks.[607]

In Cuba, Cernuda's award-winning work was proudly shown by film promoters embedded in different institutions that supported noncommercial cinema in the late 1950s, such as the University of Havana and the Catholic Center of Cinematographic Orientation (CCOC). His achievements were celebrated in the local press by key film critics who praised his

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[605] In 1954 the ACL membership was transferred to the Motion Picture Division of the Photographic Society of America. Under this new guise, the organization continued the tradition of the "Ten Best" lists, from which the top selection was awarded the Gold Medal Award. Cernuda's films earned this distinction twice, which did not happen to any other non-American.
[606] Walfredo Piñera, "Cine Amateur. Antonio Cernuda," *Cine Guía*, June/July 1960; Cabrales, *Diccionario Histórico de la Fotografía en Cuba*, 79.
[607] I examined a list of 30 years' worth of "Top Ten" selections, in Kattelle, "The Amateur cinema league and its films," 244-251. I found that only 35 films considered "foreign" were included, that is, less than 12% of the total.

"precision, colorfulness and good taste in composition" and his "innate plastic sense.[608] However, these qualities were on the verge of losing relevance, at least in the Latin American context. For instance, when *Ten Cents* was shown in the Amateur Film Festival of Valparaíso in February of 1964, the assessment was that the film "showed great photographic beauty, perhaps the best in the festival, but it suffered from having a weak script and from the main defect of being just that, photography."[609] In the context of the politicized film movement of the 1960s, this is not a surprising statement.

One of the critics who championed Cernuda's work was Valdés-Rodríguez. Besides praising his work in the local press, he also organized a screening of his films at the University of Havana in May 1959.[610] Taking into consideration the limited exposure that amateur films could have outside of their own small community circles, the role of Valdés-Rodríguez in bringing this type of film production to the public cannot be underestimated. He had started showing Cuban films during the first session of his summer course "Cinema: Industry and Art of Our Times" in 1942, and sporadically included amateur movies as part of the screenings. Furthermore, as part of the jury of the first amateur film contest of the CFC in 1943, he reinforced the importance of early amateurs, declaring their work to be of the utmost importance at a time when commercial film production was at a halt.[611] In light of that early support of 1940s amateurs, followed by his championing of Cernuda in 1959, the work of the 1950s amateurs associated with the CCH-CC is noticeably absent from his film programs. This underlines the negative effect of his animosity towards that group, which lacked opportunities for the exhibition of their first films, until the relative shift of influence that occurred in 1959.

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[608] Walfredo Piñera, "Nuevo éxito de un cortometraje cubano en festivales mundiales," *Diario de La Marina*, October 3, 1959, Digital Library of the Caribbean; Piñera, "Cine Amateur. Antonio Cernuda," *Cine Guía,* June/July 1960; José Manuel Valdés-Rodríguez, "El cine universitario en la operación cultura," *Cinema,* May 1959; Agramonte and Castillo, *Cronología IV*, 431-436.
[609] Cine Club Viña del Mar (Chile), "Los festivales de cine aficionado," *Cine Foro*, January 1965, http://www.memoriachilena.gob.cl/602/w3-article-78077.html.
[610] Valdés-Rodríguez, "El cine universitario en la operación cultura"; Agramonte and Castillo, *Cronología IV*, 431-436.
[611] Agramonte and Castillo, *Cronología II*, 406. Some CFC members subsequently took his class, including José Cid (1944) and Armando García Menocal Córdova (1947). "Relación de Estudiantes de la Escuela de Verano," Valdés-Rodríguez Digital Archive.

**Promotion of Amateur Filmmakers in 1959-1963**

Amateur filmmaking in Cuba encompassed very distinct sensibilities and aspirations. The first and only attempt to group together such different creations, was in November 1959, with a special screening promoted as "Experimental Cuban Cinema" that took place at the Lyceum of Havana. The following films were screened: *The Mount of Luna* (Néstor Almendros, 1956, 16mm, b&w), *58-59* (Néstor Almendros, 1959, 16mm, b&w), *Uno, el solitario* (One, the Solitary, Plácido González Gómez, Paulino Villanueva, 1958, 16 mm, b&w), *El Mégano* (Julio García Espinosa and Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, 1956, 16 mm, b&w), and *Diez centavos* (Ten Cents, Antonio Cernuda, 1959, 16mm, color). In his review of the event for *Diario de la Marina*, one of the widest circulation newspapers in Cuba, Piñera praised *58-59* in particular, indicating that the film's approach to the beginning of the New Year in New York "left the deepest impression because of its merits as social testimony." He also commended *Diez Centavos,* which "is notable because of its photographic perfection, its visual harmony, and the beauty of the color." Regarding *Uno, el solitario,* he pointed out that "it holds an ambition that surpasses the outcome; but it demonstrates that Havana can be a superb scenario for drama and carries very effective nocturnal scenes." [612]

This little known event offers an ideal frame of reference because it points to a brief moment of encounter that was subsequently followed by very divergent paths. This eclectic group of films allows us to reconsider the possibilities open to Cuban cinema at large in the early post-revolutionary years. At the juncture of 1959, while ICAIC was still in its formative phase, influential film critics revalued amateur films as the product of experimentation. This approach allowed for a new evaluation of the practices that were distinct from genre-based commercial production. Commenting on the eclecticism of the offering, and on the potential for these filmmakers, Piñera highlighted the implicit freedom of the experimental filmmaker as opposed to the commercial one, and pointed out that the future of Cuban cinema may well lie in their hands:

> The amateur filmmaker is not preoccupied with the commercial success of his work. He makes a fixed investment without the express goal of recovering it. Therefore, the creative possibilities of this type of filmmaker are not limited by any barriers. Many

[612] Piñera, "Una sesión de cine experimental cubano."

> professional filmmakers have started out in experimental cinema. It has often been said that in Cuba the national cinema will probably be nourished by the talent that has so far remained hidden, turning to experimental cinema as a refuge from an unwelcoming professional environment. Others, lacking the financial means for these activities, put their energy into the promotion of film culture. In fact, three of the filmmakers whose work was screened at the Lyceum have already started working professionally, and their films now reflect a more advanced stage in their development. They are Julio García Espinosa, Tomás Gutiérrez Alea and Plácido González Gómez.[613]

Indeed, ICAIC would come to rely on some of these amateurs to create the basis of post-revolutionary Cuban cinema. However, the reorganization of the cultural field defined very different trajectories for the amateur filmmakers of the 1950s transitioning into the 1960s. For instance, none of the members of the San Antonio group were invited to collaborate with ICAIC. Instead, the youngsters who created APCA remained rooted in their town, and studied journalism, architecture, law, and medicine. In contrast, those who were well connected to Nuestro Tiempo were immediately incorporated into the film institute, where Gutiérrez Alea and García Espinosa became the creative and theoretical core. Others amateurs found employment in local film and television production, like Plácido González Gómez who became a lighting technician for television.[614]

Cernuda and Almendros remain as two poles of individual talent who chose exile within a short time and disappeared from the official historical discourse. Cernuda emigrated to the United States and made a living in the commercial industries of television and advertising.[615] Almendros worked briefly at ICAIC, but his aesthetic views were in stark disagreement with institutional priorities. Amidst growing concern over repressive measures towards homosexuals, his family helped him leave for Paris.[616] In France, he started a stellar career as a professional cinematographer, working with directors like Eric Rohmer and François Truffaut throughout the 1960s and 1970s. Later, he worked with American directors, earning several nominations and

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[613] Piñera, "Una sesión de cine experimental cubano."
[614] Agramonte and Castillo, *Cronología III*, 77.
[615] Cabrales, *Diccionario Histórico de la Fotografía en Cuba*, 79.
[616] Mirabal and Velazco, "Maria Rosa mira los Almendros," 21-28.

one academy award for best cinematography.[617] Almendros' major contributions to French and American cinema were either omitted or misconstrued for a long time, and his true importance to the Cuban film culture of the 1950s needs to be recognized.

## 4. The Vanishing Amateur

### Convergence and Demarcations in 1959-1961

As explained in previous chapters, the years from 1959 to 1961 offer a rich space for reflection on the coexistence of old and new institutions. During that brief time commercial production and distribution houses had not yet been nationalized and seized by ICAIC, American films were still being shot on the island, film journalism could still be read in traditional publications, and aspiring filmmakers of diverse aesthetic and ideological persuasions still had a relatively open field ahead of them. However, by 1961, the landscape had drastically transformed, and amateurism, professionalism, and revolutionary filmmaking all took on very different connotations. The newly arrived presence of ICAIC, and the sociopolitical circumstances surrounding it, amplified the general feeling of frustration that the incoming generation of filmmakers felt towards established entrepreneurs and film directors. Thus, rather than looking to consecrated professionals for advice and guidance, the increasingly powerful film institute recruited amateurs and cine-club members instead.

The new generation of filmmakers shared a strong sense of frustration with past cinematic traditions and towards the infrastructures that sustained them. From a practical standpoint, they resented the powerful figures who controlled the limited film market and facilities that existed (production equipment, studio spaces, laboratories) and who did not give them any chances for training or for obtaining work experience. In the words of Almendros:

> The fact remains that we were not well received by the small film companies and the local media unions. It wasn't easy to break into that closed territory. Between the last days of silent films and the early days of sound some interesting Cuban films had been made, but by the late forties, the six or seven full-length films produced yearly in Cuba

[617] Almendros earned the academy award for *Days of Heaven* (Terrence Malick, 1978). He was subsequently nominated for *Kramer vs. Kramer* (Robert Benton, 1979), *The Blue Lagoon* (Randal Kleiser, 1980), and *Sophie's Choice* (Alan J. Pakula, 1982).

were only vulgar musicals or melodramas mostly coproduced with Mexican companies. Therefore, we had to concentrate our efforts on independent filmmaking.[618]

People like Almendros, Gutiérrez Alea, or García Espinosa were shaped by different aesthetic influences than the individuals who dominated the film business. While they had grown up with the standard Hollywood fare of the 1940s and 1950s, their identity as aspiring filmmakers was shaped by their early exposure to a wider aesthetic range and critical toolkit. Their early encounter with the classics of film history through the screenings organized by the CCH-CC provided them with an expanded awareness of film history. The film appreciation classes they took with Valdés-Rodríguez at the university afforded them the basic vocabulary and analytical practice from which to build well-informed opinions. They were also able to obtain further knowledge by reading specialized film magazines published abroad, or through international training and travel.

This new generation faced the almost insurmountable hurdles that had retarded the full development of Cuban cinema for decades. Long-time producers and newcomers to the field alike were in agreement that more government support was essential. While several steps had been taken in this direction, none delivered the expected results. Another important line of action was the pursuit of more financial investments on the part of Cuban industrialists. However, the wealthy were weary of committing their money to national productions because of the past unsuccessful track record of those types of ventures. Therefore, very few filmmakers were able to maintain an entrepreneurial and risk-taking spirit. Another prevalent view, even among progressive critics like Valdés-Rodríguez, was that promoting more co-productions with Mexico was the only way forward. This option did not move away from short-term lucrative deals and towards a more permanent and sustainable model of production, but it was defended on the ground that this provided jobs and technical training to the increasing number of skilled workers who were also making a living on television and advertising.

For the new generation of filmmakers, it was clear that in order to carve a creative space for themselves, they needed to push for drastic changes. They pointed out the lacks and needs in their immediate environment, and offered solutions that were in line with the technological and aesthetic developments of their time. In two conferences given at Nuestro Tiempo in 1954, a

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[618] Almendros, *A Man with a Camera*, 28.

short time after their return from Rome, García Espinosa and Gutiérrez Alea expressed their frustrations with the current production model and proposed the neorealist approach as the most viable alternative. Gutiérrez Alea presented a detailed analysis of the obstacles he believed prevented the materialization of a healthy film industry on the island.[619] He pointed out the inefficiency of copying Hollywood and Mexican representational models, and the futility of relying on star power. Echoing the thoughts of many, he objected to the entrepreneurs' disregard for artistic concerns, their ignorance of the changing preferences of the public, and their lack of confidence in the potential of telling locally specific stories. According to him, the main solution to these problems was to turn to authentically national preoccupations drawing from Cuban literature, music, and history. He called for

> (…) a greater concern for finding a means of expression that is Cuban and holds universal value (…) A greater preoccupation with presenting interesting aspects of our society with a sincere attitude, which will facilitate an improvement in the quality of our cinema and will achieve greater interest on the part of every audience. Thus, "commercial" remedies (like star power) will stop being an end in themselves and will be deployed in search of that goal.[620]

Like many young filmmakers across the world, Cubans embraced Italian neorealism's ability to connect with the audience through a sense of realism and authenticity.[621] In his conference, entitled "Neorealism and Cuban cinema," García Espinosa adopts a pragmatic approach, asserting that only by incorporating a "profoundly national" type of filmmaking would Cuban cinema be able to find a place in the international market.[622] He argues that Cuban filmmakers should not try to emulate the cosmopolitanism of most American and Mexican movies, because those film industries already had guaranteed markets. Instead, by applying the

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[619] Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, "Realidades del cine en Cuba," reprinted in Ricardo Luis Hernández Otero, ed., *Sociedad Cultural Nuestro Tiempo: Resistencia y acción* (La Habana: Letras Cubanas, 2002), 109-132.
[620] Gutiérrez Alea, "Realidades del cine en Cuba," 117-118.
[621] The global appeal of neorealism in contexts as different as the African continent, India, Iran, and Latin America are explored in Saverio Giovacchini and Robert Sklar, *Global Neorealism: The Transnational History of a Film Style* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2012).
[622] Julio García Espinosa, "Neorealismo y cine cubano", *Nuestro Tiempo*, November 1954, reprinted in Hernández Otero, *Revista Nuestro Tiempo,* 25-32.

lessons of Italian neorealism, Cuban filmmakers would be able to achieve a combination of artistic value and economic reasonableness. In sum, they would find a truly authentic approach to national self-representation that could also be viable in terms of its export value.

Interestingly, in the span of a few years some of these ideas crossed over into mainstream circles. In Paulo Antonio Paranaguá's analysis of 1950s Latin American cinema, he postulated:

> What can be stated without hesitation is that Neo-realism was not an intellectual discussion limited to film society circles, but that it also figured in the specialized periodicals of the period. It would therefore not be surprising to discover at some point that, besides being an alternative model for a happy few aspiring filmmakers, Italian Neo-realism was indeed an attractive option for some mainstream local film producers.[623]

This was indeed the case in the Cuban context. For instance, in a 1958 interview, Mario Barral, a former theatre, radio, and television personality turned film director, stressed the advantages of the low-budget aspect of Italian neorealism: "Italy started out making movies on the street, camera in hand. They saved on set design and eliminated many expenses. Those were the films that launched today's potent and international Italian film industry. Cuba could have started even better."[624] In his view, compared to Italy, what was missing from the Cuban film production context was the involvement of artists in the process. He believed Italy fared better "Because Italy used their best writers. Their most outstanding men of the theatre. Their most eminent artists. And something that started on the street went on to ample studios and more modern technologies. We bet for cheap and easy. For improvisation." [625]

The decade also saw a great expansion of the industrial infrastructure, particularly due to the success of television. This brought about a significant growth in technical expertise.[626] Even Nuestro Tiempo acknowledged these developments. One 1957 editorial asserted that "(…) in

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[623] Paulo Antonio Paranaguá, "Of Periodizations and Paradigms: The Fifties in Comparative Perspective," *Nuevo Texto Crítico* 11, no. 21–22 (1998), 40.
[624] Don Galaor, "¿Por qué no hay cine cubano?," *Bohemia*, June 15, 1958, Digital Library of the Caribbean.
[625] Don Galaor, "¿Por qué no hay cine cubano?," 46.
[626] Close to 8,000 people worked in the film and television business by 1960. Francisco Mota, "12 Aspectos económicos de la cinematografía cubana," *Lunes de Revolución*, February 1961.

Cuba we have equipment, studios, artists, capital, and even a union of technicians in the cinema sector."[627] But their perspective was that material resources were not enough:

> Above all, we need to make films that can be of interest to different types of audience, and this cannot be achieved by imitating American, Mexican, or any other cinemas. We must set our eyes on our own people and bring its true spirit to the screen. Our people, just the way we are, have enough personality to be understood and admired anywhere. Only then will we have an original cinema. A Cuban cinema. Only then will we have a film industry. And it is far from easy.[628]

When ICAIC started to take shape throughout 1959 and 1960, its founders had the opportunity to act on ideas that had been percolating for at least a decade. At this time, the young filmmakers' deep sense of distrust towards the film business establishment became enmeshed with the generalized process of rejecting bourgeois values and the privileges associated with the higher classes. As described in Chapter 2, at first film distributors and exhibitors proclaimed their support for the Revolution and aspired to participate in the new government's provisions for cinema, but this was a short-lived expectation. Old film directors and producers also hoped to reap the benefits from new forms of governmental support. However, it soon became evident that the established film entrepreneurs would not fare well in the new exclusionary system.

The clearest example of ICAIC's policy to reject any remnants of the pre-revolutionary film business establishment, was their attitude towards Ramón Peón's attempts to put his experience at the service of the new film industry. At the time of his return to Cuba from Mexico in 1958, he was the most experienced Cuban film director, with a career that begun in the 1920s, a personal history of starting up film production companies in Cuba, and a sizeable Mexican filmography.[629] All these credentials made him a well-respected figure amongst mainstream film and television producers, with one of his collaborators referring to him as "our supreme film director".[630] They expected that he would assume a leadership role in the materialization of a

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[627] "Objetivo. La carreta y los bueyes," *Nuestro Tiempo*, May/June 1957, reprinted in Hernández Otero, *Sociedad Cultural Nuestro Tiempo,* 89-90.
[628] "Objetivo. La carreta y los bueyes," 89-90.
[629] Agramonte and Castillo, *Ramón Peón*.
[630] Enrique Aguero Hidalgo, "Cruzada pro-cine cubano," *Cinema,* January 1959.

Cuban film industry in the post-Batista context, but Peón's standing among those in charge of the film institute was far from positive.

For the first few months of 1959, Peón was unrelenting in his efforts to make his voice heard and bring forth legislation, film projects, and training opportunities. Fidel Castro had publicly expressed his interest in developing a Cuban film industry, but those outside his inner circle ignored that ICAIC and Guevara' leading role within it had been decided since the early days of January. The founding of the film institute was not made public until the official announcement in March. During this interval, all those who had a connection to the film business expressed their views and offered their advice on how to proceed. Peón did this in a very public way, even publishing an open letter addressed to Fidel Castro himself, asking for a ten-minute meeting with the leader, which not surprisingly never happened.[631]

Peón's earnest letters offering his services for collaboration and training were intentionally ignored.[632] In the new sociopolitical and cultural landscape, his experience became completely irrelevant. ICAIC's indifference towards his efforts to participate in the renewal of the Cuban film industry was a premeditated decision sending a clear message that a substantial shift of influence was in the works. The main players of the old establishment dreamed up more than fifty projects, but none of them had a fighting chance to come to fruition.[633] ICAIC was not interested in the old way of doing things, relying on co-productions and following tired melodramatic and comedic formulas. Film producers and entrepreneurs were not welcome in the new environment. Instead, it was up to the amateurs of the 1950s to build the future of Cuban cinema. The young's aversion translated into outright exclusion.[634]

ICAIC directed its recruitment efforts towards young people who were as inexperienced as they were enthusiastic. Guevara organized in-person meetings to sign up potential employees. For instance, in March 1959, he invited a select group to a cocktail party. Film director and

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[631] Ramón Peón, "Carta abierta al Gobierno Revolucionario y al Doctor Fidel Castro," *Cinema*, February 1959.
[632] Peón was willing to train amateur filmmakers through a film project by a group called "Centro Experimental Cinematográfico." Agramonte and Castillo, *Cronología IV*, 500-501.
[633] Ramón Peón, "Sobre el cine cubano. Ahora o nunca," *Cinema*, March 1959.
[634] Juan Antonio García Borrero, *Cine cubano de los sesenta: mito y realidad* (Huelva: Festival de Cine Iberoamericano de Huelva, 2007), 31-32; Agramonte and Castillo, *Ramón Peón,* 192-194.

author Fausto Canel, then a 19-year old film critic who had taken Valdés-Rodríguez's film course, recalls:

> As president of ICAIC, Alfredo Guevara invited us to participate in the development of the film industry. Hi speech was a call to writers and technicians to abandon film criticism and the privatized production of advertising and newsreels, and instead join the Institute to make films financed by the revolutionary government. It was a tempting offer.[635]

This was the beginning of a recruitment drive for building the film institute from the ground up by training new filmmakers. ICAIC was a magnet for those who were interested in cinema as a profession, or who saw the medium as a way to engage with the revolutionary project. In this context, the cine-clubs became fertile ground for potential trainees. On the one hand, this depleted the cine-club movement, but on the other, it opened the door for young cinephiles towards a dream career.[636] For instance, would-be film directors Manuel Octavio Gómez (1934-1988) and Manuel Pérez (1939), as well as film editors Norma Torrado (1934) and Nelson Rodríguez (1938), then members of the Cine Club Visión, incorporated immediately. Jorge Fraga (1935-2012) and Alberto Roldán (1933-2014), founders of a cine-club at their workplace, radio and television company CMQ, also joined in and directed some of the earliest ICAIC documentaries. Even younger, film director Manuel Herrera (1942) and cinematographer Raúl Rodríguez (1939), then high school students who started a cine-club in early 1959 in the city of Santa Clara, were soon able to work at ICAIC.[637]

The core group led by Guevara originated from Nuestro Tiempo's film section. This included Gutiérrez Alea, García Espinosa, José Massip, Santiago Álvarez, and Jorge Haydú. In this context, Gutiérrez Alea and García Espinosa were more qualified to make films than the rest. Although they had struggled to make a living upon their return from Italy, in 1955 they started to work steadily at *Cine-Revista*, where they obtained extensive professional experience filming publicity, news reports, and comedy sketches. These credentials, along with the political

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[635] Fausto Canel, *Ni tiempo para pedir auxilio* (Miami, FL: Ediciones Universal, 1991), 14.
[636] For more on the cine-club movement of the 1950s, see Chapter 2.
[637] They showed films at their school and other schools in the area. They also created the amateur component of their club, called Agrupación Cinematográfica Experimental, and made the 16 mm film *Un día de playa* in 1959. Agramonte and Castillo, *Cronología IV*, 482. Douglas, *La tienda negra*, 146. Manuel Herrera became a film director and Raúl Rodríguez a cinematographer.

reputation they earned among their peers since the making of *El Mégano*, positioned them at the forefront of the emerging generation of filmmakers. In fact, before ICAIC was officially constituted in March 1959, they had already started making short documentaries for the revolutionary government through the Department of Culture of the Rebel Army.[638] Their high profile gave them relative independence within the institute.

Other contemporaries only worked at the institute temporarily. Cabrera Infante was one of the film institute counselors for a short period of time. Some early members of ICAIC who were living abroad in 1959, like Néstor Almendros, Eduardo Manet and Ramón Suárez were personally invited to join the film institute. Yet, others, like Ricardo Vigón and Germán Puig were completely excluded because of the long-standing animosity between them and Guevara.[639] In fact, those who were not as closely connected with the Nuestro Tiempo cluster quickly run into difficulties accepting Guevara's directives. They had to prove their worth not only as potential filmmakers, but as revolutionaries. In the span of a few years, several left ICAIC and emigrated, including Almendros, Canel, Roldán, José Massot, Roberto Fandiño, as well as Manet and Suárez.[640]

The difference between ICAIC filmmakers and the amateurs that preceded them was that ICAIC offered its new recruits a state-funded apprenticeship. If we take the term amateur as indicative of a stage leading to professionalization, even if not necessarily in profit-making terms, we can describe early ICAIC filmmaking as an amateur cinema. The uneven quality of the filmography produced during the years 1959 to 1966 shows that its young filmmakers were still learning the basics.[641] Moran's definition of the amateur as a "non-industrial practice pursued for

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[638] For a list of post-revolutionary projects undertaken between 1959 and 1960, see Chapter 2.
[639] García Borrero, *Cine cubano de los sesenta*, 34-38.
[640] Largely excluded from Cuban film history for several decades, the life and work of those exiled film directors has been gradually brought to light by researchers such as Emmanuel Vincenot, Manuel Zayas, and Carlos Espinosa Domínguez, whose interviews and biographical notes have been published in diasporic publications such as *Encuentro de la Cultura Cubana, Cuba Encuentro* and *Diario de Cuba*. Also, see the autobiographical works of Alberto Roldán and Fausto Canel: Canel, *Ni tiempo para pedir auxilio;* Fausto Canel, *Sin pedir permiso: Cuba, el cine y una época, en tiempos difíciles*, 2014; Alberto Roldán, *La mirada viva* (Miami, FL, USA: Ediciones Universal, 2002).
[641] With the exception of Gutiérrez Alea and García Espinosa, none of the Cuban filmmakers who directed film projects at ICAIC from 1959 to 1964 had previous filmmaking experience. Gutiérrez Alea and García Espinosa were sent to cover key events such as the celebration of the

reasons other than market exchange" can also be applied with a few qualifications.[642] Firstly, concerning the "industrial," it is important to clarify that soon after acquiring official status and a budget close to five million pesos, ICAIC proceeded with the swift purchase of new film equipment, but it took a few years before this resulted in industry-level production output.[643] Initially, the film institute needed to utilize resources that belonged to existing companies, until eventually acquiring all the existing industrial infrastructure that belonged to governmental and private entities, incorporating production equipment, labs and studio facilities. With regards to "market exchange," it must be said that while these young people were earning a salary for their work, the true aim of the film institute's endeavor at this early stage was not to make a profit. The documentaries, newsreels, and feature films produced at ICAIC were more concerned with selling an image (the image of the Revolution) and an idea (the idea of a new Cuba). At this stage, advertising the Revolution was not necessarily linked to monetary value, but rather to a powerful propaganda effect nationally, and to seeking legitimacy internationally.[644]

The young people recruited to fill the ranks of ICAIC had to make films and learn on the go in a rather improvised manner. They learned by collaborating with those who were more experienced, in a very fast-paced environment. This was a time of intense work and copious output, as evidenced by the sheer volume of ICAIC newsreels that started being produced weekly in June 1960, and the short *Enciclopedia Popular* educational documentaries, of which 32 were produced between 1961 and 1963.[645] During this time they profited from intensive training from international figures like Joris Ivens, who spent several months at the end of 1960 making documentaries in Cuba. Several other foreign filmmakers arrived on the island during this time, fascinated with the revolutionary project. They brought with them modern conceptions

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26th of July (*Sexto Aniversario*, Julio García Espinosa, 1959), Fidel Castro's declarations in front of massive groups of people (*Asamblea General*, Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, 1960), or the actions responding to the Bay of Pigs invasion (*Muerte al invasor*, Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, 1960). They also had the opportunity to make the first two feature films: *Cuba baila* (Julio García Espinosa, 1960) and *Historias de la Revolución* (Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, 1959).

[642] Moran, *No place like home video*, 67.

[643] ICAIC's budget in 1963 was $4,707,014 pesos. Douglas, *La tienda negra*, 233.

[644] Emmanuel Vincenot "Cinéma et propagande à Cuba: de la ferveur nationaliste à l'engagement révolutionnaire," in *Une histoire mondiale des cinémas de propaganda,* Jean-Pierre Bertin-Maghit, ed. (Ed. Nouveau Monde, Paris, 2008), 681-699.

[645] Douglas, *La tienda negra,* 157.

of cinema and a sense of cosmopolitanism.[646] While not methodical, this combination of hand-on training, a strong sense of purpose, first-hand contact with international cinematic trends, and plenty of opportunities to build an institutionally-based community through abundant film screenings, cine-debates, talks and conferences, provided these state funded amateurs with a vibrant apprenticeship that was at once artistic, technical, and ideological.

**The Vanishing Amateur**

The publication in 1963 of an introductory manual targeted to potential amateurs entitled *Orientaciones para el principiante en cinematografía* (A Beginner's Guide to Cinematography) suggests the possibility that amateur filmmaking could continue to exist in the 1960s outside of institutional structures.[647] The book provides technical information and practical advice for every aspect of filmmaking. It is a 121-page booklet, much more comprehensive than the brief article published by Almendros in 1950.[648] In the first chapter, the author explains the duties of each member of a film crew, while in the following he provides in-depth information and specific advice about cameras, laboratories, film stock, and filming techniques. The last chapter offers direct advice on the creation of cine-clubs and on fostering a favourable environment for amateur filmmaking within them.

It is clear from the outset that the book is addressed to young amateurs with no previous experience. The author presents it as "a didactic and simple book, dedicated to the young people with the vocation to put into practice their fascination with cinematography."[649] Agramonte's attitude is very optimistic, encouraging youngsters to create cine-clubs, make experimental films, and even create their own home-based film processing labs.[650] But the book was regretfully out of date. By the time it was published in 1963, the state's preference for large scale cultural projects impeded the formation of small-group associations such as cine-clubs, as explained in Chapter 2. Furthermore, the material goods essential to amateur filmmaking had become rarities.

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[646] European visitors who made films in Cuba during this time include Chris Marker, Agnès Varda, Theodor Christensen, and Armand Gatti. Also, Soviet and Eastern European directors such as Roman Karmen, Vladimir Cech, Kurt Maetzig, and Mikhail Kalatozov.
[647] Agramonte, *Orientaciones*.
[648] Almendros, "Orientaciones para el cine amateur."
[649] Agramonte, *Orientaciones*, 5.
[650] Agramonte, *Orientaciones*, 113-121.

The author recommends film cameras from companies such as Kodak and Bell and Howell, Kodak film stock and chemical formulas, and other equipment such as Uhler and Hollywood Jr. contact printers manufactured in the United Sates. These were no longer on sale because American-owned stores, including Kodak Cubana Ltd. had been nationalized in October 1960. The wealth of knowledge that Agramonte intended to share through this book had been accumulated under the very different pre-revolutionary economic and social landscape, and therefore the notes he was drawing from seem outdated for the time in which they were published.

In the 1950s, popular stores like Minicam supported a healthy consumer market for photography and small-gauge film equipment.[651] The typical buyer of these products ranged from middle-class to upper-class, as a wide range of models of different quality and price were available for sale. However, the massive exodus of, first the most affluent members of society, and some time later, white-collar workers and small business owners, eliminated consumer demand. Furthermore, all private property, including small and medium sized stores were completely eliminated by 1968.[652] In this environment, in order to obtain access to filmmaking technology, one needed to be directly connected to government institutions. Even those who owned small format cameras purchased before the nationalizations were unable to buy new film stock or have their filmed material processed.[653] As a result, the only filmed records of the early years of the Revolution that we can turn to are epic in nature. Domestic and family rituals from that era have forever disappeared in the memories of those who can still remember.

In addition to taking into consideration the retail environment, we should also bear in mind the channels of exhibition and exchange that sustained amateur filmmaking. Traditionally, amateurs had relied on personal favours from cinema-owners and on tenuous connections to

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[651] José Antonio Navarrete and Raúl Corrales, "Colgar las fotos," *Bohemia*, July 12, 1985, Digital Library of the Caribbean.

[652] The "Ofensiva Revolucionaria" ("Revolutionary Offensive") nationalized the remaining 57,000 private businesses across the island. Louis A. Pérez Jr., *Cuba: Between Reform and Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 259-260.

[653] For instance, Orlando Jiménez Leal recalls having to purchase film stock in the black market in 1961. Orlando Jiménez Leal, "Conversaciones en la biblioteca", in Jiménez-Leal and Zayas, 37. Also, Almendros explains the limitations he faced for concluding the short film project *Gente en la playa* (1961), which he undertook independently from ICAIC. Almendros, *A Man with a Camera*, 36-39.

influential people in the press. This informal network was no longer available once all the commercial screens on the island became nationalized and incorporated into ICAIC, as explained in Chapter 2. Since the press also suffered a major overhaul, individual influence was equally superseded. The old institutions that housed screens outside of the commercial theatre circuit lost their independence and were reshaped to respond directly to the state's ideological interests. In this way, the film resources of the Department of Cinematography at the University of Havana were subordinated to ICAIC's priorities. The previously dynamic CCOC, organized its last event, a one-month film seminar, in March 1960.[654] Piñera, along with Nicolás Cossío and José Cubero, worked in tandem with foreign embassies to show thematic film programs at the Lyceum that maintained a relatively autonomous character, until this prominent cultural institution was nationalized in 1968.[655]

ICAIC's goal was to make Cuban cinema nationally appealing, ideologically adequate, and exportable. The institutionalization process described in Chapter 2 resulted in the consolidation of all material resources and decision-making capital under ICAIC's control. Thus, the film institute had the power to select projects, allocate production budgets, and plan film releases in advance. By the same token, its distribution and exhibition branches were responsible for designing film programs at the local, provincial and national levels. This created a clear division between the public exhibition of ICAIC productions versus non-ICAIC ones. In 1959-1960, film programs were still characterized by a degree of inclusivity. This was on display at the Experimental Cuban Cinema screening at the Lyceum in November 1959, and again at the CCOC's film seminar of March 1960 mentioned above. This latter event combined a historical approach, showing Cuban films from the university film library, with a heterogeneous group of films recently produced films. They were produced by the Department of Culture of the Rebel Army, by a private documentary company, by the Department of Culture of the Ministry of Education, by ICAIC, and by amateurs.[656] However, by the time ICAIC organized its first

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[654] Walfredo Piñera, "El seminario de estudios y experiencias del CCOC," *Cine Guía*, April 1960.
[655] Rosa M. Abella and Otto G. Richter Library, *Lyceum and Lawn Tennis Club Collection, 1929-1986,* Cuban Heritage Collection, University of Miami.
[656] Piñera, "El seminario de estudios," 1-9.

collective screening in August 1960 at a glitzy event attended by key figures of the cultural and political landscape at Cine La Rampa, only its own productions were included.[657]

The event that marked a truly significant breaking point was the *PM* affair that unfolded in early 1961. This short film by first time filmmakers Orlando Jiménez Leal and Sabá Cabrera Infante, was directly influenced by Almendros' approach in *58-59* (1959). Almendros introduced the young filmmakers to the spontaneity of free cinema, and they were also particularly impressed with direct cinema, having seen *Primary* (Robert Drew, 1960).[658] As explained in Chapter 1, *PM* created a schism whereby non-ICAIC films were delegitimized. Fidel Castro's "Within the Revolution everything" phrase became a platform for demarcating insiders versus outsiders. The official critical discourse shifted from the inclusive rhetoric of 1959, in which all experimental work was welcome, to clearly ideological considerations embedded within institutional affiliations. Even though at this early stage the filmmakers working at ICAIC were at the lower end of their learning curve, they were treated as apprentices tasked with an important task. Their films were received with respect and encouragement, while the filmmakers who made *PM* became outcasts. Clearly, amateur filmmaking vanished in Cuba during the 1960s not only for economic reasons, but also because of ideological and sociopolitical causes.

**Imperfect Cinema as Amateur Cinema**

In the second half of the 1960s, ICAIC transitions from its early amateurish phase into a more mature and self-assured moment. The film institute's confidence in local talent was justified by projects such as *The Adventures of Juan Quin Quín* (Julio García Espinosa, 1967), *Lucía* (Humberto Solás, 1968), and *Memories of Underdevelopment* (Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, 1968). Those films were successfully exported and won major recognition abroad. It is in light of this qualitative jump, that a new type of discussion concerning amateur cinema's fringe attributes resurface in García Espinosa's 1969 essay "For an imperfect cinema". Since it was first translated into English in 1979, this text has had great significance as an example of what has come to be known as Third Cinema. It is typically approached from the interpretational stance of

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[657] Mirta Aguirre, "Festival de cortometrajes," *Hoy*, August 3, 1960, reprinted in *Crónicas de Cine*, eds. Marcia Castillo and Olivia Miranda, vol. 2, 2 vols. (La Habana: Editorial Letras Cubanas, 1989), 354-355; The event was documented by the recently created ICAIC Newsreel. Noticiero ICAIC No. 10, August 10, 1960, DVD.
[658] Jiménez Leal, "Un baile de fantasmas," 192.

political cinema, and appreciated for the radicalness of its message. Here, I propose to focus on its relevance for its immediate national context, and to read it in light of the historical evidence outlined throughout this chapter concerning the practice of amateur filmmaking in Cuba.

When García Espinosa published this essay in 1969, ten years had passed since ICAIC was established. From the vantage point of a decade of accumulated experiences, it is not surprising that this key founding member would take stock and advance new ideas for the future. He opens with a warning that "The major temptation facing Cuban cinema at this time (…) is precisely that of transforming itself into a perfect cinema."[659] He voices a resistance to fulfilling the expectations of existing standards of technical quality or preconceived notions of denunciatory cinema. Instead, he outlines his vision for a long-term strategy for Cuban cinema, taking a sociocultural perspective on the role of cinema as art in a revolutionary society. These are his personal views, and this essay is a personal manifesto, not an institutional document. Therefore, the ideal approach that he dreams up, and the hypothetical scenario that he outlines, should not be confused with any actual policies.

The essay delineates the author's views about artistic and intellectual practice in a revolutionary (socialist) context. For him, Cuban cinema should not be concerned with high standards of technical or aesthetic quality, but rather aim to achieve maximum communicativeness with the audience. He rejects the notion of the *connoisseur* or someone who is in position to judge the work by its artistic merits, preferring instead to envision the audience as "those who struggle". He insists on the elimination of the distinction between high art and popular art. Thus, he calls for the eradication of elite practitioners, and proposes instead that artistic creation should be conceived of as an activity for the masses. For him, one must learn from popular (folk) arts that art is part of life and that artistic realization should go hand in hand with personal realization. He believes that art should not be limited to the few qualified individuals or specialists who have traditionally taken up these roles.

What makes this text an important piece of evidence in the discussion about amateurism in Cuban cinema, is García Espinosa's insistence on rejecting the models of proficiency that at that time were considered exemplary of formal "perfection". Whether referring to the prescribed visual and narrative codes of Hollywood studio production, to the schematic tenets of socialist

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[659] García Espinosa, "For an Imperfect Cinema", 71.

realism, or the stylized gestures of art cinema, his stance is equally uncompromising. He proclaims that by staying on the margins of aestheticism, the filmmaker maintains the freedom to prioritize content over form. This emphasis on content over aesthetic quality also means putting aside the preference for a specific format or filming conditions: "Imperfect cinema is no longer interested in quality or technique. It can be created equally well with a Mitchell or with an 8 mm camera, in a studio or in a guerrilla camp in the middle of the jungle".[660]

While this piece could be interpreted as an endorsement of amateurism, several contradictions embedded within it compel further analysis. Crucially, García Espinosa insists on eliminating the privileged status of artists, and more specifically, filmmakers, arguing that their educational background and access to the necessary technological resources confer them with a special form of entitlement. Instead, he believes that filmmaking should not be a specialized undertaking, but as accessible and common as artisanal creativity. In this sense, he endorses the democratizing power of amateurism, but the scope of the amateurism he advocates for is nothing short of a wide-ranging, life-transforming force. In this conception, no space exists for amateurs like the wealthy practitioners of the CFC, nor for award-winners like Machado or Cernuda. By rejecting the separation of artistic versus day-to-day endeavours, the potential existence of artistic communities like the CCH-CC or the politicized Nuestro Tiempo are also excluded. Instead, he believes that once film (or video) technology can be made as widely available as possible, a sort of spontaneous filmmaking would sprout.

The closest historical example for the everyman's access to filmmaking, was the San Antonio local project. As explained above, the movies produced through this community initiative strived for a Hollywood-like generic quality. Certainly, García Espinosa's text does not look back into the pre-revolutionary capitalist past, but rather envisions a hypothetical communist future in which revolutionary spectators turn into revolutionary filmmakers. In this undetermined time to come, the revolutionary individual would make films that reflect on their immediate social reality, and "show the process which generates the problems".[661] And yet, the few clandestine amateur films that were made in the early post-revolutionary period, were very far removed from those concerns, and instead focused on exploring formal, erotic, and

[660] García Espinosa, "For an Imperfect Cinema," 82.
[661] García Espinosa, "For an Imperfect Cinema," 81.

humourous themes. In hindsight, we can now assert that García Espinosa's line of thinking was highly unrealistic, both in relation to its preceding past, and in light of its immediate future.

In García Espinosa's imagined future, art would become an everyday practice, a part of life, and not an activity predetermined by taste or training. In practice, ICAIC's recruitment and training practices do not show a real intention to eliminate hierarchies, but rather replaced one paradigm of culture and education (the bourgeois) with another (the revolutionary). This is evident in the dualistic nature of post-revolutionary film criticism indicated in Chapter 1, and in the film programming and exhibition choices destined to different layers of the audience, as explained in Chapter 2. ICAIC's employment strategies always targeted the most educated sectors of society. As previously mentioned, during the first recruitment drive, the institute hired skilled workers such as camera, light, and sound technicians from the television and advertising sectors, along with amateur filmmakers, film critics, and cine-club members who were ideologically compatible. The institute quickly organized opportunities to provide them with an education in film history and aesthetics through courses, conferences, face-to-face encounters, and an employee cine-club.[662] And in the few occasions when ICAIC hired new trainees, they selected recent graduates from university programs.

In the context of revolutionary Cuba, the case for the wide accessibility of cinema's means of production implied well defined ideological restrictions. Regular citizens quickly learned to understand that official pronouncements about the nation, the "people," or folk culture, did not apply to dissenting voices or to those deemed to espouse counter-revolutionary attitudes. This was made especially clear to the cultural sector during the *PM* situation and through the closure of the *Lunes de Revolución* magazine, as detailed in Chapter 1. Artists and intellectuals quickly learned the extent of the public access constraints that could be imposed on them if they deviated from the official discourse and the performance of revolutionarity. Under the Revolution's sociopolitical conditions, there was no room for filmmakers who were not allied with the film institute, which not only provided with access to the means of production and diffusion, but also with the protective mantle of revolutionarity.

The availability of a basic know-how through previous experience or through beginner's guides like Agramonte's was irrelevant in the face of politically-motivated limitations. In

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[662] For an overview of the ICAIC cine club, see Chapter 2.

practice, ICAIC worked as a highly selective elitist club where membership parameters were set by Guevara. His own personal affinities and enmities were overriding factors in determining who could break into the incipient film industry. Often, people coming from the radio or television industry were considered too lowbrow to be given an opportunity. Once inside, the mentorship of an open-minded director like Gutiérrez Alea could open doors to talented newcomers like Sara Gómez. But Guevara was, above all, a cunning manager, whose strategic selection process was designed to maximize ICAIC's (and his own) staying power. His position at the top of the pyramid was never seriously questioned, because he was effective in guaranteeing the institution's longevity and status.

For García Espinosa, imperfect cinema was "(…) a new poetics, not a new cultural policy."[663] He outlined a hypothetical scenario through an overly optimistic concept of the future in order to make a wider claim about eliminating the hierarchical distinction between citizen and artist. He pondered:

> But what happens if the future holds the universalization of college level instruction, if economic and social development reduce the hours in the work day, if the evolution of film technology (there are already signs in evidence) makes it possible that this technology ceases being the privilege of a small few? What happens if the development of videotape solves the problem of inevitably limited laboratory capacity, if television systems with their potential for "projecting" independently of the central studio renders the ad infinitum construction of movie theaters suddenly superfluous?[664]

In reality, the elimination of the consumer market, combined with ICAIC's absorption of the material resources necessary for filmmaking, precluded the possibility of common folk having access to basic material resources like cameras, film stock, or lab services. This new poetics was a beautiful fantasy very far removed from ICAIC's highly pragmatic institutional priorities, and García Espinosa's vision would never come into existence. And remarkably, these

[663] García Espinosa, "For an Imperfect Cinema," 78.
[664] García Espinosa, "For an Imperfect Cinema," 72.

ideas did not generate any contemporaneous dialogue among Cuban intellectuals or film critics.[665]

**Institutional Outsiders**

Both García Espinosa's idealistic platform for amateur filmmaking and Agramonte's earlier practical advice are expressions of a potential that would remain constrained by institutional opposition. As head of ICAIC, Guevara was opposed to the idea of giving free rein to the amateur movement.[666] This became especially clear when the Ministry of Culture, established in 1976, opened cultural centers known as *Casas de la Cultura* (literally, "Houses of Culture"). The *Casas de la Cultura* were overseen by the government branch of the municipality, the Poder Popular (People's Power) with a direct link to the Ministry of Culture. Through this initiative, art instructors were assigned to organize activities and oversee literary workshops and amateur artistic groups in dance, theatre, visual arts, and music. However, it took several years before the *Casas de la Cultura* hosted cine-clubs and amateur filmmaking groups.

In a 1978 closed-doors event with journalists, Guevara laid out his reasons (on the condition that they did not report on it). When asked about his position regarding a recent proposal to open an amateur filmmaking group at one of the *Casas de la Cultura*, he explained why he had been opposed to amateur filmmaking until then. For him, the main problem with the amateur movement in general, was that it had not been sufficiently supervised, and therefore it had tended to reproduce bad taste and the neocolonialist tendencies of the pre-revolutionary period. In the case of filmmaking in particular, he felt that it was distinct from other amateur artistic forms because of its highly expensive nature. The head of ICAIC saw a great danger in allowing amateurs to make films that could potentially reproduce the expressive and ideological models of American cinema. His perspective was that no space should be given to non-professional filmmaking, unless the Communist Youth (the youth section of the Communist Party) could regulate it. He admitted that when amateur filmmaking was first discussed in the early 1960s, he opposed the idea because the right control mechanisms were not in place. By the

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[665] This is corroborated in Juan Antonio García Borrero, *La edad de la herejía: ensayos sobre el cine cubano, su crítica y su público* (Santiago de Cuba: Editorial Oriente, 2002), 43.
[666] Alfredo Guevara, "La vocación de ser," in *Revolución es lucidez* (La Habana: Ediciones ICAIC, 1998), 421-427.

time of the interview in 1978 he felt that all the relevant provincial entities had adopted acceptable "methodological lines" (Communist Party-approved guidance and standards) to make sure amateur filmmaking did not deviate from their preferred models. This elitist and paternalistic attitude stands in stark contrast with the open invitation in Agramonte's 1963 book, and with the optimistic attitude of García Espinosa's 1969 essay.

In spite of this institutional opposition, a few individuals found ingenious clandestine ways to make films with the few means at their disposal, many years before the *Casas de la Cultura* started hosting the first cine-clubs. For instance, while working on several documentary projects for the film institute, Almendros used his weekends to independently shoot a film at a popular beach in Havana. While he was using ICAIC resources, the film *Gente en la playa* (1961) was a personal project that distanced itself from the epic tone of official productions in favour of the observational style of free cinema aesthetics.[667] Another interesting example of an autonomous project carried out by ICAIC personnel was the work of the Grupo Experimental Cubanacán (Cubanacán Experimental Group). This group, which was active from 1962 to 1964, consisted of members of the technical staff working at ICAIC's Cubanacán Studios, formerly known as Biltmore Studios. In the remote area of Cubanacán, located 20 kilometers from Havana's center, ICAIC housed several of its departments, including costume and make up, production design, film stock, laboratories, animation, and visual effects. The staff at this secondary location felt isolated from the vibrant cultural life taking place around ICAIC's headquarters in Vedado, so they decided to create their own cultural initiatives, including making their own films. As a result, they produced two humourous 16 mm shorts, *La tísica* (Rolando Zaragoza, 1964), and *Yo me baño una vez al año*. As these cases demonstrate, bureaucrats were not able to fully contain spontaneous, non-sanctioned film activities.[668]

Young people who did not have any connection to the film institute found highly inventive ways to nurture their passion for cinema. Tomás Piard (1948-2019) is the most representative example of the first generation of cinephiles that emerged in the early post-

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[667] Almendros, *A Man with a Camera*, 36-38; Vincenot, "Censura y cine en Cuba," 60-61; Jiménez Leal, "Un baile de fantasmas," 195.
[668] "Pucheux sobre el grupo de experimentacion Cubanacan," July 4, 2009, *Cine cubano, la pupila insomne*, https://cinecubanolapupilainsomne.wordpress.com/2009/07/04/pucheux-sobre-el-grupo-de-experimentacion-cubanacan/.

revolutionary period. While today he embodies the archetype of the amateur turned professional, his first "professional" film for ICAIC was released in 2008, when he was 60 years old. As a teenager, he took the film history course taught by Mario Rodríguez Alemán to university students in the Faculty of Arts and Letters, in 1966. He gleefully remembered how, in spite of being too young to attend, him and a friend skipped their high school classes to go to the course, which created some problems with their school principal. He regularly attended Sunday cine-debates and the film screenings at the Cinemateca, taking advantage of every opportunity to watch films.[669]

Piard's first film project, at 18 years old, was *Crónica del día agonizante* (1966), a compilation of 200 photographs conceived as a starting point for a film narrative inspired by Chris Marker's *La Jetée* (1962). His uncle Arturo Piard, an amateur photographer, developed the photographs. He continued to pursue his fervent interest in film by taking a full-year course in 1968 that was designed to train cine-debate moderators, and by participating in a short-lived cine club called Charles Spencer Chaplin.[670] Through these experiences he met other young people who were as eager to make films as he was. They depended on a friend who worked at ICAIC laboratories (formerly the Telecolor company), who gave them Soviet 8 mm exposed film stock, and also processed the films for them. For a time, they lent each other an old 8 mm Bell and Howell camera. Some were able to purchase 8 mm Soviet film cameras that had surreptitiously been imported to Cuba.[671] By 1972, they were able to purchase ORWO 8 mm reversible film stock imported from the German Democratic Republic. Another friend, who worked at the audiovisual department of a state institution, helped them develop it.[672]

These off-the-radar initiatives were highly problematic for ICAIC, but they continued into the mid-1970s.[673] For instance, a group that had originally formed at an approved University

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[669] Tomás Piard, interview with the author, June 8, 2015, and email exchange, April-May, 2016.
[670] For more on the course for cine-debate moderators and the cine-club Charles Spencer Chaplin, see Chapter 2.
[671] Guevara refers to these circumstances in "La vocación de ser," 426-427.
[672] Piard, interview and email exchange with the author; Tomás Piard, "El eslabón perdido. Episodios del cine independiente cubano," interview by Dean Luis Reyes, *La Gaceta de Cuba*, May-June 2015, in *Altercine* mailing list, March 26, 2019; Eduardo G. Noguer, *Historia del cine cubano: cien años, 1897-1998* (Miami, Florida: Ediciones Universal, 2002), 481.
[673] I am very grateful to Roberto Madrigal, Antonio Mazón Robau and Tomás Piard for directing my attention to the cinephile culture and amateur filmmaking of this period. Although the 1970s

of Havana Film Workshop in the early 1970s, later morphed into an independent project known as "Movimiento del Cine Aficionado de Cuba" (Amateur Film Movement, MOCAC). Between 1973 and 1976 they conceived a film school, published and distributed a mimeographed bulletin, and made films that they managed to process at the photography labs found on Soviet ships harboured in the Havana port.[674] These ingenious and furtive solutions escaped state control and were not tolerated.

Since the desire and inventiveness of young people to join together into film appreciation and filmmaking groups could not be completely prevented, ICAIC found a way to oversee their activities. Between 1977 and 1978, the film institute designated personnel from its Centro de Información Cinematográfica to lead the cine-club movement that started forming at the *casas de cultura*.[675] These cultural centers were sponsored by the Ministry of Culture, forming part of an effective system for keeping a high degree of control over citizen activities at the provincial and municipal levels. By 1984, 75 cine-clubs existed (33 for filmmaking, and 42 for film appreciation). [676] Amateur filmmaking suffered a sharp decline during the time of ICAIC's ascendance in the 1960s and 1970s. In the 1980s, it re-emerged under the watchful eye of the state. The following generations of independent-minded filmmakers have continued to challenge institutional hurdles through gradual access to digital technologies and by engaging with new media circulation channels.[677]

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fall outside the scope of this dissertation, the overall trajectory of the amateur movement in the early post-revolutionary period deserves further study.

[674] I have not had access to print documentation on this group, but it is possible to put together a basic outline based on the information in Douglas, *La tienda negra*, 179, 183, and on Piñera's mention of the "cine-club de Raimundo" in *Mirada al cine cubano*, 106. Raimundo Torres Díaz has provided his own brief account of the project in a commentary posted online. See "A propósito de un comentario sobre el cine cubano sumergido," *Cine cubano, la pupila insomne,* https://cinecubanolapupilainsomne.wordpress.com/2009/05/24/a-proposito-de-un-comentario-sobre-el-cine-cubano-sumergido/.

[675] Maria Eulalia Douglas, "Los cine clubes en Cuba," *Cine Cubano*, 2008, http://www.cubacine.cult.cu/sitios/revistacinecubano/digital10/centrocap31.htm.

[676] Douglas, *La tienda negra*, 199.

[677] For an elucidating study of the incorporation of new media technologies in the 1990s, see Cristina Venegas, *Digital Dilemmas: The State, the Individual, and Digital Media in Cuba* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2010)

## Conclusion

Critical discourse regarding amateurism shifted values from admiration towards technical skill and pictorial quality in the 1940s, to aesthetic rupture in the 1950s, and towards increased emphasis on social and political importance in the 1960s. In Cuban film historiography, the tendency to ignore much of the republican legacy has obscured present day understanding of the significant body of work created by amateur filmmakers during that time. My reassessment of the place of amateur filmmaking in the historically specific timeframe selected, offers a point of reference for these historical precedents.

ICAIC acquired a firm hold on theatrical screens, effectively suppressing the possibility of any independently made films to be shown to theatrical audiences. The do-it-yourself nature of amateur filmmaking is an example of small-scale creative action, just like writing. But as writers need publishers, filmmakers need audiences. Therefore, the removal of exhibition options was equivalent to pre-emptive censorship. Interestingly, the film institute would not even allow the theatrical release of films made by other government entities such as the Armed Forces, the Radio and Television Institute, the Ministry of Education, or the Ministry of Health. The limited number of films that were made at those institutions could only be shown at internal events or on public television, but never in the theaters.[678] Thus, while film appreciation expanded exponentially through specialized film magazines like *Cine Cubano*, cinematheque programming, and dedicated television programs like *24 x segundo*, filmmaking outside of ICAIC was effectively banned for two decades.

ICAIC policies reveal the double standards of speaking for the population in matters of film taste while at the same time controlling people-driven initiatives like cine-clubs and amateur filmmaking. This tension is evident in the large-scale cine-debates that were summoned by organizations that purported to represent "the people," but were definitely designed to respond to state interests. The Charles Spencer Chaplin cine-club of 1969 had to be shut down because it could not be properly supervised. Piard destroyed his own semi-clandestine films from that time because he did not want to jeopardize his future. In the 1980s, the *casas de cultura*, the San

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[678] Azucena Plasencia, "Documental cubano. Ajiaco de la crisis permanente," *Bohemia*, April 1, 1988, Digital Library of the Caribbean. For a full list of all the film and audiovisual production centers up to 2000, see José Antonio García, Borrero, *Rehenes de la sombra: Ensayos sobre el cine cubano que no se ve* (Huesca: Festival de Cine de Huesca, 2002), 22-23.

Antonio de los Baños Film and Television School, and the Association Hermanos Saíz, provided safer spaces for aspiring filmmakers, but they walked a tight line between self-censorship and self-expression.

Without the cinephiles and amateurs of the 1950s, the Cuban cinema of the 1960s would not have existed. And even in the absence of consumer culture, in the 1960s and 1970s resourceful amateurs found ways to make films through ingenious alliances and great perseverance. Their extreme inventiveness and ingenuity for trying to work outside of institutional frameworks offer a clear historical example of the irrepressible character of amateurism. Those energies continue to find expression in the alternative media practices of today.

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